

Code of Practice Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Code of Practice?

The *Code of Practice: Principles and Standards for Specialist Family Violence Services for Victim-Survivors (2nd edition, 2020)* is an essential industry resource provided to the specialist family violence service sector by its peak body, Domestic Violence Victoria (DVVic).

The purpose of the Code is to articulate a set of principles and standards to guide consistent quality service provision for victim-survivors accessing specialist family violence services in Victoria, Australia.

Full members of DVVic are required to adhere to the Code of Practice as per the DVVic Constitution (March 2020).

Who is the Code for?

The primary audience for the Code are leaders within specialist family violence services (e.g. executives, managers, board members) who are responsible for engaging with the Code and translating it into their own contexts, service design, and quality governance and continuous improvement systems. It is also important that the Code is understood and used by specialist family violence practitioners through staff induction, supervision, reflective practice and professional development.

What is a specialist family violence service?

Specialist family violence services are a range of complementary service providers with a shared role to work directly with victim-survivors providing dedicated resources and advocacy to promote their rights and respond to safety and support needs. In Victoria, this includes:

- State-wide family violence telephone services
- Local family violence support services
- Family violence accommodation services
- Family violence therapeutic services
- Targeted services and programs working with victim-survivors from specific communities, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, multicultural communities, or ethno-specific groups, LGBTIQ communities, older people, and people with disability.
- Services providing family safety contact work with victim-survivors through perpetrator behaviour change programs (alongside the Men's Behaviour Change Minimum Standards).

How was the Code created?

Domestic Violence Victoria established the first edition of the Code in 2006 during an earlier period of significant reform in the family violence response system. The second edition was developed over 2019 within the post-Royal Commission into Family Violence reform environment.

The Code development project was governed by a multi-agency Project Advisory Group. A participatory approach overlaid the development process including literature reviews, iterative testing of draft materials, and consultations with specialist family violence service leaders and practitioners, government and sector partners, and victim-survivor advisors.

The Code was endorsed by the Specialist Family Violence Services Leadership Group in February 2020.

What are the key features of the Code?

Description of the specialist family violence service sector

The Code provides an overview of the history and current architecture of the specialist family violence service sector in Victoria. This information is accompanied by descriptions of different types of specialist family violence services and the broader family violence response system. See section 3: About Specialist Family Violence Services.

Foundational framework

The Code is founded on an evidence-based understanding of family violence and an intersectional feminist framework. This is supported by other key frameworks including human rights, social justice, anti-oppressive practice, and a trauma and violence-informed approach. See section 4: Foundational Framework.

Principles and Standards

The Code provides ten guiding principles that exemplify best practice in service design and delivery for specialist family violence services working with adult and child victim-survivors. Each principle is accompanied by an explanatory discussion and a set of standards and indicators that specialist family violence services can use to inform their continuous quality improvement. See section 5: Principles and Standards.

Glossary

There is an extensive glossary in the Code that provides definitions of key terms relevant to the specialist family violence service sector and broader family violence response system. See Appendix B: Glossary.

How does the Code relate to other key guiding documents and legislation relevant to specialist family violence services?

The Code is situated within a family violence response system that provides numerous other essential resources and requirements for specialist family violence service provision (section 1.6: Essential Systems Resources).

These resources include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) Framework
- Responding to Family Violence Capability Framework
- Family Violence and Child Information Sharing Schemes
- Child Safe Standards
- Guideline: Family Violence Services and Accommodation > Complying with the Equal Opportunity Act 2010
- Department of Health and Human Services Standards

These resources both inform the Code and are signposted throughout the standards and indicators. Importantly, each resource is substantial in their own right and service providers must understand their obligations and requirements within each of these guiding documents.

How are children and young people considered in the Code?

The Code recognises infants, children and young people as victim-survivors of family violence in their own right meaning that they are also clients of specialist family violence services as individuals and in tandem with their parent/carer (usually the adult victim-survivor). This is promoted through the following key features:

- Principle 6 (Child-centred Practice) and its accompanying standards.
- The definition of ‘victim-survivor’ is inclusive of infants, children and young people (see Appendix B: Glossary).
- Recognition that the definition of family violence includes causing a child to hear or witness or otherwise be exposed to the effects of family violence as per the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* (section 4.1 Understanding Family Violence).
- Information about the evidence-based impacts of family violence on infants, children and young people (section 4.1 Understanding Family Violence).
- Alignment with other resources in Victoria that promote the rights and safety of children, including: the Family Violence Multi-agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) Framework; the Child Information Sharing Scheme; the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic.); and the Child Safe Standards (section 1.6 Essential Systems Resources).

What does the Code say about Aboriginal family violence services?

Aboriginal family violence services are an integral part of the specialist family violence service sector providing holistic, culturally safe, and responsive services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and families and leadership within the broader family violence service system.

While the Code is available for use by Aboriginal family violence services and programs, with respect to Aboriginal self-determination and choice, Aboriginal services may prefer to use other resources they deem more suitable to their cultures and communities. With this in mind, the Code acknowledges the *Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way – Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families (the Aboriginal 10 Year Family Violence Agreement 2018-2028)* as an essential resource for understanding the critical importance of respecting Aboriginal self-determination in family violence responses (section 1.6 Essential Systems Resources).

The Code calls upon all service providers to understand and respect the self-determination rights articulated in *Dhelk Dja*, examine and transform colonising and discriminatory practices, promote culturally-safe service responses, and develop practices that are aligned with the leadership and goals of Aboriginal communities (Principle 7: Aboriginal self-determination and accompanying standards).

How does the Code promote inclusive services for victim-survivors of family violence?

The Code promotes inclusion and equity in specialist family violence service provision through a number of key features:

- Principle 8 (Inclusion and Equity) and its accompanying standards.
- A foundational framework that articulates intersectional feminist, human rights, and social justice concepts to drive inclusive and equitable service responses (section 4: Foundational Framework).
- Description of ‘gender inclusive’ language that recognises the high prevalence of men’s family violence against women and children as well as the impacts of family violence on people across

a diversity of gender identities, social and cultural contexts, and within various intimate, family and family-like relationships (section 1.5: Language).

- An intersectional analysis of family violence as an issue situated within complex gender and social power hierarchies and structural oppression (section 4.2 Intersectional Feminism).
- Definitions of family violence that recognise its broad impact across the community (section 4.1 Understanding Family Violence).
- Highlights from the evidence-base describing specific populations that are particularly impacted by family violence as a result of power imbalances and discrimination (section 4.1 Understanding Family Violence).
- Alignment with other resources in Victoria that promote inclusive services, such as: the Family Violence Multi-agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) Framework, Everybody Matters: Inclusion and Equity Statement, the Community Services Quality Governance Framework, and guidelines from the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission for specialist family violence services (section 1.6 Essential Systems Resources).

What does the Code say about service eligibility criteria?

As described above, the Code promotes an inclusive and equitable specialist family violence service sector. At the same time, the Code also recognises that some populations in the community experience higher rates of family violence and more harmful consequences as a result of social inequality, intersecting oppressions, and systemic barriers. This shapes how many specialist family violence services determine their eligibility criteria. In particular, a large number of service providers focus their efforts on addressing the significant prevalence of men's family violence against people who identify as women, and their children. There are also targeted responses for men who experience family violence, and people from diverse cultural communities, LGBTIQ communities, older people, people with disability, and criminalised people.

Within this context, the Code informs specialist family violence services that they must adhere to the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)* and utilise guidance from the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission if they choose to limit their eligibility criteria to address the needs of a specific group (Standard 8.1b, 8.1c). This eligibility criteria must be clearly communicated to victim-survivors and the general public via the service's website and service information materials (Standard 8.1d).

Additionally, services should provide a *minimum response* to all persons who identify as victim-survivors even if they do not meet eligibility criteria by providing a brief risk assessment, safety planning information and a referral to another organisation that can meet their needs (Standard 8.1e, 8.1f). This is an essential part of promoting victim-survivor safety within an inclusive coordinated family violence response system.

How does the Code apply to working in multi-agency, co-located environments?

The specialist family violence service sector has a long history leading the development of a coordinated family violence response system through collaborative work with a range of other sectors.

Specialist family violence practitioners frequently provide outreach or co-located service delivery in courts, police stations, child protection, family services, community health services, sexual assault services, Centrelink, and multi-agency environments such as Multi-Disciplinary Centres and The Orange Door. Working in these various environments is part of specialist family violence services continuum of service provision for victim-survivors.

Within outreach, co-located, and multi-agency settings, specialist family violence services and practitioners have a distinct, independent support and advocacy role for victim-survivors, guided by their Code of Practice. As such, specialist family violence services bring the Code's frameworks, principles, and standards into a collaborative working space with other agencies that are also working from their own specialist frameworks. This enables an enriched service environment where practitioners from different disciplines bring their unique capabilities into a joined-up response addressing victim-survivor safety and perpetrator accountability. Further to this, the governance of multi-agency settings should therefore ensure that any decisions and protocols relevant to the role of SFVS are aligned with the Code.

All parts of the Code inform the role of specialist family violence services whether in their 'home' agency or in another environment, however, Principle 4 (Collaboration and Advocacy) places particular emphasis on coordinated responses and Principle 10 (Quality Governance and Leadership) sets the standard that services maintain the distinct role of specialist family violence services and practitioners as dedicated advocates working for the rights and interests of victim-survivors of family violence (Standard 10.1c).

How should specialist family violence services use the Code?

Specialist family violence services can use the Code and the complementary *Audit Tool* for continuous quality improvement by evidencing their progress against the standards and indicators, identifying gaps and trends, and making action plans for organisational change and improvement.

Additionally, services may wish to use the Code for a range of other activities such as:

- Strategic planning and visioning
- Developing policies and procedures
- Organisational change management processes
- Staff induction, supervision, and reflective practice
- Systemic advocacy for the rights of victim-survivors and role of specialist services.
- Internal and external education, training, and mentoring.

What support does DVVic provide to implement the Code?

The Code is an important part of the peak body's work to drive service innovation, policy advocacy and practice excellence in partnership with member organisations.

DVVic has developed an implementation plan to support the sector to engage with the Code. This includes using the Code as a guide for communities of practice, developing supplementary materials for the Code, supporting organisational roles tasked with internal implementation work, and providing technical assistance to organisations as required.

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Quick reference to the Principles of the Code

1. Risk and Safety Focus: The safety of victim-survivors is the cornerstone principle of specialist family violence services and is prioritised at all times.
2. Person-centred Empowerment: Victim-survivors are supported to experience meaningful empowerment through person-centred and flexible service responses.
3. Confidentiality and Information Management: Victim-survivors are informed about how their confidential and personal information is managed.
4. Collaboration and Advocacy: Services use collaboration and advocacy within coordinated multi-agency responses to benefit victim-survivors.
5. Perpetrator Accountability: Perpetrators are responsible for using family violence and are held accountable and monitored through a system-wide approach.
6. Child-centred Practice: Infants, children and young people are recognised as victim-survivors in their own right, and their safety and wellbeing are prioritised in every stage of service provision.
7. Aboriginal Self-determination: Services respect and uphold the right to Aboriginal self-determination, choice and cultural safety.
8. Inclusion and Equity: Victim-survivors are able to easily access inclusive and equitable specialist family violence services.
9. Capable and Sustainable Workforce: Services promote the professional development and sustainability of the specialist family violence workforce.
10. Quality Governance and Leadership: Services provide quality governance and leadership that is accountable to victim-survivors and advocates for systemic and social change.