

Family Violence Practice Guide

PRACTICE GUIDE FOR RED CROSS PEOPLE

Every person has a right to live free from violence and fear. Red Cross has a responsibility to ensure the safety of the people we work with and support.

This practice guide is designed to support Red Cross people to identify and respond to family violence concerns they may encounter when working with individuals, families and communities.

Resources to help you

Speak Up - www.redcross.org.au/SpeakUp

Red Cross Domestic and Family Violence Support

Red Cross Employee and Volunteer Assistance Program

1800RESPECT

Men's Referral Service

MensLine Australia

Relationships Australia

Raising Children Network

inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence

MARAM Practice Guides and Resources

Safe and Together Institute

Working with individuals and families experiencing family violence

Across all Red Cross services, programs and our work in partnership with communities, Red Cross people may find themselves working with individuals and families who may be experiencing family violence. It is important that at all times we are responding appropriately to any immediate safety needs, offering referrals, and where possible, providing ongoing support.

What is family violence?

Family violence – also referred to as domestic violence, intimate partner violence or domestic abuse - happens when one person in a relationship controls or dominates another and causes them to fear for their own or another person's safety or wellbeing. It can happen in any kind of relationship. Family violence doesn't have to involve physical violence. It includes any behaviour that causes fear, stops a person from living as they want or forces them to behave in ways they don't want.

Family violence behaviours can include:

- Physical violence
- Sexualised violence
- Emotional/psychological abuse
- Spiritual abuse
- Technology-facilitated abuse
- Financial abuse
- Exposing children to the above behaviours or their effects

People who are experiencing family violence are sometimes referred to as 'survivors' or 'victim-survivors'. People using family violence are sometimes referred to as 'perpetrators'.

Family violence can occur in a range of ways across different relationship types and communities, including heterosexual and same sex intimate partner relationships, against older people (elder abuse), between a carer and a person with a disability, within communities and across kinship networks. It happens regardless of age, income, education, culture or religion. While people of all genders can be perpetrators or survivors of family violence, overwhelmingly, perpetrators are men, who largely perpetrate violence against women and children.

Family Violence Practice Guide

Possible indicators of family violence

If you think someone you know is experiencing family violence, there are signs you can look out for. The person might:

- regularly have physical injuries like scratches or bruises, including injuries that can't be explained
- seem afraid of their partner or family member, or speak about them being jealous or bad tempered
- describe their partner or family member as controlling or mention that their daily activities are being constantly monitored or controlled
- say they have to get their partner or family member's approval to do things or go places
- are usually accompanied by their partner or family member, who does most of the talking
- lack money for necessary items for themselves and their children
- seem more anxious, jumpy, distant or depressed than usual
- be often criticised by their partner or family member
- not socialise as much as in the past
- not want to leave children with their partner or family member
- worry excessively about making their partner or family member angry
- stop spending time with family and friends and become increasingly isolated
- minimise, blame themselves or make excuses for their partner or family member's concerning behaviour

These are only some of the signs of family violence, and sometimes these signs happen for other reasons. But a combination of these over time may mean someone is experiencing family violence.

Considerations for practitioners

- Where possible, intake and needs assessments should include screening for family violence and be conducted for each member of the family.
- Ensure you have the contact details recorded for all adults so you are not contacting clients through others such as their partner/family member.
- For clients who require an interpreter, always use an interpreter service. Do not rely on their partner, child or another family member to interpret for them.
- Clients experiencing family violence may prefer a face-to-face meeting at the office rather than phone outreach or a home visit, as this may give them a break from an unsafe relationship. Be mindful of this, and create opportunities for them to indicate what works best for them, including attending appointments without their partner/family member.

Responding to perpetrators

Some people may directly or indirectly disclose that they are perpetrating or using family violence against others. It is important to not ignore a disclosure from a perpetrator, and it is also not recommended that workers challenge perpetrators about their use of violence without appropriate training and expertise. Acknowledge what has been discussed and offer to make a referral to an appropriate service such as the Men's Referral Service. If there are immediate safety and wellbeing concerns call 000, and report your concerns internally in Speak Up, and externally as required for your program, guided by the preferences, needs and best interests of survivors (e.g. statutory child protection, police, external funders).

Why might survivors hesitate to report family violence or engage with services?

- Survivors, predominantly women and children, might not report their experience of family violence, or might report in a way that obscures its nature or extent. For example, reporting an injury, but not attributing it to violence.
- Many varied and complex factors lie beneath hidden reporting and under-reporting, including shame, fear and stigma. Survivors may not recognise certain behaviours — particularly emotional or financial abuse — as family violence.
- Many survivors might not disclose or might minimise violence in an effort to manage the perpetrator. For example, a woman might fear that if she discloses the violence, the risk to herself or her children will increase.
- In the case of adolescent family violence, parents/caregivers may feel stigma and shame arising from unfair assumptions about the victim's ability (often the mother) to be a good parent and the shock that their child (or grandchild or sibling) has used violence against them. Shame is exacerbated by lack of community awareness about this form of violence. Parents/carers might also fear their child may get a criminal record if the violence is reported to police.
- Women may find sexual violence particularly difficult to disclose. The Royal Commission into Family Violence reiterated that sexual abuse is often 'left under the table' because of the additional layers of shame.

Family Violence Practice Guide

Building trust and rapport

Building rapport and trust to support engagement is the responsibility of all professionals. Key elements of rapport building include:

- Listen and show empathy without judgement. Be respectful in your communication.
- Explain your role and responsibility. This should include an explanation of what the person can expect.
- Acknowledge the courage it has taken for the person to talk about their experiences with you and that you recognise them as the expert in their own experiences, circumstances and the violence they may have endured.
- Continue to affirm to the person that they and their children (if applicable) have a right to live free from violence and that there are services and options, including legal options, to support their safety. E.g “you (and your children) have a right to live free from violence”, “I am contacting someone (police) to come and make sure you (and your children) are safe”.
- Be aware of how the person has expressed their identity or situation (for example, do they identify as Aboriginal, identify with a particular community or faith group, or as a person with a disability). Understanding a person’s identity can help you understand how their experience of family violence relates to other experiences of structural inequality, barriers to service access or discrimination.
- Highlight that any possible interventions will be guided by the person’s views and wishes. However, safety for themselves and any children that may be experiencing violence will be prioritised. Remember that when any survivor’s safety (adult or child) is in competition with an adult’s choices, safety is the paramount concern.
- Tailor your communication, be flexible and not overly prescriptive in how you ask questions. This can include allowing people to tell their story as a way of gathering relevant information. Hearing a person’s story, guided by your questions and a conversational style can help to draw out information without seeming like an interview.
- Be aware that trauma, stress - and in cases where physical violence has been used even head injuries - can impact a person’s ability to communicate clearly.
- Identify and reflect on your own conscious or unconscious biases.
- Don’t assume a person’s gender identity (based on voice); or sexual orientation (LGBTIQ people experience similar rates of family violence).
- Place the responsibility of the violence on the perpetrator.

Family violence during a crisis

During a crisis or emergency - such as a natural disaster or public health emergency - there may be increased risk of family violence. Factors such as financial stress, housing instability, disrupted routines and increased social isolation can exacerbate gender inequality, reduce access to support, and create additional opportunities for coercive control. Times of hardship are never an excuse for family violence.

Examples of perpetrator tactics during a crisis may include:

- Using the situation to excuse, blame or justify their abusive and violent behaviour
- Misinforming the survivor(s) about the situation to control or frighten them
- Increased direct abuse and violence towards children
- Using the situation as an excuse to gain total or increase control of the family’s finances
- Increasing monitoring and criticism of parenting, blaming survivors if children ‘misbehave’
- Further isolating survivors by restricting their movements or disabling mobility devices
- Preventing disability/NDIS support workers from providing care and becoming the only carer
- Increasingly monitoring devices such as mobile phone, email, online messaging
- Using the event or crisis to attempt to reconcile or resume co-habitation
- Manipulating survivors to allow them to stay to ‘help’ with the children
- Using Family Law contact orders to deceive survivors to allow them to stay or have contact with the children
- Calling police/child protection to say victim-survivor is not adhering to public advice or requirements

Tips when providing remote phone support during a crisis:

- be aware children may be more likely to witness and/or experience family violence in certain crises
- a survivor may not be able to talk openly if the perpetrator or children are present, and may be unable to find a safe or private space to talk. Establish if they can speak freely by asking: “are you safe now?”, “can you speak freely?”
- You may find a yes/no code assists, for example: “I’m going to ask you yes or no questions. Are you afraid of someone in the house? Have they physically hurt you? Have they threatened to hurt you? Do you need police? Do you need an ambulance?”

Family Violence Practice Guide

Act on concerns

If something you have observed, heard or been told concerns you that family violence may be happening, don't ignore it. Ensure those who may be experiencing family violence are supported to be safe by acting on your concerns.

ASK – 'I am wondering if everything is ok at home? Is someone making you feel unsafe?' A person may not be able to speak openly or safely, particularly if at home with the perpetrator. So first establish if they are able to speak safely with you. 'Is anyone else in the room?' 'Is anyone else listening to the conversation?' 'Do you need me to call back/visit at another time, and if so what time is best?'

LISTEN - Listen and believe what they tell you. Show empathy without judgement. Acknowledge the courage it has taken to share this information and let them know they are believed.

NAME IT – acknowledge what they have said and name it. 'No one should be made to feel afraid. What you have just described is violence and support is available.' Reinforce that it is not the survivors fault. The person being abusive is responsible for their behaviour.

ESTABLISH IMMEDIATE RISK - If there is an immediate risk to the safety of the person, their children or anyone else, support them to call 000, or call 000 for them.

REFER - Give contact details of local or national family violence services and 000. Offer them support with contacting services.

REFLECT – Reflect on the support you provided and debrief with your team and manager. Supporting people experiencing any crisis, including family violence, is difficult and at times confronting. Challenge your own biases and assumptions, ensure you continue to work with survivors in a non-judgemental and empowering way. Although you may want them to leave, remember the barriers they might be facing. Survivors are experts in their own risk and should be active decision makers in their safety plans. Be aware of the impact of possible vicarious trauma and ensure you are accessing the support you need through supervision and EAP.

REPORT - Report concerns internally in Speak Up and externally as required guided by the preferences, needs and best interests of survivors (e.g. police, statutory child protection). If appropriate, report in partnership with the survivor.

FOLLOW UP – Depending on the nature of your role, provide ongoing support (e.g. case management and safety planning) to address concerns. Next time you speak to the person check how they are going: 'Last time you spoke about your safety, I'd like to know how you are now?' Help the person to access specialised family violence support. Encourage them to develop and keep up outside contacts. Remind them you are there to support and that there are options available.

Support for Red Cross people experiencing family violence

- Talking about family violence is difficult and Red Cross people providing support to individuals and families need to be well supported. Managers and teams leaders should ensure teams are supported to remain connected and set up times and avenues for formal and informal debriefing and supervision.
- Red Cross has a Domestic and Family Violence Policy which outlines our commitments to ensure all Red Cross People in a domestic or family violence situation are supported, and to provide a work environment that promotes safety and flexibility to address any wellbeing needs. See the Family and Domestic Violence Toolkit on the Lounge.
- The following may be useful for anyone supporting a friend or loved one experiencing family violence:
 - o Red Cross Employee and Volunteer Assistance Program
 - o 1800RESPECT - Supporting someone experiencing domestic and family violence
 - o Safe and Together Institute - How to be an ally to someone experiencing domestic violence