

2020 has been a hard year for everyone, and as the high holidays approach, I like many, am reflecting on a year of change and of loss. Covid has left me very far from the home I grew up in, in London. Instead of being only a plane ride away I'm not sure when I will be there again. The concept of home, as a safe place, a shelter is a very primal and basic need for all of us and one enshrined in Judaism. The practice of our religion is largely based in the home, but not limited to it, and like Abraham we need to be prepared to welcome visitors at any time.

My work as a forensic medical examiner in sexual assault, brings me into contact with so many for whom the concept of home as a safe haven is so very far from the truth, especially as Covid shuts down our worlds and brings us into the stark reality of our pared down lives. For those living with domestic and family violence, home is rarely a safe place. The Covid pandemic and associated social and legislative changes have led to a range of domestic stressors that contribute to an increased risk of domestic and family violence, including unemployment, financial strains, home schooling children and loss of the usual routines and social supports for both victims and perpetrators of violence.

Critically, these stressors, coupled with enforced isolation as a result of the pandemic, lead to people who experience DV being in almost constant close proximity with the person who is abusing them, leading to real psychological as well as possible physical harms. If children are not at school, they don't have access to friends, trusted teachers or a school counsellor. Parents miss out on opportunities to check in with each other at the school drop offs, at the gym or at work. Without the "safety valve" of a reason to leave the house, for work, leisure or to do the shopping, pressure can build.

Many formal support services have gone on-line and health care is increasingly being provided via telehealth, this adds flexibility but sometimes creates another barrier to disclosing violence or asking for help as finding a private space to make or receive such a call can be a real challenge in lockdown.

Although you may not feel you are in a position to ask about domestic violence outright, there may be clues that things are not right when you are on a call with friends or colleagues, such as short responses to questions, shutting down the conversation, a partner or ex-partner repeatedly answering the phone or having a sense someone is controlling the conversation in the background. Asking some general questions about how friends are coping with changes can be used to start a conversation and to indicate that help is available. Examples of such questions include 'How are things at home right now?' or 'How are you coping with the extra stress of having children/husband etc. at home?'

Domestic violence services are considered essential and are available, but for many having a friend checking in on them is the step they need to make that call.

So as we enter Elul, we are drawn to home, to celebration with our loved ones. We use this time of year for teshuvah, repentance or return. This is a time to return to our physical and to our spiritual core, to examine the essence of relationship with G-d and with society. We need to find a way to make our homes big enough to encompass the stranger, welcoming and accepting of difference and of need. Whilst this may not be possible in a physical sense, we can still offer support, love and acceptance into the New Year.



DR ELLIE FREEDMAN

Dr Ellie Freedman is the medical director of Northern Sydney Sexual Assault Service and the medical forensic staff specialist at the NSW Education Centre against Violence (ECAV). In these roles she works with victims of sexual assault and domestic violence, and teaches NSW health care professionals state wide about responses to patients who have experienced interpersonal trauma. She is a passionate advocate for promoting trauma informed care in a health setting and believes that providing a respectful and caring response is a key step in the road to recovery. She is a proud member of the Sydney Jewish community and is in fact an active member of both the Great Synagogue and North Shore Synagogue.

ABOUT THE ELUL PROJECT

An initiative aiming to share stories and teachings from Jewish women leaders in our community. Whilst many of us are stuck at home, or isolated from family over Elul and the High Holy Days, we hope this project will serve to inspire, nurture, and uplift during this difficult time.

Referrals and Resources



Legal advice:

- LawAccess NSW 1300 888 529 - www.lawaccess.nsw.gov.au
- Domestic Violence Unit 02 9219 6300 - www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/what-we-do/family-law/domestic-violence-unit
- Family Violence Law Help – familyviolencelaw.gov.au

Helplines:

- 1800RESPECT: 1800 737 732
- Child Protection Helpline: 132 111
- Kids Helpline: 1800 55 18 00
- Lifeline Australia: 13 11 14
- MensLine Australia: 1300 78 99 78
- NSW Elder Abuse Helpline: 1800 628 221
- NSW Mental Health Line: 1800 011 511

Domestic Violence State Services:

| State | Organisation | Phone | Website |
|-----------------|--|--|--|
| National | 1800RESPECT | 1800737732 | www.1800respect.org.au |
| National | Relationships Australia | 1300364277 | www.relationships.org.au |
| ACT | Canberra Rape Crisis Centre | 6247 2525 | www.crcc.org.au |
| NSW | NSW Rape Crisis Centre | 1800 424 017 | www.nswrapecrisis.com.au |
| VIC | Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA) | 1800 806 292 | www.casa.org.au |
| SA | Yarrow Place Rape & Sexual Assault Service | 1800 817 421 (08) 8226 8777 | www.sahealth.sa.gov.au |
| TAS | Sexual Assault Support Service | Helpline: 1800 697 877 Office: (03) 6231 0044 | www.sass.org.au |
| NT | Sexual Assault Referral Centres | Darwin: (08) 8922 6472 Katherine: (08) 8973 8524 Tennant Creek: (08) 8962 4361 Alice Springs (08) 8955 4500 Alice Springs - after hours: 0401114 181 | nt.gov.au/wellbeing/hospitals-health-services/sexual-assault-referral-centres |
| QLD | Statewide Sexual Assault Helpline | 1800 010 120 | www.health.qld.gov.au/sexualassault |
| WA | Sexual Assault Resource Centre | (08) 6458 1828 1800 199 888 | www.kemh.health.wa.gov.au/Our-services/Statewide-Services/SARC |