

COVID-19 and gender

A guide for parents and caregivers

During this uncertain time, we should be aware of how COVID-19 affects us, and the young people we care for, differently because of our gender.



Gender and COVID-19



Gender roles and expectations shape how all of us – women, men, girls and boys – think and behave. But these roles aren't fixed.

This guide has been developed to help parents and caregivers understand the impact of gender on COVID-19 and role model healthy gender relations at home.

With families confined in small spaces, it's important that parents and caregivers learn how to cope with stress, support each other and manage conflict. Young people learn by example so you can pass on these valuable life skills to the young people you care for.

Why do we need to know about gender and COVID-19?

1. Women and girls are doing more unpaid care work



During lockdown, many women and girls are doing more unpaid work. This includes housework (cleaning, cooking, laundry etc.) as well as looking after children, elderly relatives and sick members of the family. Parents and caregivers should role model how to share this work equally between all members of the household.

2. Conflicts can arise within the family



Family members are dealing with difficult emotions such as uncertainty, fear, despair or stress. Managing these feelings in a peaceful way is very important. Conflicts and tensions are normal in every family, but parents and caregivers should resolve them through dialogue. Shouting or fighting will make things worse for everyone.

3. Some children are exposed to domestic violence



A crisis like COVID-19 can increase domestic violence. Being exposed to violence in the home seriously harms children's wellbeing. They might be scared, sad and worried about the fights adults are having. Young people who are exposed to violence might think it's 'normal' and okay. **But it is not!**

4. Domestic violence can have a lasting impact on children and young people



Research shows that boys who witness domestic violence are more likely to commit violence when they grow up. Girls who witness domestic violence are more likely to be subjected to violence when they grow up.

5. Access to sexual and reproductive health services is limited



It's the shared responsibility of men and women – not just women – to avoid unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV. During this time, it might be difficult to access essential contraception, condoms and maternal healthcare.



Actions we can all take that will help everyone



For more information visit:

WHO – www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/covid-19-vaw-infographics/en/

UNAIDS – www.unaids.org/en/covid19

Unpaid care



Set an example by sharing domestic and care work. Men and boys can and should do more **cooking and cleaning**. Or look **after children, elderly relatives and sick members of the family**, sharing tasks equally with women and girls, who usually do most of this work.



Support girls and boys with their schoolwork and education. Education will open doors to a brighter future. If girls have to do all the chores in the house, their education will suffer. That's why men and boys should do their fair share.



Create a safe space at home through love, care and support. Have meals together, do fun things like games and exercises or tell stories, and listen to each other's concerns or worries.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights



Have open conversations with adolescents and young people about sex during this time. They may have questions and concerns. Supporting young people in a non-judgemental way and answering their questions will help them make the right decisions. If you don't know the answers, get information from health workers or trusted sources such as WHO and UNAIDS.



Always get consent from your partner to have sex, even if you're in a relationship. If your partner doesn't want to have sex, or agrees to have sex and then changes their mind (for example, because you don't have a condom), you must respect their decision.



Discuss and make joint decisions with your partner about having safer sex. Avoid unprotected sex – without a condom and/or contraception – as it may be hard to access maternal healthcare, HIV/STI treatment and safe abortion services.

Managing conflict



Learn how to **deal with conflict in a peaceful way**, and teach the young people in your care to resolve conflicts through dialogue.



Step away from situations of conflict. Calm down and think about what made you feel angry, sad or upset. Give the other person time to calm down too. When you're both relaxed, find a time to talk about what happened.



Listen to how the other person experienced the situation, without interrupting or judging. Then explain how you experienced the situation. **Try to find solutions together**, rather than focusing on who is right or wrong.



Remember!

Drinking too much alcohol can make situations of conflict worse. Avoid arguments with drunk people, as they can't think clearly and can become violent.



Responding to violence



If you or anyone in your house is in **immediate danger**, call the police or emergency services.



If you're worried about domestic violence, **contact a helpline or advice network.**



Stay in contact with friends, families and neighbours. **Confide in someone you trust.**



Remember!

- **Exposing young people to violence is very damaging. Being exposed to violence also increases young people's risk of getting HIV.**
- **Everyone has the right to be free from violence. Nobody should be subjected to violence in their own home. Violence isn't 'normal' and nobody should be treated badly by their family members or loved ones. If you are experiencing violence, ask for help.**