

# **Webinar 2 – Effective family violence risk assessment with Indigenous families.**



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# Family Violence Webinar Series

**Webinar 1** - Set the Context - Indigenous Australians' experiences of family violence (available on catch up)

**Webinar 2 - 1<sup>st</sup> May, 2.30-4.30pm (NSW time): Effective family violence risk assessment with Indigenous families.**

Case management fundamentals for working with Indigenous families in the context of family violence Part 1: risk assessment - how to assess risk. With a focus on how VACCA does this.

**Webinar 3 – 6<sup>th</sup> June, 2.30-4.30pm (NSW time): Effective family violence safety planning with Indigenous families.**

Case management fundamentals for working with Indigenous families in the context of family violence Part 2: safety planning - how to develop, implement and monitor safety plans. With a focus on how VACCA does this.



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# Today's Webinar Topics

1. Setting the scene – Family Violence Risk Assessment

2. Knowledge needed to complete risk assessments for Indigenous clients

3. Completing risk assessments with Indigenous clients



# 1. Setting the scene – Family Violence Risk Assessment



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# Family Violence Risk Assessment Across Australia

Each state and territory in Australia has processes for risk screening and assessment. Becoming familiar with these documents is a useful way to gain an understanding of risk and safety. The frameworks can be used in many different work environments.

Services can use these models as a starting point for developing an approach to risk screening and assessment.

Today's webinar will focus on the Victorian Risk Assessment Framework (CRAF) and also the MARAM which is currently under development in Victoria and will replace the CRAF and how VACCA has used these tool



# What the Victorian Royal Commission Into Family Violence stated about comprehensive risk assessment and management:

## **Risk Assessment**

- Risk is dynamic and is an art rather than a science
- Weighting of risk indicators
- Service providers required to identify and assess risk have varying levels of experience
- Even for very experienced practitioners, risk assessment tools are important

## **Risk Management**

- Risk management is complex and is best undertaken by highly skilled practitioners



# Family Violence Risk Assessment & your organisation

Risk assessments occur in an organisational and practice framework. To ensure safety of victims and to develop effective safety plans it is critical that there is an alignment between professionals undertaking this work especially within the organisation but hopefully with other external professionals. The following are a list of topics or processes (not exhaustive) that organizations need to consider :

- the purpose of undertaking risk assessments
- the amount of time that is reasonable to spend doing an assessment
- how will immediate safety issues be addressed
- What is the process/factors by which victims or perpetrators or family members can be encourage their participation in the assessment
- what is said to the victim/client regarding use of information disclosed
- what information will not be considered confidential, for example information that a child is at significant risk
- which staff members will conduct the risk assessment
- the credentials and training required for people conducting the risk assessment

# Family violence Risk Assessments and your organization

- What will be communicated to victims and what directions or advice will accompany that communication
- What is to be communicated to the more formal system, that is, what information (and in what form) is appropriate for court proceedings, probation or correction services, and advocates
- How will the Victim/ client be made to feel culturally safe prior to assessments taking place

## Examples of broader organization considerations

- What supervision process are in place to both support staff but also ensure more senior oversight of risk assessments
- What are the expectations regarding case recording
- Where the assessment information will be stored and who will have access to it. what will happen to the information collected in the assessment
- What processes does the organization have in place to ensure a continuous quality improvement



## PRINCIPLES

**Universal:** Best Interests of the Child, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Placement Principle, UN Conventions: Rights of the Child and Indigenous People

Aboriginal Community Controlled

**Specific:** Holistic healing is physical, spiritual, psychological, social, collective, restoration

Culture as foundation

Culture as treatment

Culture as resilience

Capacity building

Family strengthening approach

Voice

### Knowledge Application

Aboriginal culture

The impact of colonisation

Trauma Informed Approaches

**RISK ASSESSMENT:** respectful and inclusive of cultural strengths. Based on family's own assessment of safety, the evidence-based risk factors and your own professional judgement

**RISK MANAGEMENT:** based on the family's needs at the time of assessment. Empower families with resources to manage their risks.

**SAFETY PLANNING:** work collaboratively with families to develop a plan, drawing on cultural protective factors and kinship networks.

### ALWAYS WORK FROM

#### CULTURE

#### SELF-DETERMINATION

**SAFETY** - everyone is safe and this is the most important thing

**STABILISATION** – ground people in Culture again and again and again

#### TRAUMA-INFORMED

Focus on physical, psychological and emotional safety for each family member.

Create opportunities for family members to rebuild control and empowerment.

Always contribute to healing.

Develop at own pace.

### UNDERSTAND FV FOR OUR MOB IN THE CONTEXT OF:

The 'system' is not set up to support Aboriginal families when they seek support and safety

Family relationships are complex

Fear of police and removal of children

Safety planning includes kinship/cultural networks

Intergenerational trauma sits beneath everything

Community retribution for reporting violence

Dispossession and lack of power and control

Fear of deaths in custody – especially older generations

# VACCA's family violence approach

## **Cultural consultations**

Key Aboriginal staff in each region are identified and able to provide cultural consultation.

## **Reflective practice:**

Regular sessions are facilitated to provide additional clinical supervision or consultation on cases for workers and team leaders.

## **Supervision;**

Regular supervision is in place

## **Peer supervision:**

This is encouraged as a means of building support, knowledge and learning within teams and across regions.

## **Links to action research:**

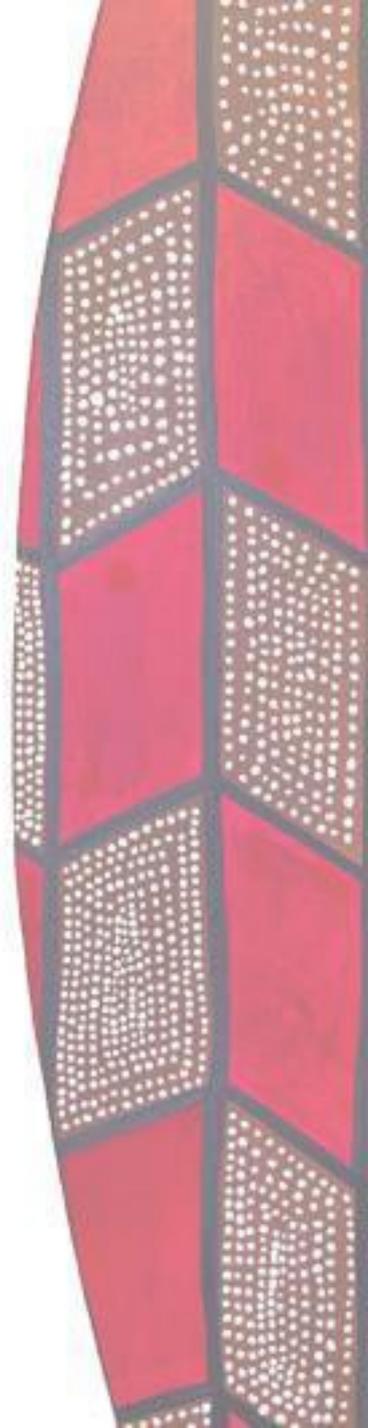
Supervision creates opportunities for therapeutic to talk about their work and identify and address issues with the support of the Team leader.

## **Feedback processes:**

Families are given information about how to provide positive feedback and how to make a complaint.



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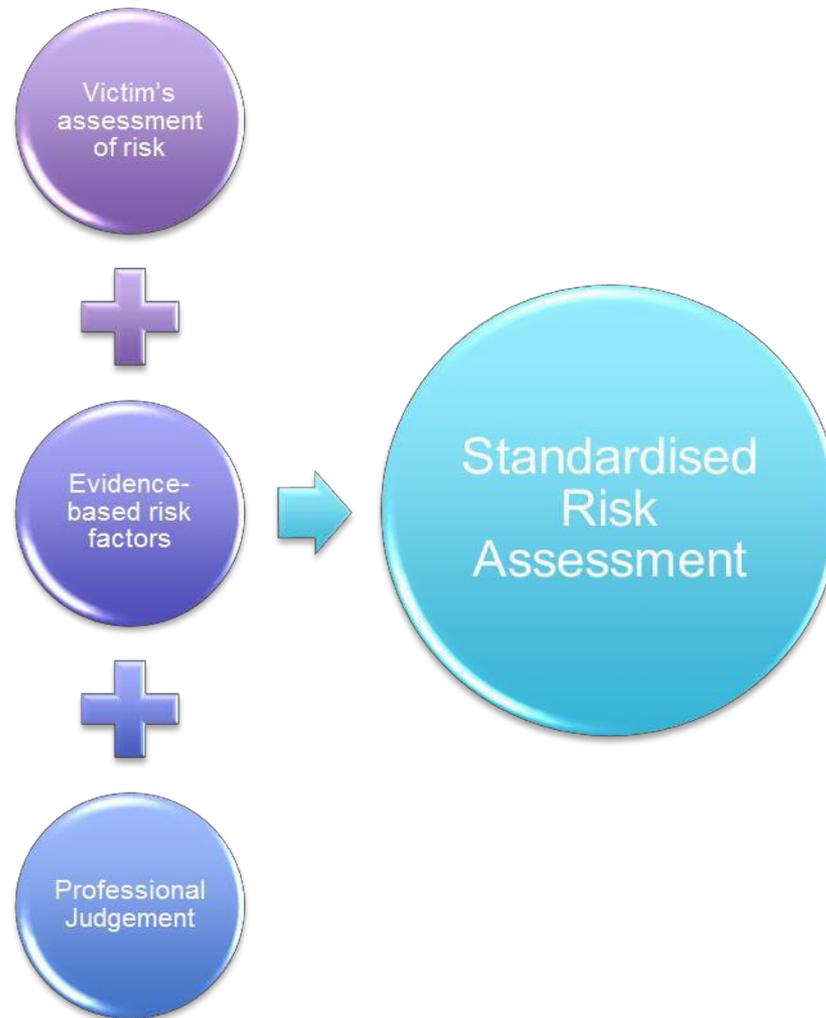


# Understanding what risk is

- Risk is the product of the likelihood of a particular event occurring and the consequences of the event occurring.
- Risk assessment is the process whereby the level of risk to an individual is determined. Risk assessment should always be accompanied by referral protocols, safety planning and risk management strategies.



# Understanding what a risk assessment is



# The purpose of an assessment

The purpose of an assessment process is to determine risk and increase safety for the victim through a safety and risk management plan. Workers can consider a range of victim and perpetrator characteristics that affect the likelihood and severity of future violence.

To achieve this, you will need to:

- ascertain the victim's view of the risk the perpetrator poses to her or her children
- identify the presence of risk factors
- identify whether a crime has been committed (for example, physical or sexual assault, threats, pet abuse, property damage, stalking and/or breach of an Intervention Order)
- identify current protective factors
- establish whether risk is present
- identify and document the contact details of any services currently involved
- document any referrals made as a result of the assessment
- record the assessment process and outcomes (police use 'L17' and other services use the recording template)



# The purpose of an assessment

- At VACCA we would obtain written consent from the victim for the risk assessment to be passed on as part of any referral made. We are always mindful that as Aboriginal workers, we are sometimes privileged to certain information that families do not want to share with mainstream agencies.

In the case that we have been provided with information that either the victim or the children are at immediate risk of significant harm, we would disclose private information to relevant agencies even without the consent of the victim. We also discuss this with the Victims as part of our best practice.

- make plans to address the immediate safety and needs of all parties affected, including children.

Pg 65, Family violence risk assessment and risk management framework and practice guides 1-3. DHHS.

# Who conducts it, When is it done & what is produced?

- At VACCA initial Risk assessment occurs a different entry points within our organisation but a more extensive risk assessment is conducted by our family violence teams.
- Risk assessment is not a once off activity. It is an ongoing activity based on the client and the level of risk they are experiencing.
- The CRAF tool is produced. It creates a picture of the risk for the victim and his/her family and contributes to the safety planning.



## **2. Knowledge needed to complete risk assessments for Indigenous clients**



# What you need to know to do risk assessment with Aboriginal clients

Below are the knowledge areas VACCA thinks that are important for working with Aboriginal family violence, some of these will be covered in more detail in the next few slides:

- Risk assessments; what is risk and how do we identify risk factors
- Defining the problem; What is Aboriginal family violence? (Definitions)
- Victims; what are the issues that have an impact on their behaviour, for example concern about incarceration of perpetrator given the number of deaths in custody
- Perpetrators; What do we need to know about perpetrators, for example what do their behaviours look like?
- Community views; what strengths are present in the community that can be utilized and also understanding collusion in the community regarding FV



# What you need to know to do risk assessments with Aboriginal clients

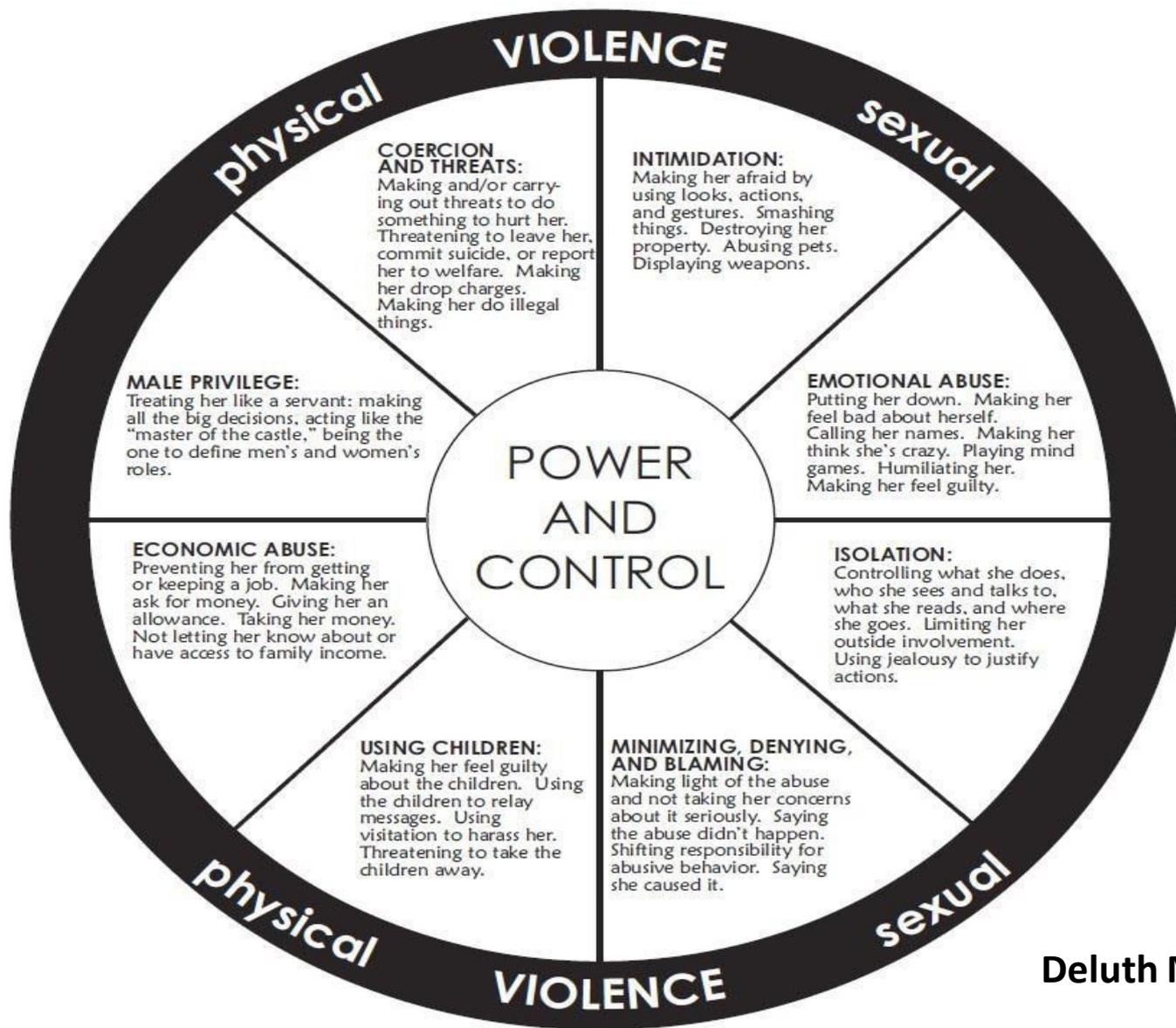
- Children; knowledge of impact of FV on children who may be witnesses to continued FV within the home and its impact on their development
- Trauma: what is the impact of the current trauma and intergenerational trauma that is impacting on all involved
- Services; what services can be put in place to support the victim and mitigate the risk factors
  - Risk factors that heighten likelihood of FV
  - Barriers to getting information in a risk assessment



# Definitions of Family Violence

<b>Intimidation</b>	Smashing things Destroying possessions Putting a fist through the wall Handling guns or other weapons in the presence of the victim Using intimidating body language such as angry looks, raised voice Questioning the victim in a hostile way Recklessly driving a vehicle with the victim in the car Harassing the victim by making persistent phone calls, sending text messages or emails, following her, or loitering near her home or workplace	<b>Emotional abuse</b>	Any behaviour that deliberately undermines the victim's confidence (for example, that leads her to believe she is stupid, a 'bad mother' useless, or even crazy or insane) Acts that humiliate, degrade and demean the victim Threatening to harm the victim, her friend or family member; to take her children; or to commit suicide Silence and withdrawal as a means to abuse Threatening to report the victim to authorities such as Centrelink or Immigration
<b>Verbal abuse</b>	Screaming, shouting, making put-downs, name-calling Using sarcasm Ridiculing the victim in public or private	<b>Sexual abuse</b>	Rape (which includes being forced to perform unwanted sexual acts, or to have sex with others) Being pressured to agree to sex Unwanted touching of sexual or private parts Causing injury to the victim's sexual organs
<b>Physical abuse</b>	Showing lack of consideration for the victim's physical comfort or safety (such as dangerous driving) Pushing, shoving, hitting, slapping, choking, hair-pulling, punching or using weapons Destroying possessions (Note: acts are physically abusive even if they do not result in physical injury)	<b>Controlling behaviours</b>	Dictating what the victim does, who she sees and talks to, or where she goes Keeping the victim from making friends, talking to her family, or having money of her own Preventing the victim from going to work Not allowing the victim to express her own feelings or thoughts Not allowing the victim any privacy Forcing the victim to go without food or water
<b>Economic abuse</b>	Denying the victim access to money, including her own Demanding that the family live on inadequate resources Incurring debt in the victim's name Making significant financial decisions without consulting the victim Selling the victim's possessions (Note: these can be contributing factors for women becoming 'trapped' in violent situations)	<b>Spiritual abuse</b>	Ridiculing or putting down the victim's beliefs and culture Preventing the victim from belonging to or taking part in a group that is important to her spiritual beliefs, or practising her religion
<b>Social abuse</b>	Isolating the victim from her social networks and supports, either by preventing her from having contact with her family or friends or by verbally or physically abusing her in public or in front of others Continually putting friends and family down so the victim is slowly disconnected from her support network Preventing the victim from having contact with people who speak her language and/or share her culture	<b>Stalking</b>	Loitering around places the victim is known to frequent, watching her, following her, making persistent telephone calls and sending mail including unwanted love letters, cards and gifts  (Note: stalking is a criminal offence. Under the stalking legislation, more than one type of behaviour has to occur, or the same type of behaviour has to occur on more than one occasion. Stalking can occur before or after separation.)
		<b>Spousal homicide</b>	The death of the victim directly attributed to family violence

# Perpetrator behaviour



Deluth Model

# Perpetrator behaviour

From an Aboriginal perspective, the drivers of family violence are located in the history and impacts of colonisation, structural inequalities, such as:

- Dispossession of land and traditional culture
- Breakdown of community kinship systems and lore
- Racism and marginalisation
- Economic exclusion and entrenched poverty
- Alcohol and other drug abuse
- The effects of initialisation and child removal policies
- Inherited grief and trauma
- Loss of traditional roles and status leading to higher rates of male perpetrators
- Poor parenting practices



# Understanding evidence-based risk factors

Effective risk assessment in terms of family violence relies on the professional or assessor:

- Having the knowledge and ability to effectively undertake the assessment
- having a sound understanding of the theory of risk generally and of the specific risk indicators inherent in family violence
  - acknowledging that some victims are often better predictors of their own level of risk than any risk assessment tool yet developed but many high profile cases highlight an underestimated level of risk
  - Evidence based risk factors are only known in intimate partner relationships not in other forms of FV. This knowledge is evolving as we are more aware of FV and its impact in recent years.
  - Aboriginal services also need to consider how we can add to that evidence base
- Note - Evidence based risk factors have been developed out of intimate partner family violence.



# Protective Factors

- VACCA believes that it is important to understand each families risk in context of their individual circumstances. An important part of this can be achieved by identify any protective factors that might mitigate current or future risk of further fv.
- Workers should take each protective factor into account when conducting a risk assessment and understand how the victim believes that this can contribute to protect them and their family.
- VACCA believe that Culture and Kinship are protective factors for Aboriginal families, and this a point of difference in our assessments compared to mainstream. We talk with the family members about the ways in which culture and family keep them safe.
- Standard protective factors might include; How does work, schools, support services, physical locations, family, friends, sporting activities, money protect the family from ongoing violence?



# Red flags

**RISK FACTORS:** Victims who are experiencing any of the following are at increased risk of being killed or almost killed.

<p><b>Controlling behaviours</b></p> 	<p><b>Escalation of violence</b></p>	<p><b>Recent separation</b></p> 	<p><b>Stalking</b></p> 
<p><b>Jealous, obsessive behaviour</b></p>	 <p><b>Threats to kill victim</b></p>	<p><b>Strangulation or attempts to strangle</b></p>	 <p><b>Harms or threatens to harm or kill children</b></p>
 <p><b>Access to, or use of weapons</b></p>	<p><b>Perpetrator threatens or attempts to commit suicide</b></p>	 <p><b>Perpetrator drug or alcohol misuse</b></p>	<p><b>Sexual assault</b></p>
 <p><b>Threats to harm or kill pets</b></p>	<p><b>Perpetrator unemployment</b></p>	 <p><b>Pregnancy/new birth</b></p>	<p>Source: Victoria, Department of Human Services (issuing body) 2012, <i>Family violence risk assessment and risk management framework and practice guides 1-3</i>, Second edition, Melbourne, Australia, Victorian Government, Department of Human Services.</p>



# IDENTIFYING RISK FACTORS/INDICATORS

## For perpetrators:

- A history of violent behaviour
- A recent separation
- Escalation – increase in severity and/or frequency
- Financial difficulties
- Depression/mental health issues
- Unemployment
- Drug and Alcohol misuse
- Obsessive behaviour towards victim
- Controlling behaviour towards victim – what to wear, who to see and use of car eg.
- Has ever harmed or threatened to kill pets or other animals Has ever threatened to commit suicide
- Stalking of the victim Sexual assault of the victim
- Previous or current breach of intervention order
- Use of a weapon in a most recent event or access to weapons
- Has ever harmed or threatened to harm the victim or children



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# IDENTIFYING RISK FACTORS/INDICATORS

## For victim:

- Pregnancy/new birth
- Depression/mental health issue
- Drug and/or alcohol misuse/abuse
- Has ever verbalised or had suicidal ideas or tried to commit suicide
- Isolation
- -Poor financial resources



# IDENTIFYING RISK FACTORS/INDICATORS

## For children:

**Behaviours** – they can act out, over-react, be hostile, impulsive, aggressive or defiant. They can also withdraw or run away. This can all be normal for children who have been traumatised by family or domestic violence.

**Development** – normal development can be impaired. They can look like they are regressing or acting younger than their age.

**Relationships** – they may avoid closeness and push people away. Children may also attach to peers or adults who may be unsafe for them, to try to develop an alternative secure base, if home feels insecure.

**Emotions** – children often feel fearful, stressed, depressed, angry, anxious or ashamed. Emotional security is the foundation of healthy relationships later in life.

**Learning** – they may not be able to concentrate at school because they are constantly on the lookout for danger. This can be subconscious. Detentions, missed school and frequent changes of schools can also affect learning.

**Cognitions** – children may have low self-esteem, and think negatively about themselves or people around them. (For example, they may think, 'everyone hates me'.)

**Physical health** – a range of illnesses may be related to domestic and family violence. Headaches, stomach aches, stress reactions (for example rashes or immune system related illnesses) and sleep disturbances (for example nightmares, insomnia or bedwetting) are common.



# IDENTIFYING RISK FACTORS/INDICATORS

**Some examples of risk factors that VACCA acknowledge for children include:**

- Who has care of the child?
- Is the child in danger of immediate physical harm? (if so we follow appropriate action such as emergency services and/or child protection services)
- If the child has a safe family environment to return to?
- What is the child's relationship to the perpetrator?
- If there is a Court order in place, is the child listed on the order and what are the conditions (ie, will the child continue to have unsupervised contact with a perpetrator at any time).
- Has the child previously witnessed or directly experienced fv?
- If the child is unborn and the mother is at risk of physical violence?
- Does the child have a disability?
  - Does the child have injuries that have not been attended to?
  - Does the child have protective factors and a safety plan?



# Barriers to getting information in a risk assessment

- Shame is a barrier which perpetrates family violence by victims not accessing services
- Staff capacity to deal with the situation. If the client doesn't have the trust/confidence in the worker clients won't share their information.
- The worker is someone that is connected to or their perpetrator to, even a distant/minor connection.
- Some Aboriginal people may have fear of the security of their information.
- Fear of children being removed
- They may not feel safe to share the information
- They may have lack of faith in FV system as an Aboriginal person



# Addressing barriers: providing a culturally safe space

Does your service provide support for clients to get to your service via cab charges/public transport?

Environment – Is the space culturally appropriate? Can the community member meet in a space where their privacy is considered?

Is financial assistance available for key items ?

Food and a cuppa – A simple gesture of food and a cuppa are a great engagement tool.

Children – Is it appropriate for the children to be in the room?  
Are the staff completing the assessment confident and trained in assessment?



# Collusion within the Aboriginal community

Collusion is an agreement where two or more people act together in a misleading way and often occurs when perpetrators attempts to avoid responsibility for their behaviour are reinforced by others.

Collusion is an issue because:

- It allows the perpetrator to deny, minimise, justify, blame others or mutualise their violent behaviour
- Perpetrators can be very persuasive in their attempts to avoid responsibility for their use of violence
- Collusion only occurs when others support their narrative

Collusion can occur when:

- There is a shared experience of avoiding responsibility
- ‘Mateship’ is used to support another person’s plight
- There are shared beliefs about women and women’s social roles that reinforce the use of gendered violence; likewise, there can be shared beliefs about the roles of men that reinforce male privilege and male entitlement



# REFLECTIVE POINT

How would you rate yourself in the knowledge area of risk assessment & how will you build your knowledge in this space?



# 3. Completing risk assessments with Indigenous clients



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# What caseworkers need to consider important in risk assessment

- Avoid using language and behavior that may cause shame.
- Are genuine in their interest in the child and their family and make this evident.
- Create time for a yarn.
- Show warmth in the conversations you have
- Use straight talk – be honest, open and transparent.
- Respect cultural norms and values and model this through your conduct, particularly in relation to the roles and responsibilities of family and Elders, men and women's business.



# What Aboriginal caseworkers see as important in risk assessment

- Acknowledge that sharing information is a two way process and share something about yourself.
- Ensures the actual assessment is more like a conversation than a grilling or survey.
- Is aware of the information needed in the assessment but may not write any information or little information but focusing on being more present to the client.



# Cultural considerations when conducting an assessment

- This assessment needs to be more like a conversation and less like a survey
- Avoid technical language and ask questions in a non intrusive way
- Creating a non-formal environment will help an Aboriginal client feel at ease
- The Aboriginal client may not understand the question you are asking, consider rephrasing the question
- Just because the Aboriginal client says yes, it doesn't mean they mean yes
- Eye contact may not always happen, especially if the client feels embarrassed/shame by the question or the situation.
- Be aware that literacy levels will vary from client to client
- Not all clients are auditory based and sometimes visual or other methods or tools will need to be used
  
- Please note the assessment questions that we are about to review are from mainstream models and we acknowledge that all of the above would need to be considered in asking these questions.



# Risk Assessment Questions

## Who is making you feel unsafe or afraid?

*(Collect demographic information about person using family violence, i.e. name, age, ethnicity)*

## About the person using family violence

1. In the past 12 months have they controlled most or all of your daily activities? (e.g. tries to keep you from seeing your friends or family, insists on knowing where you are at all times, stops you working or seeking health care or having access to money)
2. Has any physical violence increased in severity or frequency in the last year?
3. Have they ever:
  - a) seriously harmed you?
  - b) assaulted you when you were pregnant?
  - c) threatened to kill you?
  - d) threatened or used a weapon against you?
  - e) tried to choke or strangle you?
  - f) forced you to have sex or participate in sexual acts when you did not wish to do so?

## About you?

4. Do you believe they are capable of killing or seriously harming you?
5. Do you believe they are capable of killing or seriously harming children or other family members?
6. Have they ever threatened to harm the children?
7. Have they ever harmed your children?

## About imminence

8. Have you recently separated from your partner? *(IPV only)*



# Other questions that you can ask...

*Can you tell me more about the last time he hurt you?*

*Where and when did it occur?*

*Has it happened before this? How often?*

*How long has this been going on?*

*How does his violence affect you and make you feel? Often women who experience family violence become anxious and stressed because of the violence. Is this how you feel sometimes?*

*What do you do to manage these feelings?*

*Has his behaviour changed or got worse now that you are pregnant / have a new baby?*

*Does he get jealous about other relationships with other people?*

*What is it exactly that he does that hurts/scares/controls you?*

*Does he have access to weapons? Has he threatened or used any of these to harm you?*

*Has he ever stalked you or is he stalking you at the moment?*

*Does he get depressed about (name what) or about his life in general?*

*What is the scariest thing that he has done to you (or pets or others)?*

*Do you have anyone you can contact on a regular basis, who supports you, and who you trust to talk to about your situation?*



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# WHAT QUESTIONS CAN YOU ASK?

## Questions for adult experiencing FV about children:

1. Has your child/children been exposed to or participated in violence?
2. Are you concerned that other people in the community or other family members will find out what is occurring?
3. Are you concerned about further violence from other family members of the community?
4. Are you able to get support from your family and community?
5. Have you ever been forced to go or stay somewhere you didn't want to be?
6. Have your children had to telephone for emergency assistance?
7. Have your children been removed from parental care against their will?
8. Have your children witnessed either parent being arrested?
9. Have your children been asked to monitor you by the other parent?
10. Have your children had contact with the perpetrator post separation and is it supervised?
11. Has Child protection ever been involved with your family or other children in the home?

## Questions for Children?

1. Has anyone in your family done something that made you feel unsafe or afraid?
2. Are you scared of either of your parents or any other adult in the home?
3. Have you ever been physically hurt by either of your parents/caregivers?
4. Have you ever tried to stop your parents/caregivers from fighting?
5. Has your parent said bad things to you about your other parent?
6. Have you ever had to protect or be protected by a sibling or other child in the home?

## Questions for people over the age of 65:

1. Are you dependent on them to meet your daily needs?
2. Are you dependent on them to meet your financial needs?
3. Have you been threatened to relocate you or make you stay somewhere you did not want to go?
4. Are you socially isolated?
5. Has anyone in your family done something that made you feel unsafe or afraid?

# Calculating/weighting risk based on information collected

Calculating/weighting risk is based on:

- The victims own assessment
- Additional information
- Protective factors present
- Level of risk including vulnerabilities & high risk indicators
- What we can put in place to reduce the risk & what we can't put in place to reduce the risk
- Professional judgement based on all of the above



# CASE STUDY

- How many risk indicators did you identify in the case study?

-What did you think the worker could have done differently in the risk assessment with the Aboriginal client?



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*For more information about VACCA please visit our website:*

[WWW.VACCA.ORG](http://WWW.VACCA.ORG)



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