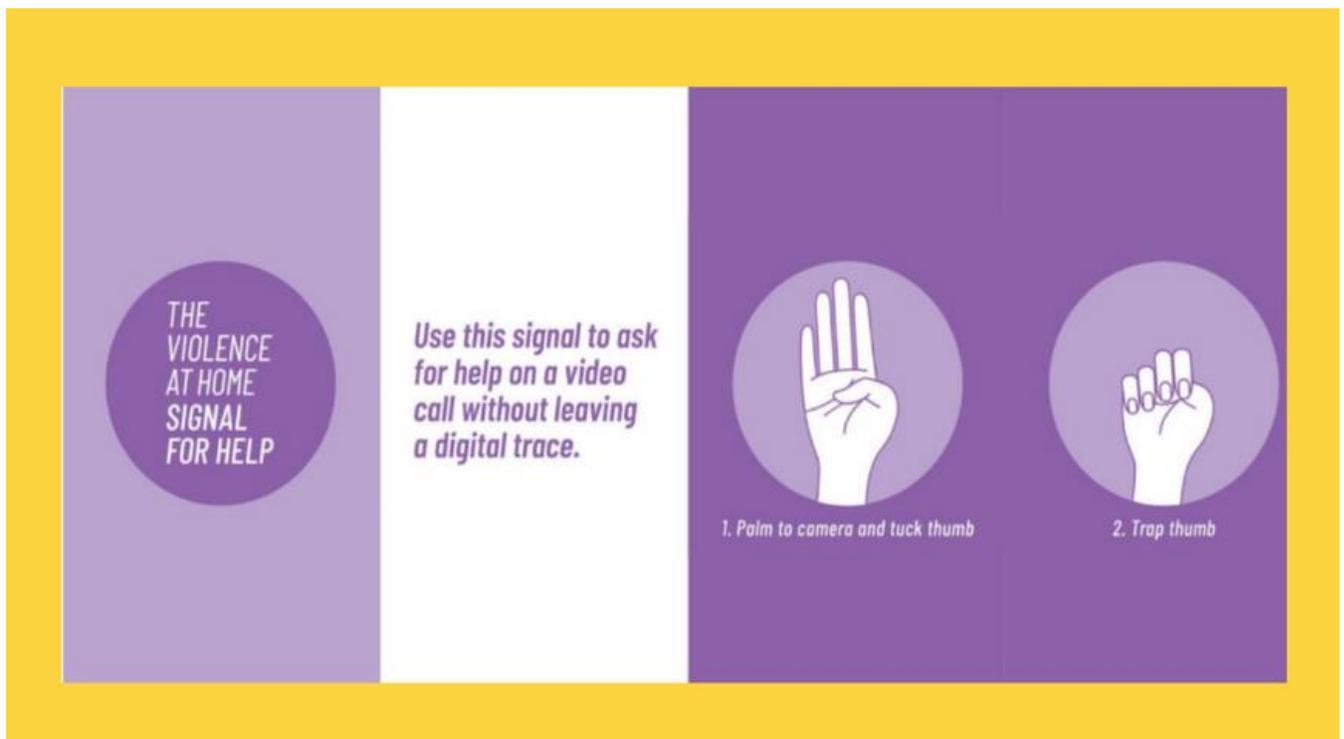# SIGNAL FOR HELP

We know that domestic violence is a going concern, especially during the pandemic when people are trapped at home with their abusers. We also know that human trafficking is a billion-dollar global industry and that victims are sometimes being transported in broad daylight. The more tools we have for getting people help the better, but first we need to know when someone actually needs help.

Learning and sharing this hand sign far and wide will help spread awareness, enable more victims of violence to ask for help in a safe way, and hopefully even save lives.

Take Action—But Do It Safely

If you see a client use the signal for help, what should you do? Start with the survivor's safety in mind and don't respond during the video appointment. Instead, reach out in other ways that will be more difficult for the abuser to monitor, such as an email or telephone call. Ask general "yes" or "no" questions to help reduce risk and make it easier for them to respond, such as:

- Are you safe?
- Can I be a part of your safety plan?

- Do you want me to call 911? (This is something you should ONLY do if the survivor asks you to.)

- Can I call a shelter on your behalf?

- Should I search for services to help and call you back?

- Should I keep checking in on you?

- How else can I support you?

It's important to only take actions that the survivor has asked you to take (or approved of via your yes/no questions). Make sure they know you're there to support them and that they can ask for whatever they may need.

Other Ways to Signal for Help

Signal for Help can be a lifesaving tool, but fortunately it isn't the only one. Because if an abuser is closely monitoring a survivor or confiscates their phone or computer, a plan B may be needed. So, what are other safety signals survivors can use to communicate covertly that they need help? The specific code will need to be worked out in advance between a survivor and a trusted provider. For example:

- **Pick a real-life signal.** "If you see me blink my eyes three times in a row. Send someone to check on me."

- **Use coded language.** "If you ask to borrow my slow cooker, I'll follow up with yes/no questions to help you."

And if you're worried that signals or code words that are being used more commonly might be recognized by an abuser, create your own. Make it something easy to do and recognize in a variety of situations, and keep it just between you and your client to ensure your safety and theirs.