

# Understanding Our Clients

## *Domestic and family violence*

### What do I need to understand to work more effectively with clients experiencing domestic and family violence?

- People experiencing domestic and family violence are a high priority group for Legal Aid NSW because their basic need for safety is compromised and they need urgent and sensitive access to the legal system. They need to be heard, they need to be believed and they need us to act quickly and with integrity to ensure their safety.
- These clients have experienced trauma, and their safety may be at risk. Taking that first step in reporting violence is a big step for clients. The response they get to that first disclosure can set the path for their future engagement with services like the police and the legal system.
- You may find that the conversation doesn't flow in the way that you might expect. Clients might have difficulty explaining what's happened quite recently, especially in circumstances of ongoing domestic and family violence. It could be that they are subject to trauma and might not be able to recount details in the way that you might expect.
- Clients might experience a trauma response when talking about what happened to them. They might become confused, dissociated, distressed, or feel like they are reliving the violence. This means they can exhibit a range of symptoms or behaviours including an increased heart rate, difficulty breathing, becoming upset or being unable to continue speaking. It's important to be patient when taking down information and to remind clients that they are currently safe with you.

### Support services for non-legal issues – referral options

#### Online referral databases

These online databases may also assist you to find appropriate non-legal services for your client.

- [WayAhead Directory](#) – online database used to find local services, to make referrals and access mental health information and resources.
- [Ask Izzy](#) – search over 350,000 services to find housing, meals, healthcare, counselling, legal advice, addiction treatment and more.

- [Data Diction LINC](#)S – LINC is used by almost all councils in the Sydney area and lists community services
- [My Community Directory](#) – directory of health and community services in NSW and other states.
- [Infoxchange](#) – national database of community support services.

## Action learning activities

- Reflect on the points raised in the [Understanding Our Clients video](#) and consider if there are aspects you could improve on in the way you work with clients experiencing domestic and family violence. Take action to make changes where appropriate.
- Discuss support services for non-legal issues with your client and help your client access these services if required.
- Complete the [Domestic and Family Violence Essentials](#) training module and reflect on your learnings.
- Review one or more of the resources below and consider how you can apply any insights to your practice.

## Useful resources

- **The Legal Aid NSW** Lawyer Education Series training module [Domestic and Family Violence Essentials](#).
- **Legal Aid NSW** [Domestic and Family Violence Resources](#).
- [The Legal Aid NSW Podcast Channel](#) that you can access via our Podbean account or wherever you get your podcasts. The series covers a variety of topics. Use the search function or topic list to find podcasts that may be relevant.
- [The Australasian Institute of Judicial Administration bench book](#) provides a central resource for judicial officers considering legal issues relevant to domestic and family violence related cases.
- [The Bugmy Bar Book](#) summarises key research relating to social disadvantage and deprivation. It is hosted on the Public Defenders Website and is designed to equip lawyers with a sophisticated, accurate understanding of the impacts adverse experiences can have upon individuals.
- The [With You Trauma-Informed Organisational Toolkit](#) provides practical guidance to foster the development of trauma-informed, rights-based legal assistance services.

- [Legal Aid NSW Quality Standards Manual](#) – this document outlines the Practice Standards, Client Service Standards, Panel Requirements and Law Practice Requirements that apply to your role.