

# Appendix L – Supporting people who experienced domestic and family violence



Maxine had to leave home to escape a violent partner, fearing for her life. Maxine is constantly terrified that her partner will find her. She knows it is not safe to fall asleep in an unfamiliar and public place so she starts using amphetamines to stay awake at night. By the time Maxine feels ready to visit a service to ask for help, her drug use has escalated and she's told that she cannot access crisis accommodation until she is not drug affected.

*Each person has their own unique experience and needs. It is important to understand the intersectionality between a person's gender, race, sexual identity, culture, experiences and circumstances. Workers may refer to multiple appendices to assist their understanding, engagement and support for each person they engage.*

## Overview

Domestic and family violence (DFV) occurs when one person in an intimate, personal, family, kinship, or informal carer relationship uses violence or abuse to maintain power and control over the other person. DFV can take many forms including coercive control, emotional, psychological, physical, verbal, social, financial, immigration, reproductive and/or sexual abuse. DFV can negatively impact a person's physical and mental wellbeing, employment status, academic performance, financial situation, and relationships<sup>i</sup>.

In NSW, there are approximately 2,500 incidents of domestic violence reported to police every month, however this is thought to represent only 40 per cent of actual incidents due to underreporting<sup>ii</sup>. In 2021/22 approximately 38 per cent of people receiving specialist homelessness services in NSW reported experiencing DFV<sup>iii</sup>.

DFV is the leading cause of homelessness for women and children, further compounding adverse impacts on health and wellbeing. (For more information on supporting women see **Appendix G**).

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual, or other gender or sexual identity (LGBTIQ+) people are just as likely as people in the general population to experience DFV (one in three people)<sup>iv</sup>. (For more information on supporting LGBTIQ+ people, see **Appendix H**). Aboriginal women are more likely to experience DFV and suffer more severe forms of violence than non-Aboriginal women<sup>v</sup>. (For more information on supporting Aboriginal people, see **Appendix C**)

Leaving a DFV situation can be extremely difficult, highly risky and complex for the victim-survivor. It is important to recognise that people who have experienced DFV have also experienced trauma. Therefore, a worker must understand the effects of trauma and avoid re-traumatising victim-survivors during any interaction.

Workers must be supportive, non-judgemental, reassuring and help the person to feel empowered and safe throughout all interactions, this includes cultural considerations. Workers must also recognise that it is not uncommon for victim-survivors to leave and return to DFV relationships more than once. For example, a lack of safe and affordable housing can prompt women to return to abusive situations to avoid homelessness.

When interacting with a person who may have experienced DFV, the worker in the first instance, must ensure the person's immediate safety is addressed and assist the person in any safety planning required. This may include managing the disclosure of personal information and/or contact details. Risk assessments and safety planning should be completed collaboratively, with the person leading the plan along with a trained professional.

A lack of safe and secure accommodation can impact a person's access to supports, including medical treatment. There are limited DFV support services for the LGBTIQ+ community which may increase risk and create additional challenges for a person to maintain physical and psychological safety.

## Worker Resources

DVNSW created the [Good Practice Guidelines](https://www.dvnsw.org.au/categories/good-practice-guidelines) to assist the specialist DFV sector in NSW (<https://www.dvnsw.org.au/categories/good-practice-guidelines>).

Say It Out Loud provides a range of tools for service providers working with people in the LGBTQA+ community who are victim-survivors of domestic and family violence at <https://sayitoutloud.org.au/professionals/?state=NSW>.

A worker can refer any victim-survivors to **1800 Respect** to get the specialised care they may need including referrals for immediate and ongoing support.

## Engagement strategy

Things to consider before engaging:

- Acknowledge that violence is not acceptable in any form and people have the right to feel safe, respected and supported in their relationships.
- Victim-survivors of DFV have experienced trauma and require a trauma-informed, strength-based response. This means focusing on building a sense of physical, emotional, and cultural safety for the individual.
- Recognise children and young people as victims in their own right even when they are accompanying their parent/carer. Consider the support required for the whole family. Information on supporting children and young people can be found at **Appendix B**.
- Older women are one of the fastest growing cohorts of people experiencing homelessness which is often related to experiences of domestic and family violence. Information on supporting older people can be found at **Appendix I**.

- Recognise that some victim-survivors have had difficult and traumatic experiences within the social and justice system which may lead to a distrust of services and agencies. Workers should take care to build trust, rapport and communicate openly and transparently.
- A worker must be aware of how their presence and approach may be interpreted. This may require a worker to adjust their behaviour avoid re-traumatising the person and/or family.
- Consider who would be best suited to approach the person on a case by case basis, including the number of workers that may approach and the gender of the worker. It is also important for the worker to take into consideration the person's culture, religion, and age to ensure an appropriate response. (For more information on supporting a person from a culturally and/or linguistically diverse background see **Appendix D**).
- Understand the relevant factors that may be associated with the DFV situation and what risks may be associated to the individual, their family, the community and the worker. This requires a timely and appropriate response and should be done in consultation with trained professionals.
- Individual victim-survivors may have different understandings or interpretations of their experiences of violence or other parts of their story. Workers must allow people the opportunity to share their stories in a way that feels appropriate to them at that time and stage of their journey.

Strategies for engagement:

- Introduce yourself in a friendly manner, stating your name and the agency/organisation you work for.
- Confirm that the person feels safe to engage with you where you are or find another place where the person feels safe. This may include engaging at another time or through other means.
  - The person's immediate safety must be prioritised and requires a timely response. This may require contacting emergency services if the person is in imminent danger.
- Inform the person of your intentions to engage and reassure the person that any information shared will remain confidential outlining the exceptional circumstances in which information may be shared (i.e. child is at risk of significant harm or a person is in imminent and serious danger).
  - It is important that phone numbers, contact details or information on the person's whereabouts are kept confidential to protect the person's safety.
- Maintain appropriate distance and be conscious of any physical contact with the person to avoid re-traumatising them.

- Do not ask the person to share their story, but if they choose to, listen without judgement or providing advice. Respond with sensitivity and prioritise the safety of victim survivors.
- Be careful not to make assumptions and be aware of any unconscious bias about violence or abuse.
- Be aware of, and provide referrals to, appropriate assistance or supports including local specialist DFV services.
- Provide person centered responses that are respectful, sensitive, culturally appropriate, and safe.
- If a bilingual worker or interpreter is engaged to support the interaction, confirm that the person has no familiarity with them to protect the person's anonymity.
- Recognise and address the barriers that impact a person's support and safety options.

## RESOURCES

CRISIS SUPPORT		
Name	Service	Contact Details
<a href="#">1800 Respect</a>	The 24 hour national domestic, family and sexual violence counselling, information and support service.	<b>Phone:</b> 1800 737 732 <b>Website:</b> <a href="https://www.1800respect.org.au/">https://www.1800respect.org.au/</a>
<a href="#">NSW Domestic Violence Line</a>	The 24 hour NSW domestic and family violence counselling, information and referral service for women.	<b>Phone:</b> 1800 656 463 <b>Website:</b> <a href="https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/children-and-families/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/domestic--family-and-sexual-violence-support-contacts/nsw-domestic-violence-line.html">https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/children-and-families/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/domestic--family-and-sexual-violence-support-contacts/nsw-domestic-violence-line.html</a>
<a href="#">Mensline Australia</a>	The 24 hour free telephone and online counselling service offering support for Australian men.	<b>Phone:</b> 1300 789 978 <b>Website:</b> <a href="https://mensline.org.au/">https://mensline.org.au/</a>
<a href="#">NSW Sexual Violence Helpline</a>	The 24 hour NSW sexual violence counselling, information and referral service.	<b>Phone:</b> 1800 424 017 <b>Website:</b> <a href="https://fullstop.org.au/get-help/our-services">https://fullstop.org.au/get-help/our-services</a>
<a href="#">Ask Izzy</a>	A website directory that connects people who are in need with nearby services such as housing, food, health care and legal services in their local area.	<b>Website:</b> <a href="https://askizzy.org.au">https://askizzy.org.au</a>
<a href="#">Link2Home</a>	A statewide telephone service providing information, assessment and referral to specialist homelessness services, temporary accommodation and other appropriate services for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. It is available 24 hours a day 7 days a week every day of the year.	<b>Phone:</b> 1800 152 152 <b>Website:</b> <a href="https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/housing/help/ways/are-you-homeless">https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/housing/help/ways/are-you-homeless</a>
OTHER SUPPORT		
Name	Service	Contact Details
<a href="#">Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Program</a>	WDVCASs provide information, advocacy and referrals to assist women and their children who are or have been experiencing domestic and family violence, with their legal, social and welfare needs including housing, financial assistance, health services, and counselling.	<b>Phone:</b> 1800 WDVCAS or 1800 938 227 <b>Website:</b> <a href="https://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/about-us/our-partners/womens-domestic-violence-court-advocacy-program">https://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/about-us/our-partners/womens-domestic-violence-court-advocacy-program</a>
<a href="#">Full Stop Australia</a>	Confidential, trauma specialist counselling for people of all genders who are impacted by violence and abuse, as well as their friends, colleagues and family members.	<b>Phone:</b> 1800 Full Stop (1800 385 578) <b>Website:</b> <a href="https://www.fullstop.org.au">https://www.fullstop.org.au</a>

## RESOURCES

Name	Service	Contact Details
Child Protection Helpline	Any member of the NSW community who suspects, on reasonable grounds, that a child or young person is at risk of significant harm should report their concerns to the 24 hour Child Protection Helpline.	<b>Phone:</b> 132 111
<a href="#">Child Wellbeing Unit</a>	The Child Wellbeing Unit can provide advice and support for appropriate local responses when the risk of harm concerns about children and young people do not meet the threshold of suspected risk of significant harm.  Child Wellbeing Units are located in NSW Health, the NSW Department of Education and NSW Police.	<b>Website:</b> <a href="https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/providers/children-families/interagency-guidelines/understanding-roles-and-responsibilities-in-the-sector/chapters/child-wellbeing-units">https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/providers/children-families/interagency-guidelines/understanding-roles-and-responsibilities-in-the-sector/chapters/child-wellbeing-units</a>
<a href="#">Immigrant Women Speakout</a>	Provides information, guidance and other direct services to help access the resources culturally diverse women need to live independently, free from violence, exploitation and discrimination.	<b>Phone:</b> (02) 9635 8022 <b>Website:</b> <a href="https://www.speakout.org.au/">https://www.speakout.org.au/</a>
<a href="#">Muslim Women Association</a>	Domestic violence specialist services and cultural support services for all women and Muslim women in particular.	<b>Phone:</b> 9750 6916 <b>Website:</b> <a href="http://www.mwa.org.au/">http://www.mwa.org.au/</a>
<a href="#">No to Violence</a>	Works with men who use violence, to change their abusive and violent behaviour.	<b>Phone:</b> 1300 766 491 <b>Website:</b> <a href="https://ntv.org.au/">https://ntv.org.au/</a>
<a href="#">Relationships Australia NSW</a>	Provides domestic violence counselling, men's behavioral change programs, and assistance to navigate through court matters.	<b>Phone:</b> 1300 364 277 <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:enquiries@ransw.org.au">enquiries@ransw.org.au</a> <b>Website:</b> <a href="https://www.relationshipsnsw.org.au/support/services/">https://www.relationshipsnsw.org.au/support/services/</a>
<a href="#">Rainbow Sexual, Domestic and Family Violence Helpline</a>	Available 24/7 for anyone from the LGBTIQ+ community whose life has been impacted by sexual domestic and/or family violence.	<b>Phone:</b> 1800 497 212 <b>Website:</b> <a href="https://www.rainbowdoor.org.au/family-violence">https://www.rainbowdoor.org.au/family-violence</a>
<a href="#">Reach Out</a>	A safe place for young people to chat anonymously, get support, and feel better.	<b>Website:</b> <a href="https://au.reachout.com/">https://au.reachout.com/</a>
<a href="#">Victims Services</a>	Helps people who are victims of a violent crime in NSW to access counselling, financial assistance for immediate needs and economic loss, funeral expenses and recognition payment.	<b>Phone:</b> 1800 633 063 <b>Website:</b> <a href="https://victimsservices.justice.nsw.gov.au">https://victimsservices.justice.nsw.gov.au</a>

i Homelessness NSW, [No child should be left without a home](#), Homelessness NSW website, n.d.

ii NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS), [NSW Budget 2020-21 Analysis: Domestic Violence](#), NCOSS website, n.d.

iii Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), [Specialist homelessness services annual report 2021-22](#), AIHW website, 2022.

iv ACON, [Domestic and Family Violence](#), ACON website, n.d.

v D Madden, C Carney, M Mitchell and N Grevis-James, '[Indigenous Domestic and Family Violence: Prevalence and Inhibiting Factors to Reporting](#)', Police Science, 2018, 3(2): 18-22.