

# Illinois Home Visiting Guidance for Addressing Intimate Partner Violence, Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Concerns During the COVID-19 Pandemic

This guidance was prepared by the Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program and the Illinois Department of Human Services with special thanks to Deborah Hwang from the Governor’s Office of Early Childhood Development. It was last updated on 4/23/2020.

Thank you for your continued commitment to serve children and families within your communities during this unprecedented time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This document is intended as a general overview for home visitors providing guidance and support to families experiencing Intimate Partner Violence/Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault (IPV/DV/SA) and for home visitors needing to fulfill MIECHV’s benchmark requirement of completing IPV screens within six months of participants’ enrollment.

One of the pressing challenges that home visitors face is reaching and serving families experiencing IPV/DV/SA. As Illinois continues to implement “social distancing” practices, survivors of IPV/DV/SA may face further isolation and increased danger. The social and financial disruptions created by the COVID-19 crisis increases stress for households; for those in IPV/DV/SA situations, this often leads to an increase and escalation of physical and psychological abuse.

**While Illinois’ “Stay at Home” order is meant to provide safety, staying at home with a violent partner may be dangerous, if not lethal.**<sup>1</sup> The “Stay at Home” order does not mean that anyone should stay in place if their safety is threatened. Instead, if possible, they should leave and call 9-1-1 or the hotlines listed at the end of this document. **That being said, leaving is not the only strategy, and staying connected or even increasing connections with survivors is vital.**<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> University of Illinois at Chicago, Center of Excellence in Maternal & Child Health: <https://publichealth.uic.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/302/2020/04/IPV-and-Pandemic-1.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Home Visiting Collaborative Improvement and Innovation Network, <http://hv-coiin.edc.org/sites/hv-coiin.edc.org/files/HV%20CoIIN%20MD%20and%20IPV%20CoIIN%20Memo%20for%20HRS%204.15.2020.pdf>

Much of the information in this document is based on several resources from the following sources:

[Center of Excellence in Maternal and Child Health at the University of Illinois at Chicago](#)  
[Collaborative Initiative between Parents as Teachers National Center and the USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work Telehealth Clinic](#)  
[Futures Without Violence](#)  
[Home Visiting Collaborative Improvement and Innovation Network](#)  
[Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#)  
[National Network to End Violence](#)

Additional resources for home visitors and participants are listed at the end of the document under “Resources”.

Home visitors play a powerful and important role in reaching out and supporting survivors during this time. As survivors and their children may especially experience heightened sense of fear and isolation, home visitors can make sure that they are not alone. They can support survivors and families by screening for presence of IPV/DV/SA, providing resources, and when and if survivors are ready, providing them with warm referrals to IPV/DV/SA providers.

### Intimate Partner Violence Screening in Virtual Home Visits

Prior to screening for IPV, home visitors should be aware and informed of local IPV/DV/SA providers, if they are accepting referrals, what services they offer during the COVID-19 crisis (e.g., video support groups, relocation to hotels, etc.) and how to provide warm referrals to the providers. Home visitors can also explore other community supports that may address IPV/DV/SA issues such as advocates, lawyers, and faith leaders. In addition, they can contact the screen developer for additional guidance on how to conduct a virtual screen.

If there are concerns regarding privacy or safety for the home visiting program participants, **home visitors should not proceed with the IPV screen and instead, document why the screening was not conducted.**

### Inform and Empower Home Visiting Participants

In the beginning, it is important for home visitors to inform participants about the following information:

- Home visitors’ mandatory reporting requirement as it relates to reporting suspected child abuse and neglect
- Risks and limitations associated with virtual communication
- If it is safe to do so, home visitors can share a [virtual card](#) with participants that provides basic information and tools as well as resources on safety from IPV/DV/SA

At the beginning of each virtual visit/conversation, home visitors are strongly encouraged to check in with participants to determine if they are safe and/or alone. If not, home visitors should determine if it is possible for them to relocate to the bathroom or go outside for a walk with their child for privacy.

Home visitors are trained to always respect participants’ rights to make choices that are best for them without pressure, including whether to disclose or address any presence of IPV/DV/SA, how much information is disclosed, and whether to seek services. Home visitors can support participants through the diverse range of services they provide.

Home visitors can also share about IPV/DV/SA resources in context of other resources that are available. For example, home visitors can use the following script: *“We’re sharing these resources as people are worried about how they will*

*feed their families and pay their bills and unemployment. We also know that when things are stressful – relationships get stressed too. Here are resources or programs that you can reach out for support or ideas on how to be safer.”*

## Risks in Virtual Communication – Personal Safety, Privacy, and Confidentiality

Home visitors are encouraged to approach virtual home visits and communication on the assumption that no interaction and conversation is completely confidential. When connecting with participants virtually using technology (e.g., chat via web-based platforms, video calls, and texting), there are increased risks to the participants’ [personal safety, privacy, and confidentiality](#). These forms of communication can leave trails of messages that can be read or record conversations that can be accessed.

Home visitors can work with participants to establish clear ways of communication and times that the home visitor may be reached during and outside of virtual visits. For example, a home visitor and participant may establish that the home visitor can be reached outside of virtual visits during normal business hours via phone.

## Virtual Communication Best Practices for Suspected Presence of IPV/DV/SA

Given the different platforms for virtual communication, phone calls tend to be the safer way of communicating and exchanging information as they do not leave threads of conversations.

If home visitors suspect presence of IPV/DV/SA in the participants’ household, home visitors can protect participants by collecting the minimum information needed to serve participants, as follows:

- Home visitors are encouraged to avoid leaving detailed voice messages.
- Home visitors can consider checking that the communication platform for the home visitor or participant does not automatically record video and audio or save chat history (e.g., iCloud or Google); if it does, steps can be taken to disable this setting and/or delete recordings/conversations.
- Home visitors are encouraged to use communication platforms with participants that minimize incidental data collection (e.g., phone number, IP address, location, device type, etc.) which can reveal the participants’ locations, attempts to access help, personal information, and more.
- Home Visitors can encourage participants to utilize incognito or private mode when using web-based browsers.
- It is recommended that home visitors be cautious of requesting participants to create user accounts for new platforms as this requires disclosing of personal information. Best practice is for home visitors to adapt to the participants’ choice of platform.
- If participants share evidence of IPV/DV/SA abuse (e.g. photographs or text messages) with home visitors, home visitors should reach out to their local IPV/DV/SA providers to request guidance on how to handle or preserve the evidence safely.

If possible, home visitors are encouraged to use devices provided by their program and avoid using personal devices.

## Safety Planning

While IPV/DV/SA providers are trained and equipped to provide comprehensive [safety planning](#) for participants, home visitors can provide support for safety plans. The following are some examples:

- Home visitors can work with participants to identify safe areas in their homes with ways to escape and with no weapons. Participants can move into these areas when an argument occurs.
- Home visitors can encourage participants to move away from children to keep them safe from the abuse.
- Home visitors can advise participants to have their phones on them at all times, if possible.
- Home visitors should encourage participants to teach their children when and how to call 9-1-1.
- Home visitors may establish coping mechanisms for emotional safety with participants, such as ways to calm down after an incident.

Home visitors are encouraged to establish communication code words with participants for the following messages:

- “Call me now, so I can move to another room/safe place.”
- “Please call the authorities.”
- Verification of identity of participant to avoid impersonation.

Home visitors can establish a protocol with participants for when a call or connection is dropped, such as whether the participant or the home visitor should call back, how long the caller should wait, and the best way of following up.

## Warm Referral to IPV/DV/SA Providers

If—and when—the participant is ready, home visitors can provide warm referrals to IPV/DV/SA providers by having participants on the line while the home visitor reaches out or calls local programs using the following script (modified for individual circumstances and details of the participant):

*“Hello, my name is [name]. I’m a home visitor - which means I’m a case manager for my pregnant participant Ella. Ella is on the other line with us right now, she asked me to call you to help support her getting help and ideas from you around making things safer/better with their partner.”*

## Take Care of Yourself

Home visitors do meaningful and impactful work in screening and securing safety for families. It is important that home visitors also take care of themselves during this time and ensure their own safety in order to best serve families.

The Maternal and Child Health Bureau’s Division of Home Visiting and Early Childhood Systems Home Visiting CoIIN recommends the following resources:

- The [Supervisors Home Visitor Reference Sheet](#)<sup>3</sup> supports supervisors of home visitors working families experiencing domestic violence

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<sup>3</sup> Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, 2015. Supervisors of Home Visitors Reference Sheet.

- The [Home Visitor Reference Sheet](#)<sup>4</sup> supports home visitors working with families experiencing domestic violence

## Additional Resources for Home Visiting Participants

The Illinois' Domestic Violence Hotline is a one stop access point for shelter needs...

- **1-877-TO END DV (1-877-863-6338 for voice or 1-877-863-6339 TTY)**
- Callers will be connected to shelter through existing local domestic violence shelters or emergency shelter through available hotels and motels. Transportation assistance is also offered.

The National Domestic Violence Hotline is 24/7, confidential, and free at...

- 1-800-799-7233
- Chat: <https://www.thehotline.org/>

The National Sexual Assault Hotline is 24/7, confidential, and free at...

- 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)
- Chat: [https://hotline.rainn.org/online?\\_ga=2.1272049.1121455869.1584120887-1734706098.1584120887](https://hotline.rainn.org/online?_ga=2.1272049.1121455869.1584120887-1734706098.1584120887)

For more information on IPV during COVID-19 pandemic, visit...

<https://publichealth.uic.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/302/2020/04/IPV-and-Pandemic-1.pdf>

For more information on COVID-19 for participants, communities, and IPV/DV/SA programs, visit....

<https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/get-updates-information-covid-19/>

For more information on providing digital services, visit...

- Digital Services Toolkit. <https://www.techsafety.org/digital-services-toolkit>
- Best Practice Principles for Digital Services. <https://www.techsafety.org/best-practice-principles>
- Best Practices for Texting and Messaging. <https://www.techsafety.org/text-best-practices>
- Best Practices for Chatting. <https://www.techsafety.org/chat-best-practices>
- Best Practices for Video. <https://www.techsafety.org/video-best-practices>
- Best Practices for Phone. <https://www.techsafety.org/resources-agencyuse/phone-communication-bestpractices>
- Best Practices for Mobile Phones. <https://www.techsafety.org/resources-agencyuse/phone-communication-bestpractices>

**THANK YOU FOR ALL YOU DO TO SUPPORT ILLINOIS FAMILIES—  
YOU ARE APPRECIATED!**



<sup>4</sup> Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, 2015. Home Visitors Reference Sheet.