

MARCH 2020

# Family Violence in Emergencies (COVID-19)

## Experiencing Family Violence in Emergencies

We know that family violence reports, incidents and police call outs increase during periods of emergency and this may impact employees at Pyrenees Shire Council directly. Family violence can occur for the first time during and after emergencies. It can also escalate and continue in cases where violence already occurs within the home.

We take this risk seriously and are committed to continuing to support anyone experiencing family violence regardless of the way we are operating throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

*For families affected by violence, COVID-19 driven self-isolation measures can pose increased risk. No matter what the external stressors, violence is never excusable (Respect Victoria).*

### COVID-19 specific risks

Being forced to share space with perpetrators for extended periods of time with external stressors, including: anxiety arising from the state of flux, financial uncertainty (e.g. job losses in the wake of COVID-19), food insecurity (fueled by panic shopping), restlessness from changed daily habits and reduced social interaction, could lead to a spike in family violence (Respect Victoria).

For employees experiencing family violence workplaces can offer a place of refuge and connection with others. Working from home and other measures put in place as a result of COVID-19 may result in victim-survivors becoming isolated. Adherence to rigid gender roles and the burden of caring may further compound risk for some people.

Other countries where the virus has caused significant disruption have reported increases cases of family violence. This is consistent with other emergencies.

## Family violence can emerge during an emergency and be gendered

Research into Victoria's 2009 Black Saturday bushfires found that many women experienced increased incidents of family violence, often perpetrated by their male partners. Almost half of these incidents occurred in families that had not previously experienced family violence. (DHHS: <https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/familyviolence-emergencies>).

## Causes of family violence and relationship to gender inequality

*Anyone can experience family violence.*

In Australia, more than one woman a week is murdered by a current or former partner. As such, we also need to acknowledge the gendered nature of family violence. The causes of family violence are complex and can include gender inequality and community attitudes towards women (Our Watch).

We know that gender identity, and other aspects of identity including age, culture and disability can affect experiences of family violence and that some people may require specialised support services.

## General inequality in emergencies

Research indicates that gender inequality can be worsened in emergency situations as people adhere to traditional gender roles.

For example, men taking control of the emergency-related decision-making processes in the family, and women taking on caring for dependents (both sick and healthy) and household duties such as cooking and cleaning. These gender roles might play out differently depending on aspects of identity including Aboriginality and sexuality. (DHHS:



<https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/familyviolence-emergencies> ).

### What does family violence look like?

Family violence can take many forms, including: physical, sexual (including within a relationship), threats, name calling, controlling contact with others, limiting or denying access to money, threatening or hurting pets, or children witnessing abuse.

### Pyrenees Shire Council Employee Contacts

Support for any Pyrenees Shire Council employees experiencing violence remains in place regardless of the working arrangements in an emergency. You can contact any director or manager, including the Manager People & Culture (Norman Prueter) via your preferred method during business hours.

In an emergency always call the Police on 000.

For support outside of business hours call the 24-hour support hotline provided by *Safe Steps* on 1800 015 188.

### What support is available?

Provisions for people experiencing family violence are included under the Pyrenees Shire Council Enterprise Agreement.

Support provided will be tailored depending on individual needs but may include:

- Changes to work hours
- Job redesign or change in duties
- Relocation to other suitable employment
- Change of telephone or email
- Access to family friendly and flexible work
- Additional paid leave
- Referral to the Employee Assistance Program with a professional trained specifically in family violence
- Information on external support services available

*Anyone accessing support can be assured that their situation will be kept confidential and no information will be retained on file.*

We understand that reaching out, particularly over the phone or via email, can be difficult. We encourage you to do so as this will enable us to work with you to find the support most appropriate for your individual circumstance. The team are well equipped to put our policies into action. These provisions are there to support our employees and your well-being and safety is a core priority.

### Support Services in or near the Pyrenees Shire

It is against the law to hurt any member of your family or for anyone to hurt you.

**Family violence hurts kids too** – it is against the law for children or young people to experience, see or hear violence in the home.

- If in danger call **000**
- Nationwide: **1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732)** (24hour national counselling line)
- Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre: **1800 015 188** (24 hours)
- WRISC Family Violence Service – Ballarat **5333 3666**
- Sexual Assault Crisis Line: **1800 806 292**
- Berry Street Family Violence support services: **5330 5000 /** [receptionrampians@berrystreet.org.au](mailto:receptionrampians@berrystreet.org.au)
- In touch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence: **1800 755 988**
- Victorian Police Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officers: **9247 6244**
- Q Life: **1800 184 527** (3pm to midnight)
- Lifeline: **13 11 14**
- Parentline: **1300 301 300**
- Kids Helpline: **1800 55 1800**
- Child Protection Crisis Line: **1300 360 391**
- Homeless Crisis Line: **1800 825 955**
- Men's Referral Service: **1800 065 973**
- Domestic Violence Resource Centre (DVRC): information for women, women with disabilities, young people, men and employees: <https://www.dvrcv.org.au/>

