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### **Welcome to this special Covid-19 edition of the Somerset Domestic Abuse Newsletter**

Domestic abuse continues to be a priority for all councils in Somerset due to its long lasting impact on the lives of survivors and their families.

The Government’s stay at home advice can create new challenges for people experiencing domestic abuse; home is not always a safe place for everyone. Self-isolating and/or social distancing while living with an abuser may heighten domestic tension and increase the risk of emotional or physical harm.

Find enclosed useful local and national information, to help you identify and support people affected by domestic abuse at this time.

Please share this newsletter with colleagues and your teams or other networks!

## Current Known Prevalence of Domestic Abuse in Covid-19

We know that nationally calls are increasing to helplines with the National Domestic Violence Helpline operated by Refuge, reporting a 28% increase in contacts since the lockdown started. Circa 70% of callers are survivors, which remains consistent with contacts pre-covid19. This may correspond with the extensive national publicity and promotion of this national helpline.

In the wider southwest, there has been an increase in contacts in Bath and Northeast Somerset and Swindon.

Locally here in Somerset – reports to the police and support services have had a small increase over the last two weeks. But we know that domestic abuse remains a hidden crime with survivors experiencing abuse 50 times on average before reporting (Safelives 2020), but in the current crisis situation, there will be additional pressures and barriers.

For instance, survivors may not realise services are open, they may feel overwhelmed with daily life at home, they may not have the opportunity to make contact due to a lack of time alone. No matter the reason, if and when survivors feel able to report their abuse, agencies need to be able to respond.

## What Are We Doing To Respond?

Somerset Public Health have created a **framework** to respond to domestic abuse in the pandemic. This includes a multi-agency data scorecard.

The scorecard is then considered on a weekly basis, by the new **Somerset Domestic Abuse Covid-19 Task Group**, made up of all councils, police, social care, local support service providers and health services, meets to look at the up to date information about the prevalence of domestic abuse in Somerset, and get assurance that all services are functioning and accessible. The group also considers any new requirements which may arise due to the coronavirus, such as new ways of offering support.

**Somerset Integrated Domestic Abuse Service (SIDAS)** continues to operate, delivered by The You Trust, supporting survivors already in service and offering support to new clients. They will support survivors who are at risk, support families, perpetrators and offer emergency accommodation for those who need to leave their homes as part of a national refuge network. Refuge clients will still be accepted but additional safety protocols have been put in place. All details of the service can be found at our dedicated local website <http://www.somersetsurvivors.org.uk/>. See page 5 for the Somerset Referral Pathway.

**MARAC** continues to operate, please see page 4 for more details.

Somerset County Council and partners are implementing a comprehensive **communications strategy** to ensure that anyone in the community who requires help and support for domestic abuse can access it. This will include messaging on social media, radio, supermarkets and household mail. Please see page 7 for more information.

**Mindline**, a new support service set up by Somerset Mind, will now also accept calls relating to domestic abuse which is now open 24 hours a day. Mindline is also connected to the new Somerset Coronavirus Helpline. (see page 10 for more details).

**Training for Village Agents** is being organised, so that they are able to effectively help their communities.

**NHS Testing Centres**—Plans are in progress to ensure if anyone discloses domestic abuse at a Covid-10 testing centre, that they can either be given details of local specialist support, or be referred.

**Boots the Chemist**—To support the new national initiative to create “Safe Places” for domestic abuse victims in Boots, we’re giving each Somerset store local posters/cards.

## Actions You Can Take To Support Domestic Abuse Prevention

### Your recommendations

1. Ensure you and your front line staff are aware of the **pathways and always use the [DASH Risk Assessment](#)**. See page 5.
2. Ensure you and your colleagues/teams have completed **training**. See below for advice.
3. **Safeguarding** "Business As Usual" continues – use the existing pathways for child and adult safeguarding. [Somerset Direct remains open—Tel: 0300 123 2224]
4. Please help promote the **#nocloseddoors2020 campaign**, both you as an individual and as your organisation (please speak to your communications team if necessary!).
5. Attend and participate in **MARAC** (see page 4 for the current process)
6. If you do any **publicity** to raise awareness of domestic abuse in your customer or employee newsletters, then please **always** include the local Somerset domestic abuse helpline and website—which are 0800 69 49 999 and [www.sometsurvivors.org.uk](http://www.somerset survivors.org.uk)



## Domestic Abuse Awareness Training

Although face-to-face trainings have been postponed. There are several e-learning opportunities for you and your colleagues. These include those listed below.

### If You're External To Somerset County Council

The charity Against Violence and Abuse (AVA) has two helpful e-learning:

1. Understanding Domestic Violence and Abuse
2. Complicated Matters: Domestic and Sexual Violence, Problematic Substance Use and Mental Ill-health

Find online at <http://www.elearning.avaproject.org.uk/>

### Do You Work For Somerset County Council?

#### Find at The Learning Centre, These Courses:

- Domestic Abuse (introduction)
- Honour Based Violence and Forced Marriage
- Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking



## What Are We Seeing In The Community—What's Not In The Data?

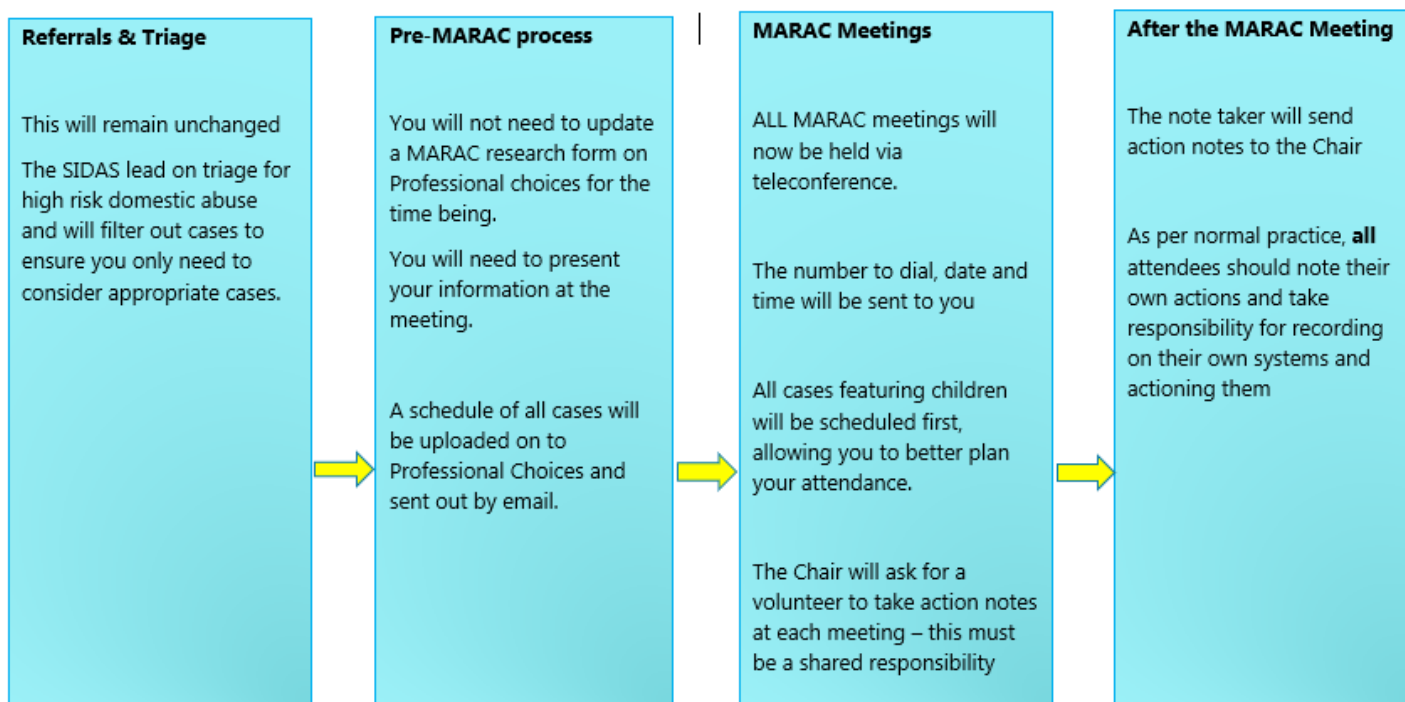
Domestic abuse incidents are being recognised in our volunteer and community sector organisations.

Due to the known barriers in reporting domestic abuse, it's anticipated that if an increase in reporting emerges. It may not be until daily life returns to normal, when pressures ease, and survivors feel more able to get support. This will mean that the increased demand for services may come later in the year. This estimated position has been factored into service planning.

In the meantime, services have capacity, are able to increase capacity if needed, and work is ongoing to ensure that everyone in Somerset who need support, can access it.

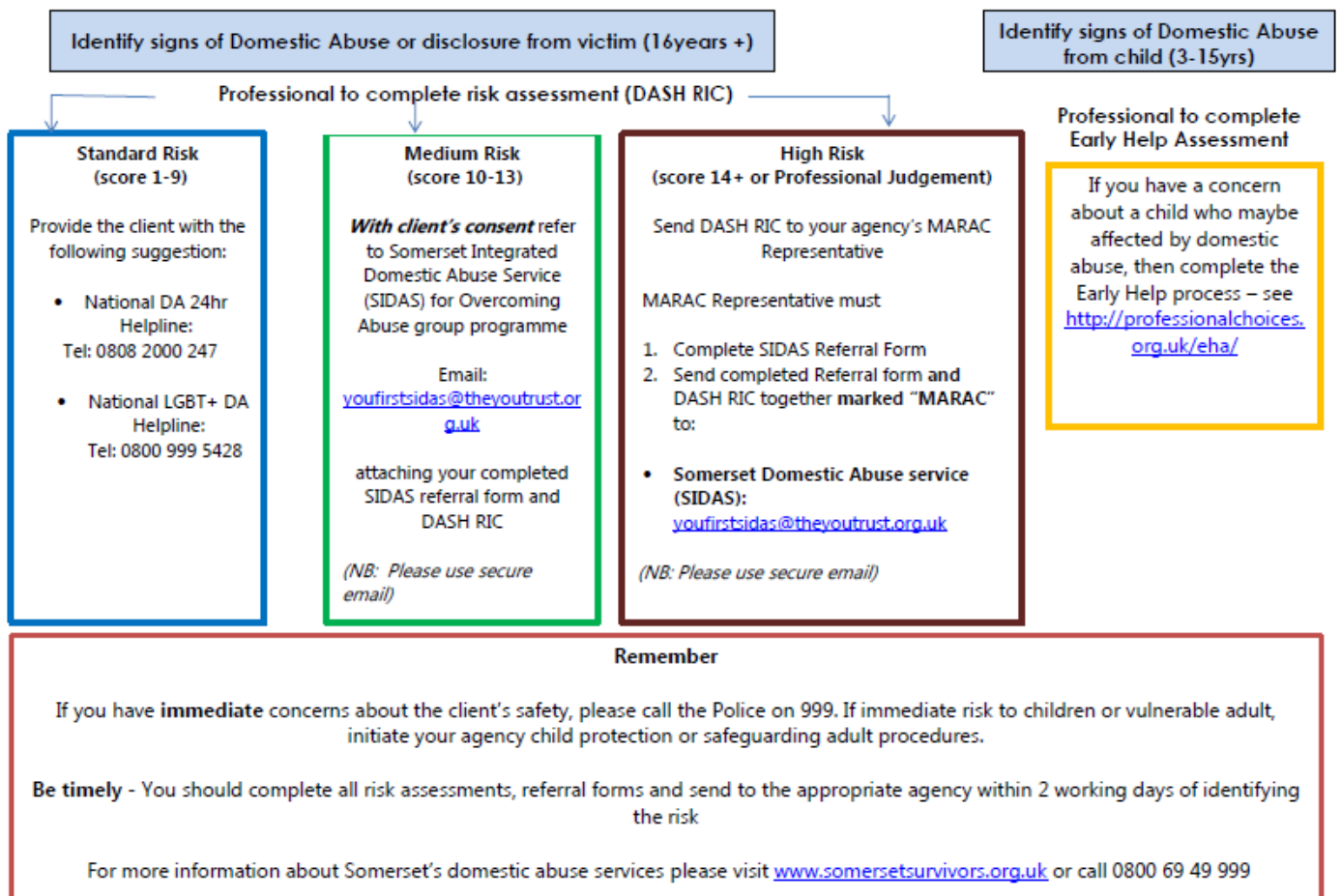
## MARAC in Somerset—Interim Arrangements

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, effective multi-agency working to safeguard victims at high risk of harm from domestic abuse remains essential. MARAC (multi-agency risk assessment conferences) continue to operate in Somerset. These have been reviewed to ensure remain the response is achievable. The current process is illustrated below.



# How to Make a Referral to the Somerset Integrated Domestic Abuse Service

## Somerset Domestic Abuse Service How to Refer (Victims/Survivors) v9 04.2020



### Tips For A Good Referral

1. **Always** use the ACPO DASH. (This is what we now use in Somerset)
2. **Don't just tick boxes** (on the DASH or referral form). Be curious. Write any specific relevant information onto the DASH or referral.
3. Be sensitive. **Take a trauma informed approach**. Encourage safe disclosure and engagement. Also to find out what the survivor/victim wants (it may not be what you think it is).
4. Include all relevant information. **Including any equality and diversity details**. Does the victim face any particular barriers seeking help?
5. Be aware of **particular risk factors**, e.g. separation, pregnancy, escalation of abuse. Use your professional judgement, if the 'number of ticks' seems too low to reflect what you're hearing/seeing. But explain on your referral form/DASH your justification.







**Somerset & Avon  
rape & sexual abuse support**

**Coronavirus Update On Services**

Confidential specialist support for people who have experienced rape or any kind of sexual assault or abuse at any time in their lives

**Freephone Helpline**

Open to anyone

**0808 801 0456**  
**0808 801 0646**

Mon: 11am - 2pm  
Tue: 12noon - 2pm, 6pm-8pm  
Wed: 12noon - 2pm, 6pm-8pm  
Thu: 12noon - 2pm, 6pm-8pm  
Fri: 11am - 2pm

**Other Services**

**1 to 1 Counselling**  
**1 to 1 Specialist  
Support**

**e-support**

**[support@sarsas.org.uk](mailto:support@sarsas.org.uk)**

Confidential, practical and emotional support provided by trained staff via e-mail

**Contact**

Bristol Office **0117 929 9556**  
Taunton Office **01823 324 944**

**[info@sarsas.org.uk](mailto:info@sarsas.org.uk)**  
**[www.sarsas.org.uk](http://www.sarsas.org.uk)**

Charity Registered in England No. 1126682  
Company No. 6738639

## New Domestic Abuse Campaign

### No Closed Doors 2020

Before the outbreak of the current COVID 19 (coronavirus) pandemic The Somerset Violence Reduction Unit had allocated funding for a domestic abuse campaign -#NoClosedDoors2020.

This campaign has been interrupted by the current self-isolation restrictions which have made some of its marketing goals impossible to achieve given the closure of so many venues. So now Somerset County Council is rolling out a new Covid-19 campaign, focused on the key messages that apply at this time.

- (1) Increase awareness that local confidential help is still available to men and women affected by domestic abuse.
- (2) Make the public aware that leaving an abuser does not break the self-isolation guidelines
- (3) Empower individuals to spot the signs and take action safely.

You can support this campaign by looking out for the hashtag #NoClosedDoors2020 on social media. Please share, like and comment with support to any of Somerset County Council's posts, to help increase engagement and spread the message far and wide.

More information on how you can support the campaign will be provided in due course.

We don't want our communities to suffer domestic abuse in silence.



**Somerset Council** @SomersetCouncil · Apr 8

Just because abuse in your relationship has been going on for a long time it doesn't make it normal behaviour. It doesn't have to be your way of life. Help is available: [somersetsurvivors.org.uk](https://somersetsurvivors.org.uk) #NoClosedDoors2020



## Do You Manage or Employ People?

Did you know that domestic abuse doesn't have to occur on an organisation's premises to affect your workplace? The COVID-19 lockdown has created conditions for the perfect storm: that many employees are being forced to live and work at home with someone who's causing them physical, emotional, psychological or other harm?

### If you are a manager, what should you do if you suspect your employee is experiencing domestic abuse?

1. Speak to your employee regularly. Given some employees may feel isolated anyway working at home, or away from their usual office base, this is a good idea anyway.
2. Follow your organisations HR Domestic Abuse Policy. This should include you asking specific questions such as:
  - How are you doing at the moment?
  - I've noticed that you seem distracted / upset at the moment – are you ok?
  - If there's anything you'd like to talk to me about at any time? I'm always here to support you.
  - Is everything all right at home? – You don't have to tell me anything, but please know that I would like to support you if and when you feel you need it. – What support do you think might help? What would you like to happen?
3. If you don't have a HR policy for domestic abuse then, either speak to your HR team and/or look at the Business In The Community toolkit at <https://www.bitc.org.uk/toolkit/domestic-abuse-toolkit/>

## Avon and Somerset Police Campaign

The Government have launched their "You are not alone" campaign, and this is being rolled out by Avon and Somerset Police. You can also engage this with this online, an example of a post is below.





## Reprovide Project Coronavirus Update

### Is REPROVIDE still recruiting during the Coronavirus period?

YES! The REPROVIDE study trialling a group intervention for men is still open to recruitment.

Please continue to send referrals to the research team through the usual channels (phone 07976 22 5462 or 07870 376 548 or email [reprovide-men@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:reprovide-men@bristol.ac.uk)).

### Why are we still recruiting?

We recognise that during the COVID-19 period of increased stress, uncertainty, home confinement and isolation, domestic abuse is likely to increase. We therefore feel that as far as possible, it is important that domestic abuse services provide support to men wanting to change their abusive behaviour and to their (ex)-partners. The REPROVIDE study is continuing to recruit men as before (although with the important change as below).

This means that as well as recruiting participants, we will be asking them to complete questionnaires and offering services to those randomly allocated to our 23-week domestic abuse perpetrator programme.

### Modifications during COVID-19

The group intervention for men allocated to receive this is currently suspended in its weekly group format in order to reduce the spread of the Coronavirus. Instead domestic abuse coordinators will be in regular contact with participants by phone, WhatsApp or Skype offering support and advice. The weekly group programme will start up again as soon as health and government advisors tell us that it is safe to do so.

Female partners and ex partners of men allocated to receive the intervention: Support to these partners will continue to be offered as normal albeit by remote methods.

Safe recruitment methods to the study using phone, Skype, WhatsApp will be used during the COVID-19 period.

**Safeguarding** – we will continue to monitor risk and safeguarding concerns with all our participants and contact the appropriate authorities and agencies.

### Any Questions?

If you have any questions please contact Rachel Laurie, the Somerset Reprovide Manager by emailing [Rachel.laurie@barnardos.org.uk](mailto:Rachel.laurie@barnardos.org.uk) or phone: 01823 270938



## Covid-19 Useful Publications

Please find below links to useful national publications relating to domestic abuse and Covid-19

- [Domestic abuse: how to get help \(Home Office\)](#)
- [Domestic abuse during COVID-19: Guidance for mental health practitioners \(AVA\)](#)
- [Guidance for providers of safe accommodation with support for victims of domestic abuse and their children \(MHCLG\)](#)
- [Harmful Traditional Practices in the Workplace, Urgent Response to Covid-19 \(University of Central Lancashire\)](#)
- [Safety and support resources for survivors, friends, family, neighbours and community members \(Women's Aid\)](#)
- [Staying safe during covid-19, a guide for victims and survivors of domestic abuse \(Safe Lives\)](#)

### MindLine

**Mindline Somerset**  
Emotional support helpline  
Coronavirus



**01823 276 892**

Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

### Domestic Abuse Bill Update

On 28th April 2020, the Domestic Abuse Bill returned to Government for its second reading. There are several areas where debate continues on whether the Bill is far-reaching enough. With the reported concerns over the negative impact of Covid-19 on domestic abuse, it's timely for the Government to progress this. Further details on the impact this will have locally, will be advised in due course.

### Healthy Somerset

### Somerset Coronavirus Helpline

**0300 7906275**

COVID-19: to find out how to stay  
healthy, happy and safe at home head  
to the Healthy Somerset website



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If you no longer want to receive emails/this newsletter from us please email [communitysafetyteam@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:communitysafetyteam@somerset.gov.uk). Or if you've not received this newsletter directly from us, and would like to be added to the mailing list, please email us