

RESOURCE

6

IF YOU
SUSPECT
SOMETHING,
ASK!

Risk assessment: when to ask what to say

Broaching a sensitive topic with a client can be challenging, even for experienced workers. In the context of family violence, it's important to follow up any suspicions that you have by asking your client. They may be waiting for someone to ask before they feel they can ask for help, and failure to do so could have serious consequences.

Don't wait to be sure before you say anything. **If you suspect something, ask.**

RISK ASSESSMENT

INDICATORS OF VIOLENCE

A person who is experiencing family violence as a victim might:

- ⊕ appear nervous, ashamed or evasive
- ⊕ describe their partner as controlling or prone to anger
- ⊕ seem uncomfortable or anxious in the presence of their partner suffer anxiety, panic attacks, stress, depression or psychiatric illness
- ⊕ present with patterns of repeated injury or signs of neglect
- ⊕ give an unconvincing explanation of injuries that they have sustained
- ⊕ have delayed seeking medical help
- ⊕ have recently separated or divorced
- ⊕ have attempted suicide
- ⊕ be accompanied by their partner, who does most of the talking
- ⊕ be reluctant to follow advice have a drug abuse problem, including tranquillisers or alcohol
- ⊕ have chronic headaches, asthma and/or vague aches and pains
- ⊕ have abdominal pain or diarrhoea
- ⊕ have joint and/or muscle pain
- ⊕ have sleeping and/or eating disorders have gynaecological problems and/or have suffered miscarriages
- ⊕ have physical signs of violence such as bruising, multiple injuries, minor cuts, injuries during pregnancy and/or ruptured eardrum

The following signs could indicate that your client is a perpetrator of family violence:

- ⊕ use of threats or glares
- ⊕ pattern of damaging property or harming animals
- ⊕ use of humiliation or ridicule
- ⊕ criticism of victim's parenting and threats to take children away
- ⊕ active prevention of the victim from working or leaving the house
- ⊕ minimising or excusing violence, e.g. 'only a slap'
- ⊕ use of victim blame to avoid responsibility for violence
- ⊕ high expectations of victim around sex or housework
- ⊕ control of household finances
- ⊕ expressions of jealousy
- ⊕ threats to harm or kill self or others
- ⊕ history of violent offences
- ⊕ unemployment
- ⊕ anxiety, panic attacks, stress, depression or psychiatric illness
- ⊕ drug abuse, including tranquillisers or alcohol
- ⊕ using 'loss of control' as an excuse

RISK ASSESSMENT

WHAT TO SAY

Ask a direct question and be clear, so your client knows what you are asking about. For example:

- ⊕ “I can see that bruise on your chin. Has someone hurt you?”
- ⊕ “Last week you said your partner was angry about you coming here, and now they are outside. Are they controlling or violent towards you?”
- ⊕ “You said you yelled at your partner. Do you think your behaviour towards him is violent or controlling?”
- ⊕ “Are you ever afraid of someone in your family or household?”
- ⊕ “Has someone in your family or household threatened to hurt you?”
- ⊕ “Has someone in your family or household ever pushed, hit, kicked, punched or hurt you?”

If your client says YES, reassure them of the following:

- ⊕ “Violence is never the victim’s fault. The perpetrator is accountable for their actions.”
- ⊕ “Violence is never OK.”
- ⊕ “You were right to tell me about this.”
- ⊕ “I will help you find the right supports so that you can decide what to do about the violence, and I will support your choices.”
- ⊕ “What we discuss will remain confidential, unless you tell me that someone is at immediate risk of being hurt or if children are at risk. Then I may need to call the police or child protection services, but if that ever happens I will keep you informed and involve you in making the report if you wish. As a provider, I also need to tell Centrelink about the violence – in broad terms only – so that we can make sure you are getting the right financial support and access to other services. We can also apply to have your mutual obligation requirements suspended or reduced while you go through this.”

If your client says NO, tell them all of the following:

- ⊕ “I hear and respect what you are telling me.”
- ⊕ “I might ask you these questions again if something else makes me think you are experiencing family violence because as an employment services provider I have a duty of care for my clients, but it is always your choice to tell me or not.”
- ⊕ “If you want information about family violence you can call 1800Respect (1800 737 732) or find them online. You don’t have to tell me if you are seeking this information.”

RISK ASSESSMENT

IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

ASSESS RISK AND ACT

jobactive Six-Step
Action Plan Resource

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE

Responding to
Domestic or Family
Violence Resource

CHILD PROTECTION REPORT

Child Protection for
jobactive Providers

If your client tells you they are experiencing family violence, you need to

ASSESS RISK AND ACT.

- ⊕ Ask if anyone is at immediate risk, and call 000 if they are.
- ⊕ Ask if your client feels safe to leave their appointment today, and call a DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE if they do not.
- ⊕ Ask if any children are living in the home where the violence is occurring, and seek management support to determine whether you need to make a CHILD PROTECTION REPORT.
- ⊕ You should refer them to the Department of Human Services (Centrelink) for further assistance and to other services appropriate to their current needs.

If any part of this conversation is difficult for you, seek immediate support from your manager.