

## **The contact list anyone leaving an abusive relationship should have.**

*Mamamia has partnered with Commonwealth Bank on a new campaign - Lighting the Way to the Next Chapter - which aims to empower the community to listen and believe victims of domestic and family violence, and be a part of paving a hopeful future.*

*"I'm so afraid, and I'm not sure what to do."*

It takes an average of seven attempts for people - and in most cases, women - to leave a domestic abuse situation for good.

The reasons are deeply complex. They often involve emotional abuse, coercive control and intimidation. In many cases, the practicalities of leaving with children, with little money, or without a home to go to, can further complicate the situation.

After leaving, these issues can have a ripple effect on a person's life for years to come. From the emotional recovery to rebuilding a safe home to becoming financially independent, none of it has to be done alone.

As a community, we can do better. We can listen. We can believe. We can educate ourselves better on how to help domestic violence victim-survivors leave, survive, thrive and live fulfilling lives.

There are many excellent Australian organisations that cover every step of the process, from counselling to finding emergency accommodation to achieving financial independence.

In 2020, organisations like these have saved lives, especially during times of heightened tension like the second lockdown in Victoria. In fact, [Domestic Violence Victoria](#) recorded an [increase in first-time reporters of family violence](#) during this time.

We have collected some of the most helpful, reliable and discrete resources and organisations to reach out to if you or someone you know is ever in need, whether in lockdown or not. You can *always* get help.

Call 000 in an emergency, and [Lifeline on 131 114](#) for immediate mental health support.

## **1. 1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732).**

Leaving an abusive relationship can be a confusing, stressful and upsetting time – which is why dedicated domestic violence services that can objectively listen to your circumstances are invaluable.

1800RESPECT is the National Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence Counselling Service, and an excellent resource for processing issues and seeking answers. It is totally confidential, and open 24 hours via telephone or online. All services are accessible to people who may have English as a second language (call 13 14 50 to book an interpreter), and any Australian living with a disability.

The website contains useful, practical information for anyone wanting to leave a relationship, such as an [escape bag checklist](#) and a nationwide service directory that you can [search by postcode](#). If you're looking for somewhere to start, their [safety planning checklist](#) is simple and useful.

## **2. Short and long-term accommodation.**

Securing a place to stay can be one of the most stressful aspects of trying to leave.

Centrelink can help with rent assistance, and the government also provides resources for safe emergency, and short-term, housing. For example, in NSW, the Department of Communities and Justice has [a webpage dedicated to accommodation in situations of domestic violence](#).

For emergency accommodation, women and children can stay in safe housing for anywhere from two days to two months. Organisations like [The Salvation Army](#) can help organise confidential locations, while also offering personal support services along the way.

In the longer term, Australia offers social housing, and it may be worth getting on a waitlist for it as a Plan B for the future.

## **3. Donated moving services.**

Many don't know that there are organisations who understand that the day of leaving can be one of the most dangerous. Their donated services include moving of furniture at the safest time, and quickly.

[Moving Against Domestic Violence](#) is one such organisation in Sydney; and companies may not advertise this special service – it would be worth asking your selected mover about it.

## 4. Nationwide support services.

Whether you're deciding to leave, in the process of leaving or rebuilding your life, there's a lot of basic information and resources lists available on government websites.

One of the most comprehensive pages you can visit is the [Services Australia site for national information](#), which provides information on how to start safety planning if you're in the process of leaving, and how to access crisis payments if you're having a hard time meeting commitments on your road back. They've also made the information available in [nearly 30 different languages](#).

All state and territory governments have more tailored information to domestic violence situations. The Victorian Government even has an updated page specifically about [family violence support during COVID-19](#). The page succinctly answers questions like "*Can I leave my home to escape family violence during coronavirus (COVID-19)?*"

The answer is yes - you won't be fined. You can break lockdown restrictions to seek help. If in immediate danger, always call 000. Otherwise, Victoria's [Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre](#) offers 24/7 support on 1800 015 188 or you can use their live webchat if you have specific questions or need help with safety planning.

In NSW, [Department of Communities and Justice](#) has a page packed with information and contacts to help with all aspects, such as housing, children, and financial help. They also cover specific resources for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, the LGBTIQ community, immigrant communities, people living with disabilities, and male victims of domestic violence.

Here are some of the main websites and groups offering local contacts, support and information for people in their areas:

[WIRE](#) (VIC): Free support, referral and information for all Victorian women, including non-binary and gender-diverse people.

[DV Connect](#) (QLD): Information and tools for both men and women experiencing abuse in a relationship.

[SA Government](#): You can call the 24-hour Domestic Violence Crisis Line on 1800 800 098 for crisis counselling, support and referral to safe accommodation.

[Domestic Violence Line NSW](#): For counselling, call 1800 65 64 63, 24/7. Their case workers can help explain everything from Apprehended Violence Orders (AVOs) to helping with transport and accommodation for families.

[Department of Health and Human Services \(TAS\)](#): DHHS Family Violence Counselling and Support Service offers professional and specialised services to assist children, young people and adults affected by family violence.

[Domestic Violence Support and Advice \(WA\)](#): Listing all resources and tools for people in WA to access.

[Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria](#) (All states, including NT): Provides comprehensive information for each state and territory, offering choice and information on resources to access in each location.

If you find that you do need legal services, see the Australian government website's page on [access to free legal counselling](#), and [Legal Aid](#), in each state and territory.

## **5. Financial services.**

All financial institutions have a hardship department, and they are a lot more understanding than you might expect. If you feel embarrassed, just remember you're certainly not the only person who needs support, especially this year.

It's important that you do reach out to your bank, especially if financial abuse has been a factor in your relationship. Financial abuse is a form of domestic violence, and it can include refusal by a partner to let the other work, and access or manage money independently.

You don't have to be alone in sorting this out; support is available. For example, [CommBank Next Chapter](#) is a new program that will see the bank launch a range of services, support, resources and research, with services designed to make it easier for victims and survivors of financial abuse to start their next chapter and achieve long-term financial independence.

As part of the Next Chapter program, the bank has created a specialist Community Wellbeing team, who have developed trauma-informed approaches to provide support to customers experiencing vulnerability with guidance from Rape and Domestic Violence Services Australia, the national experts in trauma-specialist practice.

The Community Wellbeing team provides confidential support to help customers with their immediate banking needs, including direct financial assistance, safe banking support and referrals to external experts as required.

CommBank has also partnered with not-for-profit [Good Shepherd](#), a leader in financial inclusion products and services, to launch the [Financial Independence Hub](#). The hub offers free specialist one-on-one financial coaching to assist people previously impacted by financial abuse to develop and implement a roadmap to long-term financial independence. It can provide referrals to complementary support services and, in some cases, access to solutions like interest-free loans.

And yes, you can be a customer of any bank.

## **6. Centrelink and crisis payments.**

In situations of extreme circumstances of family and domestic violence, Centrelink has a [Claim for Crisis Payment form](#) that can be submitted via your [myGov](#) account.

In all cases, you can call or visit a Centrelink office to find out if there's any support, from regular payment to accessing health services. Speaking to a Centrelink advisor can be a reassuring and hopeful experience, and arm you with resources you didn't know existed to make your next move. Phone numbers for Centrelink can be found [here](#).

Joining social media groups about Centrelink can also offer useful and practical advice on how to best navigate the system. Just type 'Centrelink' in your Facebook search button for your local group.

## **7. Food and clothing.**

In some domestic violence situations, it isn't always possible to take a lot with you when you leave. Even afterwards, it can be a struggle to afford basic goods - so there is no shame in seeking support from charities that are specifically designed to be there during those moments of hardship.

Charities such as The Salvation Army and [Foodbank](#), which both have locations in each state and territory, can offer essential items you need, for free.

There are many more services we could list. There is so much help available, and so many ways to start that next chapter.

*If you or someone you know is affected by domestic violence, please call 1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732). In an emergency, call 000.*