

RESPONSIBILITY 1: RESPECTFUL, SENSITIVE, AND SAFE ENGAGEMENT

Engagement with Persons Using Family Violence

Safe engagement is built around every professional's role working within the service system, not just those working directly with persons who use family violence. It takes into consideration:

- Keeping a person using violence in view of the service system allows for monitoring of risk and information sharing
- Support services can address the needs that impact a person's use of violence
- Rapport encourages voluntary disclosures, and improves the capacity of a person to engage in behaviour change

This sees that safe engagement with people using violence is that it increases professionals' ability to hold them accountable and enhances the safety of victim survivors.

Practice Requirements

- **Prioritising immediate health and safety of victim survivors** – Professionals core focus must be on victim survivors' safety and experiences when engaging with a person using family violence.
- **Tailoring communication** – Professionals should aim to build trust and rapport by providing key information about the role and service they are able to provide, as well as setting clear expectations from the beginning of the engagement.
- **Facilitating an accessible, culturally responsive environment** – Providing a tailored environment for adults using family violence when engaging services can increase motivation and reduce their resistance or victim stance.
- **Using a person in their context approach** – This approach considers the person using family violence's presenting needs, history and experiences, risk, strengths and environmental contexts or circumstances that contribute to their use of violence.
- **Using trauma and violence-informed principles in practice** – Engaging with service users through a trauma-informed lens allows professionals to be aware of the impacts and sensitive in engagement, as to not escalate risk, and be able to provide opportunities for other support.
- **Understanding presentations of people using violence** – It is important for professionals to be aware of common presentations (e.g., defensiveness or resistance) among adults who have used family violence in order to consider their response to support safe engagement.
- **Safe, non-collusive engagement** – Invitations to collude occur when the adult using family violence seeks out the professional to agree with, reinforce or affirm their narrative about their use of violence, the victim survivors or their situation. When taken up by professionals, this practice colludes with the adult using family violence's attempts to avoid responsibility for their use of violence.
- **Reflective practice and recognising bias** – Professionals should be aware of biases they may hold as a result of ideas, opinions, and/or stereotypes formed throughout their life. It also involves thinking about and reflecting upon their own characteristics and how these have shaped their identity, as well as what power and privilege they may hold.

Practice Considerations

- Professionals must not disclose any information that would put a victim survivor at risk (e.g., sharing information received from them, sharing risk assessments, and safety plans, etc.).
- Professionals should use a collaborative, respectful approach when engaging with a person using violence to support ongoing engagement and to keep the person using violence in view. When communicating with the person using violence, professionals should give a message of acceptance of them as people with the potential to change, while rejecting coercive or violence attitudes and behaviours.
- Consider the individual you are speaking with and use similar language to the person. This could look like avoiding the use of jargon, asking open-ended questions, or creating a conversational and curious environment (e.g., “I was wondering if you could help me understand...” rather than asking “why”).
- Recognise that people who use violence may seek for professionals to collude with them. Reflective practice can support professionals to identify whether a person using violence is engaging with a service to reinforce their position of control over the victim survivor.
- Maintain a curious and open approach when speaking with and learning about a service user's life (including family life and other aspects) - this could look like reflecting an open attitude and demeanour.

Responding When You Suspect a Person is Using Family Violence

If you suspect a person is using family violence, you should not engage with them directly about family violence unless you are trained or required to do so. This is because confrontation and intervention may increase risk for the victim survivor. Consider:

- Proactively sharing information with a service that can support the person using violence.
- Seeking secondary consultations with professionals who have a role in working with people using violence.
- Safely communicating with the person using violence to engage them in appropriate interventions and services.

Next Steps

- Responsibility 2 provides guidance on identifying narratives and behaviours linked to evidence-based family violence risk factors.
- All professionals who suspect that a person is using family violence should use the guidance in Responsibility 2.
- Responsibilities 3 and 4 provides guidance on asking questions about presenting needs and circumstances related to family violence risk factors (risk-relevant information) and exploring motivation to manage risk is in.