



To Our Community Partners:

Essex County Family Justice Center is committed to uninterrupted support for victims of domestic violence during the COVID-19 public health crisis. We recognize that there are new challenges to safety and unique risks for individuals who are living with an abuser at a time when we are urged to stay at home and most external outlets are unavailable. Our team is working tirelessly to stay on top of the issues most important to victim safety and we ask for your support in coordinating these efforts.

Here is what we are doing. Our center in Newark is currently closed for visitors and all of our advocates are working remotely. We are asking all victims living in Essex County to call our main number 973-230-7229. Calls are forwarded directly to an advocate between 9am and 3pm Monday through Friday, and advocates will provide safety planning and answer questions regarding accessing services. We are in constant communication with our onsite partner staff who are also providing remote civil legal services, behavioral health services, shelter advocacy and criminal justice advocacy.

We ask that you please spread the word that we are available and to please share our contact number with victims along with the information and resources described below. We also ask that you share with us any information relevant to the provision of services in Newark or at the county or state level.

Thank you for your support and collaboration.

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**From Essex County Family Justice Center**

Please know that as isolating as the COVID-19 public health crisis may be, you are not alone. There is help out there. We have put together resources that will be able to assist in times of crisis.

**Essex County Family Justice Center: 973-230-7229**

Advocates will be answering calls between 9am and 3pm, Monday-Friday. After these hours, leave a message and your call will be returned between 9 and 3. Advocates will provide safety planning and answer questions regarding accessing services. We are in constant communication with our onsite partner staff who are also providing remote civil legal services, behavioral health services, shelter advocacy and criminal justice advocacy

### **Emergency Shelter**

If you live in **Essex County** and are a victim of domestic violence in need of shelter, please call the Safe House at **973-759-2154**

The **Statewide Domestic Violence Hotline** is available at **1-800-572-SAFE (7233)**, and can help direct survivors to the resources closest to them.

Please visit the **New Jersey Coalition to End Domestic Violence (NJCEDV)** website, for more information, tips and resources. <https://njcedv.org/>

The **National Domestic Violence Hotline's Deaf Videophone** is available to assist Deaf survivors at **1-855-812-1001**. You can also **chat or text with an advocate** by going to the **National Domestic Violence Hotline**, click on **"Chat Now"**; or **text LOVEIS** to **22522**.

If you or someone you know is in need of shelter or resources and lives outside of New Jersey, the **National Domestic Violence Hotline** can connect you with your local domestic violence agency by calling **1-800-799-7233**.

**Domestic Violence shelters are available. However, due to COVID-19 there may be restrictions and therefore try to consider alternatives such as staying with family or friends, or staying in motels/hotels.**

### **Restraining Orders**

Restraining Orders can be obtained at your local police station. Please note that victims are also being encouraged to obtain Temporary Restraining Orders (TRO's) if they feel they need protection from someone who may be getting released from jail by going to their local police station. Because of the current COVID-19 outbreak, TRO's are not being obtained through Family Court at this time

As of March 18, 2020 and until further notice, there are no in-person Superior Court proceedings (except for extremely limited emergent matters and certain ongoing trials). As many matters as possible (including case management conferences, motions, and hearings) will be handled by telephone or video conference. Please contact the court at <https://www.njcourts.gov/courts/family/familyvicinage.html?lang=eng#essex>

## **Recent developments regarding inmate release**

On March 23, 2020, the New Jersey Supreme Court granted an order to commute or suspend county jail sentences for those who are serving as a condition of probation for an indictable offense or due to a municipal court convictions. We are concerned as to how this may impact victims of domestic violence who may have remained safe and protected from their partner's abuse because they have been in jail.

Victims who wish to be informed of an inmate's release are urged to register here <https://vinelink.vineapps.com/search> to be notified. For further assistance, please call Essex County Family Justice Center at 973-230-7229.

## **Developing a Safety Plan for Victims of Domestic Violence in Times of a Public Health Crisis**

While we are in a public health crisis and the country is in a state of emergency, things change constantly and we are likely to be asked to stay home. That's a negative factor that can increase incidents of domestic violence or make it difficult to leave an abusive relationship. Also abusers can use this national health concern as a tool to exert control and power over their victims.

Since the country is in crisis and the health of the public is in danger, we need to build a safety plan that takes into account these factors.

### **Safety in the Home**

- Try to maintain contact with a person you trust and establish a keyword with her/him, only for emergency situations.
- Have 911 as a contact that you can quickly access.
- Discuss a safety plan with your children if they are with you and think about who can take care of them if you need to leave for a period of time.
- Try to communicate with your support system by giving them an update on your situation when the abuser isn't around.
- Park your car with the front facing the street, in case you need to escape, it will be easier.

### **Safety during an explosive incident**

- Trust your judgment or intuition.
- Try to stay in an area where you have access to an exit and know your escape routes.
- Stay away from the bathroom, kitchen or where weapons may be kept.
- Try to keep as much distance between you and the abuser as possible.

- In a violent incident: protect your head and neck as best you can. If you were strangled/choked or hit your head and can't go to the hospital, check your body and pay attention to changes in breathing, vision or hearing, as well as other symptoms like dizziness, frequent headaches, urination and defecation. If these symptoms persist or get worse, it is important for you to get medical help.
- If violence is unavoidable, make yourself a small target. Dive into a corner and curl up into a ball with your face protected and arms around each side of your head, fingers entwined.
- Do not wear long scarves or jewelry around your neck in the event your partner tries to strangle you.
- If you are pregnant pay even more attention to your health and symptoms you may be experiencing.
- Try to keep firearms, sharp objects such as knives and other weapons locked away.

### **Related with COVID-19**

- Keep your social security card, identification, and health insurance in a safe place to the best of your ability.
- Inform yourself about the symptoms of COVID-19, and check regularly if you or those you live with have these symptoms: cough, fever, sore throat, runny nose, fatigue or tiredness, difficulty breathing. If your partner is experiencing these symptoms, be aware that you might be exposed as well.
- The CDC recommends that If you think you have been exposed to COVID-19 and develop a fever and symptoms, such as cough or difficulty breathing, call your healthcare provider for medical advice.
- It is encouraged that you disclose any abuse or your fears of safety to your doctor or healthcare provider. You can also use this time to call the domestic violence hotline to safety plan so you can isolate and recover from the virus safely away from your abuser.
- Keep the COVID-19 Hotline handy on you and make sure that your partner is not physically around before making a call at 1-800-962-1253.
- Keep disinfectant and hand sanitizer with you in a safe place and establish a daily routine of self-care and care for your children.
- Be aware of all the actions that medical professionals are saying to prevent infection, such as frequent hand washing, avoiding close contact with sick people, disinfecting your home, and covering your mouth when you sneeze or cough.
- Essex County COVID-19 testing site is available by appointment by visiting <https://essexcovid.org/>

### **Safety with Technology**

- Delete any information you have on your cell phone that can be suspicious to your abuser.
- Keep your cell phone in a safe place and at all times, this is your best form of communication.

### **Safety When Preparing to Leave**

- Please note that public transportation may have changed. If you have an opportunity, check online or with a friend for bus times and routes and taxi services.
- Find out what agencies are being impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak in your area - find out if they are open, operating under modified schedules, offering limited services, etc.
- Identify any neighbors that can help you.
- Call hotline numbers or domestic violence programs to find out how the courts and police departments can help. In an emergency call 911 - situations can change very quickly.
- Plan a safe place that you can go to: a family member/friend's house or shelter.
- Identify a time or day that you can leave without your abuser knowing.
- Remember to gather identifying documents (birth certificates, social security cards, immigration paperwork, drivers licenses) for yourself and any children.

### **After Leaving the Relationship**

- Try to maintain social connections online or over the phone with people who can support you.
- Keep the restraining order with you at all times. Tell family members, friends or neighbors that you have it.
- Call your local police department to report and request a response to any violations.
- Call Essex County Family Justice Center for help with safety planning and support. 973-230-7229
- Call hotlines or domestic violence programs because they may have remote counseling at this time.
- With the COVID-19 outbreak, this time can feel very uncertain and isolating. Taking the time for your health and well-being may help you to feel more safe and secure.

Crisis Text Line: text "NJ" to 741741

☐ Family Helpline: 1-800-843-5437

☐ Mental Health Hotline: 866-202-4357

Essex County Family Justice Center 973-230-7229