

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
**Child and Family Services Agency**



**Business Process: Domestic Violence**

## **I. POLICY**

It is the policy of CFSA to assess a child's exposure to domestic violence and how domestic violence impacts the children's physical and emotional safety and well-being. CFSA shall provide linkages to services to the children and both non-offending and offending partners of domestic violence. The social worker shall enter all information in FACES.NET.

## **II. DEFINITIONS**

*Child exposure to domestic violence* occurs when a child witnesses, via seeing, hearing, experiencing as a result of intervening, is told about, or observes the aftermath of abuse and coercive control used against one parent by their partner or co-parent.

*Domestic Violence (aka intimate partner violence)*, for purposes of this policy, is defined as a pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviors committed (or threatened) by an offender upon a person to whom the offender is or was married, with whom the offender is or was in a domestic partnership or romantic, dating, or sexual relationship, or with whom there are shared children. The behaviors include verbal, physical, sexual, emotional and/or psychological attacks, as well as economic coercion. Manipulation of systems (such as police, Court, Child Protective Services), can also be used as a type of coercive control tactic by the domestic violence offender against the non-offending partner. These behaviors may adversely impact the safety and well-being of minor children, regardless of whether the minor child(ren) witnessed them first-hand.

*Domestic Violence Safety Planning* is with the non-offending partner to increase safety for both the non-offending partner and the children. Domestic violence safety planning addresses both immediate and long-term safety threats to both the non-offending partner and the children taking into consideration the specific pattern of the domestic violence, the offending partner's tactics/patterns of behaviors, and the protective capacities of the non-offending partner, children, community, and offending partner.

*Parent-Figure* is an adult in a child's life who, regardless of biological relationship, is viewed by the child as a parent and whose actions and behavior impacts the household functioning and well-being of the child.

*Patterns of Coercive and Abusive Control* include ongoing patterns of domination using strategies that include irrational demands, surveillance, isolation, and the threat of negative consequences, such as physical harm.

*Domestic Violence Liaison* is the staff person within each program administration who has received advanced domestic violence training and is available to support social workers and supervisors, to make appropriate case recommendations using a domestic violence informed perspective.

*Domestic Violence Specialist* provides domestic violence-specific consultation and coaching to social workers to increase their competency in assessing and creating safety plans for children and families impacted by domestic violence. The domestic violence specialist may determine during the consultation process that further support is necessary and will coordinate with the social worker to identify next steps.

### III. PROCEDURES

#### A. Initial Assessment

##### *Initial Assessment with Non-Offending Partner*

1. The social worker shall explore the non-offending partner and child survivor's experiences of violence and coercive control, trauma, and their perceptions of their own and each other's safety, as well as their recommendations to safely engage the offending partner.
2. The social worker shall also explore the mental health and substance abuse history of the non-offending and offending partners and the interaction with domestic violence in every case regardless of whether the presenting allegation involves domestic violence.
3. The social worker shall immediately contact the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) when there are concerns of imminent danger for any family member and their safety cannot be assured through a collaborative [safety plan](#).
4. The social worker, in collaboration with the non-offending partner, shall contact [DC Safe](#) to discuss safety options. The social worker should ensure the offending partner is not aware of this phone call.

##### *Safety Planning with the Non-Offending Partner*

5. If domestic violence has occurred between the child's parent-figures within the last 12 months, the social worker shall team with the non-offending partner to create a safety plan that addresses:
  - a. the offending partner's behavior
  - b. the non-offending partner's circumstance and response
  - c. the strategies that have worked for the non-offending partner in the past
  - d. information about different community options available through the [DC Victim Hotline](#), [DC SAFE](#), the DC Superior Court, and law enforcement

##### *Initial Assessment with Offending Partner*

6. The social worker shall meet with the offending partner to assess their attitude about their behavior, willingness to accept responsibility and participate in appropriate interventions (such as safety contracts, batterers groups, mental health services, etc.).
7. If the offending partner is under court supervision, efforts shall also be made to partner with [Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency](#) for the District of Columbia (CSOSA) for increased accountability and/or compliance monitoring.
8. In situations when a home removal is necessary for child safety, separate Family Team Meetings (FTM), case planning meetings, and visits shall occur for the non-offending partner, to allow them to speak freely and avoid the influence of the offending partner.
9. The social worker shall communicate to the offending partner that their behaviors and choices put family safety at risk and that sole responsibility for the impact of this behavior on family functioning and on child safety and well-being rests with him or her.

##### *Technical Consultation with Domestic Violence Liaison*

10. Based on the complexity or severity of the domestic violence, the supervisor may contact the administration's domestic violence liaison to consult on safety assessment, engagement protocols for both parties in the domestic violence situation, and service need assessment, referral and linkage.

## **B. Office of Well Being Consultative Services**

1. The social worker shall make a referral to the Office of Well Being (OWB) for consultation with the domestic violence specialist in the following instances:
  - a. In cases when there is domestic violence suspected, but not yet confirmed
  - b. After the social worker has consulted with his or her supervisor and with a domestic violence liaison and a higher level of expertise is recommended
2. When a referral is made to OWB for consultation, OWB shall review the request for completeness, eligibility, prior history, lethality and appropriateness and schedule a consultation within 5 business days of receipt of the referral.
  - Referrals with high lethality indicators will be addressed immediately.
3. The consultation is a peer-to-peer meeting during which the OWB domestic violence specialist provides best practice coaching and to assist the social worker on moving the case forward to safe case closure. During the consultation with the social worker, the domestic violence specialist shall determine next steps on safety, resources and best practice recommendations.
4. If further support and engagement is recommended, then the domestic violence specialist and the assigned social worker shall complete a collaborative interview with the non-offending partner. During this meeting the domestic violence specialist, assigned social worker, and non-offending partner collaborate to:
  - a. Strategize on how best to keep the non-offending partner and children safe in the moment.
  - b. Discuss whether a personalized domestic violence safety plan is warranted.
  - c. Discuss and effectuate referrals to appropriate service providers.
  - d. Explore with the non-offending partner whether and how to engage the offending partner.
5. The domestic violence specialist shall meet with the social worker to discuss the recommendations and referrals and shall document all referral information in FACES.NET.
6. The social worker shall monitor services and progress and seek further consultation from the domestic violence specialist as needed if the non-offending partner is linked to a community-based domestic violence program.
7. In the event the safety of child(ren) is compromised, the social worker shall ensure the immediate safety of the child(ren), and then contact the domestic violence specialist for further consultation on safety for the family.
8. If contact and engagement does not compromise the safety of the non-offending partner and child(ren), then the domestic violence specialist and social worker shall make every effort to contact the offending partner to respectfully discuss the adverse impact of their behavior on child safety and well-being.
9. If the domestic violence specialist and social worker determine that it is not safe for the non-offending partner or the child(ren) for CFSA to contact the offending partner, the domestic violence specialist shall document this information in the FACES.NET Contacts Screen.

## **C. Ongoing Safety Assessment and Progress Monitoring**

1. The social worker shall make efforts to obtain releases of information from the family to communicate with service providers, including the non-offending partner, the offending partner and children in order to assess and follow-up on treatment and progress.

2. Ongoing assessment shall focus on the offending partner's behaviors and the level of danger to the non-offending partner and child over time. The social worker shall:
  - a. Assess for domestic violence risk at every home visit.
  - b. Continue to ensure the non-offending partner has an updated personalized domestic violence safety plan and resources to address domestic violence.
  - c. If no plan exists, the social worker shall develop a plan with the non-offending partner.
  - d. Contact the domestic violence specialist for guidance and support if there is indication that domestic violence is continuing or reoccurring.
3. The social worker shall incorporate the findings into case planning activities.

#### **D. Confidentiality and Documentation of Client Information**

1. Social workers shall be mindful of the risks of contacting the non-offending partner and child in a domestic violence situation and shall ensure that any and all contact is secure and confidential.
2. The social worker shall clearly communicate to the non-offending partner the limitations to confidentiality.
3. If information with the potential to increase danger must be shared with the offending partner because it is required by court order or subpoena, then the social worker and supervisor shall consult with the assigned assistant attorney general and shall discuss this need with the non-offending partner prior to disclosure in order to develop a personalized domestic violence safety plan.
4. Social workers shall obtain a written release of information from the non-offending partner in order to initiate conversations with the domestic violence shelters and other collaterals.
5. The social worker shall enter all pertinent information, including consultations with the domestic violence specialist in FACES.NET.
  - Documentation shall identify the offending partner and the non-offending partner and focus on facts specific to the offending partner's patterns of behavior, offending partner's willingness to change behavior and the non-offending partner's protective capacities, particularly in relationship to the harm and/or risk of harm to the children.
6. The non-offending partner's actual location, or any information about his or her whereabouts, shall never be shared with the offending partner.
  - a. The social worker shall clearly and boldly identify all information pertaining to domestic violence safety planning and other information that may increase danger if it was shared as "Confidential Information Due To Domestic Violence, Do Not Share".
  - b. Documentation of the non-offending partner's location (including shelter) shall be made in a contact note in FACES.NET and labeled as "Confidential".
  - c. Family Court petitions shall never include the address of the non-offending partner. The address shall be listed on the face of the petition as "Confidential". The non-offending partner's address and the address of any service providers shall be redacted from any records provided to parties in Family Court proceedings.
  - d. The social worker shall consult with the AAG or OGC if a request for an address that CFSA has deemed to be confidential is made by law enforcement, a court, an attorney or party in litigation through a subpoena, or other such request.