

## Domestic violence - tips for women with disabilities

Women with disabilities are likely to experience domestic violence at higher rates and over longer periods of time than women without disabilities. Leaving a violent relationship is hard for any woman, but for women with disabilities, it is even harder.

Traditional strategies for escaping family violence – such as going to a refuge, taking out an intervention order, or going to live with family or friends – are often of little use to a woman with a disability who may have restricted mobility or be dependant on her abuser for care. However, there are pathways to safety.

### Important things to remember

It is important to understand that:

- Violence of any kind is a crime and never OK.
- Without intervention, it is likely the violence won't stop. Sometimes it may even get worse.
- It is never your fault.
- You don't deserve to be abused and you don't have to live with it.
- There are laws to protect you.
- There are organisations that can help you.

### Seek help

Suggestions include:

- If you or your children are in danger, always call the police.
- If you are injured, call an ambulance, see your doctor or go to the nearest hospital emergency department. They may ask you questions around whether someone has hurt you. You will be able to trust them and giving a truthful answer – no matter how hard this might be – will assist in making sure you are safe.
- Use the law to help you. Violence is a crime punishable by law.
- Talk to trusted relatives, friends, carers and neighbours. Tell them about your situation.
- If someone you tell doesn't believe you, talk to someone else who will believe you and help you take action.
- Ask your trusted relative, friend, carer or neighbour for practical help. For example, they could gather information for you or talk to the police or other agencies for you.
- Contact the Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service on 1800 015 188. They can advise you on your rights and come up with strategies to keep you and your children safe. They may be able to help you to find a safe place to go.
- Write up a list of contact phone numbers and keep them handy. This list could include the police, trusted relatives and friends, the Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Centre, other agencies and your local taxi service.

### Have a safety plan

If you cannot leave the relationship at the moment, there are some ways you can increase your safety. It may help to devise a safety plan that you can use if you have to leave suddenly.

A safety plan includes:

- **Contact numbers** – keep your list of emergency help contacts handy.
- **Where to go** – have in mind a place where you and your children can go quickly, such as a friend's house.
- **How to get there** – work out how you and your children will get there, such as being picked up by your friend, or taking a taxi or other public transport.
- **Who to ask for help** – if you can, let supportive friends, family and neighbours know about what is happening. Arrange for a friend, relative or carer to come quickly when you call, and to help you to leave.
- **Ready cash** – if you can, keep some cash aside for emergencies.
- **Keep valuables together** – keep valuables and documents together in a safe place in case you need to leave in a hurry. These may include credit/debit cards, birth certificates, passports, medications, prescriptions, Medicare card, driver's licence and family photographs. If you can, make copies of these documents and leave them with a trusted friend, just in case you can't take them when you go.

## Your children

Suggestions include:

- Let your children know what to do in an emergency (where to go and who to telephone – give them telephone numbers for the police, neighbours and relatives).
- Talk to your children about violence and reinforce with them that it is wrong to use violence against anybody.
- Reassure them that they aren't responsible in any way for causing the violence.
- Come up with a code word you can use to warn your children if they need to leave the house in a hurry.

## Women's refuges

Women's refuges are safer places where you and your children can stay for a few days, weeks or months, depending on the refuge. They are there to help you. They can offer emotional, financial and legal advice. They will put you in contact with other organisations that may be able to support you with things like housing or legal services.

If you want to go into a women's refuge, you will need to call the Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service on 1800 015 188. They can talk to you about your options.

## Suggestions for concerned relatives or friends

Research suggests that women with disabilities who are victims of domestic violence often don't report the abuse themselves. If you are a relative, friend or carer of someone you believe is being abused, it is very important to get 'involved'. Your support can make a big difference. Make sure your actions don't place the woman in further danger.

Suggestions include:

- Talk to the woman in private. Listen to what she has to say and believe her.
- Help her to recognise the abuse and understand how it may be affecting her or her children.
- Be supportive. Offer to provide her with information or to call services for her.
- Work out an emergency strategy together. For example, if you are a neighbour you could suggest she turn on her outdoor light to signal that she needs urgent help.
- It may not be helpful to confront her abuser.
- Call the Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service on 1800 015 188 or the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (DVRCV) on (03) 9486 9866 for information and suggestions.

## Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Police or ambulance. In an emergency, always call triple zero (000)
- The Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service of Victoria (24 hour) Tel. 1800 015 188

- The Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria Tel. (03) 9486 9866 for the telephone number of your local outreach worker
- Domestic Violence Referral Line Tel. 1800 633 937
- Women With Disabilities Australia Tel. (03) 6244 8288
- National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service (Australia) Tel. 1800 737 732 – free telephone counselling hotline (24 hours, 7 days)
- 1800RESPECT – for real-time online counselling.

## Things to remember

- Contact the Women’s Domestic Violence Crisis Service or the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria for advice and practical help.
- Ask a trusted relative, friend or neighbour for help – for example, they could gather information for you or talk to the police or other agencies.
- Devise a safety plan that you can use if you have to leave suddenly.

### **This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria – DVRCV

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