

May 4, 2020

CENTRE FOR NON-VIOLENCE SAYS 'YOU ARE NOT ALONE'

Central Victoria's specialist domestic and family violence response service, Centre for Non-Violence, is concerned by a drop in the number of calls to support services since the outbreak of Covid-19.

CNV chief executive officer Margaret Augerinos says it is always difficult to know the true number of domestic violence victims, but the silence during this global pandemic is telling.

"Because we are being asked to socially distance and remain at home unless it is essential to go out, women have limited opportunities to make calls away from their abuser, or access services," she said.

"We have seen fewer calls, but many of those coming are in the high-risk category – which means women are not in a position to be able to reach out for the help they need until they are in crisis.

"This is not what we want. We want to reach those women before the abuse or violence escalates."

Centre for Non-Violence will next week start an advertising campaign across television, radio and social media – with the message 'you are not alone'.

CNV is hearing from women that men are changing their tactics of abuse during Covid-19.

Some men working from home are not giving their partners respite from their demands, and others are stopping their partner leaving the house for essential items. In some cases, vulnerable children are being prevented from attending school, but the abuser is not helping with remote learning.

Other tactics of abuse include restricting or monitoring someone's movements, monitoring conversations with others, or stopping a woman calling support networks; monitoring devices or social media accounts or taking them away; withholding money or food; using misinformation about the virus to scare someone or using the virus as an excuse to ignore parenting or intervention orders.

Ms Augerinos says many women will be drawing on their own resources to keep themselves and their children safe, while they are all at home.

"We want women to know we are here, and they can talk to us about what is happening," she said.

While it is difficult for women to find a safe way to contact Centre for Non-Violence, some women may be able to create a plausible reason for leaving the house, or wait for their partner to fall asleep before calling. They should always try to call from a room with an exit.

Centre for Non-Violence can help women prepare safety plans – regardless of whether the woman intends to leave the relationship.

"We know it takes courage to seek help if you are living in fear," Ms Augerinos said.

"We can talk to you about a range of options to help keep you safe.

"You may need to prepare a safety plan, which could include a list of emergency contacts, identifying a safe place to go, having a support person you can call and use a code word with, checking your online security or preparing a bag with important documents such as medication, money or keys."

It is important we continue to hold perpetrators to account and place the onus on them to change their attitudes and behaviour. Centre for Non-Violence is encouraging men who are worried about their behaviour towards family members, to contact us for support.

“The only way we can change behaviour is to address the drivers of violence against women and children,” Ms Augerinos said. “Violence is about power and control and is caused by attitudes that excuse or condone violence, limit a person’s decision-making, adhere to rigid gender roles and disrespect women.”

Centre for Non-Violence says it is up to all of us to be active bystanders. We must act if we hear or see someone experiencing domestic or family violence or abuse.

You can:

- Report concerning behaviour.
- Offer support or assistance if it’s safe for you to do so.
- Call out sexism and attitudes that disrespect women, or condone violence.
- Help victim/survivors prepare safety plans.
- Educate yourself to understand what causes family violence and abuse.
- In an emergency, call 000.

“It is important we find ways to stay connected with those we know are at risk,” Ms Augerinos said. “Someone living in an abusive relationship may stop communicating during this time, or when speaking with you they may be anxious or express concern about their partner becoming angry.”

It can be difficult to know how to help, but some strategies could include:

- Listening without judgement.
- Not making excuses for the abuse - which can be physical, but also psychological.
- Not questioning their choices - understand that for many reasons, they may not be ready to leave. For many women, leaving a relationship is the most dangerous time.
- Finding practical ways to help - for example, delivering groceries or keeping copies of private documents, and offering your home as a safe place to escape to.
- Helping the person prepare a safety plan.
- In an emergency, call 000.

Centre for Non-Violence covers the Loddon region – which includes the City of Greater Bendigo and the Central Goldfields, Mt Alexander, Macedon Ranges, Loddon and Buloke shires.

Centre for Non-Violence can be contacted on 1800 884 292 | The 24-hour statewide safe steps family violence crisis response line is 1800 015 188 | Men’s Referral Service 1300 766 491 | In an emergency, call 000 | For information, visit: <https://www.cnv.org.au/we-are-here-to-help>