

*Supporting our communities*

## **Crisis and natural disasters: Supports to those impacted by domestic and family violence**

On average, one in six women experiences physical and/or sexual violence by a current or previous cohabitating partner. There is evidence that domestic and family violence increases after a natural disaster situation such as a bushfire, earthquake, or flood. Generally, there is increased alcohol and drug usage and job losses. The disruption of livelihoods and economic stress has the potential to exacerbate conflict. As resources are stretched and unaffordable, there will also be added risk for those experiencing financial abuse.

Domestic and family violence is also likely to increase due to social isolation and being at home is not always a safe place. Vulnerable women and children in forced isolation are potentially at even higher risk than usual. Women and children will be more vulnerable as a result of being cut off from informal and formal support systems. Women will have less contact with family and friends who provide support and protection from violence.

A reduction in access to support services can also exacerbate the risk of violence for women and children. Where there is a history of domestic violence abuse, women and children will already have underlying health issues that might increase their fear and vulnerability.

Under the guise of a natural disaster, perpetrators will have many more opportunities to exercise power and control, for example by restricting access to essential items such as soap, toilet paper and hand sanitizer. There is also the risk of increased mental health issues such as substance abuse, suicidality, depression, and anxiety. Changes in behaviour related to mental health can also pose a greater safety risk for others.

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### How those at risk can help themselves

- Try and organise a 'confidante' outside of the home. Ideally, someone like a work colleague or community member who you would be in regular contact with to not rouse suspicion.
- Be mindful of the monitoring of your personal devices such as mobile phone and email.
- Stay engaged with children. Keeping them occupied with new and interesting activities will ease their boredom and potential impact on your relationship.
- If you are struggling to regulate your emotions and feel you may be at risk of harming your partner, reach out to a counsellor and organise strategies and techniques that you can implement on your own.

For anyone who feels at risk of abuse, it is important to remember that there is help and support available from services such as [Interrelate](#). Support services have practices in place to reduce risk to victims and survivors. Risk screening and safety planning is particularly critical during times of crisis. Interrelate can help with safety planning, which includes developing a practical plan to help those who experience family violence to stay safe.

Interrelate provides specialist domestic and family violence support through several centres around Australia, including in regional areas. Interrelate can service clients through online platforms and via the phone.

**Interrelate are here to support** – [contact us](#) to have a chat about how we can help

#### **Source:**

ABS 2016 – included in Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019 Family, Domestic and sexual violence report 2019)

<https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/ajem-apr-2013-the-hidden-disaster-domestic-violence-in-the-aftermath-of-natural-disaster/>

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