

May Newsletter

Survivors and Covid-19

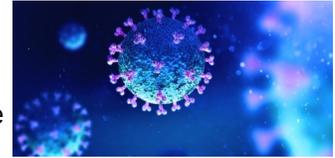
Special Dates

- **May 5 - #GivingTuesdayNow**
- **June 15 - World Elder Abuse Awareness Day**

Current Needs

- **Disinfectant wipes**
- **Paper towels**
- **33 gal. strong trash bags**
- **Laundry detergent**
- **All-purpose liquid cleaner (like PineSol)**

The truth is that the world has never seen anything like this pandemic. Ever. And in spite of our dislike of having to stay at home, being limited in our social interactions, and most likely a decreased income, the overall effect for most of us is difficult, but not dangerous.



This isn't the case for a lot of folks who are victims of intimate partner violence. Domestic violence hotlines across the country, and indeed, around the world, are reporting situations such as these:

One caller reported that her husband wouldn't let her go to work, because he says that she wants to bring Covid-19 home to infect him. Another woman had been strangled by her partner but was afraid to go to the hospital because of concerns about the virus. An immunocompromised man reported that his girlfriend was hiding sanitizing supplies from him in an act of emotional abuse. Another abuser threatened to throw his partner out if she starts coughing.

Keeping in mind that abuse rises from a need for power and control, let's take a look at why this pandemic has a significant impact on survivors.

- Shelter-in-place orders means that victims of abuse are spending a lot more time with their abusers; the odds of an aggressive incident rise with increased time together.
- Widespread job/income loss equals financial strain, which increases stressors, often leading to increased intimate partner aggression. This loss of income may also make it more difficult for a survivor to leave an abusive relationship, since any money that had been secretly put aside to do so will soon be used for necessary bills.
- An overall feeling of lack of control, (which we all are experiencing to some extent during this crisis), often contributes to an increase in abusive behaviors. If an individual is unable to maintain control in other areas of their life, it is more likely that they will exert that control over a vulnerable partner.
- A survivor most likely will find it more difficult to get help during this pandemic. They may be afraid to seek medical or mental health help because of fear of exposure to the virus, and those facilities may have less availability as well.
- Less contact with friends and family who normally provide support to the victim may place them at greater risk. In addition, a victim may be unable to seek refuge in their parents' or friends' homes due to fear of exposing them to the virus.

As we can see, our work is more important than ever, and we need to encourage survivors to reach out for our help as this pandemic continues. Thanks for spreading the word that Response is here and ready to provide hope and healing!

Survivor Story

Aly Raisman



We know Aly Raisman as an amazing gymnast, a six-time Olympic medalist who brought crowds to their feet with her flawless performances. Then, in the fall of 2017, we learned that she is also a survivor of sexual abuse, perpetrated by USA Gymnastics team doctor, Larry Nassar.

The USA Gymnastics sex abuse scandal was revealed in September of 2016, when the *Indianapolis Star* reported the allegations of two female gymnasts who filed complaints against Nassar. The paper also published an article the previous month which uncovered numerous examples of teenage gymnasts reporting sexual abuse by coaches and staff. It was revealed that top executives in this organization failed to report the allegations to the proper authorities.

Since that time over 250 young gymnasts have come forward with allegations against Nassar, he was sentenced to 175 years in prison, and there are ongoing settlements regarding the cover-ups by both Michigan State University and USA Gymnastics.

Raisman revealed her abuse just prior to publication of her memoir, *Fierce: How Competing for Myself Changed Everything*. She talked about how Nassar had been abusing her since she was 15, using his powerful position as a team physician to win her trust and silence. Nassar “treated” Raisman and numerous fellow athletes using “massage” for most injuries, while fondling their breasts and vaginal areas.

Raisman has used her horrific experience to become a passionate champion for sexual assault survivors everywhere. In addition to her powerful testimony at Nassar’s trial, she is advocating for a bill to extend the statute of limitations for reporting sexual abuse. Raisman has also teamed up with the nonprofit, Darkness To Light, to help parents and coaches spot the signs of abuse.

Thank you to this brave survivor who is working hard to shine a light on childhood sexual abuse.

#GivingTuesdayNow - May 5

You might remember our #GivingTuesday campaign back in the fall, right after Thanksgiving... welcome to a special edition of this same campaign, **#GivingTuesdayNow**, which was developed in response to the urgent needs created by the Covid-19 pandemic.

GivingTuesday is a nonprofit organization that was begun in 2012 with the intent of unleashing the power of people to transform their communities through generosity. It has traditionally been held on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving, to coordinate with Black Friday and Cyber Monday.

During GivingTuesday, folks are encouraged to donate their time, talents, goods, or money to an organization that they care about.

Due to the Covid-19 shutdown, we were not able to hold our annual fundraiser, the Spring Fashion Show, which may impact the level of services that we are able to provide for our community. We are encouraging individuals who might be interested in helping Response to visit our website at www.responseva.org/donations. As we post this event on Facebook, please help us out by sharing on your own page and encouraging folks to play a part in healing our community!



From our Friends at NNEDV



Tips for helping a friend experiencing domestic abuse during COVID-19.

Introduction

During a public health crisis, when officials recommend “social distancing” to slow the spread of infection, those facing domestic abuse may encounter additional risk. More likely than not, they will find themselves confined in the same spaces with their perpetrators for prolonged periods of time, limiting their privacy and exacerbating threats to their safety. If you have a friend, family member or co-worker in an abusive relationship, it can be difficult to know what to do. But you can do your part by starting a conversation, offering support and suggesting ways to get help. This guide, developed by the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV), offers tips on how you can help a friend dealing with domestic abuse while also maintaining your safety during a public health crisis.

Leaving an abusive relationship can be a dangerous endeavor in the best of times, but during times of global crisis it becomes even more difficult. This is why it's important not to pressure someone to leave when they don't feel ready. Instead, let them know you are there for them, that you support them, and that you'll be there to help them figure out the best strategies to get through this safely.



Ask them how they would prefer to connect

“How would you prefer we connect?”

It's important to establish a safe communication channel since they will be, in many instances, physically close to the abuser, who might be monitoring conversations. For instance, is there a specific platform or app they prefer to use? Would they prefer an instant message or text over a call? Or perhaps instead of a messaging app, you could chat in an online game, since the abuser may be less likely to look there. If communicating through text or chat, it may be helpful to remind them about erasing messages when the conversation is over. What is most important is that they think through which communication method will be the least risky for them. And remember, what's safe for someone one day may be dangerous the next, so be sure to check back in each time to see if that method is still best for them.



Help them think through how to stay safe during COVID-19

“Let's develop a safety plan”

Help them think through what dangerous situations may arise, and help create a plan for how they can get through it safely. This could include, for instance, giving them the number to a local domestic violence helpline, or developing an escape strategy - such as saying they need to go to the pharmacy or grocery store and, once there, asking to use the phone to call for help.



Stay in touch and be creative

“Let's have a call with the kids?” or “Let's play a game online”

Once you identify a preferred way to connect, make sure you stay in touch and try to be creative in how you reach out. Avoid making the abuser suspicious so the communication lines can stay open. If you both have children, for example, you can suggest joint calls between both yourselves and the kids. Or create a secret code for the conversations, such as multiple code words, sentences or emojis that would help you communicate more safely. For instance, think together about a code word or symbol that would trigger a call from you. This might very well be the best strategy to disrupt an ongoing abusive situation and prevent it from escalating. Or find another one that would mean they need you to call a friend or family member, the police, or the local helpline. Keep the lines of communication open without directly asking about the abuse, and let them know you are available to talk and help whenever they may need it.

Sheltering in Place recommendations or restrictions may create additional difficulties and risks for survivors. If authorities call for “shelter in place” in your area, are there other friends or family she could stay with during this time? Consider helping her to reach out to these people to make a plan.

NNEDV is the leading voice for domestic violence survivors and their advocates, and offers a range of programs and initiatives to address the complex causes and far-reaching consequences of this issue. For more information please visit nnedv.org.



Be supportive and believe in them

“You are not alone. I care about you, and I'm here for you, no matter what.”

Reassure them that they're not alone and that there is help and support out there. It may be difficult for them to talk about the abuse. If they want to talk, listen carefully and be empathetic. Let them know that the abuse is not their fault and that you believe what they're saying. Ask what you can do and make yourself available to help them figure out a solution. Your support will be even more important during these trying times.



Help find a local domestic violence helpline

“Here is the contact information for that grocery store I've told you about”

Help your friend find the right channel to ask for help. Is there a local domestic violence helpline? What time are they available? What services and support do they provide? Many domestic violence helplines are working to provide their services on online chat during the pandemic. It's probably safer for you to research and provide this information rather than them looking it up. Make sure when you send this information, you are communicating it safely and using any agreed upon code words or references and communication channels, to avoid raising suspicions.

Visit the following links to learn more about:

Technology Safety & Privacy: A Toolkit for Survivors
<https://www.techsafety.org/resources-survivors>
Privacy & Safety at Facebook: A guide for survivors of abuse
<https://www.facebook.com/safety/resources>
Tech Safety App - available in app or website version
<https://techsafetyapp.org/home>