

# Family and Domestic Violence:

**A GUIDE TO SUPPORTING STAFF**

## Contents

Foreword.....	3
1. Scope.....	4
1.1 Who is the Guide for? .....	4
1.2 What is the purpose of this Guide?.....	4
2. Family and domestic violence defined.....	6
2.1 What is family and domestic violence? .....	6
2.2 Types of family and domestic violence .....	6
2.3 Family and domestic violence in the community .....	7
2.4 Why is family and domestic violence a workplace issue? .....	8
2.5 Recognising the signs of family and domestic violence .....	9
2.6 Creating an environment where employees can discuss family and domestic violence .....	10
3. What are the school's obligations to employees experiencing family and domestic violence? .....	11
3.1 Family and Domestic Violence Leave .....	11
3.2 Access to other paid leave .....	15
3.3 OH&S .....	16
4. Handling conversations.....	16
4.1 Having a conversation.....	17
4.2 Examples.....	18
4.3 Looking after yourself.....	19
5. What can my school do to support employees experiencing family and domestic violence? .....	20
5.1 Practical assistance .....	20
5.2 Employee Assistance Programs.....	21
6. Referrals and resources.....	22
6.1 Referrals .....	22
6.2 Resources .....	26
7. Who can be contacted for further assistance or information?.....	28
8. References .....	29

## Foreword

The *Family and Domestic Violence: A guide to supporting staff* (the Guide) is an initiative of the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Limited (CECV).

Family and domestic violence is a crisis in Australia, with one woman per week dying at the hands of her partner or ex-partner, on average (Our Watch n.d.). Family and domestic violence has a serious impact on our community, our workplaces, families and individuals, which is why Catholic employers in the *Victorian Catholic Education Multi-Enterprise Agreement 2018* introduced Family and Domestic Violence Leave for over 25,000 employees working in our schools.

This Guide is provided to support Victorian Catholic schools in understanding their obligation to employees and to give suggestions on how to assist employees experiencing family and domestic violence.

The CECV joins in the sentiment of the Victorian Catholic Bishops:

*Our goal must be a society where all people are safe in their home, families and close relationships; where violence and abuse are not acceptable; and where all relationships respect the equality and dignity of each person. This is part of the Gospel vision of love and respect.*

I hope you find the Guide a helpful tool.

**Jim Miles**

Acting Executive Director

# 1. Scope

## 1.1 Who is the Guide for?

This Guide has been developed for:

- employers
- school principals
- other school leaders with specific responsibilities for human resources, employment of staff and managing staffing matters, such as deputy principals, business managers and human resource managers.

## 1.2 What is the purpose of this Guide?

This Guide has been prepared to assist schools as they support employees experiencing family and domestic violence and to navigate their obligations under *Victorian Catholic Education Multi-Enterprise Agreement 2018 (VCEMEA)*. It also provides recommendations and tools for how to manage and support employees experiencing family and domestic violence.

This Guide aims to provide:

- information about family and domestic violence
- an overview of the social and financial effects family and domestic violence can have on a school
- a clear understanding of employers' legal obligations
- guidance about identifying when family and domestic violence may be occurring
- an overview of the entitlements of, and obligations to, employees experiencing family and domestic violence under the VCEMEA
- processes to ensure that the confidential information provided by employees experiencing family and domestic violence is appropriately managed and maintained
- guidance on how to talk to employees who are experiencing family and domestic violence
- practical options for employers to offer employees experiencing family and domestic violence
- a list of resources and services that are available to support employees experiencing family and domestic violence.

**You do not need to wait until you receive a request for assistance regarding family and domestic violence to use this Guide.**

When it comes to family and domestic violence, understanding is the key. Familiarising yourself with the content of this Guide will mean that you are better prepared if a situation arises.

If you have received a request for leave due to family and domestic violence and are looking at this Guide for the first time, section 3 will be particularly important for you.

If an employee at school has experienced family and domestic violence, refer to section 5.

This Guide offers information that a school can provide to support an employee outside of the school environment; however, the information is not exhaustive. The aim of the Guide is to provide practical information for school leaders when supporting an employee who is experiencing family and domestic violence. An employee who discloses to a school that they are experiencing family and domestic violence should be given professional support (see section 6) and receive assistance from professional services outside of their work environment.

*'We must always say 'no' to violence in the home.'* (Francis 2016, p. 48)

## 2. Family and domestic violence defined

### 2.1 What is family and domestic violence?

The *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* (the Act) defines family broadly. The meaning of 'family member' is set out in section 8 of the Act.

Family violence can occur in any familial relationship; for example, between current or former intimate partners who are or were married or in a relationship, between parents (or step-parents) and children, between siblings, and between grandparents, grandchildren, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces and cousins.

Section 5 of the Act sets out the meaning of family violence as:

- (a) behaviour by a person towards a family member of that person if that behaviour:
  - (i) is physically or sexually abusive; or
  - (ii) is emotionally or psychologically abusive; or
  - (iii) is economically abusive; or
  - (iv) is threatening; or
  - (v) is coercive; or
  - (vi) in any other way controls or dominates the family member and causes that family member to feel fear for the safety or wellbeing of that family member or another person; or
- (b) behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of, behaviour referred to in paragraph (a).

The most common form of family and domestic violence is intimate partner violence committed by men against their current or former female partners. The violence can also affect children involved in the relationship.

### 2.2 Types of family and domestic violence

Family and domestic violence can take a number of forms, but the most common forms tend to be physical or sexual abuse, emotional or psychological abuse, technological abuse and economic abuse.

**Physical abuse** can include hitting, slapping, threatening, restraining, pushing, punching, kicking and stabbing.

**Sexual abuse** can include sexual assault or engaging in another form of sexually coercive behaviour or threatening to engage in such behaviour.

**Emotional or psychological abuse** can include threats, intimidation, derogatory taunts, preventing cultural or spiritual ceremonies or practices, threats of harm, abusing or using children or pets to create fear, and stalking.

**Financial or economic abuse** can include withholding or threatening to withhold the financial support necessary for meeting the reasonable living expenses of the person or the person's child or family (Domestic Violence Prevention Centre 2018). It can also include removing or threatening to remove property without permission, coercing a person to sign a contract, or preventing them from keeping employment.

Other forms of abuse can include cultural/spiritual, verbal (often linked to emotional/psychological), social and technologically assisted abuse such as stalking.

### 2.3 Family and domestic violence in the community

Family and domestic violence can occur to anyone, regardless of age, gender, marital status, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, culture or ethnicity. Below are some statistics regarding family and domestic violence in the community:

- two in five women (41 per cent) have experienced violence since the age of 15
- around one in three (34 per cent) has experienced physical violence
- almost one in five (19 per cent) has experienced sexual violence
- three women are hospitalised each week in Australia with a traumatic brain injury caused by their current partner or ex-partner
- children are present in one out of every three family violence cases reported to police
- Victoria Police family violence incident reports have increased from 47,000 cases in 2012 to 78,000 cases in 2016
- one in 19 Australian men has experienced physical abuse at the hands of a current or former partner
- one in four Australian women has experienced emotional abuse at the hands of a current or former partner
- intimate partner violence is the leading contributor to preventable death, illness and disability for Victorian women aged 15 to 44 years old
- violence against women cost the Australian economy \$21.7 billion in 2015. (The Lookout 2016)

People subjected to family and domestic violence may also suffer from long-term effects of the trauma, even after a relationship has ended. The psychological consequences of violence can be as serious as the physical effects. Research has shown that a clear link can be drawn between family and domestic violence and the detrimental effects on emotional wellbeing.

The following issues have been highlighted:

- depression
- self-harm or suicide
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Office of the Status of Women 2004).

## 2.4 Why is family and domestic violence a workplace issue?

Family and domestic violence is not just a private family issue. An employee who is suffering from, or has suffered from, family and domestic violence needs support in their workplace. The effects of such violence do not disappear when the employee comes to work. Family and domestic violence can affect a school in a number of different ways, including:

- increased absenteeism
- low productivity and motivation
- loss of concentration, low self-esteem and anxiety, which can then impact on work performance and the employee's overall wellbeing
- decrease in overall staff morale
- the cost of recruitment and selection of new employees, if the current employee experiencing family and domestic violence requires time off from work
- potential harm to co-workers, students and members of the school community if a violent perpetrator were to enter school grounds (Alford 2011).

One of the major concerns an employee experiencing family or domestic violence faces is that they are particularly vulnerable in relation to their work (predictability of their place of work and the hours they work).

Research conducted in 2011 into the workplace implications of family and domestic violence demonstrated how the violence can impact on the working lives of those affected by such violence. The 2011 National Domestic Violence and Workplace Survey found that 19 per cent of Australian workers who had experienced family and domestic violence in the previous 12 months reported that the harassment continued at their workplace, while 48 per cent of respondents said the violence had affected their ability to attend for work (AHRC 2014).

A perpetrator of abuse or violence may attempt to jeopardise the employment of the person they have abused and target them at work. They may attempt to do this by:

- harassing them by sending emails, texts or calling them at their workplace
- following them to the workplace
- threatening them or other staff members
- causing issues with child care
- restricting the person's sleep or other disruptive tactics.

For employees who are experiencing such violence or abuse, it can be vital to their health and wellbeing to ensure that they continue in their employment during such times. Maintaining employment during such a difficult time can help mitigate some of the factors they might be experiencing. A supportive workplace can provide a staff member with a safe place to get away from any potential trouble (National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service 2016).

### *Why should an employer proactively address and support employees suffering from family and domestic violence?*

There are many benefits for a school to proactively address and support employees suffering from family and domestic violence. Such benefits may include:

- providing an affected staff member with a safe environment away from the abuse or violence
- reducing the potential costs that the school may face if the matter isn't addressed in the first instance
- minimising the impact the violence has upon work performance
- ensuring productivity remains at the required levels
- improving overall employee health and wellbeing
- improving the morale of the employees at the school
- ensuring that the school is following its duty of care to its employees
- creating a positive working culture where employees are treated well and promoting the school as an Employer of Choice.

## **2.5 Recognising the signs of family and domestic violence**

A school may be able to recognise some of the signs of an employee experiencing family and domestic violence or abuse (SafeSteps n.d.). The school may then be able to provide early intervention and support the employee if required. An employee affected by family and domestic violence may show signs of:

- distraction
- tiredness
- stress
- depression
- anxiety
- loss of confidence or purpose
- fear
- increased absenteeism or arriving late to work
- emotional outbursts
- being withdrawn from their colleagues or isolating themselves
- receiving more personal calls at work
- visible bruising or injuries (National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service 2016).

If a school is able to recognise some of these signs they can play an important role in supporting the employee through the process. If a person feels supported and encouraged they may gain the strength to make some tough decisions. It can be extremely difficult to approach an employee you think may be suffering from some sort of violence or abuse, but showing compassion and offering support may be what is needed in the first instance (AHRC 2014). Later in the Guide we discuss different ways in which you can approach that first discussion with an employee.

## 2.6 Creating an environment where employees can discuss family and domestic violence

An employee might choose <b>not to disclose</b> family or domestic violence if they:	An employee might choose <b>to disclose</b> family or domestic violence if they:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• see it as a private/personal matter</li> <li>• are ashamed</li> <li>• fear being blamed for the situation</li> <li>• fear not being believed</li> <li>• think/know the school community knows the perpetrator</li> <li>• fear losing their job</li> <li>• don't trust their principal/manager</li> <li>• are worried about cultural taboos or stigma</li> <li>• fear the perpetrator will hurt them</li> <li>• fear the perpetrator will be harmed</li> <li>• fear the perpetrator may seek revenge</li> <li>• fear they may lose their children</li> <li>• fear isolation from their family and community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• want to access/know their entitlements</li> <li>• have a supporting school environment</li> <li>• have a sympathetic principal/manager</li> <li>• want to explain their recent behaviour / performance / absence / tardiness</li> <li>• want to warn their principal/manager of a risk to them and other staff</li> <li>• want support to seek help</li> <li>• feel safe at school.</li> </ul>

**In a healthy working environment, difficult topics can be discussed. Having open conversations with your employees can improve safety.**

Refer to section 4, 'Handling conversations', for more details.

## 3. What are the school's obligations to employees experiencing family and domestic violence?

### 3.1 Family and Domestic Violence Leave – VCMEA

Clause 33 of the VCMEA outlines the entitlements of employees experiencing family and domestic violence. The clause states:

#### **33 Family and Domestic Violence leave**

##### **33.1 Paid Family and Domestic Violence Leave**

- (a) An Employee (other than a Casual Employee) experiencing family and domestic violence is entitled to paid family and domestic violence leave for the purposes of attending medical appointments, legal proceedings and other activities related to family violence.
- (b) Paid family and domestic violence leave is non-cumulative and is available per school year as follows:
  - (i) 10 days for Primary School Principals, Deputy Principals, Teachers, Category B Education Support Employees, Category B School Services Officers, School Advisers, Visiting Teachers and Category B Placed Teachers;
  - (ii) 13 days for Category C Employees;
  - (iii) 15 days for all other Employees.

##### **33.2 Additional Family and Domestic Violence Leave**

Upon exhaustion of the paid leave entitlements in clause 33.1(b), an Employer may provide additional leave.

##### **33.3 Support person**

An Employee who supports a person experiencing family violence may utilise their personal/carer's leave entitlement to accompany them to court, to hospital, or to care for children. The Employer may require evidence consistent with clause 33.5 from an Employee seeking to utilise their personal/carer's leave entitlement.

##### **33.4 Family and Domestic Violence Leave – Casual Employees**

- (a) A Casual Employee is entitled to not be available to attend work or to leave work due to experiencing family and domestic violence.
- (b) The Employer and the Casual Employee shall agree on the period for which the Casual Employee will be entitled to not be available to attend work. In the

absence of agreement, the Casual Employee is entitled to not be available to attend work for up to three days per School Year. The Casual Employee is not entitled to any payment for the period of non-attendance.

- (c) An Employer must not fail to re-engage a Casual Employee because the Employee accessed the entitlements provided for in this clause. The rights of the Employer to engage or not to engage a Casual Employee are otherwise not affected.

### **33.5 Notice and evidence requirements**

- (a) The Employee must give his or her Employer notice of the taking of family and domestic violence leave. The notice:
  - (i) must be given to the Employer as soon as reasonably practicable (which may be a time after the leave has started); and
  - (ii) must advise the Employer of the period, or expected period, of the leave.
- (b) If required by the Employer, the Employee must provide evidence that would satisfy a reasonable person that the leave is for the purpose as set out in this clause. Such evidence may include a document issued by the police service, a court, a doctor (including a medical certificate), a registered health professional, a family violence support service or a lawyer.
- (c) The Employer must take all reasonable measures to ensure that any personal information provided by the Employee to the Employer concerning the family and domestic violence is kept confidential.

### **33.6 Compliance**

An Employee is not entitled to take leave under this clause unless the Employee complies with these notice and evidence requirements.

### *What is Family and Domestic Violence?*

The VCCEMA definitions of Family and Domestic Violence is outlined at clause 5(l) which states:

“Family and domestic violence” has the same meaning as family violence as defined in the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* (Vic).

Section 2.1 of this guide above, outlines the definition of family violence.

### *The purpose of the leave*

The leave enables employees experiencing family and domestic violence time off to attend to activities that may be associated with the family or domestic violence, including:

- organising safe housing or to move home
- finding emergency accommodation
- attending medical or counselling appointments
- accessing police services
- attending court hearings
- attending legal appointments
- addressing financial matters
- organising family matters, including changing children’s caring arrangements, such as changing a child’s schooling
- caring for children affected by family and domestic violence.

### *Paid Family and Domestic Violence Leave (FDVL)*

The paid leave outlined in the VCCEMA is non-cumulative and is for employees other than casuals.

From 8 October 2017, an employee has had access to the paid leave amounts according to their category of employment as outlined in the VCCEMA. From the commencement of each school year, the employee will have access to a further period of non-cumulative paid leave. However upon exhaustion of the paid leave entitlement the Employer may provide additional leave or provide access to other paid or unpaid leave, discussed below at section 3.2.

### *Casuals*

Casual employees are not entitled to paid leave; however, a casual employee is entitled to not be available to attend work, or to leave work, due to being subjected to family and domestic violence. In accordance with clause 33.4(b) the casual employee and employer can agree on the period for which the casual employee will be entitled to not be available to attend work. In the absence of agreement, the casual employee is entitled to not be available to attend work for up to three days per School Year. Employers should not fail to re-engage a casual employee because they were unable to work due to family or domestic violence.

### *Support persons*

Clause 33.3 provides employees supporting someone experiencing family and domestic violence the ability to utilise their personal/carer’s leave entitlement to accompany the person to court, to hospital, or to care for children.

It should be noted that the access to personal/carer’s leave is not limited to members of the employees immediate family, but is limited to accompanying the person to court, hospital or to

care for children. Employers may require evidence in accordance with clause 33.5 from an employee seeking to utilise their personal/carer's leave entitlement.

### *Notice*

Given the nature of family and domestic violence, it may not always be possible for an employee to provide prior notice of taking the Family and Domestic Violence Leave. However, as soon as reasonably practicable, the employee must request to take the leave and advise the employer of the period, or expected period, of the leave.

### *Evidence*

An employer may require an employee to provide evidence that would satisfy a reasonable person that the Family and Domestic Violence Leave is taken for the reasons listed above. However, the leave can be approved without evidence, or approved in advance of the evidence being provided.

The evidence may take the form of a document indicating the employee is experiencing family violence, issued by one of the following:

- Victoria Police or another police service
- a court
- a general practitioner, nurse or other registered health practitioner
- a family violence support service
- a maternal and child health nurse
- a lawyer.

A signed statutory declaration can also be offered as evidence.

### *Record keeping*

As with all other leave, a school will need to keep a record of the Family and Domestic Violence Leave taken.

When you have a discussion with an employee regarding family and domestic violence it can be a good idea to take down a few notes after the meeting for your records. This can be an important piece of evidence for the employee and the school if either of you require evidence of a conversation. Keep these notes strictly confidential.

### *Confidentiality*

Employers and school leaders should keep a disclosure of family and domestic violence confidential. Confidentiality in this area is important, as the spread of the information could put the employee at risk.

Below are some suggestions on how you can ensure confidentiality:

- If evidence is requested, ask yourself if you need to keep a copy or just sight the document.
- Seek the consent of the employee before you share the information. Breaching confidentiality can potentially jeopardise the safety of the person subjected to family and domestic violence, children and anyone supporting them, including family and service workers.

- If evidence is requested and kept, ensure it is placed in a secure location (for example, not in a place that other employees, such as administration staff, have access to). This may be in the principal's office, in a sealed envelope and stating that it should only be opened by the principal.
- Lock personnel files.
- The person recording any leave should be informed they are to keep the matter confidential.
- The person processing any leave should find a discreet time to process the request.
- The computer should be positioned so that visitors or other employees cannot see the screen.
- When other employees are notified of an employee's absence, often through daily organisers or internal communication, it is just noted as 'leave', not Family and Domestic Violence Leave. To make this easier, it is a good idea to state all leave other than long service leave as 'leave', as only payroll and managers may need to know the type of leave.
- Ensure that you conduct conversations with employees in a private setting.
- Do not continue a conversation as you leave the office.

**You can assure employees that disclose family and domestic violence that their information will be kept confidential and used to support them, except as required or permitted by law.**

For example:

- the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* (Vic) requires the employer to notify WorkSafe immediately of serious workplace incidents
- where a criminal act has occurred, or is threatened to occur, the police must be notified.

There may be situations where other employees need to know certain information to protect the employee or others at work, for example to stop threatening phone calls. If there is a need to disclose information, it should be limited to what is needed to maintain safety in the workplace and support the employee.

### 3.2 Access to other paid and unpaid leave

A principal can grant an additional period of paid leave in circumstances where an employee is experiencing family and domestic violence. Any decision to grant such leave is at the discretion of the principal and on a case-by-case basis.

It is important to note that in addition to the Family and Domestic Violence Leave that an employee may access, they may, depending on the circumstances, be entitled to access their personal leave under clause 30 of the VCMEA, due to family and domestic violence.

Alternatively Employees may access unpaid personal (sick leave) or an extended period of leave without pay in accordance with clause 26 – Leave without pay.

### 3.3 OH&S

Principals have a **non-delegable** duty under the Victorian *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* (the OHS Act) to institute measures to either eliminate the health and safety risk to employees or reduce the risk as far as is practicable. Section 5 of this Guide provides practical guidance on supporting employees in the school environment, including addressing the risks caused by violent members of an employee’s family who may visit the school.

An employee who discloses that they are experiencing family violence should be assured their information will be kept strictly confidential and only used for the purpose of providing support to them, except as required or permitted by law; for example, as noted above:

- the OHS Act requires the employer to notify WorkSafe immediately of serious workplace incidents
- where a criminal act has occurred or is threatened to occur, the police must be notified.

The OH&S obligations of the school are not only to the employee experiencing violence, but to *all employees*.

#### *Responding to danger*

Sometimes family and domestic violence can occur in the workplace. If this happens, keep your personal safety and that of other employees in mind before taking any action. Do not physically intervene in a violent situation and do not try to mediate.

**If a family and domestic violence situation occurs at your school, call 000 and enact your critical incident and emergency management plans.**

#### *Risks at work*

If an employee reveals that they are experiencing family and domestic violence you should not only ask:

*Are you safe at home?*

but also

*Do you feel safe at work?*

If there is a risk for the employee at work, you should conduct a risk assessment and put in place a workplace and/or person safety plan to reduce the risk for the employee.

**If you need assistance to complete the risk assessment or compile a workplace safety plan, contact the ER Unit on (03) 9267 0431 or [ceoir@cem.edu.au](mailto:ceoir@cem.edu.au).**

## 4. Handling conversations

## 4.1 Having a conversation

Discussing family and domestic violence is not easy. However, it is important for the principal and other school leaders to have discussions with employees in a sensitive and understanding manner if the issue arises. Below are some tips on having conversations with employees who disclose that they are experiencing family and domestic violence.

- **Hold the discussion in a private and safe environment** – Hold discussions in your office or a private space where you can close the door and won't be interrupted.
- **Listen** – It is not easy for an employee to discuss the issues. Try not to interrupt with advice.
- **Ensure safety** – Use questions to elicit the physical and psychological safety of the employee.
- **Be sensitive and non-judgmental** – It is not easy for an employee to discuss family and domestic violence and your response will be important in making them feel safe. Think before you ask a question, as some questions can make a person feel like you don't believe them or you are blaming them. Do not pass judgment or comment on the alleged abuser. Often a person experiencing family and domestic violence will not in the first instance leave a person who is abusing them. If you comment on the alleged abuser that may make the employee reluctant to come and talk to you in the future if they continue in the relationship.
- **Acknowledge and validate** – acknowledge the employee's courage to talk about the family and domestic violence.
- **Inform the employee of their entitlements** – If appropriate during the discussion you should inform the employee of their entitlement to family and domestic violence leave. It is important that the employee is aware of their entitlements.
- **Discuss measures** – Discuss any safety concerns the employee may have in the workplace and examine alternatives (resources, coping mechanisms, etc.).
- **Make plans** – short-term and realistic plans need to be considered for the workplace. Who will do what – when – where – with whom?
- **Referral services** – Give the employee information on relevant support services, which they can take away and refer to in their own time.
- **Seek assistance** – You are not an expert on family and domestic violence. If you are uncertain of what you can or can't do, or just want to confirm and discuss a course of action, you can call the ER Unit on (03) 9267 0431.
- **Keep it confidential** – Beyond your legal and OH&S obligations, remember to be mindful of the confidential nature of the information you have been given.

Below are some tips of things you should avoid when talking to someone experiencing family or domestic violence.

- Don't interrupt.
- Don't be critical and blame the person for the abuse.
- Don't try and figure out the reasons for the abuse.
- Don't give advice.
- Don't be judgmental of the employee.

**When discussing family and domestic violence and there is a risk to the person or other people at the workplace, you have an obligation to respond to the issues raised.**

## 4.2 Examples

### How to start a conversation about family and domestic violence

- Are you (and your children) safe (i.e. at home/workplace)?
- Our school values you and all the work you do. I want you to know that you are part of our school community and my door is open if you are having difficulties outside of work.
- I'm concerned about you. You have seemed distracted recently. Is everything okay?
- Is everything okay at home?

In a non-emergency situation, one of the primary reasons why a person subjected to family and domestic violence tells you their story is to seek your support, gather information, investigate their options and be encouraged by a non-judgmental, helpful person.

The responsibilities of anyone who works with a person subjected to family and domestic violence can be summarised as follows:

- Help them plan for future safety.
- Listen to them and acknowledge their experiences.
- Affirm the injustice of the violence.
- Respect their autonomy.
- Promote access to services.
- Respect and safeguard their confidentiality.

Safety is paramount – empowerment is essential.

What should I say if someone discloses family or domestic violence?	What should I <b>not</b> say if someone discloses family or domestic violence?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are you safe?</li> <li>• Do you have a safety plan?</li> <li>• I'm worried about you.</li> <li>• What can I do to support you?</li> <li>• Thank you for speaking so openly with me about such a difficult topic.</li> <li>• Help is available.</li> <li>• What can we do at school to make you feel safe?</li> <li>• Do you feel safe at school?</li> <li>• Can I give you information about services that may be able to support you?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is so hard to believe.</li> <li>• This is your fault.</li> <li>• I don't believe this.</li> <li>• I can't believe you put up with this.</li> <li>• You have to leave!</li> <li>• You can't stay in this situation.</li> <li>• It can't be that bad if you have stayed at home.</li> <li>• Your partner does not seem like a nice person.</li> </ul>

It is not appropriate for the principal or any other member of staff to force an employee to contact the police or to call support services. If an employee discloses information in relation to family and domestic violence to the principal or another member of staff, the school should ensure that it provides the employee with support and refers them to support services. It is not for the principal to decide whether the employee should contact the police or not. An employee should be supported and offered the relevant details of support services but should never be forced into decisions.

### 4.3 Looking after yourself

Supporting an employee experiencing family and domestic violence can be challenging and, as such, it is important for you to look after yourself.

Employees experiencing family and domestic violence may not immediately seek help and it is difficult for someone experiencing abuse to leave a relationship. However, the support you provide at school is important and you can assist your employee to find safety, even if it takes time. If you feel overwhelmed or out of your depth, make sure you seek professional assistance.

You can contact the ER Unit on (03) 9267 0431 or [ceoir@cem.edu.au](mailto:ceoir@cem.edu.au).

## 5. What can my school do to support employees experiencing family and domestic violence?

### 5.1 Practical assistance

Below are some possible controls or safety plans you can provide to an employee experiencing family and domestic violence.

The specific type of option will vary in each environment and situation, but you may consider:

- updating the emergency contact numbers of the employee to a family member or friend who is not the perpetrator, so you can check on the employee if they are absent from work
- changing the employee's work email and telephone number
- having an employee screen calls or emails sent directly to the affected employee
- setting up ICT systems to block the perpetrator's telephone number and or emails
- changing classrooms/desks away from entrances or exposed areas but maintaining their safety
- relocating the employee to another campus (if possible)
- changing parking spots for the employee to be closer to the school entrance
- organising an escort to the employee's car
- changing the employee's start and finish times regularly (change routines)
- creating code words so employees can notify each other of danger, or have a particular song play during breaks
- changing the locks at school if the perpetrator has access to the keys
- installing a personal alarm for the employee
- if the employee has agreed to provide a photo of the perpetrator, then the school could leave the photo at reception and have a plan if they enter the school
- offering for the employee to keep an escape bag at school if they need to leave urgently
- calling a referral service for the employee if the employee has asked you to
- calling the police if the employee has asked you to
- providing 'safe' meeting rooms (e.g. proximity to colleagues, external visibility, adequate lighting, suitable access/exit doors, electronic emergency alert systems)
- providing convenient, accessible emergency escape and evacuation routes (for employees and students)
- ensuring there are appropriate mechanisms to summon assistance if required
- ensuring the effectiveness of mechanisms to effect a lockdown and/or evacuation
- providing adequate lighting in all areas
- minimising isolated staff and work areas where possible.

Not only is it good practice to involve employees in the identification of risks, and to ascertain how confident, equipped and supported they feel, but employers have a duty under the OHS Act to consult with employees regarding such matters.

**If your school puts a safety plan in place it should be documented.**

## **5.2 Employee Assistance Programs**

Schools that currently have Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) in place can make these programs available for employees who are affected by family and domestic violence.

While an EAP is an appropriate service in most circumstances, in the case of an employee experiencing family and domestic violence, if they ask for assistance it may be more appropriate to give them the details of specific family and domestic violence support services, which are outlined in section 6 of this Guide. These are services that have expertise in dealing with family and domestic violence and are in the best position to help an employee if they are seeking support.

## 6. Referrals and resources

While it is not definitive, below is a list of resources available from a few family and domestic violence support organisations.

### 6.1 Referrals

Service	Description	Contact
<b>Emergency services</b>	The Triple Zero (000) service is the quickest way to get the right emergency service to help you. It should be used to contact police, fire or ambulance services	<b>Call:</b> 000
<b>Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service (FVPLS)</b>	An Aboriginal community-run organisation providing assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim survivors of family violence and sexual assault	<b>Call:</b> 1800 105 303 <b>Link:</b> <a href="http://www.nationalfvpls.org/">http://www.nationalfvpls.org/</a>
<b>Berry Street</b>	Provides a range of support services to women and their children who have experienced family violence in the northern and western suburbs of Melbourne	<b>Call:</b> (03) 9429 9266 <b>Link:</b> <a href="https://www.berrystreet.org.au/">https://www.berrystreet.org.au/</a>
<b>Beyondblue</b>	Provides information and support to help everyone achieve their best possible mental health and includes a 24-hour helpline	<b>Call:</b> 1300 224 636 <b>Link:</b> <a href="https://www.beyondblue.org.au/">https://www.beyondblue.org.au/</a>
<b>Centres Against Sexual Assault</b>	Confidential, non-profit, government-funded organisations providing support and intervention for women, children and men who are victim survivors of sexual assault	<b>Call:</b> 1800 806 292 (Sexual Assault Crisis Line, 24 hours) <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:ahcasa@thewomens.org.au">ahcasa@thewomens.org.au</a> <b>Link:</b> <a href="https://www.casa.org.au/">https://www.casa.org.au/</a>

Service	Description	Contact
<b>Court Network</b>	A voluntary non-legal court support service operating throughout Victoria and Queensland. They can tell you about how the court works and can also make referrals to other community agencies for support after the hearing	<b>Call:</b> 1800 681 614 <b>Link:</b> <a href="http://www.courtnetwork.com.au">http://www.courtnetwork.com.au</a>
<b>Good Samaritan Inn</b>	Provides short-term emergency accommodation for single women, and women with children, escaping family violence and homelessness	<b>Link:</b> <a href="http://www.goodsamaritaninn.org.au/">http://www.goodsamaritaninn.org.au/</a>
<b>InTouch: Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence</b>	A state-wide organisation specialising in services, programs and responses to family violence in migrant and refugee communities	<b>Call:</b> 1800 755 988 <b>Link:</b> <a href="http://www.intouch.org.au/">http://www.intouch.org.au/</a>
<b>Kids Helpline</b>	Provides 24-hour assistance for children, teens, young adults and also for parents and carers. Email counselling and WebChat is also available	<b>Call:</b> 1800 55 1800 <b>Link:</b> <a href="https://kidshelpline.com.au/">https://kidshelpline.com.au/</a>
<b>Lifeline</b>	Provides 24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention services	<b>Call:</b> 13 11 14 <b>Link:</b> <a href="https://www.lifeline.org.au/">https://www.lifeline.org.au/</a>
<b>McAuley Community Services for Women</b>	Provides much-needed services for women and their children who are escaping family violence, and for women who are homeless	<b>Call:</b> (03) 9362 8900 <b>Link:</b> <a href="http://www.mcauleycsw.org.au/">http://www.mcauleycsw.org.au/</a>
<b>MensLine Australia</b>	A national phone and online support service for men that includes video counselling	<b>Call:</b> 1300 789 978 <b>Link:</b> <a href="https://mensline.org.au/">https://mensline.org.au/</a>

Service	Description	Contact
<b>1800RESPECT – National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service</b>	Qualified and experienced counsellors provide 24-hour phone and online counselling, information and assistance to access other services to all people in Australia affected by sexual assault and family and domestic violence	<b>Call:</b> 1800 737 732 <b>Link:</b> <a href="https://www.1800respect.org.au/">https://www.1800respect.org.au/</a>
<b>No to Violence Men’s Referral Service</b>	An anonymous and confidential phone counselling, information and referrals service to help men involved in family violence, including those using violent and controlling behaviour towards a partner or family member	<b>Call:</b> 1300 766 491 <b>Link:</b> <a href="http://www.ntv.org.au">http://www.ntv.org.au</a>
<b>Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre</b>	A confidential 24-hour response service for women and children that provides information on family violence support services, legal rights and accommodation options	<b>Call:</b> 1800 015 188 <b>Link:</b> <a href="http://www.safesteps.org.au/">http://www.safesteps.org.au/</a>
<b>SmartSafe</b>	Provides advice and resources on technology-facilitated abuse	<b>Link:</b> <a href="http://www.smartsafe.org.au/">http://www.smartsafe.org.au/</a>
<b>The Lookout</b>	An online resource where you can find information, resources and services aimed at preventing and responding to family violence	<b>Link:</b> <a href="http://www.thelookout.org.au">www.thelookout.org.au</a>
<b>Victims Support Agency</b>	Provides support and information to help victims of crime. The service guides victims through the legal process and helps manage the effects of crime through practical assistance and counselling (8am to 11pm, seven days a week).	<b>Call:</b> 1800 819 817 (Victims of Crime helpline) <b>Text:</b> 0427 767 891 <b>Link:</b> <a href="https://www.victimsofcrime.vic.gov.au/">https://www.victimsofcrime.vic.gov.au/</a>

Service	Description	Contact
<b>WIRE (Women's Information and Referral Exchange) Women's Support Line</b>	A free, confidential and state-wide phone service, 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.	<p><b>Call:</b> 1300 134 130</p> <p><b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:inforequests@wire.org.au">inforequests@wire.org.au</a></p> <p><b>Link:</b> <a href="https://www.wire.org.au/">https://www.wire.org.au/</a></p>
<b>Women's Information and Referral Exchange (WIRE)</b>	Provides Victorian women with free and confidential support, information and referrals on any issues. Services include the Telephone Support Service, Women's Information Centre, online Livechat support and email support service	<p><b>Call:</b> 1300 134 130</p> <p><b>Link:</b> <a href="http://www.wire.org.au/">http://www.wire.org.au/</a></p>
<b>Women's Legal Service Victoria</b>	Provides phone advice and appointments to women in Victoria who are in need of legal advice, information or referral, irrespective of their income or assets	<p><b>Call:</b> 1800 133 302 or (03) 8622 0600</p> <p><b>Link:</b> <a href="http://www.womenslegal.org.au/">http://www.womenslegal.org.au/</a></p>

## 6.2 Resources

Your school can display information in the staffroom about support available to those dealing with family and domestic violence. Displaying the information will allow staff to access it confidentially and will also raise awareness. It may also be useful to have information on hand to provide to staff who request leave. Below are some of the resources available from various organisations.

Organisation	Resources
<b>Our Watch</b>	<p>Our Watch was established to drive nation-wide change in the culture, behaviours and attitudes that lead to violence against women and children. It includes videos, posters and other material about preventing violence.</p> <p><b>Link:</b> <a href="https://www.ourwatch.org.au/Media-Resources?c=Video,Workplaces">https://www.ourwatch.org.au/Media-Resources?c=Video,Workplaces</a></p>
<b>National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service</b>	<p>You can request free material such as brochures, posters or referral cards.</p> <p><b>Link:</b> <a href="https://www.1800respect.org.au/workers/promote-1800respect/">https://www.1800respect.org.au/workers/promote-1800respect/</a></p>
<b>Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (DVRCV)</b>	<p>The DVRCV produces resources and publications for those experiencing (or who have experienced) family violence. These resources are available electronically and in print. Printed material incurs a cost.</p> <p><b>Link:</b> <a href="https://dvrcv.myshopify.com/">https://dvrcv.myshopify.com/</a></p>
<b>Safe Steps – Family Violence Response Centre</b>	<p>You can print brochures for the Safe Steps services in a variety of different languages.</p> <p><b>Link:</b> <a href="http://www.safesteps.org.au/our-services/services-for-community/brochures-print-resources/">http://www.safesteps.org.au/our-services/services-for-community/brochures-print-resources/</a></p>
<b>MensLine Australia</b>	<p>You can order a variety of brochures, including MensLine Australia brochures or calling cards.</p> <p><b>Link:</b> <a href="https://www.mensline.org.au/news-and-resources/order-materials">https://www.mensline.org.au/news-and-resources/order-materials</a></p> <p>A tip sheet for men experiencing violence or abuse in relationships is also available.</p> <p><b>Link:</b> <a href="https://mensline.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/MLA_TipSheet_experiencingviolence_web.pdf">https://mensline.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/MLA_TipSheet_experiencingviolence_web.pdf</a></p>

Organisation	Resources
<b>Lifeline</b>	<p>You can download and print resources provided by Lifeline.</p> <p><b>Link:</b> <a href="https://www.lifeline.org.au/about-lifeline/resources/download-our-resources">https://www.lifeline.org.au/about-lifeline/resources/download-our-resources</a></p> <p>You can also purchase resources.</p> <p><b>Link:</b> <a href="https://www.lifeline.org.au/about-lifeline/shop">https://www.lifeline.org.au/about-lifeline/shop</a></p>

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## 7. Who can be contacted for further assistance or information?

External support is available to your school via the relevant diocese and applies where advice or back-up services might be required in different contexts, for example:

- when you need to understand your obligations as an employer
- when you need assistance recording the leave
- if you need assistance with a safety assessment
- when threats of violence have been made and/or there are fears that threatening behaviours could escalate at school
- in the immediacy of a violent incident.

### *Employee Relations Advice*

Employee Relations (ER) Unit

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria

228 Victoria Parade East Melbourne VIC 3002

Phone: (03) 9267 0228

Website: [www.cecv.catholic.edu.au](http://www.cecv.catholic.edu.au)

Email: [ceoir@cem.edu.au](mailto:ceoir@cem.edu.au)

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