

NEWS

Domestic abuse support available even if self-isolating

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A domestic abuse service in Plymouth has warned that victims may be feeling unable to flee abusive or violent situations due to self-isolation requirements for themselves or their children.

Plymouth Domestic Abuse Services (PDAS), run by Sanctuary Supported Living, which provides practical, non-judgemental support, advice and protection for all victims of domestic abuse, has experienced a drop in the number of people contacting them about needing refuge accommodation in recent weeks.

Given the rise in cases of domestic abuse since the start of the pandemic, combined

with the increase in Covid-19 cases and people being 'pinged' by the Test and Trace app, PDAS staff are concerned that people experiencing domestic abuse may be feeling unable to flee their homes if they have been notified that they or a family member need to self-isolate. Perpetrators of domestic abuse may also be using self-isolation requirements as an opportunity to try and prevent their victims from leaving.

Katy Fisher, Local Service Manager for PDAS, said: "We would like to reassure the public that fleeing domestic abuse is a permitted exemption from self-isolation requirements. If you or a family member, including children, are self-isolating and you need to flee an abusive situation, you should try to

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avoid mixing with others where possible, and take precautions such as hand hygiene or wearing a mask, but it does not mean that you cannot leave. If you, or someone you know, is experiencing domestic abuse and requires support or refuge accommodation - even during a period of self-isolation - our staff are here to support you, so please get in touch.”

PDAS has recently expanded its community-based support, with a new Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) based at Derriford Hospital, providing another route for victims to get support. The new IDVA role was made financially possible thanks to a £40m Government fund which was created to help tackle the increase in domestic abuse during the pandemic, and is organised in partnership with the safeguarding team at University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust. The team at PDAS hope that the new hospital-based IDVA support will enable them to connect with victims of domestic violence who may not otherwise have got in touch with the service.

Councillor John Riley, Plymouth City Council Cabinet Member for Governance, HR, IT, and Community Safety added: “Thank you to PDAS for the brilliant service they provide to victims of domestic abuse, and for this

timely reminder that support is available whatever your circumstances. Do what you can to reduce the spread of the virus, but if anyone is in an abusive situation, your personal safety must be your priority. Please don't hesitate to get in contact with PDAS if you need help.”

