

DVSM Practice Framework

Introduction

Our purpose is to build individual and community safety and wellbeing.

Our **values** and **principles** underpin all our work.

The purpose of the Practice Framework is to guide the way we practice at Domestic Violence Service Management (DVSM). It outlines the way we approach our work with individuals, communities, stakeholders and partners to address Domestic and Family Violence (DFV). It sets out 'how we do things around here' and underpins our policies, practice guides and tools, and our planning reflection in order to continuously improve.

DVSM provides support services to people experiencing DFV and people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. We support children, young people and adults, each as individuals and as a family unit.

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.dvnsdsm.org.au.



Our Approach

We know that when someone seeks support, it might be the first, last or only time they reach out. Every interaction to support someone is important. Our approach aims to be:

Informing

Offering new information or increasing an individual's awareness about DFV and homelessness, risks to their personal safety and wellbeing and ways to enhance their safety and wellbeing.

Empowering

Supporting individuals to restore dignity, power and control over their life, enabling them to exercise options and make informed decisions about their lives and set their own goals.

Enduring

Offering information and support that can be used by individuals now and after they leave our service, to stay safe and enhance their wellbeing.

We work in a way that upholds people's dignity as they seek and navigate supports. This way of working relies on us upholding a reliable and trustworthy reputation as a service and enabling a strong foundation of safety with the person we are supporting.

Contents

The Practice Framework content outlines how our approach is informing, empowering and enduring.

Upholding
Dignity

Whole of
Person -
Wellbeing

Creating
a foundation
of safety

Practice
Dashboard

Building on
Personal Safety &
Navigating Risk

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 ethically.

Our commitment is to uphold the dignity of the people we support. We do this by practicing in ways that enable us to learn 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. Alongside 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 we work to uphold people’s dignity within our practice 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.

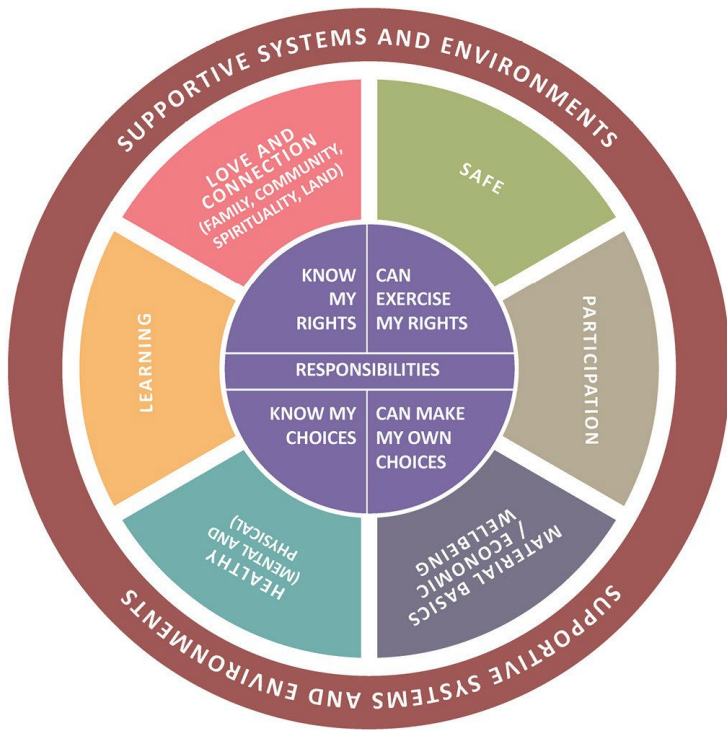
We understand that people’s responses and resistance to violence are their efforts to keep hold of and reassert their dignity.

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>

Whole of Person - Wellbeing

Wellbeing matters to adults, children and young people and this includes their safety. Being 'safe' is more than being physically safe – it includes all aspects of wellbeing.



© 2017 DVSM | Sightlines

DVSM defines wellbeing as being made up of interdependent areas each of which will look different in each person's life.

The value and weight of these will also change over time as a person's needs, priorities and circumstance change.

Rights, responsibility and choices

We work to support people's rights, responsibilities and choices, working with their capacity to act and make decisions – this can be described as a person's 'agency'.

When a person is aware of their rights, they are able to make informed choices.

It is important to recognise that people's choices are not only informed by their rights but also by their responsibilities (which may be linked to their civil, cultural, family, community, spiritual connections including to land).

For a person experiencing DFV, the coercive control they are experiencing can limit and undermine their capacity to make choices, exercise their rights and fulfil their responsibilities.

Safety

Means feeling free from violence or the threat of it (violence could be psychological, verbal, physical, sexual, reproductive control, social, financial, property damage, stalking, image based or technological abuse).

Love and connection

Encompasses family relationships, friends and connections with community, spiritual connection and connections to land.

Learning

Is a continuous process throughout life. Elements of learning include the value of self-development for wellbeing.

Health

Includes physical health and nutrition, as well as mental health and self-esteem. Mental health is a key aspect of what it means to be healthy.

Material basics and economic wellbeing

Includes the provision of food, safe and adequate shelter, money and other basic human needs. Includes the economic resources the person has available to support not only their material living conditions, but the control over these resources and conditions.

Participation

Includes having opportunities to have a voice and be involved as a citizen and in the community.

Supportive systems and environments

Sitting across all areas, is the presence and provision of supportive systems and environments which support an individual's wellbeing.

Creating a Foundation of Safety

How do we create a foundation of safety within our practice?

People accessing support services, are at times, disclosing and making decisions about some of the most personal and intimate details of their lives.

We are very mindful that this not only requires personal courage on their part, but this requires us as a service and as practitioners to create '**safe**' conditions so that the person can be as open as they need to, in order to get the support, they are seeking.



Creating and understanding safety

We know that perceptions of, and/or experiences of using a support service can mean different things to different people. For some this can mean an increase in safety and to others decrease in safety. Each service experience can either reinforce prior experiences or offer something new.

We make every effort to support people's sense of safety by acknowledging the importance of their choice and control. We explore with the people we support:

"What would **having control** over this support look like to you?"

"What would **experiencing safety** and **feeling safe** look like to you in our work together?"

Being open and honest

We explain to people who are accessing our services where our role and responsibilities start and stop. We remain open about our role as circumstances, needs and responses change within the work together.

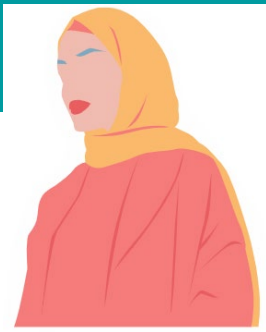
A person's desired level of support and their choices might be different from what we **hope** or **wish** for the person. We remain committed to supporting the person's **agency** and to fulfilling our **duty of care**.

Building trust and being respectful

We seek to learn about people's existing safety awareness, experiences and strategies. Listening to people and learning from them in this way informs what we understand and how we respond.

Being communicative

We keep attuned to what is and isn't working well for the person, regularly checking in on their **sense of safety**, the boundaries and capacity of our role and the person's experience of us and with us. We actively invite informal and formal feedback on how to improve our practice so that we can make quick adjustments that reflect a person's individual needs and wishes.



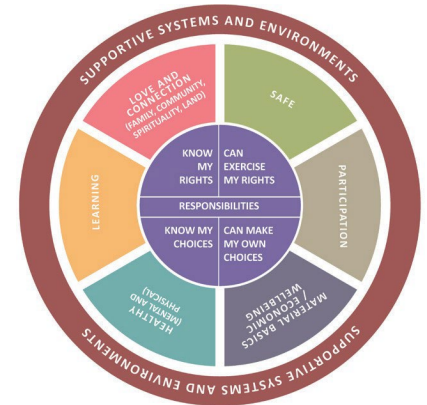
Practice Dashboard

DVSM's practice dashboard is a way of holding four simultaneous elements in our mind's eye as we provide support. It includes the **Person** (their wellbeing), the **Process**, the person's **Potential** (the direction they are seeking/taking), and **Self** (keeping our role in check).

The Person - their wellbeing

Our conversations explore what's going on for people and what this means to them. This includes:

- Hearing about their experiences and acknowledging their story of resistance.
- Asking about, listening to and observing how they are, their wellbeing.
- Asking about, and hearing from their children, how they are, their wellbeing.
- Keeping attuned to what's changed and changing.
- Observing what is said, and not said, what their energy and stress level is like when we talk.
- Observing changes and patterns over the time of our support.



The Process - what is useful and relevant

We support people's agency and decision making by working with them in using the Benefits/Risk Framework tool. This supports people to:

- Distil what the benefits are of a decision they are facing or goal/activity they are pursuing.
- Identify what the potential threats/harms are in making this decision or pursuing this goal/activity.
- Recognise ways (strategies) they have already developed, refined or might be seeking in order to mitigate the risks to their safety whilst retaining the benefits they are seeking.
- Explore (on balance) what decision/s they will make, who can support, and in doing so we support their rights, dignity and choice.



I have an idea about what I want to do next.

BENEFITS	HARM / THREAT
If I do this, what will be the benefits for me?	What harm or threat would that be to my safety and wellbeing?
STRATEGIES	ON BALANCE
In what ways (strategies) could I reduce the risk of harm without losing the benefits?	On balance, do I need to decide now? What are my next steps? Who could help me with these?

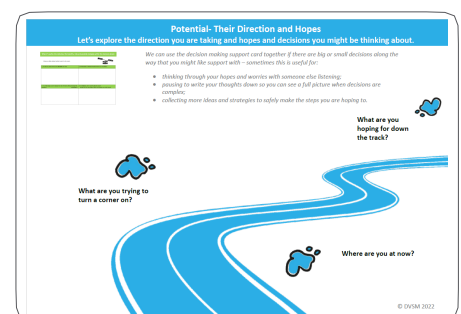
© 2017 Domestic Violence Service Management

Potential - their direction and hopes

Our conversations explore people's hopes and direction for the future.

We explore:

- Where are you at now?
- What are you trying to turn a corner on?
- What are you hoping for down the track?



Self - our professional and interpersonal practice

Being aware of our own attitudes, behaviours and responses to enhance our objectivity.

This reminds us to see the difference, and put distance, between our professional experience/expertise and our personal experience/opinions, so that we are conscious of the boundaries, the position of power and responsibilities of our role. We check in on:

- How well we are supporting the person's dignity and choice.
- How well we are managing our agenda, our objectivity and how we use our practice experience.
- How well we are balancing the person's agency and out duty of care.



Building on Personal Safety and Navigating Risk

Our person centred approach considers all aspects of wellbeing, it has a **whole of person** focus.

Safety is an important aspect of wellbeing and is an important element throughout the period that we support a person.

People experiencing DFV are already navigating their safety ahead of seeking our service support. Whether consciously or not, they are self-assessing the risks they face, and use ways (strategies) to mitigate the risk of harm.

Our contribution as a support service is to build on their level of safety awareness, their assessment of their safety and to support them to build on the ways (strategies) they use to adapt to changing risk.

DFV Safety Trio



Building on personal safety consists of three interdependent components:

- **Safety Assessment:** Regularly self-assessing the risks or threats they may face at a particular point in time and/or over time.
- **Safety Strategies:** The ways (strategies) a person has developed and refined to mitigate the threats they face.
- **Safety Awareness:** A person's awareness of the factors that may increase or decrease their safety will determine their capacity to assess changing risks and to adapt and invent new safety strategies.

The practice dashboard introduces the **Benefit/Risk Framework** as a tool to support decision making in the face of complex, significant and escalating circumstances.

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.

Using Safety/Risk Assessment Tools

We use safety and risk assessment tools on a **fit for purpose** basis, as part of the benefit/risk framework conversation, to inform how we work with a person.

We use these tools in a way that builds on our efforts to create just, effective, dignified responses. We use the information and guidance in the tools to build on the person's existing safety awareness and their own safety assessment and strategies already in place.

We acknowledge that actuarial safety/risk assessment tools, whilst important and useful, are only reflective of a portion of a person's life context and can only hold point in time picture.

Ultimately, all forms and levels of violence are unacceptable, significant and warrant the offer of our service support.

ISBN 978-0-6483513-7-5