

COVID-19: It's not safe for me to stay at home. What should I do?

FACTSHEET

This factsheet is part of a series from Legal Aid NSW that aims to help answer your questions about COVID-19 and family law.

You may be worried or confused about how COVID-19 will affect you and your family. Sometimes a crisis can make legal problems worse or new problems might develop. Legal Aid NSW understands that there will be a lot of questions about family law issues, parenting and staying safe. This series of factsheets will give you helpful information and contacts to support you and your family to manage all the changes that are happening in our community.

If it is not safe for you to stay in your home, you should consider moving to alternative accommodation. It's important that you do this safely. If you leave your home to protect your safety or the safety of anyone else in your home, you will not be fined by police. If you leave for safety reasons, this is a reasonable excuse.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it may be harder for you to find a time when it is safe to leave your home. It might be hard because:

- the people you live with are required to self-isolate at home
- you or the people you live with are at home more due to changes at work
- there is a 'lockdown' in your area or across the state and everyone is required to stay home

This factsheet provides information about things you should consider when you plan to leave.

Who can help me?

The Legal Aid NSW Domestic Violence Unit is a specialist domestic violence service. Our lawyers, social workers and financial counsellors work together to support you to sort out your legal and non-legal problems and to improve your safety.

You can contact the Domestic Violence Unit by calling (02) 9219 6300 or emailing domesticviolenceunit@legalaid.nsw.gov.au. **In an emergency**, always call 000.

For information about how to make a safety plan and to access online safety planning support, visit the [1800 RESPECT "Safety planning" web page](#). For general information about staying safe, visit the "Staying safe" page on the [Family Violence Law Help website](#).

The Domestic Violence Unit can also help you plan to leave home safely during the pandemic.

Planning to leave home safely

Things you can do while still living at home

Read this list of suggestions and think about what will work best for you.

- You may have friends or family who have agreed to help you. Talk to them about a code word so they know you need their help.
- If you have neighbours that you trust, ask them to call the police if they hear fighting, shouting or noises.
- Have somewhere to go if you need to get out. Keep contact details of family or friends in your wallet, mobile phone or another safe place.
- If you feel that you have nowhere to go, you can contact the 24-hour Domestic Violence Line on 1800 65 64 63 or Link2Home on 1800 152 152. Their counsellors can help you find emergency accommodation.

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- Have your own mobile phone and a contract that you can control. You need to make sure that your phone calls won't be checked on a phone bill. If this is not possible, save emergency numbers under a fake name so no one can tell who you call and delete your call history.
- Leave spare copies of keys, important papers, photocopies of bank cards and credit cards with a family member, friend or someone that you trust.
- Pack a small bag with important belongings in case you have to leave in a hurry, including your keys, important papers, cash and any medication and prescriptions. Make sure you leave this bag in a safe place. Don't pack more than you could safely take with you and remember not to pack items that might tip off the perpetrator.

If you have to leave home:

- If possible, choose a time when it is less likely that the perpetrator will be able to stop you leaving, for example while they are at work or have gone out.
- If everyone is staying at home, think about choosing a time when the perpetrator will be asleep or in the shower.
- Think about taking the quickest and safest way of leaving the home and getting to a safe place. Driving yourself or being picked up by someone who understands your situation may be the safest methods.

Once you have left home:

- Think about whether you should make a report to police, and whether an apprehended domestic violence order (ADVO) should be made for your protection. The Domestic Violence Unit can give you advice about ADVOs.
- Check your mobile phone settings. Turn off location services and applications like Find my iPhone.
- Change your mobile phone number and keep it set to private. Keep your mobile phone on you.
- Change or delete your social media accounts and your children's accounts or review your privacy settings to restrict access. People can accidentally give away details of where you are living or where you will be.
- Change your email account. Make it hard to trace – don't use your name and birth year in the account name.
- Get a post office box and have important mail delivered there. Keep your home address private.
- Ask government agencies, power and water companies, doctors, schools and other services to keep your details private.
- Apply to register as a silent elector with the Australian Electoral Commission.
- You may be able to install security devices at your home to increase your sense of safety and discourage the perpetrator. There are services in NSW that may be able to help with the cost, including Staying Home Leaving Violence, and Victims Services. To contact Victims Services, call the Victims Access Line on 1800 633 063 or the Aboriginal Contact Line on 1800 019 123.

What happens after you leave?

Once you have left the home, you may wish to seek further legal advice in relation to things like ADVOs and financial stress. More information on these topics can be found in our series of [factsheets about COVID-19 and family law](#).

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If the perpetrator was your partner, and you are receiving Centrelink payments, you should tell Centrelink within 14 days that you have separated from your partner. You might be able to get a higher rate of payment once you have separated from your partner.

How can I get help?

For free legal help call 1300 888 529 or [call your local Legal Aid NSW office](#). You can contact the Legal Aid NSW Domestic Violence Unit by calling (02) 9219 6300 or emailing domesticviolenceunit@legalaid.nsw.gov.au.

If you need an interpreter, call the Translating and Interpreting Service on 131 450 and ask for Law Access NSW. If you find it hard to hear or speak, call the National Relay Service on 133 677 and ask for Law Access NSW or visit www.relayservice.gov.au.

This factsheet is intended as a general guide to the law. Do not rely on this information as legal advice. We recommend you talk to a lawyer about your situation. This information is correct at the time of writing, however, it may change.

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