

Best practice guidelines for administrative and client service staff

Working with people who have experienced domestic violence

Principle 1. Improve your understanding

Guideline 1 – Develop and maintain your own knowledge of the social context of domestic violence.

PRACTICE POINTS:

- Ensure you are informed about the impact of abuse and domestic violence both on clients and children who witness it.

Principle 2. Prioritise safety

Guideline 2.1 - When first speaking to a client ask whether they are safe now.

PRACTICE POINTS:

- Ask when it is safe to call.
- Suggest the client calls back when it is safe.
- Consider asking screening questions from the Legal Aid Queensland risk assessment tool.
- Suggest contacting the police or a domestic violence telephone service.

Guideline 2.2 When making arrangements for a client to come to Legal Aid Queensland, inquire about any potential safety or security issues.

PRACTICE POINTS:

- When a client is waiting for a family dispute resolution conference ask whether they feel safe in the waiting room and if not, make appropriate arrangements.

Guideline 2.3 - Take precautions to protect the client's safety when using their file.

PRACTICE POINTS:

- Do not put a client's address on the front of the file.
- Do not disclose a client's whereabouts unless given permission.
- Always ensure there are no identifying documents/files left in view or accessible to other parties.

Guideline 2.4 - Take appropriate precautions for your own safety when seeing a client.

PRACTICE POINTS:

- If you are working at a Legal Aid Queensland office, know where the distress buttons are in interview rooms.
- If you are working at a Legal Aid Queensland office and a physical incident occurs or is threatened, complete a workplace health and safety incident report, notify Legal Aid Queensland and document the incident appropriately.
- If a client threatens you or a physical incident occurs, notify your supervisor and consider if the appropriate authorities need to be notified.
- Protect your personal information (eg be conscious of social media posts, your listing on the electoral role and transport arrangements).
- Protect your own safety as you leave the building.

Principle 3. Facilitate empowerment

Guideline 3 - Provide clients with enough information to help them make up their own mind.

PRACTICE POINTS:

- Do not put pressure on a client to make a decision.

Principle 4. Foster respect

Guideline 4 - Do not be judgemental in your response when assisting a client and hearing about their experience of domestic violence.

PRACTICE POINTS:

- Listen and respond respectfully and behave sensitively when clarifying and getting further details of alleged abuse, domestic violence or cultural practices.

Principle 5. Acknowledge violence is a crime

Guideline 5.1 - Give clients appropriate information about their legal options to address domestic violence.

PRACTICE POINTS:

- Tell clients how to apply for a protection order or how to make a complaint to the police.
- Acknowledge that violence is a crime.
- Be aware of referral options for support services.
- Help client access legal advice.

Guideline 5.2 - Inform clients that they are not alone and are not to blame.

PRACTICE POINTS:

- Acknowledge that responsibility for domestic violence lies with the offender.

Principle 6. Respect diversity

Guideline 6.1 - Ensure you are familiar with cultural issues.

PRACTICE POINTS:

- Do not make assumptions about a client based on their background.
- Recognise that people may respond to domestic violence in different ways.

Guideline 6.2 - Clarify language considerations are met when responding to clients.

PRACTICE POINTS:

- Consider the barriers that may limit the client's understanding of complex legal language and meaning and adapt your practice accordingly. For example the client may require an interpreter, support worker or social worker.
- Be aware of Legal Aid Queensland's Language Services Policy:
 - trained interpreters should be organised if you think language is an issue or the client has requested an interpreter

- always check that a client from a culturally and linguistically diverse background is comfortable to proceed without an interpreter, even if they have declined to use one on a previous occasion.

- organise a telephone interpreter for any interviews
- Legal Aid Queensland will fund interpreters
- use separate interpreters for both parties in a dispute
- ask if the client would prefer a male or female interpreter.

- Interpreters must be independent to the parties – don't use friends or neighbours.
- Interpreters must not be part of the negotiations. Their role should be only to interpret for the client.
- Be aware extra time may be required when an interpreter or support worker is involved in a matter.
- Make alternative arrangements if a disability precludes a client from coming to the office.
- Attempt to make arrangements so the family dispute resolution conference can proceed, such as organising a telephone interpreter and be aware that funding is available for an extended period due to the need to use interpreters.

Principle 7. Respond collaboratively

Guideline 7 - Provide clients with information about services that will address their other needs and those of their children.

PRACTICE POINTS:

- Ensure you know or can find out about appropriate non-legal support and referral services and ensure this information is available to the client, such as domestic violence services, refuges, children's contact centres and other organisations listed in Legal Aid Queensland's online organisations directory

www.legalaid.qld.gov.au/legalinformation/Pages/Organisations.aspx

- If in doubt, contact a lawyer or social worker in Legal Aid Queensland's Violence Prevention and Women's Advocacy team.

Notes

Training

The Queensland Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research offers regular videolink seminars to keep practitioners current in their knowledge and understanding of domestic violence. A free and regular newsletter is also sent out to subscribers <http://www.noviolence.com.au/reader.html>

Useful contacts for referral

- DV Connect is a 24/7 service offering advice on domestic violence matters Ph: 1800 811 811
- DV Connect - Mensline - Ph: 1800 600 636
- Department of Communities Regional Domestic Violence Services www.communities.qld.gov.au/communityservices/violence-prevention/contacts/regional-domestic-and-family-violence-services