

Family Violence during COVID 19: Guide for Supervisors, Leaders and staff supporting employee's



During emergencies, such as COVID 19, evidence indicates there is likely to be an increase in existing and new cases of family violence. Social isolation, economic insecurity, loss of work and independence, increased alcoholism and other contributors exacerbate gender inequality and family violence is likely to be amplified. These factors do not excuse family violence. The City of Casey has always had mechanisms in place through our Enterprise Agreement for employees however acknowledging the increased risk during COVID 19, more resources have been developed to support staff working from home and beyond.

We all have a duty of care to ensure staff are supported to undertake their roles in a safe environment where they are treated fairly and equally.

What is this guide?

This guide provides City of Casey leaders with key information about family violence, how to manage disclosures and internal and external resources to support them. It should be read in conjunction with the 'Family Violence during COVID-19 Support for Staff' document.

Note: Utilising a 'shared leadership' model, the word 'Leader; throughout this document refers to supervisors, managers and any employee who support employee's across the organisation.

In this guide you will find:

- Key Messages
- What is Family Violence
- What is your role as a leader
- 6 steps to manage disclosures
- Recognising the signs staff may be displaying
- A checklist of available support for staff at the City of Casey
- Support for Leaders
- A list of Family Violence Support People across the organisation
- External Support Services

Key Messages:

- Disaster, times of stress and hardship are never excuses for violence.
- Family Violence is a workplace matter and City of Casey have resources to support staff and leaders in a confidential manner.
- Community Family Violence services continue to be available for support and advice for anyone experiencing violence, or who are concerned about their safety.
- People Managers may be the only safe and consistent contact an employee has outside of the house during social isolation period.

What is Family Violence?

Also known as 'Domestic Violence', 'Intimate Partner Violence', and Child Abuse. As outlined in the Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic), family violence includes behaviour by a person towards a family member that is physical, sexual, emotional or psychological,

spiritual, economic, threatening or coercive behaviour. It includes any other way that a perpetrator may control or dominate that causes a family member, partner or ex-partner, to feel fear for the safety or wellbeing of themselves or others. It also includes behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of, abusive behaviour.

Family Violence can happen in all sorts of relationships including intimate partner and ex-partners, older people, other family members, parents with their teenage or adult children, friends and people living with disabilities and their carers.

Learn more specific to COVID 19 and Family Violence on DVRC website , how to develop a personal safety plan or how to support someone you know (including children and young people) here: <https://www.dvrcv.org.au/help-advice/coronavirus-covid-19-and-family-violence/survivors-during-coronavirus> .

What is your role as a leader?

As a leader within the City of Casey, you will continue you will continue to manage your staff as a part of your key responsibilities. During COVID 19 where staff are now working from home, the way you manage will look different. We encourage you to check in with all staff on a daily basis, both in a team environment, but also for one-to-one meetings. For those that may be at risk of family violence, or if they have disclosed to you, it is important that these check in's are more regular as agreed with the staff member.

Some good practice strategies to support all staff include:

- Checking in daily with your team members
- Implementing a buddy system amongst staff to ensure wellbeing and connectedness
- Encouraging all staff to turn their video ON during team meetings and in videoconferencing platforms (where they feel comfortable to do so)
- Send all staff family violence resources – as even if not required by them personally, they have them for future or to refer their colleagues who may confide in them
- Acknowledging the COVID 19 pandemic and working from home can cause more anxiety and stress, as well as increased risk of family violence, encouraging staff to take care of themselves and use our Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and external resources as required.

As a leader, it is your role to:

- Know the internal and external support available for staff experiencing violence (see Family Violence Page, and online training is available) and be ready to respond and support.
- Notice if something isn't 'quite right'. Know the warning signs.
- Remember that someone may not be able to communicate in case a perpetrator is present in the home or remotely monitoring them (phones, computers, tracking devices and hidden video cameras are all possible).
- Avoid judgement or blame, and do not excuse violence due to 'increased pressure' due to COVID 19 or any other factor.
- Appropriately explore what the cause of someone's reduced performance might be.
- Understand that people's experiences may be impacted by their gender identity, sexuality, culture, economic-status, health, disability and many other factors.

- Seek support of family violence contacts across the organisation if necessary.
- Utilise the checklist below in your conversations with team members who disclose.
- Practice self care.

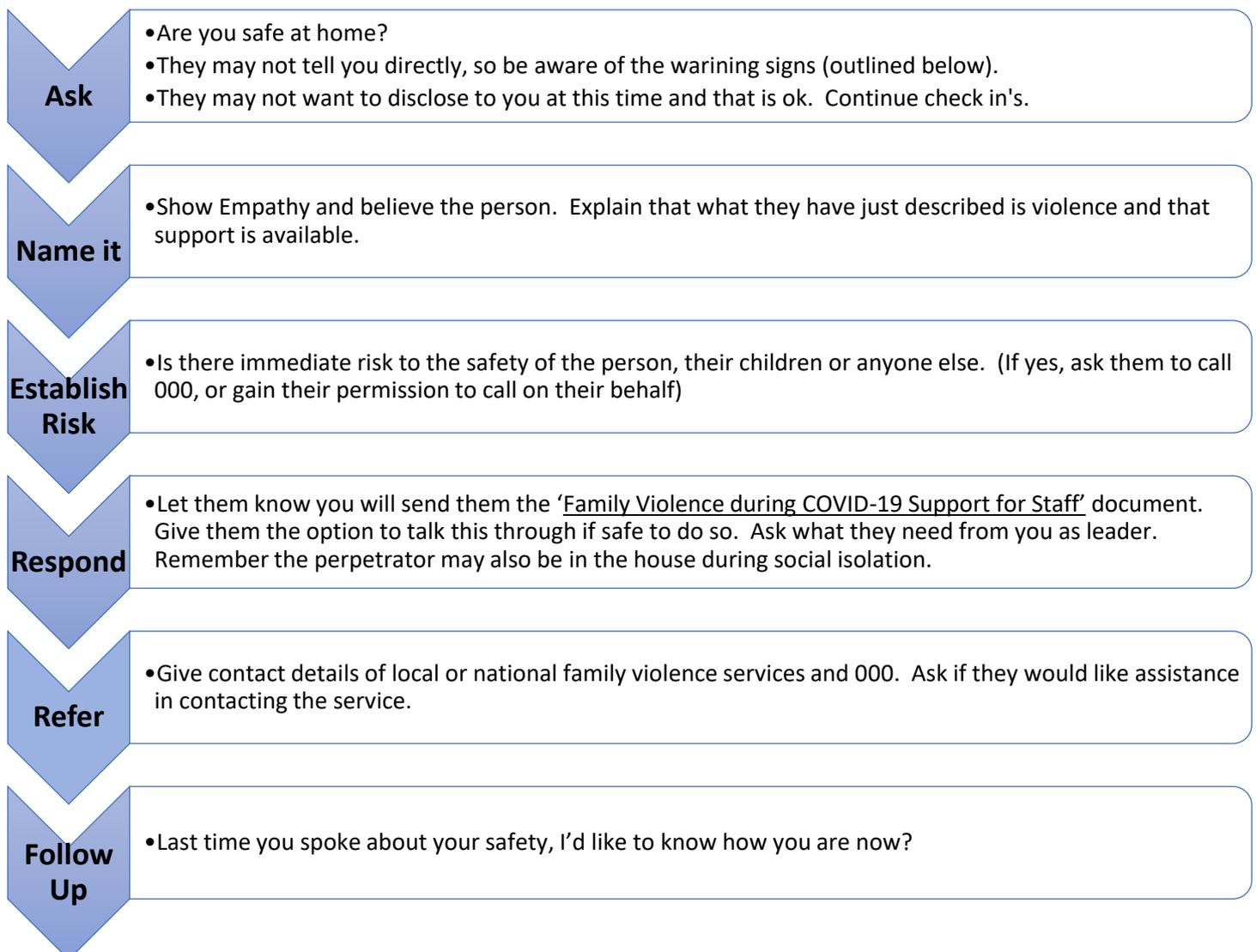
It is not your role to:

- Be a Counsellor or provide case management.
- Find the solution for someone.
- Judge any decision someone makes for themselves.
- Encourage someone to leave.
- Undertake safety planning on someone's behalf.
- Commit to a long-term plan of action

For more comprehensive guidance on Responding to Disclosures including different phrases that would be helpful to use, see Our Watch Resource:

<https://workplace.ourwatch.org.au/resource/practice-guidance-responding-to-disclosures/>

Managing Disclosures: You Can Help in Just 6 steps:



Responding appropriately to Disclosures of Family Violence

As a leader, you are expected to provide a basic and appropriate response to team members who disclose family violence. We acknowledge that on occasions some leaders may not feel they have the skills to do this or may have previous experiences which may lead to trauma. If you do not feel able to respond appropriately, please immediately refer to a Family Violence Support Person in the organisation (refer to list below). Training and support is also available to you.

In most cases however, responding in the moment to a team member or colleague is the most effective course of action. Please see below some guidelines to assist you.

Recognising the signs:

Someone experiencing family violence may:

- appear nervous, ashamed or evasive
- describe their partner as controlling or prone to anger
- seem uncomfortable or anxious when their partner is present in the home
- suffer anxiety, panic attacks, stress and/or depression
- appear emotionally 'flat'
- have a drug abuse problem including dependency on tranquillisers or alcohol
- have chronic headaches, asthma and/or vague aches and pain
- have sleeping and/or eating disorders
- have attempted suicide and/or have a psychiatric illness
- have physical signs of violence such as bruising on the chest and abdomen, multiple injuries, minor cuts, injuries during pregnancy and/or ruptured eardrums

NOTE: Some people experiencing family violence may have no 'recognisable' signs, and have learnt to hide their situation due to shame and stigma. Just because you can not see the 'signs', does not mean it is not happening. Always believe someone when they disclose.

Checklist of responding to Family Violence in the workplace

Below is a checklist that you can work through to ensure staff experiencing violence are clear on the support available to them. You will need to use your discretion as to what is and isn't appropriate.

1.	Provide the 'Support for Staff Experiencing Family Violence' guide.
2.	Continue regular check in's. The staff member may consider providing an emergency code word or signal to call 000 immediately.
3.	People Leaders may approve leave applications and/or a request for flexible working arrangements for an employee. Employees can apply for up to 20 days of paid family violence special leave within a 12-month period (pro rata for part-time employees) for medical appointments, legal proceedings and other activities related to family violence

	<p>Refer to clause 20 to the Enterprise Agreement (Part A) for further information.</p> <p>Discuss what is required in terms of leave for the immediate situation. Refer to the Family Violence Special Leave form and complete as required.</p> <p>Continuity of employment and the network this provides may be critical to an individual. Sometimes, it is preferable to support someone with short ‘bursts’ of leave, particularly initially, to alleviate pressure.</p>
4.	<p>If someone is not feeling safe to work at home, consider other locations (e.g. Bunjil Place or Vibe). This option is subject to government restrictions. Discuss this option with the Manager of People and Culture to ensure there is a safe place to work.</p>
5.	<p>People experiencing trauma may not have the same level of output as they usually do and/ or may need adjustments to their work activities and/or workload to support them and ensure that they are safe. As appropriate, discuss with the person if they require any modifications to their work duties and agree how this will be handled.</p>
6.	<p>Ask them if they would like the option of borrowing a council mobile phone which they can use in emergencies and/ or to make discreet calls to support services. The employee may consider listing contacts discreetly under code names in the phone. Requests for mobile phones need to be approved by Louise Green or Vicki Blackman in People and Culture.</p>
7.	<p>Determine if there are any privacy concerns. Do they need their work contact details changed or adjusted? Do they need to change their work phone number/ email address or have it removed from any work directories.</p>
8.	<p>Do they need to update City of Casey with emergency contacts?</p>
9.	<p>You may consider flexible work arrangements or change of work pattern to suit their situation.</p>
10.	<p>Explain confidentiality with the person as per below.</p>

Confidentiality

As a general principle, the less people who know the better, and it is important to reduce the number of touch points as much as possible.

You can reassure the employee that you will maintain confidentiality, however, due to the specific nature of a pandemic context the following exception applies:

- If you fear for the safety of the staff member or a child within the household
- That you are strongly encouraged to report a disclosure of family violence to a People and Culture representative as listed at the end of this document. (this can only happen with permission from the staff member)
- The name of the employee will need to be disclosed only to this person. This ensures that support can be provided to the employee if you become unable to perform your role. It also provides P&C with the opportunity to ensure

you are not isolated and sitting with the knowledge of family violence and provide additional support to you.

- The details of their situation do not need to be disclosed
- There is no requirement for the employee to speak directly to P&C. This is available should they choose to, but you can remain the key point of contact.

Support for Leaders

After a disclosure is made to you by a team member you may feel:

- Distressed for your team member
- Sad that our support is limited to the workplace
- Concerned about their welfare and safety
- Reflective on the support you provided in the moment
- Positive that you have been able to support someone

It is normal to feel a whole range of emotions including unsettled, upset or distressed following a disclosure of Family Violence. Our natural inclination is to help someone and to feel concerned for their welfare. Talking to someone else such as our [Employee Assistance Program](#) a P&C representative or the Family Violence Prevention Officer, may assist you to process this.

It is important that you have the opportunity to reflect on how you responded and talking through your experience may be beneficial. It can also help to discuss the support that you offered and share ideas on how we can extend this support if needed. You don't need to do this alone.

Support contacts, external agencies and resources

Family Violence Supports at City of Casey are:

Family Violence Supports	Contact Details
Krissy Nicholson, Family Violence Prevention Officer	knicholson@casey.vic.gov.au
Teresa Thomson, Gender Equality Officer	tthomson@casey.vic.gov.au
Vicki Blackman, People & Culture	vblackman@casey.vic.gov.au
Angela Carter-Wilson, People & Culture	acarter@casey.vic.gov.au
Louise Green, People & Culture	lgreen@casey.vic.gov.au
Nik Filips, Community Safety	nfilips@casey.vic.gov.au
Nick Grant-Collins – Inclusion & Wellbeing	NGCollins@casey.vic.gov.au

It is important that you know that specialist family violence services are there to help and remain open for support or advice during COVID 19 and beyond.

Family Violence Support Services
Police: Call 000 (if in immediate danger)
<p>1800 RESPECT (24 hours) Australia wide confidential support services, counselling, information and referral for sexual assault, and family violence for everyone. www.1800respect.org.au 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732)</p>
<p>Safe Steps: Family Violence Response Centre (24 hours) Safe Steps provides emergency accommodation, counselling and other support services. http://www.safesteps.org.au/ 1800 015 188</p>
<p>InTouch: Centre Against Family Violence Service https://intouch.org.au/ 1800 755 988</p>
WAYSS
<p>Djirra: Aboriginal and Torres Straight Island Service https://djirra.org.au 1800 105 303</p>
<p>Lifeline (24 hours) www.lifeline.org.au 13 11 14</p>
<p>Kidsline (24 hours) www.kidshelpline.com.au 1800 55 1800</p>
<p>MensLine (24 hours) www.mensline.org.au 1300 789 978</p>
<p>With Respect: LGBTQI Service https://www.withrespect.org.au 1800 542 847</p>

For further information or to provide feedback please contact:

Krissy Nicholson, Family Violence Prevention Officer: knicholson@casey.vic.gov.au

Teresa Thomson, Gender Equality Officer: Tthomson@casey.vic.gov.au