

## MARAM Practice Guide – Practice Note Update: Minimum response to victim survivors during COVID-19 period

For up to date public health advice, visit the [Department of Health and Human Services website](#).

### This is a minimum response guide under MARAM during COVID-19 quarantine and isolation period

Adult and child victim survivors are at increased risk of violence during required measures for the current outbreak of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). This can be due to factors including increased time in quarantine/isolation with the perpetrator, reduced opportunities to seek support from professionals, family and/or friends, less incidental contact with other systems such as child care and school and increased family stressors related to finances, employment or housing instability. Alcohol and substance use as well as mental health issues, may also be impacted by COVID-19, known risk factors for a potential escalation in family violence.

*No matter the external stressors, violence is never excusable.*

**It is recommended that all current and new clients have a revised risk assessment and updated safety plan in response to COVID-19 related quarantine or increased government imposed physical distancing and travel restriction measures.**

Where possible, services are expected to prioritise accordingly:

- RAMP Clients – current and referred
- Clients identified at serious risk especially if the perpetrator is on remand (and release is imminent)
- Clients: who are pregnant; with children (esp. under 3 years); who require an interpreter; with complex needs (including children with complex needs, such as disability or medical condition); who are over 60 years; who are in hotel accommodation
- All clients

### 1. Review all risk assessments as soon as possible

See revised screening template identifying immediate risk, at **Attachment 1**. Ask:

*Has a DHHS self-assessment or medical screening for COVID-19 occurred?*

If positive and in quarantine, different forms/levels of risk will be present compared to physically distancing measures.

Be aware of heightened mental health issues for all victim survivors resulting from increased isolation, control and fear. New questions to ask about suicide or self-harm risk are in **Attachment 1**<sup>1</sup>.

Be aware of new perpetrator coercive and controlling behaviour /tactics. Perpetrators may: start using violence; continue, escalate or vary previous tactics of violence and abuse or coercive and controlling behaviours; or exploit COVID-19 pandemic measures, and use pandemic specific behaviour below:

- misinformation about the pandemic to control or increase fear, or limit help-seeking to available support
- control access to, or use COVID-19 as a reason to disengage with therapeutic or mandated services, or and/or justify escalation in problem behaviours
- increased isolation within the home and/or increased control of communication devices
- denial of access to medical care
- increased threats to suicide or self-harm, and/or expressions of hopelessness
- increased demands for custody of children and attacks on parenting
- threatening to cause the victim survivor, adult or child, to contract the COVID-19 virus.

If these serious risk perpetrator behaviours are identified, an **immediate intervention response** is required.

### 2. Update your risk management and safety planning – use updated MARAM Safety Plan

- Encourage the victim survivor or key contacts to contact **000** if risk changes or escalating.
  - Safety plan for isolation periods where the perpetrator is in the home.
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- Apply for or vary a family violence intervention order to exclude the perpetrator from the home or places victim survivor (adults, children and young people) frequent– **some extremely serious risk cases should have proactive intervention to exclude perpetrators during the isolation period**
- Plan tailored risk management strategies for marginalised groups of victim survivors
- Continue to monitor risk for women and children in physical isolation/quarantine with perpetrators – develop plan for contact for clients at serious risk to monitor, such as weekly.
- Activate additional resources such as relocation to crisis accommodation or refuge, a Personal Safety Initiative or RAMP referral, welfare checks by local police, access to courts and legal support and brokerage
  - Where possible and safe to do so, intervention should prioritise victim survivors (including children) to remain at home and source alternative accommodation for the perpetrator.
- New questions to ask about suicide or self-harm risk are in the updated Safety Plan (**Attachment 2**)
- Support connection to Legal Help 9 am and 5 pm, Monday to Friday by phone (1300 792 387) or webchat at <http://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/>.

### 3. New ways to communicate with clients in physical isolation

Plan ahead for methods of communication during physical isolation/social distancing period. Communicate that support for safety continues, even if they need to leave. This may mean not returning home for some time or removing the perpetrator to isolate elsewhere.

Plan in advance for limited opportunities to contact families, friends and services. **Always state:**

- “Help is still available – how can we help you to continue to access support?”
- **“Call police on 000** if you need immediate help”
- “If you call emergency services and need to leave the phone, try not to hang it up”
- “If possible, teach children or young people how to call police in an emergency”<sup>2</sup>
- “Your safety still comes first - you won’t get into trouble for calling police during quarantine or physical distancing/isolation periods”

**Technology** - note perpetrators will escalate use of technology to monitor and control communication. Discuss safe communication, including safe devices that can be kept private. If unsafe to directly communicate, arrange alternative methods with ‘safe’ third parties.

Identify and prioritise known serious risk and RAMP victim survivors and set up expectations around communication. Let the person know they can continue to ask for help any time you call to check in.

- Consider alternative methods if phone is unavailable or restricted, e.g. email [safesteps@safesteps.org.au](mailto:safesteps@safesteps.org.au).
- Ask when and how to call – weekly/fortnightly? If a victim survivor does not respond to calls, consider their most recent risk assessment and use your professional judgement if you need to call police.

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<sup>2</sup> See Child Safety Plan for conversation model in MARAM Responsibility 4, Appendix 10.

Attachment 1: Updated Immediate Risk Assessment [Template presumes personal/demographic information already collected or can be when safe to do so]

Question		Yes	No	Comments (or not known)
Do you have any immediate concerns about your safety?				
PERPETRATOR ACTIONS	<i>Have they...</i>			
	physically hurt you in any way (hit, slapped, kicked or otherwise physically hurt you)?			All communication with victim survivors should promote the language of 'physical distancing' with a social inclusion messaging – victims are already methodically isolated by perpetrators which means this language can make people even more reluctant to seek support.
	threatened to hurt you or any children? (including threats to cause you or your children to contract COVID-19?)			
	increased control of your communication or activities?* or increased emotional abuse?			
threatened to self-harm or suicide?				
<i>The following risk related questions refer to the victim survivor:</i>				
IMMEDIATE THREAT	Are there any children or people in your care in immediate danger?			Identify and focus on escalating mental health, controlling behaviours, physical or sexual violence, threats, including perpetrator threats to suicide.
	Do you have any thoughts of suicide? Are they overwhelming? Do you have an uncontrolled feeling of hopelessness?			
HELP ACCESS	<b>Can you call police on 000?</b>			Identify if victim survivor also at increased risk of mental health issues or suicide.
	If yes – hang up and do so now			
	Do you need me to do this for you? What is your location?			

Attachment 2: Updated safety plan

## Crisis COVID-19 Safety Plan

Plan detail and questions to support planning	Checklist and detail
<b>Safe place to go</b>	
<i>What is the fastest/easiest/safest way to exit the house? If you need to leave quickly, where could you go?</i>	Address or name of place and how will you get there?
<b>Emergency contacts</b>	
<i>Would you feel comfortable calling the police (000) in an emergency? If not, how can we support you to do so?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A Call <b>000</b> in an emergency or Safe Steps on <b>1800 015 188</b> or local family violence organisation on _____ [insert]	
Who are your personal emergency contacts? (plan for them to be a point of contact)	Name, relationship, contact details
<b>System intervention</b>	

**If the victim survivor has a Positive COVID-19 test and are quarantined – explain heightened risk of abuse and help available**

- Are they at home? Are they confined to a smaller space? Are they in hospital?

If at home they are likely to have regular contact from health services who can assist to monitor risk. **Health services should screen routinely, asking if they**

<p>Is the perpetrator living with you in the home during quarantine/physical isolation period? Is the perpetrator returning to the home due to job or housing loss? Have additional people moved into the home recently?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A</p>	<p><b>are ‘safe at home’? Consistently message help is available if they are unsafe.</b></p>
<p>Is an intervention order in place (and children named)? See Legal Help – 1300 792 387: Family Violence Intervention Orders; Child Protection; Parenting issues (Family Law); Criminal law; Tenancy; Migration; Social security (Centrelink). Available in a range of languages and for people who are deaf or hearing/speech impaired.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A (provide details)</p>	<p>If the victim survivor is not living with the perpetrator – the perpetrator will likely increase their use of violence towards victim survivors who they believe are more vulnerable as they know where they are at all times.</p>
<p>Does intervention order need variation to exclude perpetrator from home? (if perpetrator has returned to the home due to housing or employment stress – discuss alternative housing options for perpetrator to increase safety and enable exclusion)</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A</p>	<p>If the victim survivors is currently living with a perpetrator, ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Are you planning on staying with them during isolation?</li> </ul>
<p>If an intervention order in place, is it being adhered to? (note if any breaches, list/describe)</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A (provide details)</p>	<p>If yes, <b>explore their reasons and options for isolating elsewhere.</b></p>
<p><b>Safe communication / Support of someone close by</b></p>		
<p><i>Do you have other options for accommodation?</i> <b>Explore why if they are reluctant to use other available options</b></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A (provide details)</p>	<p>Some people may feel they don’t have any other choices – due to reduced or lost income, care needs, options to leave with children, or fears of putting at-risk cohorts at risk of contracting COVID-19.</p>
<p>How can we communicate during quarantine or physical isolation? Do you have access to a phone or internet? (Skype, Teams, social media, or contact with friends, family or school?)</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A (provide details) (check technology safety - below)</p>	<p>Increased financial stress may limit perceived choices where available support not known.</p>
<p>Can you contact friends, family or someone trusted if you need to? Consider a <b>code word</b> or signal with a safe person or someone close by who knows how to respond if you contact them in an emergency? Ask: - can they <b>contact police on 000</b> on your behalf? - can they come to your assistance if they hear sounds of violence? - can they assist you to leave? Code word or signal may be flashing internal lights, the position of internal blinds, toys or ornaments arranged outdoors or the shouting of certain words to tip off observers. Note willingness to assist may change or diminish with fear/ risk of infection – let the person know they will not be in trouble if they come to your assistance</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A (provide details)</p>	<p><b>Legal Help is available</b> – Victoria Legal Aid can provide advice and/or triage to local community legal service support.</p> <p>Court duty lawyer services for intervention order matters can provide support, even if applicant not attending court, ideally ahead of Court date. All applicants for intervention orders or variations should be provided with legal help contact information.</p>
<p>Does anyone else have access to your phone or online accounts? (email, Facebook, other social media etc.)</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A (provide details)</p>	

<p>Can you access essential services for help? (GP, pharmacist, supermarket worker, teachers or other staff) Think in advance how you could communicate with them. Services can plan and support risk management ahead of escalation.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A (provide details) Can you give them a note with your name and address on it and the help you need, e.g. <i>My name is [NAME], Please call the police, I live at [ADDRESS] and I am in danger.</i></p>
<p><b>Check online and phone security:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Install free Aurora or Daisy app on the <a href="#">1800RESPECT website</a></li> <li>- keep records of abusive texts, emails, social media etc.</li> <li>- Clear browser history, use private browsing, for example by opening ‘incognito’ in Chrome or ‘private’ in Safari</li> <li>- Instant messaging can be tracked and recorded. It may be safer to call from a landline or friend’s telephone.</li> <li>- Create an anonymous email account but keep using your old accounts to avoid suspicion</li> <li>- Protect or change passwords</li> <li>- If possible, have a spare mobile with prepaid credit</li> <li>- Limit social media contacts to only those you trust</li> <li>- Install anti-virus protection to help block spyware.</li> <li>- Check for signs of spyware:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Battery of device is dying faster/speeds slower</li> <li>• Any unknown programs operating</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Perpetrator knows what you are doing, where you are, who you talk to online/by emails/texts/calls</li> </ul>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A (provide details) <b>Check actions completed:</b></p>
<p>Can you tell someone close by about the violence who can call the police? <b>What is a code word or signal you can use?</b> i.e. flashing internal lights, the position of internal blinds, toys or ornaments arranged outdoors or the shouting of certain words to tip off observers.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A (provide details)</p>
<p>Could they assist if you want to leave? (note willingness to assist may change or diminish with fear/ risk of infection)</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A (provide details)</p>
<p>Could they come with assistance or call the police if they hear sounds of violence coming from your home?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A (provide details)</p>
<p><b>Planning for children, older people or people in your care [if applicable]</b></p>	
<p>What would you need to arrange for people in your care?</p>	<p>(provide details)</p>
<p>What are their support needs?</p>	<p>(provide details)</p>
<p>Would they come with you if you leave in an emergency?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A (provide details)</p>
<p><b>If you have children in your care</b></p>	<p>Make sure children understand the safety plan, where age and developmentally appropriate. See Child Safety Plan in MARAM Responsibility 4, Appendix 10.</p>

**Discuss emergency planning, what to do, and where they will go in case of immediate danger.**

The safety plan may include:

- If the victim survivor is self-isolating and continuing to live with the perpetrator, identify a space in the house that is lower risk to go to where they can phone police/000 for assistance, or which may be an escape option
- Plan for the perpetrator restricting food, medicines, support equipment, private spaces (e.g. bathroom), care, services .
- Pre-programming the victim survivor’s phone with emergency contacts and preparing an emergency ‘go bag’.

Ask additional questions that may help them manage the perpetrator. Use the language of the perpetrator to be less challenging and allow the victim survivor to talk about how the family are going to manage and stay safe:

- Does the perpetrator acknowledge the impact of his behaviour towards you and the children?
- Would they be open to agree on a designated space in the house as a ‘safe zone’ for you and the children when he becomes ‘angry’ ‘frustrated’ or thinks ‘they’re losing it’ that they agree not to breach.

How many children do you have in your care? Ages?	(provide details)
Do they have any particular needs?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A (provide details)
Do your children attend school? (including online platforms – noting teachers and school staff can support wellbeing and safety checks for children and adults experiencing violence – and report to Child FIRST, Child Protection, police and specialist family violence services)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A (provide school address/contact details)
What sort of new/revised routine or structure is in place for your child/ren? How has it changed recently?	(provide details)
What do you already do on a day-to-day basis to keep your child/ren safe?	(provide details)
Is there anyone in your child’s life you trust they can talk to? Can they talk to teachers online if they are unsafe or afraid?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A Name of trusted person, contact details:
<b>Planning for pets</b>	
Would pets come with you if you leave in an emergency?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
<b>Transport</b>	
Do you have access to a vehicle to get to a safe place?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A (provide details)
Can someone come to pick you up? (let safe person know in advance they may need to assist you in an emergency)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A (provide details)
<b>Items to take with you – escape bag</b>	
Key items including phone, keys, money (cash, bank cards), documents, medication, support aides, prescriptions?	(provide details)
Can you put together items in a safe place or leave them or copies with someone, just in case?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A (provide details)
<b>Financial access</b>	
Do you have access to money? Access in an emergency?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A (provide details)
<b>Current supports</b>	
Do you have supportive people who you trust to talk to about your situation? Can they help you in an emergency?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A (provide details)
Are you connected to social networks (family, friends, etc)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A (provide details)

- Would they agree to take a walk or leave the room when they feel their feelings are getting the better of them.
- Would the perpetrator call men’s referral service (1300 766 491), beyond blue (1300 22 4636) or lifeline (13 11 14) for support if things were getting too big for them to manage?

Consider all personal plans for responding to violence in the home. Increased and sustained emotionally abusive tactics, including abuse related to parenting and communication, personal self-worth etc. will take an increased toll on victims.

Discuss personal strategies to manage this impact and how to determine when and how they can leave if they need to.

What do you usually do day-to-day to manage your safety? How has/will this change during physical isolation?	(provide details)
Are you engaged with any professional/therapeutic services? Will they continue by phone/online during physical isolation?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A (provide details)
Access to antenatal services? (if applicable)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A (provide details)
<b>Personal emotional supports</b>	
If perpetrator increases their emotional attacks, what strategies can you use to manage your mental health? - Can you spend time in different rooms? - Can you do exercise at home or close to home?	(provide details)
If you feel suicidal, enact your safety plan: - What are my warning signs? - What are my reasons for living? - Who can I talk to? - How can I make my environment safer? - What activities can I do until the feelings pass?	Who can I contact? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In an emergency always <b>call 000</b></li> <li>• Lifeline 13 11 14 (24/7)</li> <li>• Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659467 (24/7)</li> <li>• My GP:</li> </ul>