

Press Release from Buckinghamshire Council

08 February 2021

Love shouldn't hurt

When most of us think about Valentine's Day we think of spending time with our partners, romantic gestures, a loving message in a Valentine's card and maybe a gift. Unfortunately for many people in Bucks it represents just another day of physical or psychological abuse at the hands of a loved one.

National restrictions mean that many people are spending longer periods of time at home with their partners; amplifying existing tensions and escalating conflict. Lockdown may have made it harder for victims to access help and support which is why it's really important to raise awareness of the different ways our residents can access help and support.

Councillor Gareth Williams, Buckinghamshire Council's Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health, said: "We know that home isn't always a safe place for everyone and I cannot stress enough that 'Stay Home' doesn't mean that you cannot get help if you are living with a controlling or abusive partner. Please don't suffer in silence, there are ways you can seek help without your partner finding out.

"I would also like to urge residents to keep an eye on your friends, family members, colleagues and neighbours. Anyone, of any age and of any gender can be a victim. It's never been more important to ensure that we are all looking out for each other to keep individuals and our communities safe. It's vital that we all know the signs of domestic abuse so that if you spot something that doesn't look or feel right, we can speak out and report it.

"It isn't always looking out for cuts and bruises, it's other signs like the victim is becoming submissive and withdrawn or has suddenly broken off contact with yourself or others. Has their partner taken over control of their finances or are they controlling what they wear? These are all signs of controlling behaviours. If you want to learn how to recognise domestic abuse, visit Women's Aid's website at: <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/recognising-domestic-abuse/>

"If you, or someone you know is victim of domestic abuse please seek help, it is still available."

Here are some ways to seek help and keep yourself safer:

Silent calls to the police - If you are in danger but are unable to speak for fear of being heard, call 999, listen and respond to questions and instructions and make yourself heard by coughing, tapping the handset or once prompted by the automated system, by pressing 55. Police will do their best to respond.

Cover your tracks online - If you have access to the internet but are worried that your abuser may be able to see which websites you have visited, Women's Aid has a webpage giving advice about how to hide your tracks online - <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/cover-your-tracks-online/>

Ask for Ani – Over 2000 Boots stores and some independent pharmacies are now offering discreet help for victims of domestic abuse. Look out for posters and ask a member of staff for Ani.

Safe word / emoji - speak to someone you trust and agree a safe word or maybe a generic emoji that you can quickly text to alert them that you need the emergency services. You could establish code words or phrases that the abuser will not understand.

Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) – If you're concerned your partner has a history of domestic abuse, you have the right to ask the police for information about a person's past in relation to domestic abuse or violence. DVDS isn't just for partners. A disclosure can also be requested by anyone - a family member, friend, colleague or neighbour can apply for a disclosure to protect someone they believe to be at risk from their partner.

If you, or someone else is in immediate danger, always dial 999.

There's lots more information about where to get help on the Buckinghamshire Council's website at: www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk

Local support services:

Aylesbury Women's Aid: 01296 437777
www.aylesburywomensaid.org.uk

Wycombe Women's Aid: 01494 461367
www.wycombewomensaid.org.uk

Women's Aid also offer an online chat service Monday to Friday 10am - 4pm, Saturday and Sunday 10am-12 noon - chat.womensaid.org.uk

Other support services:

National Domestic Abuse Helpline – 0808 2000 247 – www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk/ (run by Refuge)

The Men's Advice Line, for male domestic abuse survivors – 0808 801 0327 (run by Respect)

The Mix, free information and support for under 25s in the UK – 0808 808 4994

National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline – 0800 999 5428 (run by Galop)

Samaritans (24/7 service) – 116 123