

Safety Action Meeting Manual



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Definitions

ADVO Apprehended Domestic Violence Order

CALD Culturally and linguistically diverse

Central Referral Point An electronic platform hosted by Victims Services NSW that facilitates referral of domestic violence victims to support services

Delivery Board Domestic and Family Violence Reforms Delivery Board, the executive body responsible for overseeing implementation of the NSW Government Domestic and Family Violence Framework for Reform

DVSAT Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool. The DVSAT has been developed to help service providers consistently and accurately identify the level of threat to domestic violence victims. There are two versions of the DVSAT – one for NSW Police Force and one for all other service providers

Domestic violence Any behaviour, in an intimate or family relationship, which is violent, threatening, coercive or controlling, causing a person to live in fear. It is usually manifested as part of a pattern of controlling or coercive behaviour. Domestic violence may include physical violence, sexual assault, emotional or psychological abuse including verbal abuse and threats of violence, economic abuse, stalking and harassment

FACS Department of Family and Community Services

Family relationship People who are related to one another through blood, marriage or de facto partnerships, adoption and fostering relationships, sibling and extended family relationships. Family relationships include the full range of kinship ties in Aboriginal communities, extended family relationships, and constructs of family within lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer 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 if their relationships exhibit family-like dynamics

Intimate relationship	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
<i>It Stops Here: Safer Pathway</i>	A new model of service delivery for domestic violence victims developed as part of the NSW Government Domestic and Family Violence Framework for Reform, including the Central Referral Point, Local Coordination Points and Safety Action Meetings
LAC	NSW Police Force Local Area Command
Local Coordination Point	One of a network of local services providing victims of domestic violence with threat assessment, case coordination and referral to a Safety Action Meeting if necessary. Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services (WDVCASs) host Local Coordination Points for women victims, and Victims Services NSW hosts a Local Coordination Point for male victims
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer
Occasional Safety Action Meeting attendee	A service provider that attends a Safety Action Meeting on an occasional basis, for the discussion of a particular victim only
Police	NSW Police Force
Protocol	Domestic Violence Information Sharing Protocol
Reforms	NSW Government Domestic and Family Violence Framework for Reform
Reforms Implementation Working Group	The group of key government agencies responsible for implementing the <i>It Stops Here: Safer Pathway</i> service delivery model
RDVC	NSW Police Force Regional Domestic Violence Coordinator
Regional domestic and family violence forums	Regional bodies comprising representatives of key government and non-government service providers established to monitor and support all elements of the Reforms
Safety Action Meeting	A regular meeting of local service providers that aims to prevent or lessen serious threats to the safety of domestic violence victims through targeted information sharing
Safety Action Meeting Coordinator	The Local Coordination Point worker responsible for organising Safety Action Meetings in the local area, including circulating agendas and recording actions arising from meetings

Safety Action Meeting member	A regular attendee of Safety Action Meetings in a local area
Safety Action Plan	A list of targeted, time-specific actions developed at a Safety Action Meeting to prevent or lessen a serious threat to the life, health or safety of a domestic violence victim and their children. Safety Action Plans include actions for service providers, not victims
Service provider	A government agency or non-government organisation that provides a service to domestic violence victims or perpetrators. Service providers include specialist domestic violence services (e.g. a domestic violence counselling service) and generalist services (e.g. a medical centre or school)
Warm referral	A referral made by a service provider on behalf of a victim. Warm referrals involve contacting a service provider for a victim, rather than providing the victim with information and recommending that they contact the service provider directly. Warm referrals also involves a certain amount of follow-up, in which the initial service provider checks to make sure that the referral has been successful and the victim is receiving the required support from the service provider to which they have been referred
WDVCAS	Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service

Foreword

Safety Action Meetings are being implemented across the state as part of the NSW Government Domestic and Family Violence Framework for Reform (the Reforms).

Domestic violence affects people from all backgrounds and communities. It requires an integrated, collaborative response from government and non-government service providers.

Research has shown that a lack of information sharing between service providers can prevent victims from receiving the most effective and timely support possible and is a contributing factor in domestic violence-related deaths.

Safety Action Meetings aim to address this by facilitating information sharing between service providers in order to prevent or lessen serious threats to the life, health or safety of domestic violence victims and their children.

This manual provides a guide to the purpose and operation of Safety Action Meetings, and the roles and responsibilities of Safety Action Meeting members.

Service providers are encouraged to read the manual in conjunction with the Domestic Violence Information Sharing Protocol (the Protocol). The Protocol provides guidance about sharing information in domestic violence cases under Part 13A of the *Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007*.

The manual has been developed by Legal Aid NSW in collaboration with key government agencies, including the Department of Justice, NSW Police Force and Women NSW.

Legal Aid NSW extends its thanks to these partner agencies and the other members of the Domestic and Family Violence Reforms Delivery Board, including the Department of Family and Community Services, the Department of Education and Communities, NSW Health, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

The manual reflects a shared commitment to improving the response to domestic violence in NSW through increased information sharing and collaborative service provision.

Legal Aid NSW gratefully acknowledges the Office for Women, South Australia, as the original source of much of the material that has been adapted for this manual.

This manual is one of a suite of five reference documents developed as part of the Reforms. Service providers are encouraged to read the manual in conjunction with the other documents, which include:

Domestic and Family Violence Reforms Overview

The Domestic and Family Violence Reforms Overview (the overview) explains the development of the Reforms. The overview gives a summary of the critical findings and recommendations of three parliamentary inquiries that made it clear NSW had to change the way it responded to domestic and family violence. The overview also includes the common definition of domestic and family violence.

Domestic Violence Information Sharing Protocol

The Domestic Violence Information Sharing Protocol (the Protocol) explains information sharing allowed under Part 13A of the *Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007*. It sets out the procedures for service providers to share information, including consent and referral practices, and outlines their information management obligations. It also outlines procedures for access and amendment, the management of complaints, and a compliance framework.

Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool Guide

The Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool Guide (the guide) explains the new common threat assessment tool, the DVSAT. The tool is designed to help service providers consistently and accurately identify the level of threat to domestic violence victims.

Domestic Violence and Child Protection Intersection Guidelines

The Domestic Violence and Child Protection Intersection Guidelines (the guidelines) clarify the intersection between the domestic violence response system and the child protection system in the context of information sharing.

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

Safety Action Meetings are regular meetings of local service providers that aim to prevent or lessen serious threats to the safety of domestic violence victims and their children through targeted information sharing. Members share information to develop tailored, time-specific Safety Action Plans for victims at serious threat and their children.

Safety Action Meetings are chaired by a senior police officer and attended by key government and non-government service providers working with domestic violence victims and perpetrators in the local area.

This manual is designed to provide a clear guide to the purpose and operation of Safety Action Meetings, and the roles and responsibilities of Safety Action Meeting members. The manual reflects the current stage of the NSW Government Domestic and Family Violence Framework for Reform (Reforms) implementation process and will be updated over time.

The manual is an operational document designed to assist service providers in practice. It is not a legal document. Safety Action Meetings do not result in legally binding orders or documents. However the manual reflects legal requirements regarding information sharing in domestic violence cases set out in the Domestic Violence Information Sharing Protocol (the Protocol).

The examples provided in this manual are for illustration purposes only and are not an exhaustive representation of domestic violence situations or actions arising from Safety Action Meetings.

1.2 Terminology

Both women and men are victims of domestic violence and both women and men are perpetrators of domestic violence; however the majority of victims are women and the majority of perpetrators are men. This manual uses gendered language in recognition of the fact that women will form the majority of victims considered at Safety Action Meetings.

The manual refers to people who have allegedly perpetrated domestic violence as perpetrators. Use of this term does not necessarily mean that these persons have been convicted of a criminal offence or are subject to an Apprehended Domestic Violence Order (ADVO).

1.3 Aim and objectives

Safety Action Meetings aim to prevent or lessen serious threats to the life, health or safety of domestic violence victims and their children. By sharing information, members put together a comprehensive picture of each victim's situation and develop a Safety Action Plan based on this picture.

A Safety Action Plan is a list of actions that service providers can take to reduce the threat to a victim's safety. Safety Action Plans only include actions for service providers, not victims.

The guiding idea behind Safety Action Meetings is that, generally, no single service provider has a complete picture of a victim's situation, but all may have information or insights that are crucial to securing the victim's safety. By sharing information to build a comprehensive understanding of each victim's situation, Safety Action Meetings enable service providers to take more effective action.

The objectives of Safety Action Meetings are to:

- prevent domestic violence-related deaths, illness, injury and disability;
- prioritise responses to victims at serious threat and their children;
- reduce repeat victimisation;
- reduce re-offending by perpetrators;
- manage threats collaboratively across relevant service providers;
- improve service provider accountability for their response to victims, children and perpetrators; and
- increase the safety of staff working with victims and perpetrators.

Victims do not attend Safety Action Meetings; nor do perpetrators. This is because the meetings are designed for service providers to commit to actions to support victims and reduce the threat to their safety. The meetings are not case plan meetings; they do not result in a plan or document with which a victim must comply.

Benefits of Safety Action Meetings

- A comprehensive picture of a victim's situation, the threats to her safety and her own plans and desires is developed. This includes her choice to remain in the relationship or separate from the perpetrator; or to remain safely in her home or to move residence.
- Responses to victims at serious threat are prioritised and provided in a coordinated way.
- An integrated response to domestic violence is promoted, where all service providers are 'at the table', instead of the previously fragmented, 'silo' approach.
- Service providers working with victims or perpetrators are held to account for fulfilling their duties and any specific actions agreed at Safety Action Meetings.
- Collaborative and trusting working relationships between service providers are fostered, with benefits for victims of domestic violence generally.
- A shared understanding of domestic violence and indicators of threat is promoted.

1.4 Background

Safety Action Meetings are based on successful initiatives in the United Kingdom and South Australia. Evidence from these and other jurisdictions has shown that information sharing is vital to providing coordinated support to victims and to preventing domestic violence-related deaths.

For example, in South Australia an evaluation of Family Safety Meetings found that 62% of victims referred to a Family Safety Meeting were assessed as at lower risk as a result of being considered at a Family Safety Meeting.¹

Safety Action Meetings have been established in NSW as part of the whole-of-government Reforms. The Reforms aim to improve the NSW response to domestic violence.

A key component of the Reforms is a new model of service delivery for domestic violence victims, *It Stops Here: Safer Pathway*. Safety Action Meetings are one element of this model. The other elements are:

- A standardised tool for assessing the level of threat to victims, the Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool (DVSAT);
- A streamlined referral pathway for all victims via the Central Referral Point, an electronic platform that receives referrals for victims from NSW Police Force and allocates them to a Local Coordination Point based on their gender and postcode;

¹ *Family Safety Framework Final Evaluation Report*, Office of Crime Statistics and Research, South Australia, 2008.

- Consistent access to coordinated support via a network of Local Coordination Points, local services that provide victims with threat assessment, case coordination and referral to a Safety Action Meeting if necessary.

The *It Stops Here: Safer Pathway* service delivery model, including Local Coordination Points and Safety Action Meetings, is being rolled out across NSW in stages. It is currently only operational in Orange and Waverley Local Court catchment areas.

For more information about the DVSAT, refer to the DVSAT Guide.

2. Information sharing

2.1 Legal framework

Part 13A of the *Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007* allows service providers to share information for the purpose of providing victims with domestic violence support services, and for the purpose of preventing or lessening a serious threat to persons' life, health or safety.

In cases involving a child or young person, information can also be shared under Chapter 16A of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*.

The Protocol explains when and how information may be shared under Part 13A. Safety Action Meeting members must comply with the Protocol at Safety Action Meetings and in regard to any matter relating to a meeting.

For more information, refer to the Protocol.

2.2 Consent

Part 13A allows service providers to share information at Safety Action Meetings for the purpose of preventing or lessening a serious threat to a person's safety. This includes information about a victim or her children, the perpetrator or another person.

It is best practice to seek a victim's consent before sharing their information with another service provider, including at or in relation to a Safety Action Meeting.

However, in certain limited circumstances Part 13A allows service providers to share information without a victim's consent where it is necessary to prevent or lessen a serious threat to their safety, or the safety of their children or other persons.

For more information refer to Chapter 4 and the Protocol.

2.3 Information sharing at Safety Action Meetings

Information sharing at Safety Action Meetings is limited to that which is necessary to prevent or lessen a serious threat to the life, health or safety of victims, their children or other persons.

Safety Action Meeting members may only share accurate information that is relevant to the current issue of the safety of a victim and her children, and the actions needed to prevent or lessen that threat.

For example, information relating to an individual's medical condition, past criminal history, or past medical history need not be shared unless it is directly relevant to the current threat posed to a victim's safety and the actions necessary to prevent or lessen that threat.

Each member is responsible for decisions about what information it considers reasonably necessary to share. Information shared may include, but is not limited to, details of the victim, perpetrator, children and/or other persons; a service provider's interaction with the victim, perpetrator and/or children; previous incidents of domestic violence; relevant court or child protection proceedings; and any recognised domestic violence risk indicators.

Example – Only sharing information that is relevant to the current threat to a victim's safety

Shannon is a repeat victim of domestic violence, first perpetrated by her father and then later by two abusive partners. Anna is a manager who attends the local Safety Action Meeting on behalf of a family support service that has worked with Shannon over a number of years.

Recently, Shannon was hospitalised following a serious assault at the hands of her current partner Barry and referred to the Safety Action Meeting. At the meeting, Anna advises the other members about her service's recent engagement with Shannon and actions they can take to reduce the current threat to her safety. Anna mentions that Shannon is a long-term victim of domestic violence but does not go into detail about her past abusive relationships or medical history.

2.4 How information shared at a Safety Action Meeting may be used

Information obtained at a Safety Action Meeting may only be used for the purpose of preventing or lessening a serious domestic violence threat to a victim, her children or other persons.

A service provider may receive information at a Safety Action Meeting about a victim or a perpetrator that potentially impacts upon a service it is providing to that victim or perpetrator, unrelated to domestic violence. The service provider cannot use the information received as evidence in respect of the unrelated matter. This is because the information was received by the service provider under the Protocol for a specific purpose only. Any service provider who shares information for an unrelated purpose is in breach of the Protocol.

For example, information shared at a Safety Action Meeting cannot be used for representation purposes in a civil or criminal matter.

There are two limited exceptions in which information shared at a Safety Action meeting may be used for other purposes:

1. The Police have a legal obligation to protect persons and prevent offending, and to take action where a crime has been or is about to be committed. For this reason, the Police may on occasion be required to take action as a result of information shared at a Safety Action Meeting (e.g. to investigate an alleged breach of an ADVO). However, any action taken will consider the overall situation, the victim's needs, and the threat to her life, health or safety.

2. Service providers who are mandatory reporters under the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* have obligations under that Act. Where information shared at a Safety Action Meeting indicates that a child or young person is at risk of significant harm due to abuse or neglect, the Keep Them Safe Mandatory Reporter Guide should be completed. If the Mandatory Reporter Guide indicates that it is necessary, a report to the Child Protection Helpline must be made.

Safety Action Meetings do not replace or change these obligations. For more information about child protection refer to Chapter 6.

Similarly, if the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) forms the opinion, on reasonable grounds, that a child or young person is in need of care and protection, it may take whatever action is necessary to safeguard or promote the safety, welfare and well-being of that child or young person.

It is important to note that Safety Action Meetings enable members to build a comprehensive understanding of each victim's situation, her needs and the threats to her safety. If a service provider, such as FACS, needs to take action in regards to child protection, the information shared at a Safety Action Meeting will help the agency to do so in an appropriate way.

For more information about child protection refer to Chapter 6.

Example – Only using information gained at a meeting for the purpose of reducing a serious threat to a victim's safety

Peter is a manager who attends the local Safety Action Meeting on behalf of a registered community housing provider contracted by the Department of Family and Community Services. One of the victims on the meeting agenda, Polly, lives in a social housing property managed by Peter's community housing provider. Under her lease agreement Polly is not allowed to have anyone residing with her, but at the meeting Peter learns that Polly's ex-partner and his brother have returned to the house. After the meeting Peter does not take action to penalise Polly for breaching the terms of her lease or for not declaring additional household income. Peter acknowledges Polly's complicated situation and knows that he became aware of the information for one purpose only – to prevent or lessen the serious threat to her safety.

Example – Only using information gained at a meeting for the purpose of reducing a serious threat to a victim’s safety

Tracy is a social worker who attends the local Safety Action Meeting on behalf of the mental health clinic at a local hospital. One of the victims on the meeting agenda, Georgina, attended the clinic for help with her schizophrenia. At the meeting, Tracy learns that Georgina has started using drugs which may adversely interact with her schizophrenia medication, putting her at greater risk of harm.

At Georgina’s next clinic appointment, Tracy takes care to speak with Georgina fully about her situation and asks about any factors which may impact upon her safety. Georgina discloses her recent drug use and Tracy makes arrangements for her medication to be adjusted. Tracy also speaks with Georgina about drug addiction and explains the support on offer from various service providers. In this situation, Tracy has used information gained at a Safety Action Meeting to reduce a serious threat to Georgina’s safety, but in such a way that does not negatively affect Georgina’s engagement with the clinic.

2.5 Information management

Information and records relating to Safety Action Meetings must be managed and stored in accordance with the Protocol.

The Safety Action Meeting Coordinator is responsible for ensuring that Safety Action Meeting agendas, records and any relevant documentation are securely stored with other Local Coordination Point records in accordance with the Protocol.

The Coordinator should take into account any conflicts disclosed by members when circulating Safety Action Meeting records (see section 4.6.3. for more detail).

It is important to note that Safety Action Meeting agendas and records may be subpoenaed.

For more information, refer to the Protocol.

3. Roles and responsibilities

3.1 Membership

3.1.1 Overview

Service providers nominate a representative as their Safety Action Meeting member. This person must be in a senior role with authority to commit to actions, prioritise matters and allocate resources on behalf of their service provider. Members must be able to contribute to the development of a Safety Action Plan at the meeting without having to take decisions or proposals back to their service provider for approval. This ensures that Safety Action Plans can be developed and implemented quickly to prevent or lessen serious threats to victims' safety.

3.1.2 Regular members

Safety Action Meetings are chaired by a senior police officer and organised by the Safety Action Meeting Coordinator, who works for the Local Coordination Point.

In addition to these service providers, the following government agencies regularly attend Safety Action Meetings in each local area:

- NSW Health, including representation from drug and alcohol services and mental health services where possible;
- Department of Family and Community Services, including officers able to speak about child protection and housing assistance;
- Department of Education and Communities; and
- Corrective Services NSW.

These agencies are generally standing members of Safety Action Meetings.

Non-government service providers may become regular Safety Action Meeting members as decided locally. The Safety Action Meeting Chair and the Coordinator identify these members in consultation with relevant stakeholders. The Chair, in consultation with the Coordinator and government agency members, has final decision-making authority regarding non-government membership of the Safety Action Meeting in their local area.

Non-government services that may be identified as Safety Action Meeting members include specialist domestic violence support, accommodation, family support, case management, counselling, and community health service providers. Capacity to contribute effectively to the development of Safety Action Plans for a broad range of victims is the determining factor when considering which non-government services to include as members.

Together, the government agencies and identified non-government service providers form the regular membership of Safety Action Meetings.

It is important that all members attend every Safety Action Meeting in their area. This enables effective and trusting working relationships to develop between members, and ensures that a shared understanding of the purpose of the meetings is maintained. Experience in other jurisdictions has shown that the actions developed at meetings become more collaborative over time, as members grow to understand each other's roles and responsibilities and see the benefits to their service provider of membership.

Regular members must sign a confidentiality agreement and disclose any conflicts at the beginning of each Safety Action Meeting (see Chapter 4 for more detail).

Victims Services NSW will attend, either in person or by teleconference, if a male victim is listed on the agenda. As the Local Coordination Point for male victims, Victims Services is responsible for providing or arranging case coordination for these victims.

Example – Identifying non-government Safety Action Meeting members

Trisha is the Safety Action Meeting Coordinator in a particular town. When determining which local non-government service providers to ask to join the Safety Action Meeting as members, Trisha consults with the Chair and government members of the meeting. She also speaks to a range of local services in the town.

After consultation, Trisha and the Chair ask the local women's crisis accommodation service and a case management service to become Safety Action Meeting members. This is because the two services work with the majority of domestic violence victims in the town and will therefore be able to bring relevant information to meetings and commit to useful actions at meetings.

3.1.3 Occasional attendees

Other service providers may be invited to attend a Safety Action Meeting on an occasional basis to assist with the development of a Safety Action Plan for a particular victim.

For instance, where a victim is known to be working closely with a service that is not a member of a Safety Action Meeting and the victim is not engaged with any of the Safety Action Meeting members, that service may be invited to attend a meeting solely for the discussion of that victim. The Local Coordination Point should ask each victim if they are working closely with a particular service provider. If this is the case, the Safety Action Meeting Coordinator should consider whether it would be beneficial to ask the service provider to attend the meeting for the discussion of that particular victim.

Similarly, if a service provider that is not a regular member refers a victim to a Safety Action Meeting, the Coordinator should consider inviting the service provider to attend the meeting on a one-off basis, as they may have the most up-to-date information about the victim.

Occasional attendees must sign a confidentiality agreement and disclose any conflicts before participating in a Safety Action Meeting (see sections Chapter 4 for more detail).

Example – Occasional Safety Action Meeting attendees

A Sydney suburb has a small Sudanese community. The Safety Action Meeting in the area does not often have Sudanese victims on the agenda, and no specific Sudanese service provider attends the meeting regularly.

On the rare occasion when a Sudanese victim is listed on the agenda, the Safety Action Meeting Coordinator invites a local Sudanese women's service to attend the meeting for the discussion of the Sudanese victim, after first consulting with the victim about whether this would be appropriate.

3.1.4 Proxies and changes to membership

If a member cannot attend a Safety Action Meeting they must send a proxy with the authority to make decisions and commit to actions on behalf of their service provider. A proxy member must be fully apprised of the matters on the agenda and have access to the relevant papers in order to prepare for the meeting.

Where a service provider changes its nominated Safety Action Meeting representative, it is responsible for training the new member in Safety Action Meeting responsibilities and briefing the new member regarding current cases.

If a member advises that their service provider can no longer attend Safety Action Meetings on a regular basis, the Safety Action Meeting Chair and Coordinator will identify an appropriate replacement service provider in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

If a member consistently fails to comply with this manual, the Safety Action Meeting Chair may terminate that member's participation in meetings. The Chair may either request that the service provider in question identifies another member to attend the meetings, or identify an appropriate replacement service provider in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

3.2 Roles and responsibilities

3.2.1 NSW Police Force

Safety Action Meetings are chaired by a senior police officer. The Chair:

- Attends each meeting;
- Brings all relevant information about victims on the agenda held by Police to the meeting;
- Chairs the meeting in accordance with the standard agenda (Appendix A);
- Reads out the confidentiality agreement at the beginning of each meeting and ensures all members sign the agreement, including the Chair;
- Ensures all members disclose any relevant conflicts at the beginning of each meeting, including the Chair;

- Reviews actions agreed at the previous meeting and notes any outstanding actions;
- Contributes to the development of a Safety Action Plan for each victim on the agenda, whether or not Police have previously been involved with the victim, her children or the perpetrator;
- Summarises actions at the end of each meeting to ensure all members understand the actions agreed upon and the timeframes for their completion; and
- Completes any actions arising from the meeting that relate to Police.

3.2.2 Local Coordination Point

Safety Action Meetings are organised by the Safety Action Meeting Coordinator, who works for the Local Coordination Point. The Coordinator:

- Collates referrals for victims at serious threat sent to the Local Coordination Point and places them on the agenda for the next meeting;
- Distributes the agenda to all members at least **three business days** prior to the meeting via secure email so that members can carry out information searches within their service providers;
- Attends each meeting;
- Brings all relevant information about victims on the agenda held by the Local Coordination Point to the meeting;
- Advises members about whether victims on the agenda have consented to being considered at the meeting;
- Signs a confidentiality agreement at the beginning of each meeting;
- Declares any conflicts at the beginning of each meeting;
- Records actions agreed at the meeting and distributes these records to members within **one business day** of the meeting (Appendix B);
- Contributes to the development of a Safety Action Plan for each victim, whether or not the Local Coordination Point has previously been involved with the victim or her children;
- Completes any actions arising from a Safety Action Meeting that relate to the Local Coordination Point; and
- Liaises with victims following a Safety Action Meeting to advise them of the outcome where appropriate and to ensure that victims are receiving adequate support.

The Local Coordination Point receives all Police referrals for female domestic violence victims in the local area. The Local Coordination Point provides victims with coordinated support, except where they are already receiving case management from or working closely with another service provider.

For this reason, the Safety Action Meeting Coordinator can generally act as a contact point between victims and Safety Action Meetings. The Coordinator will be able to bring up-to-date information about the victim and her perception of the threat to her safety to the meeting and advise the victim of the outcomes of the meeting.

Where another service provider is working closely with a victim, that service provider may act as a contact point between the victim and Safety Action Meetings.

The Safety Action Meeting Coordinator or service provider liaising with a victim about the meeting should work to ensure that actions agreed at the meeting take into account the victim's needs, wishes and plans.

The Safety Action Meeting Coordinator is also responsible for ensuring that Safety Action Meeting agendas, records and any relevant documentation are securely stored with other Local Coordination Point records in accordance with the Protocol.

3.2.3 Other regular members

Safety Action Meetings are also attended by senior representatives from service providers that work with domestic violence victims, perpetrators and/or their children (see section 3.1.2. above). The members:

- Keep their respective service providers advised of the purpose and progress of Safety Action Meetings;
- Coordinate an information search regarding victims at serious threat, their children and/or associated perpetrators upon receiving the agenda for a forthcoming Safety Action Meeting;
- Attend each Safety Action Meeting (or provide a proxy as required), whether or not the service provider they represent has a prior history of involvement with some or all of the victims on the agenda;
- Bring all relevant information about victims on the agenda, their children and/or associated perpetrators held by their service provider to each Safety Action Meeting (including information held by a Child Wellbeing Unit if relevant);
- Sign a confidentiality agreement at the beginning of each Safety Action Meeting;
- Disclose any conflicts at the beginning of each Safety Action Meeting;
- Contribute to the development of a Safety Action Plan for each victim on the agenda, whether or not their service provider has previously been involved with the victim, her children and/or associated perpetrators; and
- Complete any actions arising from a Safety Action Meeting that relate to their service provider.

3.2.4 Code of conduct

All Safety Action Meeting members must:

- Possess a sound understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence and its disproportionate impact upon women;
- Acknowledge that the safety of victims and their children is paramount;
- Commit to the shared goal of preventing or reducing serious threats to the safety of victims;
- Participate in discussion in a respectful and collaborative manner;
- Understand and comply with the *Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007* and the Protocol; and
- Understand and comply with the Charter of Victims' Rights and the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*.

Discussion at meetings must respect victims' dignity and agency over their own lives. Members should recognise the impact of domestic violence upon victims and avoid making judgements about victims' choices. All members are responsible for ensuring that communication at Safety Action Meetings is respectful.

Members should also acknowledge that disagreement is a healthy part of working collaboratively, and strive to resolve differences of opinion appropriately.

3.2.5 Responsibility for actions arising from a Safety Action Meeting

The responsibility to progress an action arising from a Safety Action Meeting rests with the relevant service provider; it does not become the responsibility of the Safety Action Meeting group, the Coordinator or the Chair.

Safety Action Meeting members cannot be directed to commit to a certain action by other members, the Chair or the Coordinator. Members are responsible for committing to and undertaking actions in regard to their own service providers only.

Safety Action Meetings do not replace or change service providers' normal functions and responsibilities in relation to domestic violence victims and perpetrators. The meetings are designed to complement and support these functions.

At the first Safety Action Meeting held in an area, members should provide a brief overview of the functions of their service provider. This will help the group to form an accurate picture of the responsibilities of each member and assist the group to develop feasible actions.

3.3 Meeting frequency and location

3.3.1 Frequency

Safety Action Meetings are held regularly, usually **fortnightly**, in each local area. Safety Action Meetings are generally two hours in duration and it is expected that no more than six or seven victims can be considered at one meeting.

Experience from other jurisdictions has shown that fortnightly meetings are the most effective in providing a timely response to victims at serious threat without exceeding the capacity of service providers to attend on a regular basis.

Safety Action Meetings do not replace or change service providers' normal functions and responsibilities in relation to domestic violence victims and perpetrators.

Service providers that participate in Safety Action Meetings should provide victims and perpetrators with an appropriate response as soon as they engage with them, and should not wait until the next Safety Action Meeting to take action independently if possible.

Service providers must comply with their obligations regarding children and young people under the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*. Safety Action Meeting members should not wait until the next Safety Action Meeting to take appropriate action in line with these obligations if they have sufficient information to proceed independently.

In exceptional circumstances an emergency Safety Action Meeting may be held. These are only called if a victim is at serious and *imminent* threat, and it is critical that service providers share information in order to prevent or lessen this threat. Any Safety Action Meeting member can request an emergency meeting. Requests should be sent to the Safety Action Meeting Coordinator.

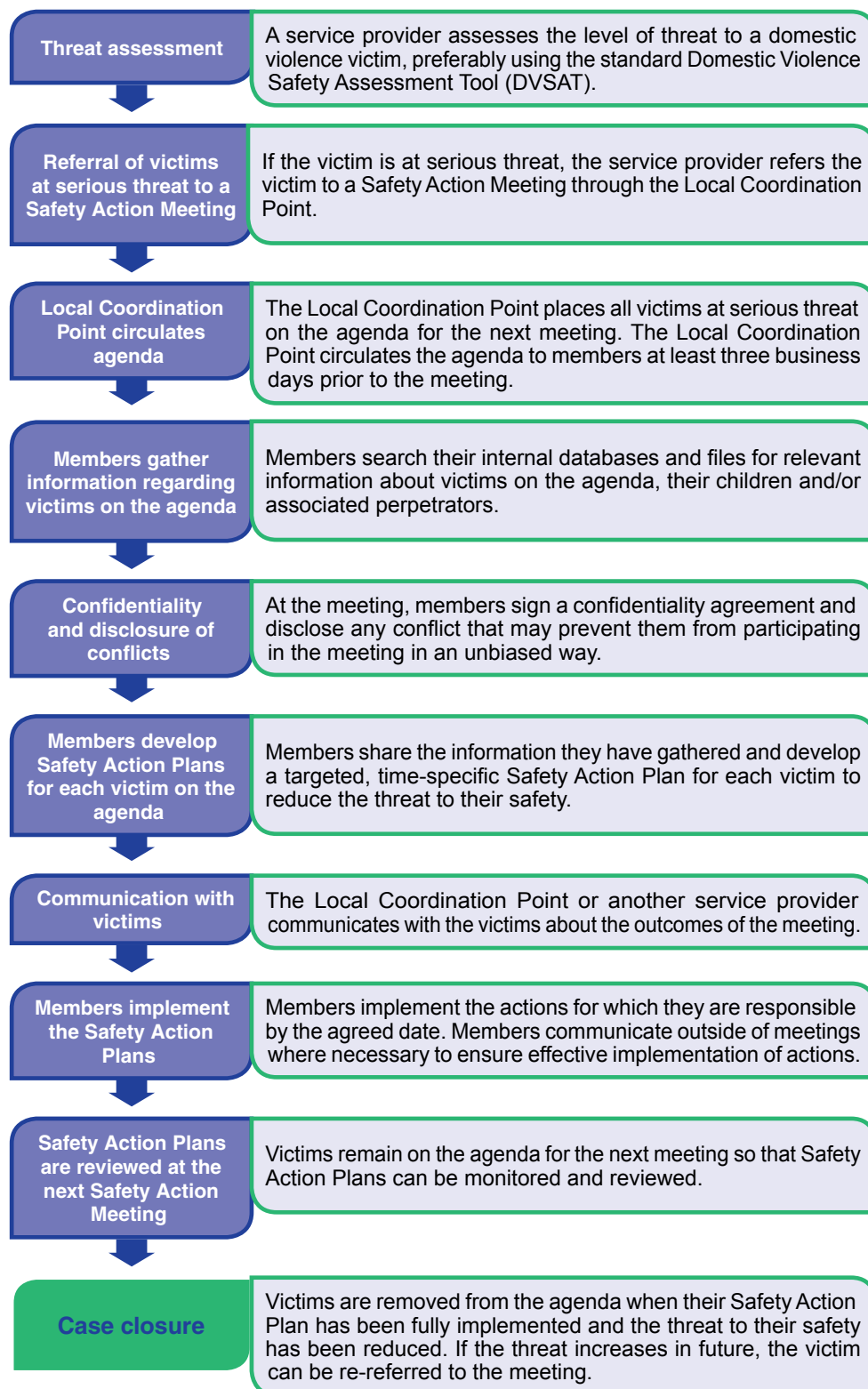
3.3.2 Location

Safety Action Meetings may be held in any suitable venue in the local area, such as the Police Station or the office of another Safety Action Meeting member. The venue must be safe and private to ensure confidentiality. The Safety Action Meeting Chair and Coordinator determine the venue in consultation with members.

Safety Action Meetings should be held in person wherever possible. Face-to-face meetings better facilitate information sharing and foster collaborative working relationships. However, in rural and remote areas meetings may be conducted via teleconference, audio-visual link or other means when necessary. For example, in a remote area meetings may alternate between being held face-to-face and via teleconference every fortnight.

4. Process

4.1 Overview



4.2 Threat assessment

At serious threat means there is evidence of a serious threat to a victim's life, health or safety due to domestic violence, and urgent action is necessary to prevent or lessen this threat.

A victim can be identified as at serious threat using the DVSAT, another recognised threat assessment tool, or professional judgement.

A threat does not have to be imminent to be considered serious, as it is often hard to determine whether something is going to happen within a certain timeframe. For example, a victim whose partner will be released from custody in two months' time may disclose extreme physical violence that occurred in the past. A service provider completing the DVSAT with the victim may determine that the threat to their safety is serious, due to the perpetrator's history of repeat offending, but is not imminent because the perpetrator will not be released for another two months.

For more information about the DVSAT, refer to the DVSAT Guide.

4.3 Referral to a Safety Action Meeting

All domestic violence victims, whether female or male, identified as at serious threat aged 16 or above in a local area should be referred to a Safety Action Meeting.

To be included on the agenda for a Safety Action Meeting, victims must be referred to the Local Coordination Point. The Local Coordination Point provides secretariat support for the meetings.

If Police assess a victim as at threat or at serious threat due to domestic violence, they automatically refer them to the relevant Local Coordination Point via the Central Referral Point, an electronic platform that allocates victims on the basis of gender and postcode.

If another government agency or non-government service provider assesses a victim as at serious threat, they should refer the victim directly to the relevant Local Coordination Point. Service providers are encouraged to use the Safety Action Meeting Referral Form (Appendix C).

The Local Coordination Point is responsible for ensuring that all victims at serious threat referred to it are considered at the next available Safety Action Meeting.

Examples – Referrals to a Safety Action Meeting

- Police are called to an incident at Kaylee and Brandon's house. Using the DVSAT, the Police assess Kaylee as at serious threat and refer to her the Central Referral Point. The Police also apply for an ADVO on her behalf and charge Brandon with assault.

The Central Referral Point allocates Kaylee to the Local Coordination Point that services her town, Orange. The Local Coordination Point undertakes a comprehensive threat assessment with Kaylee and confirms the initial assessment of at serious threat. Kaylee is placed on the agenda for the next Safety Action Meeting.

- Due to reports by teachers at her children's school, FACS has opened a case file about Jenny and her family. The teachers state that Jenny's son Connor and daughter Amelia sometimes come to school with minor bruises and are often absent. A caseworker talks to Jenny, who discloses that her husband Terry, an alcoholic, physically abuses her in front of the children.

While continuing to work with Jenny regarding her children, the caseworker seeks Jenny's consent to refer her to the Local Coordination Point for support. Jenny accepts the offer of assistance. When a Local Coordination Point worker speaks to Jenny, Jenny says that the family is experiencing intense stress due to Terry losing his job, and that his drinking is increasing and he is becoming more violent. The worker assesses Jenny as at serious threat and places her on the agenda for the next Safety Action Meeting.

- Belinda brings her three young sons to playgroup at the local family support service. The workers there suspect that Belinda is being abused by her partner Tim. They ask Belinda if she will let them refer her to the Local Coordination Point for help and she agrees. The Local Coordination Point assesses Belinda as at serious threat and places her on the agenda for the next Safety Action Meeting.

Sometimes the primary perpetrator and primary victim in a domestic violence situation can be wrongly identified. If the Local Coordination Point suspects that this has occurred, it should contact the referring service provider for more information. Where a misidentification of the primary perpetrator has occurred, the incorrectly identified 'victim' does not need to be placed on the Safety Action Meeting agenda. The Local Coordination Point should advise the Central Referral Point and the referring service provider of the issue.

Examples – Wrongly identified perpetrators

- Mike rings Victims Services NSW as he knows that Victims Services provides support to male domestic violence victims. Mike states that he has left the family home after an “altercation” with his wife, Rebecca. Mike reports that his wife has a substance abuse problem and raises concerns about her parenting, stating that she is often unable to care for the children due to intoxication. More generally, Mike says Rebecca frequently throws things about the house and has attacked him using household implements.

Upon questioning by a Victims Services worker, Mike indicates that he has successfully “disarmed” and “restrained” Rebecca in the past, but only “when necessary”. Mike states that he keeps a gun in the house and has been feeling depressed lately. Mike also blames Rebecca for losing his job.

The worker completes the DVSAT with Mike and establishes that he is safe. Given the concerns raised about Mike and Rebecca’s children, the worker makes a report to the Child Protection Helpline. Using professional judgement, the worker assesses Rebecca as at serious threat. As there is no safe way to contact her to seek consent, the worker refers Rebecca to a Local Coordination Point for support without consent. The Local Coordination Point contacts Rebecca and confirms the assessment of at serious threat. Rebecca is placed on the agenda for the next Safety Action Meeting.

- Police are called to an incident at Lucy and John’s house. On arrival, they find that both parties have serious injuries – John has stab wounds to the leg and Lucy has serious bruising to her face and neck. Lucy and John appear heavily intoxicated, and neither will speak to Police. Given the nature of the incident, Police use their professional judgement to assess Lucy and John as at threat and refer them to the Central Referral Point.

The Central Referral Point refers Lucy to a Local Coordination Point and John to Victims Services NSW. When the Local Coordination Point speaks with Lucy she discloses John’s long history of extreme violence toward her. Lucy states that she thought John was going to kill her that night before the Police arrived and only stabbed him in self-defence. The Local Coordination Point identifies Lucy as at serious threat and places her on the agenda for the next Safety Action Meeting. The Local Coordination Point also contacts the Police and Victims Services to advise them of the situation. Victims Services considers the full situation when working with John, and shares any information relating to Lucy’s safety with the Local Coordination Point.

4.4 Consent to referral

It is best practice to seek a victim's consent before sharing their information with another service provider, including for the purpose of making a referral to a Safety Action Meeting.

However, in certain limited circumstances the Protocol allows service providers to share information without a victim's consent where it is necessary to prevent or lessen a serious threat to her safety, or the safety of her children.

If a service provider assesses a victim at serious threat and it is necessary to make a referral for them to a Safety Action Meeting, the service provider must seek the victim's consent unless it is unreasonable or impractical to do so. For example, it is not necessary to seek consent if doing so would increase the threat to the victim's safety or if the victim is in hospital and cannot communicate due to serious injuries.

If a victim refuses consent for referral to a Safety Action Meeting, a service provider may make the referral without consent if the threat is serious and sharing information at the Safety Action Meeting is necessary to prevent or lessen the threat. The service provider must record this decision and the reasons why it was made.

Service providers must also make a written record of a victim's consent or refusal of consent and the reasons for her decision.

The Safety Action Meeting Coordinator notes whether each victim on the agenda for a meeting has consented to the referral. Members should take a victim's consent or refusal of consent into account when developing a Safety Action Plan for them.

Where victims at serious threat have children in their care, service providers who are prescribed bodies may share information under Chapter 16A of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*.

The perpetrator's consent is never sought for information sharing at a Safety Action Meeting.

For more information, refer to the Protocol.

Example – Consent granted for referral to a Safety Action Meeting

Danielle has recently left her abusive partner Hugh and is currently accommodated in a women's refuge. A caseworker at the refuge completes the DVSAT with Danielle on admission and assesses her as at serious threat. Danielle consents to being referred to the Local Coordination Point.

Because Danielle is already working closely with the refuge caseworker, the Local Coordination Point does not provide Danielle with case coordination, but does seek Danielle's consent for referral to the next Safety Action Meeting. Danielle agrees and is placed on the agenda.

Example – Consent refused for referral to a Safety Action Meeting

The Local Coordination Point has been working closely with Thani for several weeks, making warm referrals to a range of service providers for her ongoing needs. The Local Coordination Point is about to close their file on Thani, as she has been successfully referred to a case management service, when her ex-boyfriend Leon is released from prison and begins to harass and threaten her again.

The Local Coordination Point reassesses the level of threat to Thani's safety and identifies her as at serious threat. A worker seeks Thani's consent for referral to a Safety Action Meeting but she refuses, saying it will cause more trouble with Leon. After discussing the situation carefully with Thani, the worker explains that she will still be referred to the Safety Action Meeting because the Local Coordination Point has grave concerns for her safety. Thani is placed on the agenda for the next Safety Action Meeting.

4.5 Prior to a Safety Action Meeting

4.5.1 Overview

The Safety Action Meeting Coordinator, located within the Local Coordination Point, collates the names of victims identified as at serious threat and places them on the agenda for the next Safety Action Meeting (Appendix A).

The Coordinator circulates the agenda by secure email to all members at least three business days prior to the meeting so that members can conduct information searches regarding victims on the agenda. The Coordinator provides the name, date of birth and address (if known) of the victim, any children and the perpetrator to enable members to conduct information searches. The agenda also notes whether each victim has consented to her information being shared at the meeting.

Members should establish what information is held by their service provider about each victim, any children and associated perpetrators and bring all relevant information to the Safety Action Meeting. Members are not required to bring comprehensive case notes or files to meetings unless these are directly relevant.

Members should not wait until the Safety Action Meeting to take appropriate action if they have sufficient information to reduce the threat to the victim independently once the agenda has been circulated.

4.5.2 Communication with victims prior to a meeting

Unless it is unreasonable or impractical to do so (e.g. it will increase the threat to victims' safety), victims at serious threat must be informed about a forthcoming Safety Action Meeting.

Communication with a victim about a meeting is generally undertaken by the Local Coordination Point, unless another service provider is already working closely with a victim, in which case that service provider may communicate with the victim about the meeting.

Examples – How the Safety Action Meeting process differs depending on whether the victim is already working with a service

- Matilda regularly attends the local neighbourhood centre with her two children and has developed a strong rapport with a caseworker connected to the centre. The Police attend an incident at the home of Matilda and her husband Mohammed. They assess Matilda as at serious threat due to Mohammed's violent behaviour, and refer her to the Local Coordination Point.

When the Local Coordination Point speaks with Matilda it is clear that she is working closely with the neighbourhood centre and does not require case coordination from the Local Coordination Point. The Local Coordination Point speaks with Matilda's caseworker and the caseworker agrees to attend the Safety Action Meeting to provide the most up-to-date information about Matilda's situation, and liaises with Matilda about the meeting. After the meeting, the caseworker explains the outcomes to Matilda.

- Sally lives on a remote property with her abusive father Duncan and her young daughter Bonnie. Sally has not told anyone about the violence she is experiencing. One day Duncan drinks heavily and threatens to shoot Sally and Bonnie. Sally and Bonnie lock themselves in a room and Sally calls the Police. In addition to undertaking their other standard procedures, when the Police arrive they assess Sally as at serious threat. Sally is referred to the Local Coordination Point.

When a Local Coordination Point worker contacts Sally, Sally explains that she hasn't spoken to anyone else. The worker undertakes a threat assessment with Sally and provides case coordination. The worker communicates information about the Safety Action Meeting to Sally before and after it has occurred.

Wherever possible, victims should be given a copy of the Safety Action Meeting Information Sheet (Appendix C). Service providers communicating with a victim should explain that:

- there are serious concerns for her safety, and that her consent is being sought for referral to a Safety Action Meeting;
- the purpose of the meeting, who will attend and what the outcomes of the meeting may be;
- if the victim has children, that service providers have certain child protection obligations they must meet;
- that she will not be directed to do anything as a result of the meeting; and
- if the victim refuses to give consent, the referral may still be made due to continuing concerns about the serious threat to her and her children's safety.

Service providers must make a written record of a victim's consent or refusal of consent and the reasons for her decision. If the victim refuses to give consent but a service provider forms the view that the victim is at serious threat and should still be referred to a Safety Action Meeting, the service provider must record this decision and the reasons why it was made.

If the Local Coordination Point is communicating with a victim about a forthcoming meeting, they should ask the victim if they are working closely with a particular service provider. If this is the case, they should consider whether it would be beneficial to ask the service provider to attend the meeting for the discussion of that particular victim.

The Local Coordination Point should also consider whether any other service provider should be invited to attend a meeting for the discussion of a particular victim, or whether another service provider should be asked for information prior to a meeting. For example, if a victim has children who attend a non-government school, a request for information could be sent to the school in line with the Protocol, as the Department of Education and Communities representative will not be able to advise the meeting in relation to those children.

4.6 At a Safety Action Meeting

4.6.1 Overview

Safety Action Meetings are conducted by the Chair in accordance with the standard agenda (Appendix A). In general, meetings take the following form:

- Welcome and introductions;
- Review of the confidentiality agreement and signature by all members;
- Disclosure of conflicts by all members;
- Review of actions arising and victims remaining on the agenda from previous Safety Action Meetings;
- Discussion of victims on the agenda for the first time based on information provided by each member, including whether or not each victim consented to referral to the Safety Action Meeting;
- Development of a Safety Action Plan for each victim on the agenda for the first time;
- Any other business and administrative matters; and
- Review and confirmation of actions agreed.

4.6.2 Confidentiality

The Chair must read out the standard confidentiality agreement at the beginning of every Safety Action Meeting (Appendix E). All members present must sign the agreement. This is to ensure that members understand and abide by their obligations under the Protocol at all times.

4.6.3 Disclosure of conflicts

It is important that members disclose any conflicts that may exist.

Conflicts are **not** conflicts of interest in the legal sense. The term refers instead to anything that may prevent a member from maintaining a victim's confidentiality or participating in the development of a Safety Action Plan for a victim in an appropriate, unbiased manner.

Conflicts may include where a member is related to, is or has been in a relationship with, or is a friend of the victim, perpetrator or any other person directly involved in a case.

The Chair must ask members to disclose any conflicts at the beginning of each meeting. All members present must declare that no conflict of interest exists between themselves, their service provider and any of the victims on the agenda, or disclose a conflict if one exists.

If a member discloses a conflict, they must excuse themselves from the meeting for any discussion regarding the victim in question, or nominate a proxy to attend the meeting on their behalf.

Examples – Disclosure of conflicts

- Marieke works for a local community health centre and regularly represents the centre at Safety Action Meetings. One day Marieke receives the agenda for the next meeting and realises that her brother's partner Vicki is listed as a victim. When the Chair asks members to disclose any conflicts at the beginning of the meeting, Marieke explains the situation and leaves the room while Vicki's case is being discussed.

- Janelle attends the local Safety Action Meeting on behalf of a family support service. It is the only family support service in the rural area in which the meeting is located. Janelle receives the agenda for the next meeting and notes that one of the victims, Ida, is the partner of a current family support service client, Nadine.

Janelle discusses the situation with her manager and advises the Safety Action Meeting Coordinator that she will not attend the meeting while Ida remains on the agenda. Instead, another worker from the service with no knowledge of Ida or Nadine will attend to ensure that Ida does not miss out on the support they can offer her. The service arranges for all files and documentation relating to the two people to be kept separately and securely.

4.6.4 Safety Action Plans

At the meeting, members share whatever relevant information they possess about each victim on the agenda and develop Safety Action Plan for victims to reduce the threat to their safety.

A Safety Action Plan is a targeted, time-specific list of practical steps that service providers can take to prevent or lessen serious threats to victims and their children.

Safety Action Plans do not change or replace safety plans developed with a victim by other service providers, such as a Community Services Centre.

For more information, see Chapter 5.

4.7 Following a Safety Action Meeting

Each member should ensure that any actions arising for their service provider from the Safety Action Meeting are completed within agreed timeframes and advise the next Safety Action Meeting of the outcomes of these actions.

If it is safe to do so victims should be advised of the actions that will be taken to reduce the threat to their safety. In the majority of cases, the Local Coordination Point will be able to do this, as they will already be working with the victims. If the Local Coordination Point is not working closely with a victim, another service provider should be tasked with liaising with the victim where possible.

Information shared at a Safety Action Meeting and actions pertaining to a victim and her children must never be shared with a perpetrator.

4.8 Case closure

4.8.1 Length of time a victim remains on a Safety Action Meeting agenda

Safety Action Meetings are not case management or case tracking meetings. Victims do not remain on the agenda for an extended period of time. The purpose of the meetings is to reduce the serious threat to a victim and her children by developing and implementing a targeted and time-specific Safety Action Plan. Once this objective has been achieved, and the level of threat to a victim is no longer assessed as serious, the victim should be removed from the agenda. For this reason, victims are usually only on the agenda for two to three meetings.

However if a victim remains at serious threat, or the Safety Action Plan developed in relation to her has not yet been fully implemented, the case should remain on the agenda.

If a victim is removed from the agenda, but the threat to her safety later escalates and she is again assessed as being at serious threat, another referral for the victim should be made to the Safety Action Meeting. The victim will then be added to the agenda and a new Safety Action Plan will be developed for her.

4.8.2 Repeat victims

There may be a number of victims at serious threat who are referred to a Safety Action Meeting multiple times. These victims usually have complex needs and may be at grave risk of serious injury or death.

If a victim has been referred to a Safety Action Meeting on three or more separate occasions in a twelve-month period, members should consider organising a specific strategy meeting between key service providers about the victim directly following the next Safety Action Meeting (e.g. an extra half-hour could be added to the meeting for this purpose). Such a meeting would offer an opportunity to work intensively together on a comprehensive Safety Action Plan for the victim that is focused on jointly preventing the victim from needing to return to the Safety Action Meeting agenda. Members should consider involving executive representatives from their service providers in these meetings.

Service providers should focus particular effort on engaging with repeat victims before any specific strategy meeting is held to ensure that their circumstances, needs and wishes can be taken into account.

4.8.3 Cases in which no further action is possible

In some cases a victim may remain at serious threat despite Safety Action Meeting members having fully implemented a Safety Action Plan and taken all possible steps to reduce the threat to her safety.

In these circumstances, it is important to make the distinction between Safety Action Meetings and case management. The purpose of a Safety Action Meeting is to develop a targeted, time-specific Safety Action Plan to directly reduce the serious threat to a victim's safety. Safety Action Meetings cannot undertake longer-term case management of victims with complex needs.

If members can take no further action collaboratively, and members have been unable to identify any new actions at two Safety Action Meetings, the victim should be removed from the agenda. The Coordinator should record that this has been done and the reasons why. Members should continue to either provide their usual assistance to the victim or attempt to engage the victim, and should flag the victim in their internal systems for consistent monitoring.

It is important to note that although a victim may no longer be on the agenda for a Safety Action Meeting, service providers are required to meet their ongoing, regular obligations in regard to that victim.

4.8.4 Safety Action Meeting transfers

Victims at serious threat should be considered at the Safety Action Meeting closest to where they live so that the meeting is attended by local service providers able to assist them.

If a victim relocates, her matter should be transferred to the Safety Action Meeting in the area in which she now lives.

The Safety Action Meeting Coordinator should advise the Central Referral Point that the victim needs to be re-allocated to the Local Coordination Point closest to the victim's new address. The Coordinator should also directly provide the Local Coordination Point in question with all relevant information, including any Safety Action Plan previously developed for the victim.

Information sharing necessitated by the transfer of a victim from one Safety Action Meeting to another must comply with the Protocol. Unless it is unreasonable or impractical to do so, a victim's consent must be sought for the transfer of her matter to another area.

Examples – Case closure

- Nerida is referred to a Safety Action Meeting due to her partner Joseph's violence against her. At the meeting, members develop a Safety Action Plan to reduce the threat to Nerida's safety, including finding safe accommodation for her. At the next meeting, the Department of Family and Community Services advises that a specialist homeless service specialising in domestic violence is working with Nerida and that she has been provided with transitional accommodation while the service supports her into a longer term housing option. The Police advise that they have charged Joseph with breaching an ADVO. The members agree that the threat to Nerida's safety has been reduced and she is removed from the agenda.
- Rosanna is a long-term victim of domestic violence. She has left her abusive husband Doug multiple times, but always returns to live with him. Rosanna has been referred to the local Safety Action Meeting on three separate occasions in the last year, twice times by the Police and once by the local women's refuge. Members decide to hold a special meeting regarding Rosanna to develop a specific strategy to reduce the threat to her safety.
- Trudy is also a long-term victim of domestic violence and has been diagnosed with a mental illness. Trudy is referred to the local Safety Action Meeting due to the serious threat posed by her partner Kevin. The members develop and implement a Safety Action Plan for Trudy, including securing safe accommodation and obtaining a new ADVO for her, and offering her specialist support and medical assistance.

However Trudy rejects all offers of assistance and refuses to move into the safe accommodation offered to her. The threat to her safety remains serious. After two meetings at which no new action can be identified to reduce the threat to Trudy, she is removed from the agenda. Members agree to flag Trudy in their internal files and systems, and continue to attempt to engage with her wherever possible.

4.9 Safety Action Meeting record-keeping

The Safety Action Meeting Coordinator is responsible for recording all actions arising from Safety Action Meetings (Appendix B). The Coordinator should take care to briefly note the reason for each action to assist discussion of the action at future meetings.

The Coordinator should distribute the record of the meeting to members within one business day via secure email or other appropriate means.

The Coordinator is also responsible for ensuring that Safety Action Meeting agendas, records and any relevant documentation are securely stored with other Local Coordination Point records in accordance with the Protocol.

The Coordinator should take into account any conflicts disclosed by members when circulating Safety Action Meeting records.

It is important to note that Safety Action Meeting agendas and records may be subpoenaed.

For more information, refer to the Protocol.

Examples – Importance of accurate record-keeping

Mary suffers extreme physical violence at the hands of her partner Ben. At a Safety Action Meeting, the local counselling service states that Mary may have an undiagnosed mental illness, as she was erratic, distant and indicated she was hearing voices during a recent appointment.

NSW Health agrees to arrange a referral for Mary to the mental health assessment team. The Safety Action Meeting Coordinator notes “Referral to mental health team due to concerns regarding erratic behaviour at last counselling appointment” on the Safety Action Meeting record. Following the meeting, members complete actions arising for their service providers and the threat to Mary’s safety is reduced. Mary is removed from the Safety Action Meeting agenda.

A year later, Mary is again assessed as at serious threat and referred to the Safety Action Meeting. The membership of the meeting has changed since she was last on the agenda and the counselling service no longer attends. Due to the detailed actions recorded at previous meetings, members can trace Mary’s interaction with the mental health system and know that the first time her illness was noticed by services was in relation to the counselling appointment.

5. Safety Action Plans

5.1 Overview

Based on the comprehensive picture of a victim's situation put together through sharing information, Safety Action Meeting members develop a list of actions, known as a Safety Action Plan, for each victim on the agenda.

A Safety Action Plan is a targeted, time-specific list of practical steps that service providers can take to prevent or lessen serious threats to victims and their children.

Safety Action Plans do not change or replace safety plans developed with a victim by other service providers, such as a Community Services Centre. However members should advise a Safety Action Meeting regarding any other relevant safety planning that has been undertaken with a victim.

Safety Action Plans list actions for Safety Action Meeting members, **not** victims.

Safety Action Plans only list actions for members, not victims. Victims cannot be directed to do anything as a result of a Safety Action Meeting, and Safety Action Plans are not case plans or agreements with which victims must comply. When developing a Safety Action Plan, members should ask themselves 'What can my service provider do now to reduce the serious threat to this person's safety?'

Safety Action Plans are recorded by the Safety Action Meeting Coordinator at each meeting (Appendix B). The Coordinator should note the member responsible for completing each action and the timeframe for doing so. Members should advise the next Safety Action Meeting regarding whether they have completed their actions arising from the previous meeting.

Members can only commit to actions on behalf of their own service provider. Members cannot be directed to commit to any particular action by another member, the Safety Action Meeting Coordinator or Chair, or the group as a whole. Decision-making authority rests with each member for their own area of responsibility.

Examples of items on a Safety Action Plan

- Members to identify a victim, child or perpetrator on client systems and records.
- Members to conduct information checks about a victim, child or perpetrator.
- Local Coordination Point or another domestic violence support service to contact a victim and offer assistance and support.
- Police to advise a victim regarding a perpetrator's location, warrants, bail conditions, court outcomes and dates.
- Police to apply for or seek to vary an ADVO.
- Police to investigate and/or charge a perpetrator for an offence, e.g. breach of an existing ADVO.
- Members to conduct joint visits to provide support to a victim, e.g. Police and a domestic violence support service.
- Department of Education and Communities to liaise with school staff regarding a child's safety and ongoing needs.
- Corrective Services NSW to monitor a perpetrator's contact/ attempted contact with a victim while in custody.
- Corrective Services NSW to advise a victim of a perpetrator's upcoming release from custody.
- FACS to conduct a home visit with a victim and complete a safety assessment for any children involved.
- FACS to carry out a Housing Pathways assessment to identify appropriate housing options (e.g. Rent Start Bond Loan, Start Safely subsidy or social housing).
- Members to organise for a home safety audit, security screens and/or duress alarms for a victim's residence.
- NSW Health to undertake a mental health assessment and referral for a victim, and provide support for the victim's medical needs.
- Members to liaise with NSW Local Courts as appropriate regarding any current or upcoming court proceedings, e.g. arrange for a victim to attend a pre-hearing clinic with a Police Prosecutor, arrange for an interpreter, and/or arrange for a victim to use a remote witness facility when attending court/giving evidence.
- Members to make warm referrals for a victim to other service providers.

5.2 Victims with diverse needs

5.2.1 Overview

It is important that Safety Action Plans are culturally appropriate and responsive to victims' specific needs.

If a victim from a certain community or with a particular need is listed on the agenda for a Safety Action Meeting and none of the members represents a service provider working specifically with that community, the Coordinator should consider, in consultation with the victim, inviting a representative of an appropriate service provider to attend the meeting.

Safety Action Plans should take into account a victim's individual needs, such as for an interpreter or support person, and the role a victim's family and/or carers may play in securing their safety.

5.2.2 Aboriginal victims

Aboriginal women are six times more likely to be victims of domestic and family violence than non-Aboriginal women². A range of factors contribute to increased rates of domestic violence in Aboriginal communities, including historical trauma experienced by Aboriginal people, which has eroded family and social structures and created a distrust of authority.

Aboriginal victims who have had negative experiences with service providers in the past may be reluctant to engage in the Safety Action Meeting process if these service providers participate in meetings. In particular, some Aboriginal community members may be concerned that engaging with service providers involved in Safety Action Meetings will lead to negative outcomes for their families, based on past experience of government policies. For example, communities may fear removal of their children.

Safety Action Meeting members need to consider these specific concerns and the associated risk that victims will disengage from support when developing Safety Action Plans for Aboriginal victims. Members should consider how best to provide Aboriginal victims with targeted support.

5.2.3 Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) victims

Victims from CALD communities, including newly arrived migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, experience specific barriers to accessing support and assistance. These barriers include cultural and family expectations and norms, social isolation, immigration issues, financial dependence, and language and communication difficulties.

CALD victims on spousal visas often hesitate to engage with service providers due to fear that they will not be able to remain in Australia if they leave a violent relationship, and experience difficulty accessing support due to the impact of immigration status on service eligibility in some instances. Refugees may have had torture and trauma experiences prior to arriving in Australia and may need special assistance with treatment and rehabilitation.

2

Performance Audit: Responding to domestic and family violence, NSW Auditor-General's Report, 2011.

Safety Action Meeting members need to consider these specific issues when developing Safety Action Plans for CALD victims.

5.2.4 Victims with disability or mental illness

Victims with disability experience domestic violence at higher rates, of greater severity and over longer periods than other people. Attitudes towards disability, dependence on the perpetrator for personal care and power dynamics all contribute to the incidence of domestic violence amongst people with disability.

Victims with disability and mental illness experience difficulties in accessing services due to dependence, incapacity, prejudice, stigma and social or geographical isolation.

Safety Action Meeting members need to consider these specific issues when developing Safety Action Plans for victims with disability or mental illness.

5.2.5 Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) victims

LGBTIQ people experience domestic violence at similar rates to that of the wider community but are less likely to identify the experience as abuse, report violence to the Police, or seek assistance from a support service for fear of prejudice and discrimination. Sometimes services may not understand the needs of a LGBTIQ person or the nature of their relationship; support workers may have preconceived ideas about the diversity of sex, sexuality, gender or family; or LGBTIQ people may be hesitant to engage with services for fear of being 'outed' in their community.

Safety Action Meeting members need to consider these specific issues when developing Safety Action Plans for LGBTIQ victims.

Example – Safety Action Plan

Clara is 21, has spina bifida and uses a wheelchair. She lives with her father, who is verbally and physically abusive. He tells her that she is worthless and no one would care for her if she moved out. A nurse from the local community health clinic visits Clara every couple of months. Clara's father always sits in on her visits. One day the nurse notices severe bruises on Clara's back. Clara is withdrawn and won't say how she got the bruises. The nurse strongly suspects that Clara's father is violent. The nurse uses her professional judgement to assess Clara as at serious threat and makes a referral for her to the Local Coordination Point, noting when it would be safe to call Clara.

The Local Coordination Point contacts Clara and she discloses the violence. The Local Coordination Point undertakes a comprehensive threat assessment with Clara and makes warm referrals for her to a range of services, including a specialist support service for people with disabilities. The Local Coordination Point also places Clara on the agenda for the next Safety Action Meeting and asks the support service to attend.

At the meeting, members discuss Clara's situation. Corrective Services advises that her father has spent time in prison for assault and may be in breach of his parole conditions. The following actions are agreed to reduce the threat to Clara's safety:

- Police to undertake a welfare check; investigate the alleged assault and apply for an ADVO for Clara;
- Corrective Services to check the father's parole conditions;
- Disability support service to continue working closely with Clara and to provide her with specialist counselling; and
- Crisis accommodation service and FACS to investigate accessible accommodation options for Clara if she chooses to leave her father's house.

Example – Safety Action Plan

Merren is a 25 year-old Aboriginal woman with four children under the age of six. She lives in a social housing property with her boyfriend Jai, who is the father of her two youngest children. Jai is a regular drug user who is becoming increasingly violent and has stopped letting Merren leave the house. Jai beats Merren's older children and often accuses her of loving them more than him and the children they have together.

One day Merren calls the Police after an especially violent attack. The Police come to the house. They charge Jai with assault and apply for an ADVO for Merren which includes an exclusion order. The Police also complete the DVSAT with Merren. Although she refuses to answer several of the questions, the Police assess her as at serious threat based on professional judgement. Merren is referred to the Local Coordination Point.

When a worker from the Local Coordination Point contacts Merren, she says she doesn't want any help. The worker explains that there is a specialist Aboriginal service in the area and asks if it would be okay with Merren if that service called her. Merren agrees. The service develops a rapport with Merren and provides her with counselling. In the meantime, the Local Coordination Point places Merren on the agenda for the next Safety Action Meeting and invites the specialist service to attend.

The specialist service puts Merren in touch with the local WDVCS worker, who provides Merren with support and advocacy regarding her ADVO and arranges to meet her at court for the first mention.

At the meeting, members discuss Jai's history of violence and recent child protection reports regarding Merren's children. The specialist service states that Merren is working closely with them and says she does not want Jai to return to the property. The Police advise the meeting that Jai has been bailed to his mother's address but has not reported to the police station as required. His assault charge has been set down for mention next week. None of the members know where Jai is currently living. The following actions are agreed to reduce the threat to Merren and her children's safety:

- Police to locate Jai and advise other members on the progress of the assault charge;
- Corrective Services to flag Jai in their system and notify Merren of any relevant information about Jai when available;
- FACS to follow up child protection issues to ensure Merren's children receive appropriate support, noting that Jai is now out of the house and Merren is engaging with services;
- Staying Home Leaving Violence to assess security at Merren's home to see if any upgrades are required;
- Education to contact the relevant schools to ensure Merren's children receive available support; and
- Specialist Aboriginal service to continue to work with Merren and her children.

Example – Safety Action Plan

Thilak immigrated to Australia from Sri Lanka two years ago. Last year his wife Amanthi came out to join him on a spousal visa. Thilak is extremely violent and controlling, and often threatens to cancel Amanthi's visa and send her back to Sri Lanka if she speaks to anyone outside the home. Amanthi does not speak English and has no other family in Australia. The Police are called to the house one night when neighbours hear the couple fighting. Amanthi can't answer any of the questions on the DVSAT because of the language barrier but the Police assess her as at threat on the basis of professional judgement. Amanthi is referred to the Local Coordination Point. The Police also apply for an ADVO for Amanthi.

The Local Coordination Point contacts Amanthi using a telephone interpreter while Thilak is at work. Amanthi discloses Thilak's violence and coercion. The Local Coordination Point assesses Amanthi as at serious threat and places her on the agenda for the next Safety Action Meeting. The Local Coordination Point also makes a range of warm referrals for her, including to a migration law advice clinic for assistance with her visa. The Local Coordination Point invites a migrant support service to attend the meeting.

At the meeting, members discuss Amanthi's situation. The following actions are agreed to reduce the threat to her safety:

- Police to conduct a welfare check;
- Local Coordination Point to refer Amanthi to Centrelink for assistance with income support;
- Local Coordination Point to discuss with Amanthi about whether she can safely stay at home with Thilak;
- Local women's refuge undertakes to accommodate Amanthi if she chooses to leave Thilak; and
- Migrant support service to work with Amanthi, including by arranging English classes and connecting her with a Sri Lankan women's community group.

Example – Safety Action Plan

Meleni is an elderly Tongan woman who lives with her son Folau. Folau has recently separated from his wife Kristy and is fighting her for custody of their three children. Folau has always been controlling and violent towards his mother, but the violence has got worse since he broke up with Kristy. Last week Folau pushed Meleni down the stairs and she broke her leg. When she goes to the hospital, a doctor asks Meleni how she injured herself and she begins to cry. The doctor arranges for the hospital social worker to talk with Meleni. Meleni discloses the violence she is experiencing and the social worker refers her to a domestic violence support service.

While working with Meleni, the service assesses her as at serious threat using the DVSAT and contacts the Local Coordination Point to ensure she is put on the Safety Action Meeting agenda. At the meeting, the Police state that Kristy has had multiple ADVOs against Folau and detail his extensive history of violence. FACS explains that child protection reports have been made in relation to Folau and Kristy's children. The domestic violence support service states that it has previously worked with Kristy. The following actions are agreed to reduce the threat to Meleni's safety:

- Police to apply for an ADVO for Meleni, investigate alleged assault and conduct a welfare check;
- Police to check on current ADVO for Kristy and ensure appropriate conditions are in place regarding the children;
- Support service to continue working with Meleni and to connect her with an older women's support group;
- FACS to note concerns regarding Folau in case files for his children so that they are considered in any future action regarding child protection; and
- Domestic violence support service to contact Kristy to offer support.

Example – Safety Action Plan

Jim was previously on a community treatment order for a mental illness. The order provided for compulsory medication and attendance at specialist consultations. The order has now lapsed and Jim attends a community health centre. The centre is aware of a history of serious domestic violence assaults by Jim against his wife Karen.

Jim reports to the doctor at the centre that he has stopped taking his medication and is hearing voices. Karen is also present with their newborn baby, but appears withdrawn and subdued. The doctor considers that in his professional judgment, Karen is at serious threat. In addition to meeting his mandatory child protection obligations, the doctor refers Karen to the Local Coordination Point for support. The Local Coordination Point places Karen on the agenda for the next Safety Action Meeting.

At the Safety Action Meeting, information shared by members reveals Jim's significant mental illness and prior attempts at suicide, a long history of domestic violence incidents between Jim and Karen, threats by Jim to kill Karen and other family members, and previous ADVOs taken out against Jim by Karen. The following actions are agreed to reduce the threat to Karen's safety:

- Police to apply for a new ADVO for Karen, including an exclusion order if she wants one so that Jim can no longer live with her;
- if Karen wants an exclusion order, Victims Services to offer brokerage for immediate installation of a duress alarm;
- if Karen wants to move, FACS to assess her eligibility for housing assistance, including temporary accommodation, private rental assistance or priority housing;
- FACS to re-assess the child's safety and take appropriate action;
- the Local Coordination Point to liaise with the doctor who made the original referral to obtain an ongoing assessment of the threat posed by Jim's mental illness and refusal to take medication; and
- Police to involuntarily commit Jim into a community treatment facility if necessary.

5.3 Male victims

The majority of domestic violence victims are women. However some victims are men. Male victims at serious threat should be referred to a Safety Action Meeting.

Victims Services NSW can provide male victims with case coordination and referral, either directly or through arranging local support. If a male victim is referred to a Safety Action Meeting, the Safety Action Meeting Coordinator should contact Victims Services so that a representative can attend the meeting for the discussion of the male victim.

If Victims Services assesses a male victim client as at serious threat due to domestic violence, they should contact the relevant Local Coordination Point to ensure the victim is placed on the agenda for the next Safety Action Meeting.

Example – Male victims

Josh is being abused by his partner Patrick. One night the neighbours hear Patrick assaulting Josh at their house in Orange and call the Police. When the Police arrive, Josh has extensive injuries. The Police assess Josh as at serious threat and refer him to the Central Referral Point. The Central Referral Point refers Josh to Victims Services NSW for support.

Because he has been assessed as at serious threat, Victims Services contacts the Local Coordination Point in Orange to ensure he is placed on the agenda for the next Safety Action Meeting. As the meeting will be held in Orange and Victims Services is based in Sydney, Victims Services makes arrangements to attend the meeting via audio-visual link.

6. Child protection

6.1 Intersection between domestic violence and child abuse

There is a considerable intersection between domestic violence and child abuse and neglect. Children who are subjected to or witness domestic violence experience significant trauma and are more likely to experience or perpetrate domestic violence as adults. Domestic violence is present in 50% of households where children are abused³. Perpetrators may harm or threaten to harm children as a means of controlling or coercing their primary victim, usually the children's mother.

A significant number of victims referred to Safety Action Meetings will have children in their care and Safety Action Meeting members will often need to consider child protection issues.

Given that the aim of Safety Action Meetings is to prevent or lessen serious threats to the safety of domestic violence victims and any children in their care, it is vital that actions arising from Safety Action Meetings address the needs of both victims and their children.

6.2 Legal obligations

Service providers have obligations under the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*. Safety Action Meetings do not replace or change these obligations.

Under NSW law, certain groups of people are mandated to report to FACS if they suspect, on reasonable grounds, that a child is at risk of significant harm due to abuse or neglect. Mandatory reporters may, but are not obliged, to report a risk of significant harm to unborn children or young people (those aged 16-17 years). They are encouraged to make a report if it is appropriate. Some government service providers have internal policies that require such reports to be made regarding unborn children and/or young people.

In addition, if FACS forms the opinion, on reasonable grounds, that a child or young person is in need of care and protection, they may take whatever action is necessary to safeguard or promote the safety, welfare and well-being of that child or young person.

3 *Performance Audit: Responding to domestic and family violence*, NSW Auditor-General's Report, 2011.

4 *Child Deaths Annual Report 2012: Learning to improve services*, Department of Family and Communities, 2013.

6.3 Child protection concerns arising from a Safety Action Meeting

If information shared at a Safety Action Meeting leads one or more member to form the view that a child or young person may be at risk of significant harm, the Keep Them Safe Mandatory Reporter Guide should be completed in relation to that child or young person.

The Mandatory Reporter Guide should be completed by the Safety Action Meeting member that is best placed to do so, for example the member that holds the most relevant information regarding the child or young person at risk, or has the capacity to complete the Mandatory Reporter Guide in a timely manner.

Completion of the Mandatory Reporter Guide in a timely manner should be clearly listed as an action for that member on the victim's Safety Action Plan. The Chair should review all actions agreed at the end of a meeting so that members clearly understand who will complete the Mandatory Reporter Guide. This is to prevent multiple reports being made about a child or young person based on the same information following a meeting.

If the Mandatory Reporter Guide indicates that it is necessary, a report to the Child Protection Helpline must be made. The only exception to this is where a report has already been made by one of the members about the child or young person in question, and the Safety Action Meeting provides no new information to add to this report.

Reports to the Child Protection Helpline should be made in consultation with the victim wherever possible. The reporting service provider should discuss the report thoroughly with the victim, and explain why a report is being made regarding her child or children. The only exception is where doing so will increase the threat to the victim or her children, is impracticable, or will seriously compromise a relationship with the victim or her children that is crucial to ongoing support.

If the Mandatory Reporter Guide indicates that another course of action is necessary or recommended, such as contact with a Child Well-being Unit or other service provider, this course of action must be taken in a timely manner and in consultation with the victim wherever possible. Again, the only exception is where doing so will increase the threat to the victim or her children, is impracticable, or will seriously compromise a relationship with the victim or her children that is crucial to ongoing support.

Similarly, if FACS forms the opinion, on reasonable grounds, that a child or young person is in need of care and protection, they may take whatever action is necessary to safeguard or promote the safety, welfare and well-being of that child or young person following a Safety Action Meeting.

It is important to note that Safety Action Meetings allow service providers to meet their child protection obligations more effectively by providing more complete information about all relevant circumstances.

Safety Action Meetings enable members to build a comprehensive picture of each victim's situation, her needs and the threats to her safety. If a member, such as FACS, needs to take action in regards to child protection, the information shared at a Safety Action Meeting will help them to do so in an appropriate way.

The Mandatory Reporter Guide and other child protection resources can be found at www.keepthemsafe.nsw.gov.au.

6.4 Community concern

Victims with children who have had negative experiences with service providers in the past may be reluctant to engage in the Safety Action Meeting process if these service providers participate in the meetings.

In particular, victims from diverse communities may be concerned that engaging with service providers involved in Safety Action Meetings will lead to negative outcomes for their families, based on previous experience of government policies. For example, Aboriginal communities may fear removal of their children. Asylum seekers may fear being returned to immigration detention.

Members should consider these concerns and the associated risk that victims will disengage from support when developing Safety Action Plans for victims with children. Actions developed as a result of a meeting must have as their aim the prevention or reduction of a serious threat to victims and their children.

In addition, Safety Action Meeting members and other workers employed by their service providers should be appropriately trained in having skilled discussions with victims about child protection issues. This is vital as members should consult with victims during the reporting process wherever possible.

7. Governance, compliance and review

7.1 Governance

7.1.1 Local problem-solving

If an issue arises regarding the operation of a Safety Action Meeting or the conduct of a member, members should seek to resolve the issue locally wherever possible.

For example, if a member disagrees with an action that another member proposes to take, the members should discuss the merit and potential consequences of the action as a group. If a member takes an action that is not supported by other members and which does not align with this manual and the purpose of Safety Action Meetings, the Safety Action Meeting Coordinator and/or Chair should in the first instance discuss the matter with the member in question, and their executive if necessary.

If an issue cannot be resolved locally or it relates to a systemic matter concerning the operation of Safety Action Meetings across NSW, the Chair should escalate the matter to a regional domestic and family violence forum or Legal Aid NSW as appropriate. Legal Aid NSW will liaise with government agencies and other service providers as needed.

7.1.2 Regional governance

The operation of Safety Action Meetings is supported by regional domestic and family violence forums. These forums have been established to monitor and assist with implementation of all elements of the Reforms.

The forums meet on a regular basis and comprise executive representatives of all government Safety Action Meeting members, senior to local members themselves, as well as other key service providers in each region.

Until March 2015, the forums will be chaired by a senior police officer and supported by Police Regional Domestic Violence Coordinators (RDVCs). Other arrangements will be developed in future.

In regard to Safety Action Meetings, the forums:

- provide a forum for problem-solving;
- ensure roles and responsibilities of Safety Action Meeting members are clear;
- proactively identify and manage risks to the ongoing implementation of Safety Action Meetings;
- facilitate cooperation with the child protection system at a regional level;

- provide timely reporting on agreed key performance indicators and outcomes to the Reforms Implementation Working Group; and
- escalate systemic issues and provide advice to the Implementation Working Group where necessary.

7.1.3 Executive governance

The operation of Safety Action Meetings is overseen by the Reforms Implementation Working Group. The Working Group comprises representatives of the key government agencies responsible for implementation of the *It Stops Here: Safer Pathway* service delivery model, including the Department of Family and Community Services, the Department of Justice, NSW Health and Legal Aid NSW.

The Working Group meets on a monthly basis. In regard to Safety Action Meetings, the Working Group:

- provides a forum for cross-agency problem-solving;
- proactively identifies and manages risks to the ongoing implementation of Safety Action Meetings;
- facilitates cooperation with the child protection system at agency level;
- monitors regular reporting on agreed key performance indicators and outcomes from the regional domestic and family violence forums;
- escalates systemic issues and provide advice to the Reforms Delivery Board where necessary.

The Reforms Delivery Board is the high-level cross-agency body responsible for overseeing implementation of all elements of the Reforms. The Delivery Board considers issues relating to Safety Action Meetings as necessary.

7.2 Compliance

7.2.1 Overview

Safety Action Meetings must be conducted in accordance with this manual and the Protocol. Safety Action Meeting members must comply with the manual at Safety Action Meetings and in relation to all matters concerning Safety Action Meetings.

If a member fails to comply with the manual, the Safety Action Meeting Chair should seek to resolve the matter with the member and their service provider directly.

If a member consistently fails to comply with this manual, the Safety Action Meeting Chair may, in consultation with other members, terminate that member's participation in the meetings. The Chair may request that the service provider in question identifies another member to attend the meetings, or identify an appropriate replacement service provider in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

If a member consistently fails to comply with the Protocol, the Safety Action Meeting Chair should follow the compliance procedures set out in the Protocol.

If an issue cannot be resolved locally or it relates to a systemic matter concerning the operation of Safety Action Meetings across NSW, it should be escalated to the relevant regional domestic and family violence forum or Legal Aid NSW as appropriate.

7.2.2 Complaints by victims

A victim considered at a Safety Action Meeting may wish to make a complaint about the meeting process or a member. Complaints should be handled in a timely and appropriate manner to resolve issues where they exist and to ensure victims' concerns are addressed. Victims should be assisted to make complaints in writing wherever possible.

Complaints relating to information sharing should be handled in accordance with the Protocol. Complaints relating to a Safety Action Meeting member should be referred to the Safety Action Meeting Chair. Complaints relating to a member in their general capacity as employees of their service provider should be directed to that service provider and handled in accordance with internal policies and procedures.

If a complaint raises a systemic issue that may affect Safety Action Meetings across NSW, the Safety Action Meeting Chair should refer the matter to the relevant regional domestic and family violence forum or Legal Aid NSW as appropriate.

7.2.3 Complaints by members

A member may wish to make complaint about another member. For example, a member may feel that another member has spoken inappropriately about a victim or breached confidentiality, or taken an action that is inappropriate, unethical or unsafe.

In the case of a dispute:

- Members should first raise the issue at a Safety Action Meeting and attempt to resolve it through discussion;
- If the issue remains unresolved, members should meet with the Chair separately; and
- If the issue still remains unresolved, members should make a formal complaint in writing to the Chair.

In such cases the Chair should seek the views of all parties involved if appropriate, and convene a meeting to resolve the matter.

If a complaint cannot be resolved locally, or raises a systemic issue that may affect Safety Action Meetings across NSW, the Safety Action Meeting Chair should refer the matter to the relevant regional domestic and family violence forum or Legal Aid NSW as appropriate.

7.3 Review

This manual reflects the current stage of the Reforms implementation process and will be updated over time.

The manual will be formally reviewed by Legal Aid NSW in collaboration with key government agencies following evaluation of the *It Stops Here: Safer Pathway* service delivery model. The manual will then be reviewed at regular intervals in line with the Protocol.

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Appendices

- A Safety Action Meeting Agenda
- B Safety Action Meeting Record
- C Safety Action Meeting Referral Form
- D Safety Action Meeting Information Sheet
- E Safety Action Meeting Confidentiality Agreement

Appendix A

Safety Action Meeting Agenda

Safety Action Meeting						
Date				Record-taker		
Location				Attendees		
Chair				Apologies		
1. Welcome and introductions						
2. Confidentiality agreement and disclosure of conflicts						
3. Victims at serious threat – existing referrals						
Victim	Date of referral	Consent to referral (yes/no)	Date of birth	Address	Children (names and dates of birth)	Perpetrator (name, relationship to victim, date of birth and address)
4. Victims at serious threat – new referrals						
5. Review of actions arising						
6. Any other business/ administrative matters						
7. Close						

Appendix B

Record of Safety Action Meeting

Safety Action Meeting				
Date		Record-taker		
Location		Attendees		
Chair		Apologies		
1. Victims at serious threat – existing referrals				
Victim	Date of referral	Safety Action Plan	Member responsible	Time-frame
2. Victims at serious threat – new referrals				
3. Any other business/ administrative matters				

Appendix C

Referrals to Safety Action Meetings

Safety Action Meetings aim to prevent or lessen serious threats to the life, health or safety of domestic violence victims and their children through targeted information sharing between service providers.

Victims identified as **at serious threat** of further harm should be referred to a Safety Action Meeting.

Referrals should be sent to the Local Coordination Point. The Local Coordination Point coordinates the agenda for Safety Action Meetings in the area.

Note:

Information sharing in domestic violence cases, including for the purpose of making a referral to a Safety Action Meeting, must comply with Part 13A of the *Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007* and the Domestic Violence Information Sharing Protocol.

Unless it will increase the threat to a victim's safety, or it is otherwise unreasonable or impractical, it is always best practice to seek consent before making a referral.

Safety Action Meeting Referral Form

For use by non-government service providers and government agencies other than Police

Victim at serious threat	
Date of birth	
Address and contact number	
Safe time to contact	
Perpetrator (name, date of birth, address)	
Children (name, date of birth)	

1. Victim identified as **at serious threat** based on (select one)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool (DVSAT);
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other risk identification tool; or
<input type="checkbox"/>	Professional judgement.

Please provide the completed DVSAT or other risk identification tool if available.

2. Background information/ major risk indicators:

.....

.....

3. Has the victim consented to the referral?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	No

If not, why not?

.....

4. Referrer

Name	
Service provider	
Contact number	
Email address	
Date	

Appendix D

Safety Action Meeting Information Sheet

We have serious concerns about your safety

Your safety is very important to us. We want to work with you to reduce the threat to you and your family.

If you have been identified as **at serious threat** because of domestic violence, you may be referred to a Safety Action Meeting.

Domestic violence is a crime. It means any behaviour, in an intimate or family relationship, which is violent, threatening, or controlling, and causes you to live in fear. It can include physical, verbal, sexual or emotional abuse.

What is a Safety Action Meeting?

A Safety Action Meeting is a targeted response to serious cases of domestic violence. Safety Action Meetings are held regularly and bring together relevant service providers in the local area. At the meetings, service providers develop ways to reduce the threat to you and your family's safety.

It is important to know that information shared at a Safety Action Meeting is confidential and will never be shared with the person who has hurt you.

Why am I being referred to a Safety Action Meeting?

You may be referred to a Safety Action Meeting so that service providers can discuss the threat to you and your family's safety and work together to reduce this threat.

Who attends the Safety Action Meeting?

Representatives from the following service providers regularly attend Safety Action Meetings:

- Police
 - Community Services
 - Housing
 - Health
 - Corrective Services
 - Education
 - Local Coordination Point
- Do I have to attend the Safety Action Meeting?

No. You and your family are not expected to attend the meeting. It is for workers only.

What will happen at the Safety Action Meeting?

Service providers will discuss your situation and the threat to you and your family's safety in order to develop a Safety Action Plan. The Safety Action Plan is a list of actions that service providers can take to protect you from further harm.

It is important to understand that the Safety Action Plan includes actions for service providers only, not for you. You can never be made to do anything as a result of a Safety Action Meeting.

Wherever possible, you will be told what happens at the Safety Action Meeting.

What if I don't want to be referred to a Safety Action Meeting?

You may not want your case referred to a Safety Action Meeting. You can let workers know if you do not agree to being referred.

However if your situation is highly dangerous there may be times when we need to make a referral for you to a Safety Action Meeting without your consent. In this case, we may need to share information to protect your life, health or safety or that of your family.

Appendix E

Safety Action Meeting Confidentiality Agreement

Safety Action Meeting	
Date	
Location	
Chair	

The Chair reminds all attendees that:

- Information sharing at Safety Action Meetings must comply with Part 13A of the *Crimes (Domestic and Personal) Violence Act 2007* and the Domestic Violence Information Sharing Protocol (the Protocol);
- Safety Action Meetings are based on a fundamental commitment to preventing or lessening serious threats to the life, health or safety of domestic violence victims and their children; and
- Discussion at Safety Action Meetings is conducted in a respectful manner that treats all individuals with dignity.

Information shared at Safety Action Meetings is **strictly confidential** and must not be disclosed elsewhere except in order to prevent or lessen serious threats to the life, health or safety of victims and their children in accordance with the Protocol or Chapter 16A of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*.

Safety Action Meetings aim to:

- prevent domestic violence-related deaths, illness, injury and disability;
- prioritise responses to victims at serious threat;
- reduce repeat victimisation;
- reduce re-offending by perpetrators;
- manage threats collaboratively across all relevant service providers;
- improve agency accountability for their response to victims and perpetrators; and
- increase the safety of staff working with victims and perpetrators.

All attendees must ensure that any documentation relating to Safety Action Meetings is stored securely in accordance with the Protocol.

By signing this document, I agree to abide by the above:

Name	Service provider	Signature	Date

