

Continuity of collaborative practice: A practice resource for specialist sexual assault and family violence practitioners

This information is intended for specialist family violence practitioners working within the Victorian context to strengthen understanding, skills and confidence when responding to disclosures of sexual violence within the context of family violence.

About this resource

This resource, developed by Sexual Assault Services Victoria (SASVic) in collaboration with Safe and Equal, supports specialist sexual assault counsellor advocates and specialist family violence practitioners in working collaboratively to ensure safety, support and continuity in the provision of services for victim survivors

It is informed by:

- The National Association of Services Against Sexual Violence (NASASV) Standards of Practice Manual for Services Against Sexual Violence
- The Domestic Violence Victoria (DV Vic) Code of Practice to inform the principles of continuity of care.

What is continuity in collaborative practice

Continuity in collaborative practice is a coordinated and person-centred approach to providing multiple services that meet the holistic needs victim survivors. When sexual violence occurs in the context of family violence, a victim survivor may seek support from a range of services including specialist sexual assault and specialist family violence services. Victim survivors may move between services at different points in their journey. Continuity in the provision of services ensures that they receive ongoing seamless support whether they are engaging with crisis response, therapeutic services or case management services. It fosters a more coordinated and supportive response, helping victim survivors feel heard, empowered, and better supported, while also reducing the need to repeatedly share their experiences.

A trauma and violence informed approach to continuity in collaborative practice: recognises that many victim survivors of sexual and family violence encounter systemic barriers and siloed or fragmented services emphasises safety, choice and empowerment, ensuring victim survivors retain agency in service engagement integrates collaborative practice to reduce a lack of continuity, service gaps, avoid repeated trauma disclosures and reduce disengagement.

Structural and systemic considerations:

- acknowledges that sexual and family violence often intersect and do not occur in isolation
- emphasises strong coordination between sexual violence and family violence services
- promotes collaboration across distinct service models to avoid service duplication and miscommunication
- uses the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM) and Information Sharing Schemes with clear communication to victim survivors about confidentiality and privacy.

Guiding principles and considerations for practice

The specialist sexual assault and family violence sectors operate within different practice frameworks yet share fundamental principles. Continuity in collaborative practice leverages these commonalities to inform practice and to guide cross sector collaboration supporting victim survivors as they move between services.

Person-centred approach

Prioritise safety, dignity, and autonomy to empower victim survivors in making informed decisions.

A person centered approach ensures services are consistent, transparent and responsive to each individual's journey.

Key practice considerations:

- Empowerment and choice: Provide clear, accessible information to support informed decision making.
- Cultural safety: Deliver inclusive, respectful services that are responsive to diverse cultural identities and lived experiences.
- Trauma and violence informed care: Centre safety, trust and empowerment in every aspect of service delivery.

Holistic and integrated services

Recognises the complex and interconnected challenges that victim survivors face and ensure coordinated responses that reduce the burden of navigating multiple systems.

Key practice considerations:

- Collaboration and coordination: Establish formal pathways for secondary consultations, referrals and shared case planning.
- Comprehensive care: Address immediate safety needs alongside longer-term needs and wellbeing.
- Continuity across systems: Ensure updated and consistent communication of safety plans, case plans, and risk assessments across services to minimise re-traumatisation.

Safety and confidentiality

Prioritise risk assessment and protect confidentiality to build trust and ensure compliance with legislative requirements.

Ensure personal information is protected in accordance with legislative requirements, mandatory reporting obligations, and organisational policies and procedures.

Key practice considerations:

- Prioritise safety: Use ongoing MARAM risk assessments, understanding that risk is fluid.
- Develop safety plans in collaboration with victim survivors.
- Confidentiality and privacy: Proactively share information under the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS) and the Children Information Sharing Scheme (CISS), ensuring victim survivors are informed about limitations and safeguards.

Accessibility and inclusivity

Removing barriers to ensure all victim survivors receive culturally safe, appropriate and accessible support.

Key practice considerations:

- **Rights:** Implement reasonable adjustments, to improve access, safety and usability for all victim survivors in line with ethical responsibilities and legislative requirements
- **Intersectional and inclusive services:** Ensure your practice is culturally responsive to all victim survivors, including multicultural communities, LGBTQIA+ people, people with disabilities and others facing systemic marginalisation.
- **Flexible and responsive:** Offer diverse engagement options to meet evolving needs.

Capacity building and workforce development

Invest in skill development to ensure consistent, informed and trauma and violence informed responses.

Key practice considerations:

- **Cross sector training:** Participate in training opportunities that strengthen understanding and collaboration across sectors.
- **Support for workers:** Engage in ongoing supervision, reflective practice and professional development.

Accessibility and inclusivity

Strengthen service coordination and amplifying victim survivor voices to drive systemic change.

Key practice considerations:

- **Victim survivor feedback:** Regularly gather and integrate victim survivor feedback in your practice.
- **Stakeholder relationship:** Strengthen key relationships with colleagues across sectors to build shared understanding and more integrated responses.

Integrating continuity in your practice

The following steps outline how you can integrate continuity in your practice.

Establish Context

- Clearly explain your role and service scope.
- Discuss confidentiality and obtaining informed consent for information sharing and referrals.

Identify Risks

- Conduct MARAM risk assessments and consider all relevant forms of risk.
- Consider all forms of violence and risk factors and use the MARAM for sexual assault if in the context of family violence.
- Where sexual assault is disclosed outside of this context, ensure that the disclosure is appropriately responded to. If required, contact your local specialist sexual assault service for practitioner advice, secondary consultation and next steps.

Develop a Plan

- Co-develop safety plans that support the victim survivor and include or consider children's needs.
- Identify key services, support, and resources.
- Empower victim survivors with information to guide informed choices.
- Facilitate appropriate secondary consultation and referrals.

Secondary Consultations

- Use secondary consultations to guide best practice and determine appropriate referrals.
- Seek advice from other services to strengthen case planning.

Referral

- Ensure referrals are informed, consent based and include relevant risk and safety information.
- Provide accurate and current service information.
- Maintain ongoing support until the referral is actioned and care is transferred.

Collaboration

- Clarify roles and responsibilities between services.
- Share relevant risk and safety information with appropriate consent.
- Communicate regularly to ensure consistent care across the service system.

Moving forward together

Seamless collaboration between specialist sexual assault counsellor advocates and specialist family violence practitioners is critical to providing consistent, empowering and effective support for victim survivors. The guiding practices outlined in this resource support a unified approach to collaborative practice that honours autonomy and dignity.

Within the context of sexual assault in a family violence context, priority must be placed on:

- resourcing shared casework
- establishing clear referral pathways
- strengthening secondary consultation processes
- engaging in cross sector learning
- sustaining dialogue on how to uphold continuity in collaborative practice approaches.