

## Shelter-In-Place While Living in Abusive Homes

By Amy Groven, LMFT

Shelter in place is supposed to keep us safe, but for some people, it means being trapped in their home with abusive partners. With tension already being high, and then adding further stress from homeschooling children, financial issues mounting, and the uncertainty of when work will return, those in domestic violence situations are in even more danger.

During the first week of Shelter-In-Place, the San Francisco DA saw an initial spike of 60% increase in clients coming to their victim services division<sup>1</sup>. This is not unique to San Francisco- we are seeing a huge spike across the board as counties and states implement this necessary ordinance. So, what are victims supposed to do? How can they survive being trapped 24/7 with an abusive person? How can we let victims know that help is still here? These tips may help you or a loved one who is in that very situation.

### SAFETY PLAN

A safety plan consists of steps put into place in case of an emergency situation. Leaving an abusive relationship can be the most dangerous part of the relationship. Having a plan before you leave can help you be more successful in leaving. Part of this plan is gathering all of your important documents (things like birth certificates, bank statements, ID, etc.), a few changes of clothes, money, keys, etc. and put them together in a “go bag” which can be hidden from the other partner. You may want to keep this bag at a friend’s house, or somewhere the abuser will not look. The best time to leave is if the abuser is not in the home, but since shelter in place is happening, you may have to find a different opening to leave. If you have children, make a bag and a plan for them too. Your plan should include where you will go (shelter with a friend, go to a DV shelter, etc.), and how you will keep yourself safe. If you need help doing this you can contact Empower Yolo’s crisis line, which will be talked about later in this article.

### LET SOMEONE KNOW

Many domestic violence victims feel that they will be shamed or blamed for staying in abusive relationships, or that somehow others will believe that they are the one in the wrong. They may also be afraid that word will get back to their abuser and they will be abused even worse. It is understandable why abuse is kept a secret. If at all possible, letting someone know you are in trouble can save your life. Even if you are not ready to leave, and want to work it out- letting someone you trust know what is going on with you can be advantageous in case things continue to sour. It can be easier to ask for help in that moment you really need it if someone around you knows what is going on, and you do not have to explain the whole story.

Let’s also not forget that many abusers isolate their victims from friends and family, so if you need support and have been isolated from a support network, there are places you can reach out to, like Empower Yolo’s crisis hotline.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://sfmayor.org/article/mayor-breed-and-district-attorney-boudin-announce-temporary-housing-survivors-domestic>

## **HOTLINE**

Empower Yolo's crisis hotline is available 24/7 and is a support line for survivors and caregivers of survivors of violence. It is a place to have someone to talk to, find resources such as legal referrals, help with finding shelter, confidential therapy, as well as referrals and resources for other things that may get in the way of leaving an abusive relationship such as clothing and food vouchers. Our hotline is answered by trained staff and volunteers who are empathetic and want to help. Call 530-662-1133 or 916-371-1907.

## **SUPPORT GROUPS**

It is easy to feel alone, like you are the only one going through an abusive situation. Depending on what is going on, you may also feel like it is all of your fault. Support groups can be very effective in learning about abuse and new healthy skills, as well as meet others who have gone through a similar situation. Empower Yolo has support groups to help you with your growth and lessen the feeling of being alone. Our newest group is done over Zoom on the topic of self-care, and is for those 18 and over. Please call the main line, or email Amy Groven at [Amy@empoweryolo.org](mailto:Amy@empoweryolo.org) to sign up for the group.

## **HELPFUL APPS**

Helpful applications such as Aspire News can be a great way to covertly have help at the tips of your fingers on your smart phone. Disguised as a news app, this application can help you pre-record messages to go to certain people at the touch of a button. It can also alert others of your location, start video and audio recordings and call 911 at the touch of a button. It also has some useful curriculum and resources for domestic violence victims. It is disguised as a news app so that if the abuser looks through the phone, it will just look like a regular application. There is also a way to switch the screen to a news story quickly if someone decides to look over your shoulder while you are looking at the application. It is available for both android and iPhone and is free.

## **CARE FOR YOURSELF**

Regardless if we are sheltering in place or not, self-care is incredibly important. Self-care usually invokes images of massages, spas, and expensive vacations, but it does not have to be so indulgent. Making sure you are taking care of your basic needs is a good place to start. Ensuring you have healthy food, drink enough water, get exercise and adequate sleep is the base to building a solid self-care plan. We also have social and emotional needs that we need to take care of like the need to spend time with others and have our emotions validated and understood. If we cannot reach out to others because it is not safe, then at least getting our feelings out by writing them down can be helpful. If it is not safe to keep a paper and pen journal, then you may want to download a journal application that is password protected. Practicing daily self-care can help with feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness, as you start to show yourself that you can take care of yourself.

If you or someone you know needs help while sheltering in place with their abuser within Yolo County, please reach out to Empower Yolo. We are here to help.