



Conversation Guide

A guide to help community and faith leaders
to recognise and respond to family,
domestic and sexual violence

July 2025

This Conversation Guide is part of the Train, Engage, Connect, Support (TECS) project, to be used along with the [e-learning module](#).

Use this guide to remember and reflect on important information from the e-learning.



Scan QR code
to access
e-learning module

If you or someone you know is experiencing family, domestic or sexual violence, contact:

- Full Stop Australia • 1800 385 578
- 1800 Respect • 1800 737 732
- Lifeline • 13 11 14

**In an emergency
call the police on 000**

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Multicultural community and faith leaders play a very important role in preventing and responding to family, domestic and sexual violence. The TECS project aims to build the capacity of multicultural community and faith leaders to identify and respond to family, domestic and sexual violence, through an online learning course and resources.

These resources were shaped by national consultation and co-design involving people with lived experience of family, domestic and sexual violence, as well as service providers, faith leaders, and community leaders.

TECS is a project of SSI, delivered in partnership with Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia. The project is supported by the Australian Government Department of Social Services, as part of the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2033.



FECCA
Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia



SSI
For equality
of life.

What is FDSV?

Family, domestic and sexual violence (FDSV):

Family, domestic and sexual violence (FDSV) refers to a range of behaviours that involve the abuse, coercion, or manipulation of one person by another within the context of intimate or familial relationships.

It is about using **power and control** to get someone to do something they don't want to do or stopping them from doing something that they want to do.

The person who commits an act of FDSV may be a spouse, partner or ex-partner, de facto, family member, carer or person living in the same household.

Victim-survivor:

This refers to a person who is experiencing or has experienced family, domestic, and sexual violence.

Person using violence:

A broad term used to describe people who use violent and harmful behaviours against others.

Coercive control:

Coercive control is behaviour that results in someone having control over another person. It's used to create fear, intimidation, and submission in another person. For example: constant phone calls and/or texts, financial control, threats to harm themselves or others

Who does violence affect?

Family, domestic and sexual violence is a significant issue in Australia. It affects people across all demographics and communities. It can happen in any culture and in many different families.

- People who use violence and/or abuse in families can include family members, adult children, in-laws, and ex-partners.
- Violence can happen in all different types of families and relationships, including between people who are dating, living together as a couple, de facto, married, separated, or divorced. It can also happen in LGBTQIA+ relationships.
- FDSV affects people of all genders, but women are impacted the most.

How to recognise FDSV

How can you tell the difference between healthy conflict in a relationship and family, domestic and sexual violence?

Healthy conflict:

When there's a conflict in a relationship, it might feel upsetting, but no one is trying to control the other person. Both people can talk and help sort things out without feeling afraid, forced, or tricked.

FDSV:

It is when one person uses their power to control, intimidate, or hurt another person. The person being harmed (the victim-survivor) often feels afraid of how the other person might behave. It's not just about physical violence – it can involve many different ways of controlling someone and making them feel scared.



In the e-learning module, you can download a glossary with many more definitions.

There are many types of abuse:



Go to the e-learning to see examples of each form of abuse.

- **Physical abuse:**
An act of violence or force that is used to harm, injure, or control a family member.
- **Verbal abuse:**
Using words to intimidate or control the other person and can often involve emotional abuse.
- **Emotional abuse:**
The person manipulates, degrades, and threatens another. Saying things that can be damaging to their self-esteem, mental health, and overall well-being. 'Gaslighting' which refers to making someone doubt their own reality or memories.
- **Sexual abuse:**
Any sexual activity where consent hasn't been given. Marriage does not mean that consent can be assumed. Both people need to consent willingly whether the couple are married or not.
- **Financial abuse:**
Controlling, exploiting, or restricting a victim-survivor's financial resources.
- **Social abuse:**
Controlling a person's social connections or isolating the person from their family and other support networks.
- **Stalking:**
Persistent monitoring of a person or letting them know they are being watched. Stalking often overlaps with technology-facilitated abuse.
- **Technological abuse:**
The use of technology such as smart phones or tracking devices, to control and intimidate the victim-survivor.
- **Spiritual or cultural abuse:**
Spiritual or cultural beliefs are used as a way of controlling, manipulating, or coercing a family member.
- **Systems abuse:**
Using legal, financial, and institutional systems to harass, control, or punish a victim-survivor.

Migration-related tactics

Certain tactics are often used against people from migrant or refugee backgrounds.

Women from migrant or refugee backgrounds may face specific types of abuse that target their visa status, language barriers, or cultural background. For example:

- **Threatening to take the children away**
- **Hiding or destroying residency documents**
- **Isolating the victim-survivor from friends and family**

What are the impacts of FDSV?

Impacts for the victim-survivor

Family, domestic and sexual violence can cause significant physical, emotional, psychological, and financial harm to those who experience it. In some cases, it can be fatal. This harm can include:

- **Physical impacts** such as injuries, disability, losing a pregnancy
- **Psychological impacts** such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression
- **Emotional impacts** such as difficulty sleeping, distrust in others

Impacts for children

Children are affected by family, domestic, and sexual violence – they can experience serious physical, emotional and psychological harm, even if the violence is not directed at them. Violence in the home can hurt children at every age and stage of life and cause long-term harm. The impacts may be different, depending on the child's age.

With the right support, children can feel safe again. That's why it's important for adults to recognise when a child might be affected by violence and respond in appropriate ways.



You can find examples of the impacts for victim-survivors and children in the e-learning.

Victim blaming

Victim blaming is when people around the victim-survivor blame them for the behaviour of violence and abuse.

For example, when people say things like:

- “She shouldn’t do that because it makes him angry!”
- “She shouldn’t have argued with him.”
- “If she was a good wife and did her duty, this wouldn’t happen.”

When we blame the victim, the person who **caused** the violence is not held responsible.



Using violence is a choice, and is never okay.

Mandatory reporting

The safety of children is the responsibility of everyone and that is why we have mandatory reporting for children who are at risk of significant harm. As a faith or community leader you are likely to have a legal obligation to make a report to child protection authorities.

Every state and territory in Australia has laws about protecting children. Read more about mandatory reporting laws here: <https://aifs.gov.au/resources/resource-sheets/mandatory-reporting-child-abuse-and-neglect>

Warning signs that violence may get worse

High risk indicators

High-risk indicators are important warning signs that the person using violence might become more violent, seriously hurt someone, or even kill their partner, children or themselves.

Some high-risk indicators include:

- Pregnancy or a new baby
- Separation or plans to leave
- Violence getting worse over time
- Non-fatal strangulation
- Stalking (including technological stalking)
- Threats to harm or kill themselves, others, the children, pets
- Access to weapons
- Sexual assault
- Controlling, obsessive or jealous behaviours



You can find more information about the high-risk indicators in the e-learning.

Understanding the risks

As a community or faith leader, it is very important that you do not tell the person using violence that you know about the abuse or that the victim-survivor is thinking about leaving. Sharing this information can put the victim-survivor, children, and other family members in danger.

- The person using violence **wants to have power and control** over the victim-survivor. **If they find out that the victim-survivor has told someone about the abuse or think they might do so, the violence and abuse are likely to get worse.**
- Sometimes people may try to help, **but their actions may actually make things more dangerous** for the victim-survivor. Here are two examples:

Example 1:
Bringing the couple together to talk through the issues



The victim-survivor may be too afraid to speak honestly. Afterwards, they may face more violence at home for speaking up.

Example 2:
Speaking to the person using violence about their behaviour



Speaking alone with the person using violence lets them know that the victim-survivor has said something about the abuse and this may put the family at risk of greater violence.

What can community and faith leaders do?

Listen to people who share their experiences of family, domestic, and sexual violence.

Refer the victim-survivor to specialist services that can help them.

Refer the person who is using violence to a service that can support them to change their behaviour, if they want to change the behaviour.

Speak out when you see or hear things that support violence.

Build a safe and supportive community.

Promote healthy and respectful relationships that don't involve power, control, and fear.

Raise awareness about family, domestic, and sexual violence.

Form connections with service providers.

Take part in events that promote safety and respect.



You do not need to be an expert in family, domestic, and sexual violence to help someone in that situation. You can still support someone by listening to them, showing care, and connecting them with the right services.

Preparing for the conversation

- Be aware of any bias or prejudice you have that could affect how you respond
- It is often very hard for someone to share their experience and in doing so the person is showing great courage
- When someone talks about the abuse, they might only share small parts or make it sound less serious. They usually want to see how you respond. They are unlikely to tell you the worst thing straightaway.
- How you respond can influence whether the person feels safe to ask for help again, either from you or others.
- The person may not directly say there is violence or abuse, they may hint at it or say something like: “my husband and I are having issues at the moment”.

What to say

Say thank you and acknowledge their courage. It is not easy to talk about abuse with another person.

“Thank you for telling me, it takes a lot of courage to talk about this.”

Say that the violence is not okay.

“I want to tell you that this behaviour is not okay. You and your children have a right to be and feel safe in your home.”

Let them know they are not alone. Let them know that other people have been and are in similar situations.

“I have seen other people with issues like yours in the home.”

Remind them it is not their fault.

“Violence/abuse is never okay, it is a choice your partner has made. It is not your fault.”

Talk about other types of control. Remind them that other forms of control - besides violence - are also wrong.

“If he is trying to control what you do, who you see, or where you go, that’s not okay. If he is making you feel scared, trapped, or like you can’t say no, that’s not okay.”

Ask if they are safe to go home that day.

“Do you feel safe to go home? Do you have someone you trust who you can call? Would you call the police, and do you know how?”

These words help build trust and help the victim-survivor to feel safe talking with you.

What not to say

If someone says they are being abused by a family member,
DO NOT say:

“Are they hitting you?”

“Well at least there’s no physical violence.”

“Have you done something to make them angry?”

“You know he gets stressed.”

“What did you say to cause that?”

OR anything that makes the victim survivor feel less in control.

These types of questions and comments can make the victim-survivor feel blamed, ashamed and unsafe.

What not to do

Avoid any actions that may create further risk:

- Don't tell the person using violence that you have been told about it
- Don't tell other family members that you know about the violence
- Don't go ahead and talk with the person using violence without the victim-survivor knowing or giving permission
- Don't hesitate to make a report to child protection if any children are at risk of significant harm
- Don't disbelieve the victim-survivor
- Don't tell the victim-survivor that they must stay in the marriage
- Don't tell the victim-survivor they must leave the marriage
- Don't use your power and authority over the victim-survivor.



The victim-survivor is the expert in their life.

They know what might make things safer or more dangerous for them.

If we tell them what to do, we take away their power and control.

Always ask before you do anything—unless the law says you must act, like in cases of child protection. Let them make their own choices.

Support them, don't take over.

National services

1800 RESPECT (24/7)

1800 737 732

Support for anyone affected by FDSV including those who provide support.

Lifeline (24/7)

13 11 14

A counselling service for people in distress.

Family Relationship Advice Line

1800 050 321

For people affected by relationship or separation issues.

Mensline Australia (24/7)

1300 789 978

A counselling service specifically for men.

Men's Referral Service (24/7)

1300 766 491

For men who use violence and abuse and want to change their behaviour.

Kids Helpline (24/7, ages 5-25)

1800 55 1800

For children and young people.

13 YARN (24/7)

13 9276

An Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander crisis support line run by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

1800 ELDERHelp

1800 353 374

Information and advice on elder abuse.

These services are free, confidential, and you can request an interpreter.

Where to get support

It is not expected that you be an expert in domestic, family, and sexual violence. Your role includes listening, providing a safe space, and, when needed, connecting people with services that can help. This is called making a referral.

Referrals

Making a referral is about supporting the victim-survivor to take the next step — when they feel ready, by:

- sharing helpful information about available services
- offering to make a call to a support service together or on their behalf (with their permission)
- giving them a phone number or website

Referral is the process connecting the victim-survivor with information, resources, and services that help people facing family, domestic and sexual violence. You can ring a service – with the victim-survivor's permission – or the victim-survivor can call the service themselves. You can familiarise yourself with referral services in your area at any time.



More services in each state and territory can be found on the Australian Department of Social Services website: www.dss.gov.au/help-and-support-ending-violence

Next steps

You can take action in your community with these next steps.

1 Recognise:

Keep learning about FDSV. The e-learning module contains lots of information about FDSV, and also shows you where to find more information and training.

2 Respond:

Revisit the e-learning to know how to respond when someone tells you they have experienced violence. Think about how you could make your community more supportive for people experiencing FDSV.

3 Refer:

Learn about services available in your local area and connect with local services.

4 Share:

Support your community by sharing information about FDSV and promoting awareness.

5 Plan:

What actions will you take next?

Self-care

Faith and community leaders are often available and make time to listen to other people's feelings and concerns. It is easy to forget to look after your own wellbeing when you are helping others. But, as we know, faith and community leaders need to take care of themselves so they can keep doing their role well.

There are many wellbeing strategies that work for different people. In the e-learning, you can find tip sheets and information to help you plan how you can look after your wellbeing.

Where to learn more

You can find the e-learning module and other resources from the project on our website.

Train, Engage, Connect, Support (TECS)
0466 217 497
fdsv.tecs@ssi.org.au
www.ssi.org.au/our-services/domestic-family-violence/tecs/

We're SSI.
We stand for a world in which everyone has access to equal opportunity.
We are driven by equality, empathy, and celebration of every individual.
ssi.org.au

