

Domestic Violence: Staying Safe During COVID-19

As the COVID-19 crisis continues, many of us are spending more time than ever in our homes. With shelter-in-place orders, tensions and anxiety are high for all of us, and this presents a potential risk for domestic violence.

Signs of Domestic Violence

It's not always easy to identify when you or someone close to you is in an abusive relationship, and the signs of domestic violence may be different in each relationship. Abuse can be verbal, emotional, physical or psychological. Signs of unhealthy, abusive relationships include:

- Physically aggressive with you.
- Physically aggressive toward other people or animals.
- Abusing alcohol or drugs.
- Controls all the finances.
- Denies there are any problems.
- Isolates you from others.
- Verbally abusive.
- Possessive, jealous and unpredictable.

Recognize these signs in yourself:

- Feel controlled and manipulated by your partner.
- Are unable to make your own decisions.
- Don't feel safe in your own home.
- Feel watched, even at work.
- Feel humiliated, dismissed and helpless.

"Just because there may not be physical abuse, does not mean that it is not abuse," says Dean R. Sobcoviak, CPP, CHPA, Sutter Health chief protective services officer.

"Verbal abuse, psychological abuse and bullying are all real abuses, and the effects

can be just as, or possibly even more damaging than the visible wounds that are obvious from physical abuse."

Safety and Self-Care Strategies

If you identify as someone in an abusive relationship we encourage you to reach out for help:

1. Consider creating a safety plan (thehotline.org/help/path-to-safety/) that includes ways to remain safe while you are in the relationship, planning to leave or after you leave.
2. Continue to stay in frequent contact with your support network, such as family, friends and co-workers.
3. Recognize that there are many resources available and reach out for help:

- **911:** If you or your family are in immediate danger call 911.

- **Anonymous, Free and Confidential Support and Resources:**

Sutter Health EAP (sutterhealth.org/eap): 800-477-2258

National Domestic Violence Hotline (www.ndvh.org): 800-799-7233

National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (nrcdv.org)

California Partnership to End Domestic Violence (cpedv.org/domestic-violence-organizations-california)

- **Workplace Support:** Let your boss know. Ask if your employer offers additional services for employees in your situation. Not every employer offers additional services, but informing them may help keep you safe while on the job.
- **Domestic Violence Restraining Order:** This is a court order that helps protect you from abuse or threats from your spouse or intimate partner. To explore the option of a domestic violence restraining order, contact your local District Attorney's office or courts.ca.gov/selfhelp-domesticviolence.htm. Filing is free.
- **Therapy:** Work with a counselor or therapist to build your emotional strength to leave, and to process the trauma afterward. Sutter Health EAP offers free confidential referrals to licensed therapists for our members. Call 800-477-2258 to verify eligibility.

Asking for help can feel difficult or dangerous in situations like this, says Kim Narvaez, LMFT, a licensed EAP clinician. "We recognize the turmoil you are going through. Just know that you are not alone, and you have the right to be safe."

Remember your life is valuable. **Get help and remove yourself from the situation as soon as safely possible.** If you feel you or your family's life or safety are in immediate danger, call 911. You can and will rebuild your life after this relationship.

Reach Out for Help

Sutter Health EAP provides employees and family members with referrals to licensed, professional therapists who can help with personal problems. We also provide referrals for caregiving, legal and financial resources. The services are free and confidential.

For more information, visit sutterhealth.org/eap
or call 800-477-2258 to learn more about your benefit.