

New domestic campaign launched as cases expected to increase

Partner agencies across Devon and Cornwall are launching a campaign to raise awareness around domestic abuse and have warned that it may increase in the coming weeks due to the impact of Covid-19.

However, they want to reassure communities that victims will still have access to vital support services despite the current uncertainty.

The campaign will highlight the fact that whatever type of abuse takes place, be it physical, sexual, emotional, psychological or financial, the abuser is trying to control the victim and uses abuse and/or violence to achieve that control. It will also tell victims how to access help and support.

Superintendent Sharon Donald of Devon & Cornwall Police said, "Sadly, as schools close and home working is encouraged, Covid-19 may cause a rise in domestic abuse. The cycle of violence may intensify with people having to isolate themselves and being unable to socialise in the normal ways. It is important that victims know how and where to get advice and support and that they know they can report by phone and online."

The Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, Alison Hernandez, is responsible for delivering victim care in the area and works closely with the Victim Care Network to ensure that help is on hand to those who need it including to victims of domestic abuse.

She said: "Unfortunately we have to prepare for a rise in incidents of crimes such as domestic abuse that might go hand in hand with a period of mass isolation. Sadly, some children are safer when they attend school regularly as it's through them signs can be spotted that something might be wrong and picked up and reported.

"It is crucial that victims get straight to the services they need as quickly as possible and the launch of live chat means that they will be able to do exactly that. I would urge any victim of abuse to seek help even if you don't want to report it to the police, there is a range of support available.

The campaign will be rolled out via digital media and will include mobile phone banner messaging. It aims both to raise awareness that domestic abuse may increase with people self-isolating, and to reassure people that help is available during these unprecedented times.

Anna MacGregor at Safer Futures, which provides support for victims in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, said: "Covid-19 will have a serious impact on the lives of those living with domestic abuse. For some people, home is not always a safe place, which might mean that the prospect of physical distancing or self-isolation may be causing some adults and children to feel additionally anxious, at an already difficult time.

"We are doing everything possible to ensure that specialist support continues to be available to everyone that needs it. Some services are restricted to delivering non-face to face support, due to current health concerns. However, the support is still here for you and your family, refuges are still running, and specialist domestic abuse workers are still working to respond to your needs and help you to stay safe."

Chrissy Stower of Splitz, which provides support to victims across Devon, said:

"We see too often that at times of heightened anxiety a rise in the number of incidents of domestic and sexual violence, just as we are hearing now from reports in China.

“The restrictions on people’s movement, financial concerns as employment sees a downturn, the temporary closure of schools to some children, the fear of this virus and the uncertainty about the future – these are all factors that increase the risk of domestic abuse within the home.

“Right now, our message to people across the region, is that there is no excuse for domestic abuse. There is no part for it in our society. To victims, I say that while you may feel alone, you are not alone. There is help. There is support. There is safety to be found for you and your children. We are here to support you.”

Resources/help

Live Chat is a web-based support service that will be available to victims in Devon and Cornwall 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The service is anonymous, confidential and free to use. To access it please visit victimsupport.org.uk or visit the Victim Care website – www.victimcaredevonandcornwall.org.uk. Victim Support will still offer telephone support on 0808 031 8178.

In addition to the web chat facility, other channels for victim support are still available. The Victim Care Unit can be contacted on 01392 475900 from 8am to 8pm on Monday to Friday and 9am to 5pm at the weekend. Information on the practical and emotional support on offer is available at victimcaredevonandcornwall.org.uk.

In a non-emergency, you can also report a crime 24 hours a day, seven days a week on 101 webchat or on the online crime reporting form - both on the force website – www.devon-cornwall.police.uk. There’s also a useful AskNed system that provides online advice on a range of issues and by signing up to Neighbourhood Alert regular updates and information can be received from the OPCC. This can be done via devonandcornwall-pcc.gov.uk.

Crime can also be reported anonymously via Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 or via its website – www.crimestoppers-uk.org

The situation continues to change rapidly so for up to date advice on the Covid-19 virus please visit the Force website – www.devon-cornwall.police.uk and www.gov.uk