

Intersection of Domestic and Family Violence and Pet abuse

What is Domestic and Family Violence?

Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) includes any behaviour, in an intimate or family relationship which is violent, threatening, coercive or controlling, causing a person to live in fear and to be made to do things against their will. DFV can happen to anyone and can take many forms. It is often part of a pattern of controlling or coercive behaviour. Women and children are overwhelmingly the victims of DFV and those who use violence are overwhelmingly male. It can be perpetrated by a partner, family member, carer, house mate, boyfriend or girlfriend. Women also commit DFV against men, as do same-sex partners. DFV is also committed by and committed against people who identify in non-gender binary terms.

Our full definition of DFV is on our website www.dvnswsm.org.au.

What is Pet abuse?

Studies both in Australia and overseas have identified a link between animal abuse and domestic and family violence. A 2008 Australian study looking into the relationship between domestic violence and pet abuse found that:

PET ABUSE IS A PREDICTOR OF PARTNER ABUSE



Research indicating that approximately 50% of women in violent relationships reporting that their violent partner had also hurt or killed one of their pets.

33% OF WOMEN WHO OWNED A PET



Delayed their leaving a violent relationship because of concerns of their pet's welfare (time delayed varied from 1 week to more than 8 weeks).



AUSTRALIA HAS ONE OF THE HIGHEST RATES OF PET OWNERSHIP IN THE WORLD

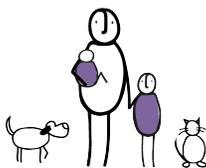


ABOUT **63%**

OF AUSTRALIAN HOUSEHOLDS OWN PETS



ACCOUNTING FOR MORE THAN **25 MILLION** PETS ACROSS THE COUNTRY



PETS ARE CONSIDERED TO BE PART OF THE FAMILY



AUSTRALIA'S MOST COMMON PETS



38%



29%



12%



12%

OTHER PETS 9%

(Animal Medicine Australia, 2016)



Upholding Dignity

Dignity forms the basis of human rights

‘Human rights recognise the inherent value of each person, regardless of background, where we live, what we look like, what we think or what we believe. They are based on principles of dignity, equality and mutual respect, which are shared across cultures, religions and philosophies. They are about being treated fairly, treating others fairly and having the ability to make genuine choices in our daily lives. Respect for human rights is the cornerstone of strong communities in which everyone can make a contribution and feel included.’¹

The Australian Human Rights Commission

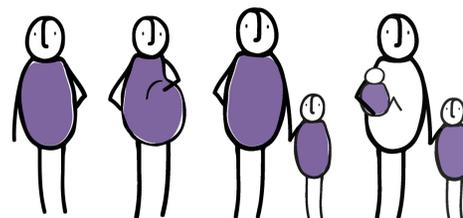
DFV is an injustice. It is an offence to a person’s dignity, it compromises a person’s safety and undermines their wellbeing. This is true of adults, children and young people. The concept of **dignity** expresses the idea that all people have the right to be valued and respected, and to be treated fairly.

It is important to uphold the dignity of people who reach out for support. We can do this by learning what people already know, feel, believe and do. Listening to and learning from people in this way, informs how we respond.

Acknowledging resistance and responses to violence

“Whenever individuals are subjected to violence, they resist. Along side each history of violence, there runs a parallel history of resistance...”

‘Victims’ resist in a myriad of ways that are not successful in stopping violence but nevertheless are profoundly important as expressions of dignity and self respect.”²



Dr Coates and Dr Wade

Commonly, the dialogue on DFV focuses on the violence used by the perpetrator and the impact on the person experiencing violence. However, by only focusing on these things we don’t get a full picture of what happened and how or why a person has resisted and responded to violence in order to uphold their dignity. Whenever people are abused, they do many things to try and reduce, prevent or stop the abuse in some way. Resistance can take many forms – from overtly standing up to a perpetrator, to small acts or thoughts that go unnoticed by others.

Some of the ways you can uphold people’s dignity include:

- exploring and acknowledging people’s resistance and responses to the violence they have experienced.
- asking questions to better understand the context within which the violence has occurred.
- exploring and acknowledging that children and young people also resist and respond.
- using language that exposes violence, reveals the perpetrator’s responsibility for violence and contests victim blaming.
- recognising that all people exercise caution, creativity, deliberation and awareness in navigating DFV.

People’s responses and resistance to violence are their efforts to keep hold of and reassert their dignity.

¹ Australian Human Rights Commission What are human rights? retrieved from <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/about/what-are-human-rights> (11/1/18)

² Coates, L. and Wade, A. (2007) Language and Violence: Analysis of Four Discursive Operations, *Journal of Family Violence* 22: 511. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-007-9082-2>

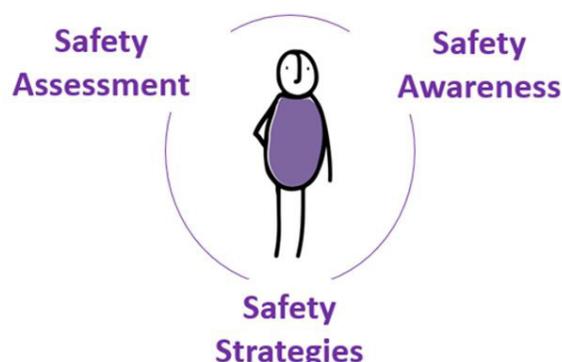
Building on Personal Safety and Navigating Risk

People experiencing DFV are already navigating their safety before they ever reach out for support. They are self-assessing the risks they face and use strategies to mitigate the risk of harm.

Any advice given or action taken by a support person may unintentionally or unknowingly increase the harm and threat that a person may face as a result of not fully understanding a person's situation and context.

Our contribution is to support a person to self-assess their safety, build their safety awareness and support them to develop and implement ways (strategies) to keep safe.

DFV Safety Trio



The **Benefit/Risk Framework** is a tool to support decision making.

What value does the **Benefit/Risk Framework** tool offer?



Benefits	Harm/threat
<p>Exploring the benefits of a decision/goal serves to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw on what is important to the person and what they hope for. • Inform us about how much the decision/goal means to a person in their life context and situation (now and moving ahead). 	<p>We see a more comprehensive picture of potential harm/threat when we:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw from the safety awareness and lived experience of the person. • Share what we know more broadly about patterns and indicators of risk.
Strategies	On balance
<p>By exploring strategies rather than plans we support people to have a richer more flexible menu in the face of changing risk and circumstances.</p> <p>When we recognise peoples existing strategies we can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on their existing capabilities. • Offer additional strategies where options seem exhausted or new ideas are being sought. 	<p>By exploring the full picture 'on balance' we are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting the person as the lead decision maker in their own life – this can uphold their dignity. • Balancing where our role stops and starts in fulfilling our duty of care.

DFV and Pet abuse

DVSM RECOGNISES THAT:



Pets are considered as important family members



There is a link between DFV and pet abuse



Pet abuse is a predictor of partner abuse



A women's decision to leave a violent relationship may be impacted by her concern for the welfare of the family pet



Children are impacted by living with DFV and witnessing abuse

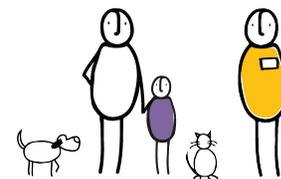
DVSM HAS DEVELOPED:

a purpose built facility for accommodating pets (dogs and cats) at the DVSM accommodation.

procedures, guides and accompanying forms that support the intake and care of pets accommodated at the DVSM accommodation.

a guide to inform and support access to alternative pet accommodation where pets cannot be accommodated in the DVSM service.

At DVSM we recognise that pets are part of the family and can also be at risk due to domestic and family violence. We understand that the welfare of a family pet can play a key factor in a woman's decision to leave a violent relationship. In some instances a woman may delay leaving if she is concerned for a pet's safety.



DVSM's purpose built pet accommodation ensures that families have an option to leave DFV without fearing for the safety of their pets. Where we are not able to accommodate a pet, we will support families to secure alternative accommodation.

Animal Medicine Australia: Pet Ownership in Australia 2016 http://animalmedicinesaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/AMA_Pet-Ownership-in-Australia-2016-Report_sml.pdf

Volant, A. M., Johnson, J. A., Gullone, E., & Coleman, G. J. (2008). The Relationship Between Domestic Violence and Animal Abuse: An Australian Study. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*.

NATIONAL CONTACTS

Domestic Violence Line (24 hours) 1800 65 64 63

The Domestic Violence Line is a NSW state-wide telephone crisis counselling and referral service for women and persons who identify as female.

Counsellors on the Domestic Violence Line can help you:

- talk to the police and get legal help
- get hospital care and family support services
- obtain an Apprehended Violence Order (AVO)
- develop a safety plan for you and your children
- find emergency accommodation for you and your children

Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800

Australia's free, private and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25. **Anytime. Any Reason.**

For men experiencing Domestic and Family Violence if you are a man experiencing Domestic and Family Violence you can contact:

- **Mensline** <https://mensline.org.au/>
- **1800RESPECT** <https://www.1800respect.org.au/>