

Respect

Phoneline

Service Review

2020/21

Helping perpetrators of domestic
abuse during Covid-19



Help me or I'm going to
do something I regret

Managing the Respect Phonenumber during the Covid-19 pandemic

March 2020 was an unforeseeable time, with lockdown restrictions changing the ways perpetrators of domestic abuse were able to exert power and control.

The Respect Phonenumber saw a significant surge in demand from perpetrators becoming increasingly isolated with their partners. As the lockdown measures restricted their movements outside the home, the frequency and severity of their violence and abuse increased, exacerbating the risk and impact on victims.

The growing need for support with their abusive behaviours, alongside barriers accessing domestic abuse perpetrator programmes during the lockdown, led more perpetrators to contact the Respect Phonenumber.

We adapted our service by extending the opening hours, recruiting additional Advisors, and creating resources for perpetrators. We made these openly available on the Respect Phonenumber website to ensure more tools were available to those seeking support to change their abusive behaviours.

The Respect Phonenumber has helped many perpetrators move from a place of helplessness to hope, whilst holding them accountable for their behaviour and making clear that they can choose to change and be non-violent and abusive – including in times of crisis.

The safety of survivors and children is always the central focus and priority of our work.

Tanisha Jnagel
Helplines Manager



Respect Phonenumber: responding to perpetrators of domestic abuse

The Respect Phonenumber is a confidential helpline for perpetrators of domestic abuse and those supporting them. We provide specialist advice and guidance to help male or female perpetrators change their abusive behaviours. The service is offered by phone, email, and webchat.

The Respect Phonenumber website is a source of useful information, with downloadable factsheets and help-guides for perpetrators, as well as resources to help frontline workers engage with perpetrators safely and effectively.

Demand for the Respect Phonenumber in 2020–21 was exceptional. We received the highest number of contacts across all channels – phone, email, webchat, and a record number of website visitors.

Even when lockdown restrictions were lifted, people looking for help to change their behaviour and stop their abuse continued to contact the service at rates higher than before the pandemic.

The most significant change, however, was the urgent need to focus on crisis management and de-escalation: most perpetrators could not access in-person services or remove themselves from home during lockdown, and, as a result, their violence and abuse increased in frequency, severity, and impact.



I got so depressed during lockdown that I started drinking again. Then I had a meltdown and started throwing stuff around the house and hitting her with a towel

Male caller to the Respect Phonenumber



Demand increased by 97%

In 2020–21 (1.04.20–31.03.21) we received 13,508 contacts by phone, email, and webchat – a **97%** increase compared to 2019–20 (6,858 contacts).

In February 2020, the month before Covid–19 restrictions began in the UK, there were 1,423 visitors on the Respect Phonenumber website and in March 2020 1,817 visitors – 1,620 monthly visitors on average. From 1 April 2020–31 March 2021 there were 4,850 monthly visitors on average (58,200 visitors in total) – a monthly increase of almost **200%**.



68% more calls:

There were 8,170 contacts by phone – a **68%** increase compared with the year before (4,867).



77% more emails:

We received 2,344 emails – **77%** more than the year before (1,324). In the summer and autumn of 2020, however, the increase in emails was unprecedented: **122%** more emails in August 2020 than August 2019 and **164%** more emails in September 2020, for example.



349% more webchats:

There were 2,994 webchat contacts – **349%** more than the year before (667). The exceptionally high increase reflected the need of perpetrators to get in touch in real time, but without having to talk, as it was difficult to find a quiet place at home during lockdown.



Duration of calls:

In addition to the increased quantity of contacts across all channels, the number of long calls (lasting more than 40 minutes) tripled in 2020–21: from **2%** of the total the year before to **6%**, as a result of the Advisors' focus on de-escalation and crisis management with perpetrators.

Who we supported

Perpetrator
42%



Victim
20%



Other
16%



Frontline Worker
13%



Family/ Friend of
Perpetrator
5%



Family/ Friend of
Victim
4%



- 1 Respect Phonenumber Advisors select the most relevant category based on service users' description of the presenting issues that triggered their help-seeking.
- 2 The category 'Other' includes Researchers, Journalists, Mutually abusive Service Users, and those making enquiries such as confirming opening hours etc.

Gender of perpetrators

84% of the perpetrators we supported identified as male, 15% identified as female.

Gender of victims

Whilst the primary target audience of the Respect Phonenumber is perpetrators, many victims also get in touch looking for support and understanding around their partners' behaviour.

71% of the victims we supported identified as female, 27% identified as male

4 in 5 perpetrators identified as White British

Perpetrators' ethnicity breakdown

White British

74%



Asian/ Asian British

10%



Black/ Black British

5%



White Other

5%



Mixed

3%



Other Ethnic Group

3%



3 Respect Phonenumber Advisors ask service users to provide anonymised demographic information, including what best describes their ethnic group. Out of the callers who provided information about their ethnic group in 2020–21, 4 in 5 (74%) identified as White British.

Experiences of perpetrators seeking support

Soon after the first wave of Covid-19 restrictions in March 2020, it became clear to us that, alongside the increasing demand for the Respect Phonenumber, the nature of perpetrators' help-seeking was changing and the abuse they were perpetrating was more frequent and more severe.

Through calls, emails and webchats, we identified 3 key themes arising:

#1

As tension and conflict in relationships increased during lockdown, the violence and abuse perpetrators used exacerbated.



We always had brawls, but with the lockdown we have moved to another level

Male caller to the Respect Phonenumber

Lockdown restrictions left people feeling anxious, uncertain about employment, worried they might get Covid-19, and frustrated not knowing when normal life would resume. Where there was domestic abuse it became worse, with perpetrators gradually becoming unable to regulate their behaviour.

Being unable to leave home left perpetrators revisiting arguments, trapped in a vicious cycle of toxic thinking. In many cases perpetrators had to take on their share of home-schooling their children, and this became another source of conflict and frustration.

For some others, perpetrating domestic abuse was a way to manage feelings of powerlessness in relation to the Covid-19 virus and lockdown restrictions.



I need his compliance, I need him to yield, for me to feel safe

Female caller to the Respect Phonenumber

#2

The reality of lockdown had another consequence for perpetrators: **they were faced with the violence and abuse they perpetrated.**

Before Covid-19, a perpetrator could choose to storm out after an incident of violence, avoiding seeing the aftermath of the abuse they perpetrated. There was no such luxury during lockdown.

For many perpetrators who were confronted with the hurt they caused their partners, this realisation increased their empathy towards them, becoming the previously missing link between abusive behaviour and proactive help-seeking.



I feel like such a small man

Male caller to the Respect Phonenumber

#3

A key factor that contributed to perpetrators feeling desperate and anxious was **the closure of many services in the community, including Domestic Abuse Prevention Programmes.**

There were many calls from perpetrators who were attending such a programme that closed during lockdown. Their only alternative was asking support from the Respect Phonenumber, as they knew they were reaching a point where they would be unable to behave non-abusively.

Other services also closed or limited the support they were offering during lockdown. A male perpetrator who became homeless because of bail conditions didn't get a response from the housing department of his local authority or from local housing charities for 5 days. He was debating the possibility of going back to where the victim lives because he wasn't sure what else to do, despite the bail conditions, and fully aware that he would be breaking the law and putting the victim at increased risk.



Help me or I'm going to do something I regret

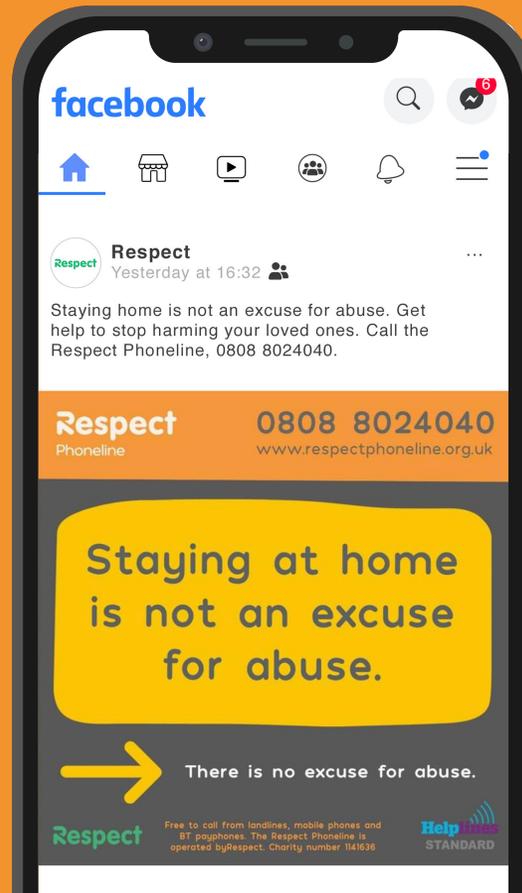
Male caller to the Respect Phonenumber

Using social media campaigns to reach perpetrators

No excuse for abuse

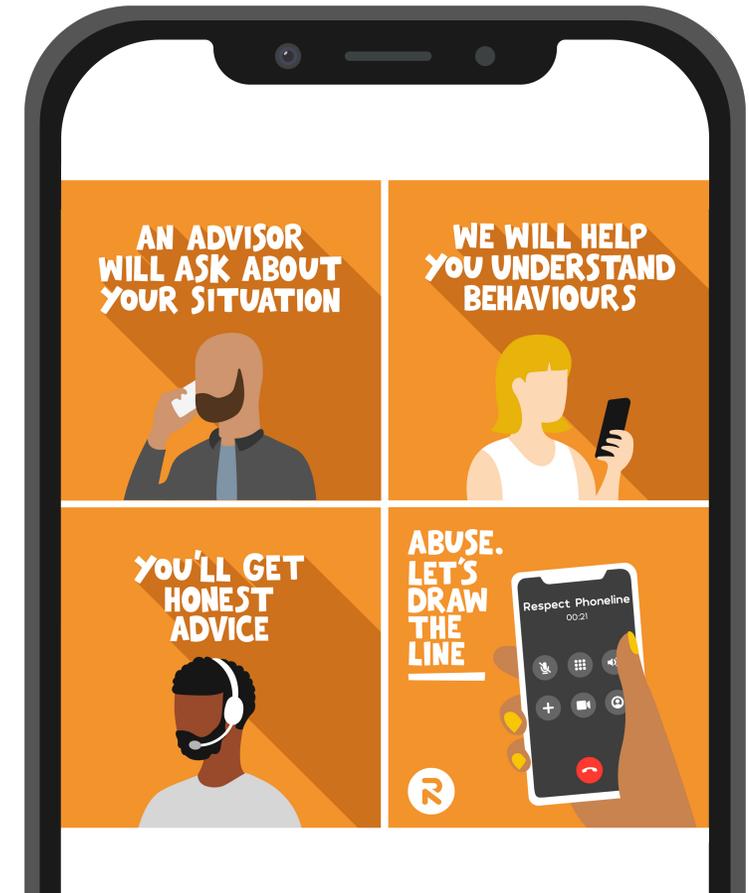
Right after the first lockdown in March 2020, we launched a social media campaign. The key message was 'No Excuse for Abuse'. We challenged notions of being "out of control" to show that perpetrators have a choice and are in control of, and responsible for, their behaviour.

The wider domestic abuse sector supported and amplified our campaign.



Abuse. Let's draw the line

Our second campaign focused on reaching perpetrators who were not aware of our helpline; as well as their family and friends. Our aim was to raise awareness on abusive behaviours and encourage everyone to draw the line on abuse.



Supporting perpetrators beyond the pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic has given unprecedented attention to domestic abuse and shown why it's critical to provide services to perpetrators of domestic abuse; so they can manage and change their behaviours. We have a rare opportunity to continue shining the spotlight on perpetrators, making sure everyone willing to change is given the appropriate timely support to do so.

Our top priority is to continue providing extended support to perpetrators through the Respect Phonenumber. No victim or survivor should be made unsafe because the perpetrator can't access critical support when they need it.



Respect Phonenumber
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Providing help for domestic abuse perpetrators.



Respect
Phonenumber