

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE TOOL

Supporting victim survivors who do not view police as a safe option for managing family violence risk

This reflective practice tool was developed in partnership with survivor advocates and practitioners from Flat Out, Switchboard, inTouch, and Elizabeth Morgan House to support family violence practitioners to identify and implement tailored anti-oppressive responses for victim survivors who do not consider calling police to be a safe option.

You can use this resource to support reflective practice in individual or group supervision settings, in order to identify and advocate for anti-oppressive, person-centered approaches to supporting victim survivors' safety when they do not want to contact police in responding to and managing family violence risk posed by a person who use violence.

Reflective practice points and questions

"We need to trust people to be the experts on their own lives and to take them seriously and have faith in people to set the course for working from harm to transformation."

(Creative interventions, p.20)

What is the full picture of intersecting risks for the victim survivor I am working with?

In our society, priority communities experience major levels of structural inequality and systemic discrimination and marginalisation because of how their intersecting identities are valued and considered in the society and institutions.

These inequalities are rooted in oppressive constructs such as colonialism, sexism, racism, classism, ageism, ableism, xenophobia, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and intersex discrimination, among others.

Conversely, privileges such as whiteness, masculinity, being able-bodied and heterosexual can also intersect and amplify a person's access to social power and multiple advantages.⁵

Therefore, for some people from priority communities, family violence risk is not the only risk they need to consider when calling police or engaging with the justice system.

They need to consider state and institutional violence and harm too.

- What are the reasons victim survivors will not contact or engage with police? What other risks co-exist for victim survivors when considering whether to contact police?

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- How will a victim survivor be impacted if you insist that they need to contact police when they assess it will not be a safer option or an option for them? How do you and your organisation hold cultural safety and client voice when you face this kind of dilemma in practice?
- How do you and your organisation create accountability practices for the work you do, and how you do it? Is it anti-oppressive, and person centred?
- Do you consider your own power and privileges and experiences of marginalization as a person and as a practitioner, and are you aware of how these are expressed in your practice to be able to dismantle biases and systems of oppression built on white and patriarchal constructs?

How is my social location as a practitioner influencing my assumptions about justice and statutory interventions and how I will respond to the victim survivor I am working with?

Our personal experiences, perspectives and biases about Police and the justice system influence how we understand and make decisions when we work with victim survivors. Taking the time to reflect about your own experiences and beliefs about police as well as how you understand their role in victim survivors' safety is an important step to recognising if your decisions are based on your beliefs and privileges rather than keeping victim survivors centred.

- Ask yourself – if you were experiencing family violence and having similar experiences to the person you are supporting, would you view the police as a safe option for you and why. Then notice why calling or engaging police is not a safe option for some of the victim survivors you work with using the case studies provided as a reference.
- Contrast what you expect/seek from police involvement and what victim survivors tell you about what the impact can be on them if they contact police.
- Can safety be achieved without police involvement? How have victim survivors managed their risk without Police involvement? What is a victim survivor safety plan without police involvement and how can this be supported? Remember that your role is to support victim survivors and you can do it by helping them to explore different alternatives.

Whose voices do I centre when working with victim survivors?

Family violence organisations and practitioners in Victoria operate in a family violence system that conceptualises family violence as a law-and-order issue and therefore centres police intervention and criminal justice responses.

MARAM have stated responsibilities for organisations to increase victim survivors' safety and positioned as common risk management practice for services to contact police. In addition, practitioners are responsible for delivering a service that is person centred, takes into consideration victim survivors' voices, and their own professional judgement. This can create a

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tension that practitioners and services need to navigate when victim survivors refuse police involvement and services assess this involvement is needed.

Within this tension, it is important to keep in mind that people experiencing violence make decisions every day to keep themselves safe, which may not always reflect what practitioners and services advise them to do, but may be the safer option for an individual victim survivor. It is also important to ensure that victim survivor's agency and dignity is always honoured.

Ending an abusive relationship is a dangerous time, and this is especially true for victim survivors who face increased barriers to support within the current response system and for who police involvement can escalate the risk and cause new risks.

Do you take into consideration victim survivor's experiences, expertise and agency when they do not want to contact police? Is your role and decision-making being centred, rather than the voice of victim survivors in creating a safety plan? Have you considered if calling police can increase the risk of family violence and other types of risks for some victim survivors? Have you listened to victim survivor's feedback on this?

- What biases do you notice on yourself or your colleagues when working with a victim survivor from priority communities who refuses to work with police or connect with the justice system?
- How can you support your staff to create alternatives to police – what opportunities are there for education and professional development?
- Developing trust with victim survivors by actively listening to them and respecting their knowledge and expertise in managing risk and keeping safe is key in managing safety. This requires an empathetic approach regarding hesitation to contact police and exploring strategies to safety and advocate and provide written support documents that highlight their choices and why it is not safe.

Do I consider and document historical and systemic harm experienced by victim survivors as well as their strengths, acts of resistance and how they have built safety without contacting police to inform victim survivor's risk management plan?

Recording victim survivors' experiences with police and the justice system is important in understanding why they prefer not to engage with these institutions. Similarly, documenting victim survivors' strengths, acts of resistance and how they have built safety without contacting police can help to define tailored risk management responses in partnership with victim survivors (See MARAM Appendix 15– [ecomap diagram](#)).

- Do you explore and document in your case notes experiences of systemic harm and victim survivors' insights as to whether engaging police will in fact escalate risk of family violence or other types of risk? Documenting this can contribute to challenging victim survivor blaming and pathologizing and amplify victim- survivors voices at the systemic level.

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- Do you ensure that victim-survivors' personal circumstances and experiences (e.g. mental health or AOD use or previous experiences with police, including experiencing violence by a police officer) are not further exacerbated when recording case information and communicating information about clients with other services? Does the narrative you use highlight victim survivors' personal circumstances, which potentially enhance victim blaming, instead of the pattern of violent behaviour of the person who uses violence?
- Do you record in your case notes the things victim survivors value, what matters to them, what they hope for regarding their safety using a strength-based approach? Do you register the way victim survivors have built safety without contacting police? Do you support victim survivors to note and integrate those strategies in their safety plan and risk management? (See Lauren Caufield's article which illustrates the importance of doing this)⁶.
- Do you confirm with victim survivors third-party documents that blame them and support them to document their truth? What tools or processes could support you to collect evidence that could be used by victim survivors when they are ready to approach police and the justice system on their own terms? For instance, Elizabeth Morgan House created a Record of Incident/s of Family Violence template to use especially if the person experiencing violence chooses not to report the incident to police at the time.

Do I support victim survivors to map their individual, family and community assets or protective factors to create alternative responses to safety when they do not want police and justice intervention?

Frameworks like MARAM, the Code of Practice, and information sharing schemes calls for a coordinated and a collaborative approach to respond to family violence risk and risk management. Although this is easier said than done in a context of limited funding and time constraints, it is fundamental to provide a service and system support to victim survivors. However, the first coordination and collaboration should happen between the practitioner and the victim survivor, and together they can decide what and how to engage with other services and supports, including police and the justice system.

- Do you partner with victim survivors, build trust, centre their voices, and respect their choices and autonomy without judgement? Do you communicate with honesty about your organisation's position or policies regarding police and other statutory institutions and when to do so, so they can make an informed decision about your service and their safety (cultural, physical and emotional) and how to keep their agency in this situation?
- Do you create the space to identify and expand on how victim survivors have created safety without calling police and support them to map their personal, social, family and community resources that can support safety and use this information to enhance and find new strategies? How have victim survivors used their friends, neighbours,

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colleagues, workers and family networks to create safety? Who are the key people, what they can do, and what are they are willing to do? (See section B.3. Staying safe, 4.C. Mapping Allies and barriers and 4E Supporting survivors or victims of [Creative Interventions Toolkit: A Practice Guide to Stop Interpersonal Violence](#)).

- How can you consider and include victim survivors' communities and other networks in your responses to safety to remove the pressure to contact police as the only alternative to safety? How do/can you coordinate and collaborate with these alternative safety networks?
- How can you activate the system to protect victim survivors and hold the person who use violence accountable without the victim survivor having to contact or engage with police? Do you keep re-assessing the safety plan with victim survivors and see if and how they would like to use the justice system to keep the person who uses violence in view and accountable.
- How do you ensure in your contact with other services that the focus stays on the person who uses violent behaviour rather than on victim survivors' personal circumstances? Does your organisation provide alternatives to correct misidentification, create a new digital identity (pseudonym), update information on personal circumstances, for instance?

A note on language

The term '**priority communities**' encompasses groups in our society that experience intersecting levels of systemic oppression and marginalisation such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, victim survivors of police and correction perpetrators (including victims who themselves are police officers or have adverse experiences with police culture), criminalised people, people with disability, LGBTIQ+ people, people from migrant and refugee communities, children, young people and older people, among others. For specific information about how to better support people from priority communities, consult the [Tailored and inclusive support section](#) on the Safe and Equal website.

Systemic harm is the harm that someone experiences because of rules, laws, regulations, policies, and practices. **State violence** is a term that refers to different forms of harm and suffering caused by the use or abuse of governmental authority. **Systemic collusion** is when someone supports, enables, or compounds a person's experience of systemic harm and/or systemic abuse.

Anti-oppressive practice is a type of critical social work that seeks to challenge social inequality and systemic power imbalances affecting clients by engaging with person-centred, strengths-based, activist and critically reflective approaches. Services that use this practice acknowledge their responsibility to take a stand against injustice and recognise clients as active agents of change who have their own strengths, capabilities and strategies in response to their experiences of violence, oppression and discrimination.

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Resources

The following resources have been considered in the development of this practice tool:

- Family Violence Risk and Management Framework ([MARAM](#)) provides guidance on the barriers for priority groups to access services and ways to address those at the individual and systemic levels.
- [The Code of Practice for specialist family violence services | Safe and Equal](#)
- [Case Management Program Requirements | Safe and Equal](#)
- [Codesigning the Foundations for a Client Outcomes Framework | Safe and Equal](#)
- [Providing tailored and inclusive support | Safe and Equal](#)
- [Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people | Safe and Equal](#)
- [Toolkit | creative interventions \(creative-interventions.org\)](#)

Acknowledgements

This resource was developed in partnership with the following organisations.

Flat Out, a state-wide homelessness support and advocacy service for criminalised women, sistergirls, intersex, transgender and/or gender diverse women who have had contact with the criminal justice and/or prison system in Victoria, offers the Beyond OOO training, and secondary consults for family violence practitioners who are supporting criminalised folks.

inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence is a specialist family violence service that works with women from migrant and refugee backgrounds in Victoria.

Elizabeth Morgan House, the peak body in Victoria for Aboriginal women and children, advising Peak Aboriginal Organisations, Government & NGO sector on issues affecting Aboriginal women & families.

Switchboard Victoria, a community based not for profit organisation that provides a peer driven, support service for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and gender diverse, intersex, queer, asexual (LGBTIQA+) communities and their allies, friends, support workers and families.



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