

# Working with clients\* who have experienced domestic and family violence

## Best practice guidelines for client service centre staff

### 1. The safety of clients, children and workers is paramount

#### 1.1 When first speaking to a client ask whether they are safe now

*Practice points:*

- Suggest contacting the police or the domestic violence telephone service.
- Ask when it is safe to call.
- Suggest the client calls back when it is safe.

#### 1.2 When making arrangements for a client to come to Legal Aid Queensland, inquire about any potential safety or security issues

*Practice points:*

- When a client is waiting for a conference ask whether they feel safe in the waiting room and if not, make appropriate arrangements.

#### 1.3 Take precautions to protect the client's safety when using their file

*Practice points:*

- Do not put a client's address on the front of the file.
- Do not disclose a client's whereabouts unless given permission.
- Always ensure there are no identifying documents/files left in view or accessible to other parties.

#### 1.4 Take appropriate precautions for your own safety when seeing a client

*Practice points:*

- Take precautions for your safety.
- If you are working at a Legal Aid Queensland office, know where the distress buttons are in interview rooms.

- If you are working at a Legal Aid Queensland office and a physical incident occurs, complete a workplace health and safety incident report, notify Legal Aid Queensland and make a file note.

- If you are threatened by a client notify Legal Aid Queensland and consider reporting it to the police.

### 2. Violence is a crime whether it occurs in public or in private

#### 2.1 Give clients appropriate information about their legal options to address domestic and family violence

*Practice points:*

- Tell clients how to apply for a domestic and family violence order or make a complaint to the police.
- Tell clients all violence is a crime.
- Be aware of referral options for support services.

### 3. Actively involve clients in assessing their own legal needs and in making decisions about their future

#### 3.1 Provide clients with enough information to help them make up their own mind

*Practice points:*

- Don't put pressure on a client to make a decision.

### 4. Work collaboratively with other services that support clients who have been affected by domestic and family violence

#### 4.1 Provide clients with information about services that will address their other needs and those of their children when giving them information

*Practice points:*

- Ensure you know or can access details about appropriate services, eg regional domestic violence services, refuges, sexual assault services and community specific programs.
- If in doubt, contact a relevant specialist unit within Legal Aid Queensland, (eg Women's Legal Aid, domestic violence unit, family lawyers, social work team.)

### 5. All clients should be treated with respect

#### 5.1 Do not be judgmental in your response when assisting a client and hearing about their experience of domestic and family violence

*Practice points:*

- Listen and respond respectfully and behave sensitively when clarifying and getting further details of alleged abuse or domestic and family violence or cultural practices.

### 6. Legal Aid Queensland's services should be accessible and equitably delivered to all clients affected by domestic and family violence

#### 6.1 Ensure cultural issues are addressed when providing information and referrals

*Practice points:*

- Refer an Indigenous client to an Indigenous service.
- Refer a client from a non-English-speaking background to an appropriate service.

#### 6.2 Be aware of possible barriers for people accessing Legal Aid Queensland when arranging for a client to visit the office

*Practice points:*

- Trained interpreters should be offered if you think language could be an issue.
- Make alternative arrangements if a disability precludes them from coming to the office.
- Always check that a client from a non-English-speaking background is comfortable to proceed without an interpreter, even if they have declined one on a previous occasion. Attempt to make arrangements so the conference can proceed, such as organising a telephone interpreter.
- Use separate interpreters wherever possible if both parties to a dispute are from non-English-speaking backgrounds (subject to funding constraints).
- Consider getting an interpreter of the same gender as the client and check whether the client has any preference.
- Try to use the same interpreter every time.

### 7. Develop and maintain your knowledge of the social context of domestic and family violence including power, control & gender

#### 7.1 Inform clients that they are not alone and are not to blame

*Practice points:*

- Acknowledge that responsibility for the domestic and family violence lies with the offender, eg a woman's nagging is not an excuse for domestic and family violence.
- Ensure you are informed about the impact of abuse and domestic and family violence both on clients and children who witness it.

\* Clients are all parties to a dispute.