

EMBEDDING TOOLS INTO EXISTING PRACTICES



Acknowledgment of Aboriginal people and communities in Victoria

The Victorian Government proudly acknowledges Aboriginal people as Australia's First Peoples and as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and waterways upon which we depend. We acknowledge Victoria's Aboriginal communities and culture and pay respect to their Elders past and present.

Aboriginal culture is founded on a strong social and cultural order that has sustained up to 60,000 years of existence. Victorian Aboriginal communities and peoples are culturally diverse, with rich and varied heritages and histories pre- and post- invasion. The impacts of colonisation — while having devastating effects on the traditional life of Aboriginal Nations — have not diminished Aboriginal people's connection to country, culture or community.

The Victorian Government recognises the long-standing leadership of Aboriginal communities in Victoria to prevent and respond to family violence, supported through self-determination and self-management, to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people and families, whilst also acknowledging the devastating impacts and accumulation of trauma across generations as a result of colonisation and the dispossession of land and children.

Authorised and published by the Victorian Government,
1 Treasury Place, Melbourne 3002

© State of Victoria, Australia, Family Safety Victoria, June 2020.

ISBN 978-1-76096-036-0 (pdf/online/MS word)

Accessibility

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In this document, 'Aboriginal' refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

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Things to consider when incorporating screening, risk assessment and risk management tools and updating organisational policies and procedures into your organisation's practice

Organisations holding responsibilities 2, 3 and 4, and 7 and 8 should ensure staff:

- gather information through engagement with service users and other providers (in some cases through the use of screening tools or routine screening) to identify family violence (**responsibility 2, appendix 2**)
- competently and confidently conduct intermediate risk assessment of adult and child victim survivors using structured professional judgement (**responsibility 3, appendices 5, 6, 7 and 8**)
- comprehensively assess the risks, needs and protective factors for adult and child victim survivors (**responsibility 7, appendices 11, 12 and 13**)
- actively address immediate risk and safety concerns relating to victim survivors, and undertake intermediate risk management, including safety planning (**responsibility 4, appendices 9–10**)
- undertake comprehensive risk management through development, monitoring and actioning of risk management plans, including information sharing (**responsibility 8, appendices 14–15**).

Pillar 2 requires organisations to:

- use a shared approach to identification, screening, assessment and management of family violence risk
- use tools that are consistent with the evidence-based risk factors.

The tools in the appendices listed above are MARAM-based tools that are consistent with the evidence-based risk factors (and align with the MARAM framework).

Using these tools will help your organisation be part of a shared approach to identification, screening, assessment and management of family violence risk.

This guide identifies the key things to consider when adopting or aligning existing tools with MARAM.



Staff capability and capacity is fundamental to successfully identifying, assessing and managing a service users' risk of family violence.

- ❑ Consider whether there is a need for a **new process** to be established for screening, assessment and management of family violence, or whether the MARAM tools can be **piggybacked onto existing practices**.
- ❑ Professionals are under pressure to gather a lot of information. If they're asked to perform too many tasks at once, there is a risk their **mental bandwidth** may be reduced, and family violence screening, assessment and management could become a 'tick box' exercise. When thinking about how and when screening and assessment takes place, consider both the professionals' capacity to perform the task properly and whether the service user can fully explore family violence issues if they're raised.
- ❑ It will be easier for professionals to screen, assess and manage family violence risk if there are **clear procedures and pathways** to be followed. This means the responsibility is not solely left to the professional who identified the risk. Organisations should adopt clear **policies, procedures** and **practice guidance** to support screening and risk assessment **tools**.
- ❑ The tools attached to the MARAM practice guides are already **MARAM-aligned tools**. They are designed to elicit risk-relevant information. These tools can be adopted entirely or used to **develop and update existing tools**. If used to update existing tools, it is important that these include demographic questions to help discover a service user's identity and potential needs, as well as questions linked to evidence-based risk factors.

PIGGYBACK ONTO EXISTING PRACTICES

— Adopting the assessment in full

Services use an intake and assessment tool to ask questions about alcohol and other drug use, mental health and suicide risk. Your organisation can add the MARAM family violence screening or assessment tool in full as an additional form. However, you need to consider professionals' **mental bandwidth** if they're asked to complete too many tasks at one time, and the risk that family violence questions may become a 'tick box' exercise.

— Embedding the assessment

MARAM questions are embedded into core intake and assessment questions to ensure all service users are asked about family violence as part of business as usual, and not as an add-on assessment. Again, consider professionals' **mental bandwidth**.

NEW PROCESS

— A new process altogether for family violence risk assessment

Rather than using existing tools as above, your organisation can create a new process for the assessment of family violence. Clear **procedures and pathways** are required to identify this new process. Consider the impact on the normal course of the day and any potential resistance to what may seem a larger change in working practices.



Every interaction with a service user is an opportunity to identify and assess risk of family violence.

- ❑ Some organisations undertake **routine screening**, which means that family violence risk questions are asked of every service user regardless of whether family violence indicators are present. Other organisations will be more suited to **indicative screening**, which takes place only when indicators of family violence are identified. Policies, procedures, practice guidance and tools should reflect the organisation's position.
- ❑ Where routine screening does not take place, organisations may wish to consider whether family violence is a **visible issue**. Asking about family violence, or displaying clear signage that your organisation can help with family violence, may increase the **salience** of family violence to a victim survivor and may promote subsequent disclosures.

Family violence risk changes over time. Screening, assessment and risk management are not activities that occur only once within a service. Procedures should be in place to ensure screening, assessment and management can take place at whatever point family violence indicators become identified.



There is an opportunity to build family violence capability and capacity by harnessing existing organisational processes and structures as well as adopting best practice approaches.

- ❑ The MARAM Framework allows organisations to either adopt MARAM tools or embed them into existing practices. When doing so, this will present opportunities to also **support learning and capability development opportunities** through a number of practices and mechanisms:
 - » regular peer supervision
 - » reflective practices
 - » triage meetings (managers prioritising clients for risk assessment or management)
 - » ensuring availability of secondary consultations from managers or Family Violence Specialist Advisors
 - » clinical reviews of screening responses and assessments
 - » sharing and learning from service user examples
 - » education sessions (in-house and by inviting in external family violence services)
 - » change champions.
- ❑ A **smooth process** from identifying family violence, to screening, to assessment (and beyond to management) is important to victim survivor experiences and professional capability and capacity. Where screening, assessment and management may be undertaken by different professionals, consider how to increase co-location of staff to support the exchange of relevant information, support decision making and professional development.
- ❑ Creating a **community of practice** involves a group of professionals sharing information on family violence risk screening and assessment and learning together how to do this better. Communities of practice help establish appropriate **norms** that can reinforce good practices.
- ❑ **Support from managers** is essential for professionals when screening and assessing family violence risk. Organisations should have formal processes for seeking and providing support and ensure a **psychologically safe** environment for professionals to ask questions. This increases informal learning.

