

This resource
contains descriptions
of Domestic and
Family Violence

Follow My Lead

This resource speaks from the voices of people with lived experience of Domestic and Family Violence who need the professionals and their social networks to be more prepared to respond effectively.

More prepared to respond in ways that **uphold dignity** and **build on safety**.

Your response can be of immense help.

How you respond to me when I share with you, and in the time that follows, matters significantly to me.

I might tell you parts of my experience to test out how safe I am with you and to explore how you react or retreat.

I'll be looking to see;

- what you think of what I have shared
- that you believe me
- what you think of me and if/how that changes now that you know more about me
- whether you give more weight to what the person abusing me says than what I say
- whether the person abusing me will be able to influence your thinking and make you think differently about me

and what this means next.

**Are you prepared to
respond safely
if I share with you?**

Being safe is no simple or single decision, or task.

A good first step is to learn more about my world
and how the violence harms my safety and wellbeing.

**Domestic and Family
Violence is an injustice
and is an offence to my
dignity, compromising my
safety and undermining
my wellbeing... and the
dignity and wellbeing of
the people I care for and
who care for me.**

I am a unique person
with unique experiences.

I have **rights** and
responsibilities.

I respond to events
and exercise **choice**.

But violence and coercive
control limit my options.

Know my rights
Can exercise my rights

Responsibilities

Know my choices
Can make my own choices

I have my own sense of what is important right now and in the long term.

I **identify** with and belong to many **communities** and networks.

These are the contexts in which I understand and respond to Domestic and Family Violence. I respond to, and **resist**, the violence,

discrimination and oppression in my own way despite danger and unpredictability.

I am always **aware** of the actual and possible responses of others, from professionals to my friends and family members.

These responses inform how, or if, I reach out to others.



Where I am (at **home**, in **school**, **online**, on my mobile, at **work**, in the **community**) changes the risks I face and the responses I can expect to receive.

I anticipate and respond to threats and risks wherever I go, with whoever I meet and whatever I do.



The risks I face change over time and can change rapidly.

The abuse I have experienced in the past might be similar or different to the current or future threats I face.

The importance I place on the **past**, the **present**, the **future**, and possibly the **afterlife**, can influence how I see things and make decisions.

Something that makes me safer in the short term might make me less safe in the future.

These facts may be seen or unseen by others, however they are personal and make sense to me.



The status of my relationship matters.

My relationship status with the person abusing me creates different levels of risk, threat and consequences for my dignity and wellbeing.

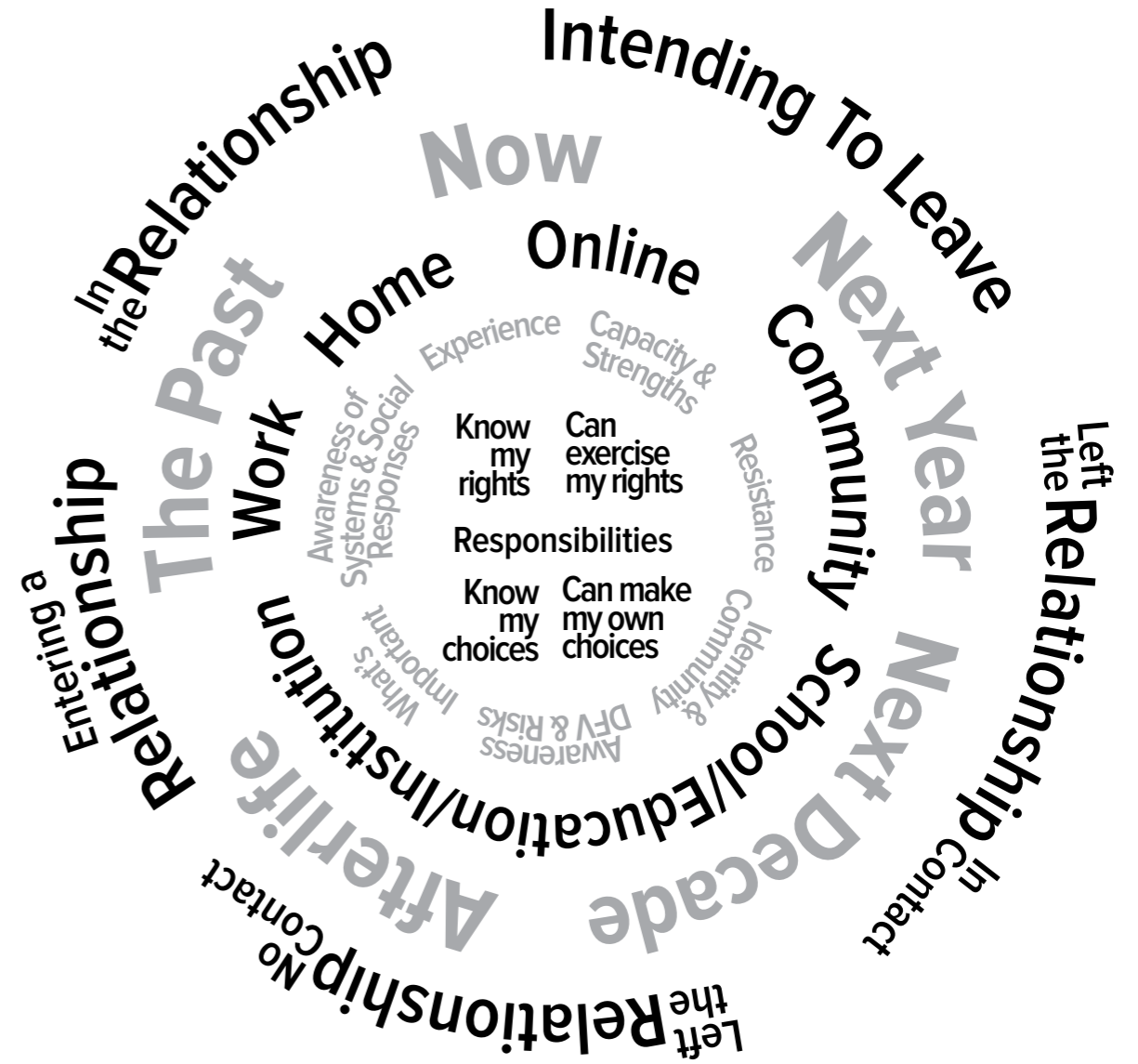
I might be **entering a new relationship, in a relationship** with no intention to leave, or **planning to leave** when I can. I might have **escaped but am threatened and forced back into contact with the person abusing me** because of the children (or pets, or some other

reason). I might have **no contact** with the person abusing me but know I will (or may) be unsafe if found.

The person abusing me may change the nature of their behaviour rapidly, without warning, significantly changing the realities I face.

I might be in relationships with more than one person who is committing violence against me.

It is my choice whether I am in a relationship and whether I choose to leave it.



Just as every person is unique, the violence I experience is unique.

I may be threatened, intimidated or coerced into doing things against my will.

The person committing the abuse may **isolate** me from those I love and **manipulate** others against me, and **undermine** my relationships including my parenting.

They may commit **physical, verbal, emotional** or **sexualised** abuse, and they may threaten or abuse my children, friends or family, pets, property, and things that are important to me as a means to control me. They may

steal, control or undermine my finances, or my ability to work or be financially independent.

They may try to use my beliefs and spirituality to control and isolate me.

I am experienced in anticipating the patterns and tactics that the person abusing me uses against me and the people I care about. I can see how they adjust their tactics to suppress my resistance and responses to their abuse.

The actions of the person who has abused me may be similar to others but are also completely unique and specific to me and those whom I love.



The violence I experience undermines my wellbeing across many areas of my life.

My responses – the person using violence violates my rights, restricts my choices, and limits my capacity to act and put into force my own decisions.

My safety – my safety is compromised.

Love and connection - my family relationships, friends and connections with community, spiritual connection and connections to land may be under threat.

My learning and growth – because I am forced to deal constantly with abuse, and possibly

with negative responses from others, I experience fatigue and isolation. Sometimes I cannot help but ignore or avoid activities that could help me learn and develop as a person because of competing priorities related to violence.

My health – my body and mind suffer from the violence and coercion. I can become physically unwell, fearful, desperate, lonely, sad, and angry.

Although my despair is one form of resistance to the violence, I may be seen as ‘clinically depressed’ or as having another disorder. My feelings are ethical emotional responses to violence.

My material basics and economic wellbeing – the person abusing me tries to suppress my resistance by limiting my access to material and economic basics, such as food, housing, clothing, money and my financial assets. If they can undermine my material and economic wellbeing, they will be more able to use violence.

My participation – my opportunity to participate, have a voice and be involved as a citizen and in the community may be limited.



The violence I experience is an affront to my dignity.

I resist and respond to the violence, discrimination and oppression I experience.

I do this in visible and invisible ways that might not seem obvious or directly related to what is going on, but this resistance and response to violence is important to me, and is part of upholding my dignity.

The person abusing me knows that I do not like the violence and anticipates that I will resist. Consequently, I must hide my resistance, sometimes completely, and find a safe place in the privacy of my mind.

**How ready are you
to respond if I do
share with you?**

One step to becoming more ready to respond, is to understand what your response might mean to me - how your response can help or how it could harm.

Please recognise that I am already active in resisting the violence, building safety for myself and others, and managing risk. I am constantly...



Please remember, there may be much more going on than I care to say - until I know you're safe to share with.

If you try to make decisions for me and tell me what to do, I might feel more unsafe than before I shared with you.

I may not know what I want you to do, I may want you to do nothing, I may want you to do something. I may want your quiet support alongside me, or I may want you to do something proactive, or a mix of these things.

Listen to me and follow my lead.

Let me decide what's needed and what's next.

Let me lead the pace and the precision of any steps.

Let me lead.

All of this may take time.

Definition

Domestic and Family Violence includes any behaviour, in an intimate or family relationship, which is violent, threatening, coercive or controlling, causing a person to live in fear and to be made to do things against their will.

Domestic and Family Violence can happen to anyone and can take many forms. It is often part of a pattern of controlling or coercive behaviour.

An intimate relationship refers to people who are (or have been) in an intimate partnership whether or not the relationship involves or has involved a sexual relationship, i.e. married or engaged to be married, separated, divorced, de facto partners (whether of the same or different sex), couples promised to each other under cultural or religious tradition, or who are dating.

A family relationship has a broader definition and includes people who are related to one another through blood, marriage or de facto partnerships, adoption and fostering relationships, sibling and extended family relationships. It includes the full range of kinship ties in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (see – Family Violence), extended family relationships, and family of choice within lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer (LGBTIQ) communities.

People living in the same house, people living in the same residential care facility and people reliant on care may also be considered to be in a domestic relationship when one or both people in the relationship try to create an imbalance of power to establish coercive control and commit violence.

The behaviours that may represent Domestic and Family Violence include:

- Physical violence including physical assault or abuse
- Reproductive coercion
- Sexualised assault and other abusive or coercive behaviour of a sexualised nature
- Emotional or psychological abuse including verbal abuse, threats of violence, threats of self-harm or suicide, blackmail and bribery
- Economic abuse; for example denying a person reasonable financial autonomy or financial support
- Stalking; for example harassment, intimidation or coercion of the other person's family in order to cause fear or ongoing harassment, including through the use of electronic communication or social media
- Kidnapping or deprivation of liberty, as well as unreasonably preventing the other person from making or keeping connections with her or his family or kin, friends, faith or culture
- Damage to property irrespective of whether the victim owns the property
- Causing injury or death to an animal irrespective of whether the victim owns the animal.

Women and children are overwhelmingly the victims of Domestic and Family Violence and those who use violence are overwhelmingly male.

Domestic and Family Violence can be perpetrated by a partner, family member (including children perpetrating violence against their siblings or parents), carer, house mate, boyfriend or girlfriend.

Women also commit Domestic and Family Violence against men, as do same-sex partners. Domestic and Family Violence is also committed by and committed against people who identify in non-gender binary terms.

The term **'Family Violence'** is preferred in an Indigenous context. It is used to describe the range of violence that takes place in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities including the physical, emotional, sexual, social, spiritual, cultural, psychological and economic abuses that may be perpetrated within a family. The term also recognises the broader impacts of violence; on extended families, kinship networks and community relationships. It has also been used in the past decade to include acts of self-harm and

suicide, and has become widely adopted as part of the shift towards addressing intra-familial violence in all its forms.

Gordon, S Hallahan, K, Henry, D (2002) Putting the picture together, Inquiry into Response by Government Agencies to Complaints of Family Violence and Child Abuse in Aboriginal Communities, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Western Australia.

“A social responder is any person who is knowingly or unknowingly responding to those who are directly involved in cases of violence – those who perpetrate violence and those who are victimized.”

Ref: Wade, 2014 (Where the hell is everybody?) and (Coates and Wade, 2016) 'We're in the 21st Century After All': Analysis of Social Responses in Individual Support and Institutional Reform

If you or your children, or the person you are supporting are in immediate danger, please contact the Police on 000

NATIONAL CONTACTS

Domestic Violence Line (24 hours)

1800 65 64 63

The Domestic Violence Line is a NSW state-wide telephone crisis counselling and referral service for women and persons who identify as female.

Counsellors on the Domestic Violence Line can help you:

- talk to the police and get legal help
- get hospital care and family support services
- obtain an Apprehended Violence Order (AVO)
- develop a safety plan for you and your children
- find emergency accommodation for you and your children

Kids Helpline

1800 55 1800

Australia's free, private and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25.

Anytime. Any Reason.

For men experiencing Domestic and Family Violence

If you are a man experiencing Domestic and Family Violence you can contact:

<https://mensline.org.au/>

<https://www.1800respect.org.au/>

Domestic Violence Service Management would like to thank all contributors, critical friends and communities, who have engaged directly or indirectly with our Concepts of Safety Project and this Follow My Lead resource.

In particular, Sightlines, the Professional Services of DVSM would like to thank Dr Linda Coates and Dr Allan Wade and their colleagues at the Centre for Response-Based Practice, Canada for their visionary and pioneering work on social responses, resistance, language, and the upholding of dignity.

Wade. A. (1997) Small Acts Of Living: Everyday Resistance To Violence And Other Forms Of Oppression. Contemporary Family Therapy 19 ⁽¹⁾ March 1997

Most significantly, our thanks goes to all people with lived experience of Domestic and Family Violence who have courageously shared their insights for the benefit of others.

First Edition: Free electronic copies of Follow My Lead are available and online and we welcome continued feedback in order to learn about the value of this resource and to improve future editions. Access the online version and/or provide your feedback via www.insightexchange.net

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