

# Strengthening practice in responding to domestic and family violence

A TOOLKIT FOR COMMUNITY HOUSING PROVIDERS





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*Other sections available in this series*

**SECTION ONE** Introduction

**SECTION TWO** Guidance tools and checklists

**SECTION THREE** Tenant and applicant resources

**SECTION FIVE** A resource for employers

**SECTION SIX** Resource for Housing Professionals

# *Contents*

## **Scenario one**

Paying attention to your observations ..... 4

## **Scenario two**

Working with someone who has English  
as a second language ..... 6

## **Scenario three**

Working with an SHS youth service ..... 8

## **Scenario four**

Working with an Aboriginal tenant ..... 10

A number of case studies have been developed to facilitate practice discussions between staff and build opportunities to explore how CHP staff might operate in different situations.

## Scenario one paying attention to your observations

### *Jess*

Jess is a tenancy manager of a CHP. She notices that one of her tenants, Lily, frequently has neighbours making noise complaints about her whenever her boyfriend David stays over. They have arguments fairly regularly, but there is never any property damage. She also notices that Lily seems to have become more and more of a recluse. She used to be quite chatty and bubbly, often seen outside her property smoking with the neighbours. She doesn't go out as much and when she does it's usually only when her boyfriend is with her.

Jess organises for a home visit to discuss noise complaints with Lily, purposefully making it at a time when she knows Lily's boyfriend is at work. She informs Lily about the noise complaints and asks her if everything is ok – Lily says it's fine and makes it clear that she doesn't want Jess asking any personal questions. Jess explains that everything Lily says to her will be in confidence but puts no pressure on her to talk. She tells her about the local women's group run out of the neighbourhood centre – she explains that lots of women go there when they just need a safe place to chat and to learn new skills or have fun. Jess knows they are running a cooking class in a couple of weeks and suggests Lily go to check it out. She gives Lily a flyer with the information on it and the types of thing the service offers – including support for victims of domestic violence. It also has some information on what domestic violence looks like, including social isolation, emotional and psychological abuse and coercion.

### *Lily*

Lily starts to think about the flyer Jess gave her and the information Jess shared with her. She initially thought Jess was overstepping her mark, but she appreciated that Jess didn't push her to tell her anything personal. She kept the brochure for a few weeks and read about the service. She knows that David won't care if she's going to a cooking class with all women but she asks his permission anyway – being careful not to tell him it's a support service but just that it's a cooking class where she gets to bring home a free meal each week. Thankfully he agrees so she decides to head along.

She attends the first cooking class, and finds that even though they do learn about cooking – they mainly talk about what's going on in their lives. One of the support workers starts talking about domestic violence and Lily immediately tunes out – she isn't a victim of domestic violence as David never puts a hand to her. Then the support worker asks her what her relationship with David is like, if she feels happy when he comes home from work and what they mainly argue about. She explains that David usually gets angry at her when she doesn't tell him what she's doing or where she is, and that he hates her wearing certain clothes out so she finds it easier to just not go out much anymore. She explains



that she doesn't see many of her friends or family anymore as David doesn't like them and always puts them down - so that she doesn't feel like she should be spending time with them. She says that David does yell quite a bit - and she always feels a bit worried when he gets home from work or comes over, but he never physically hurts her and surely he just wants to know where she is all the time because he loves her so much.

The support worker explains to Lily that not all domestic violence is physical - that David's behaviours actually don't sound healthy and respectful. She suggests that if Lily wants, she can pretend to be going to the cooking class but in actual fact they could sit together and work through how Lily feels about her relationship. She explains to Lily that this kind of violence is just as bad as being hurt physically, and explains that David is behaving in a dangerous way. After a few weeks, Lily decides that this is a good idea. She realises her relationship is unsafe and unhealthy. She needs help and support to leave the relationship.

### *Jess*

Jess has been keeping a subtle eye on Lily. She knows she's been visiting the support service regularly but also knows that David and her relationship has become increasingly more aggressive. David is nearly always with Lily and their arguments seem to be becoming more frequent and regular.

Jess calls Lily in for a meeting with her. She explains that they can do some minor things to her property to help keep her safe if she chooses to end her relationship with David. She explains that by putting locks on the windows and sensor lights on the windows and doors she might feel more secure. She explains that Lily's safety is the most important thing and if she feels like she needs to go away for a while to be safe, that it's ok and that she won't lose her property. Jess knows that many women fear leaving their property in case they are forced to move out.

The fear of being homeless often overshadows the fear of being in the violent relationship. Lily didn't know any of this information - and accepts Jess's help to make her property safer. Jess explains that she has ended the relationship and that she is scared for her safety. With Lily's permission, Jess calls her support worker who talks to Jess around what safety measures are in place for Lily and what to do when David arrives. Talking to the support worker, Jess feels more skilled and confident in being able to assist Lily. Lily feels safe knowing that she has both Jess and her support worker looking out for her.

## Scenario two working with someone who has English as a second language

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### *Tony*

Tony has just started working as a tenancy manager for a CHP in a regional area. He is getting to know each of the tenants in the properties in his area and meets a young family – Joseph, Zahra and their son Tommy. He knows that English is not their first language, and notices that Zahra is very quiet and doesn't speak much. He assumes that she doesn't understand very much English as Joseph will frequently speak on her behalf when Tony asks their family any questions.

After a few months, Tony conducts a property inspection on Zahra and Joseph's unit. Zahra doesn't say anything throughout the entire inspection, while Joseph shows Tony inside. Tommy, who is 2, clings to his mother's side the entire time.

Tony notices some minor damage to the bathroom door – it looks as though it's been kicked. He thinks possibly the bathroom door gets jammed and asks Zahra about this. She doesn't say anything and Joseph steps in and explains that he had to kick it open one time but he's fixed the latch since then. Tony has a quick look at the latch and notices that it doesn't appear to be new or replaced.

Later on, Tony is doing an inspection on the unit next to Zahra and Joseph's. As he's about to leave he notices Zahra coming back from doing the shopping. She is visibly pregnant. Tony goes to congratulate her, but upon seeing Tony, Zahra looks terrified and quickly darts into the Unit. Tony casually asks Zahra's neighbour if they have much to do with them. The neighbour raises her eyebrows and says "they keep to themselves, but Zahra doesn't seem to be having a good time at the moment". She doesn't elaborate.

### *Kate*

Tony knocks on Zahra's door but she doesn't answer. He heads back to the office and decides to speak to his colleague Kate about the situation, as something didn't quite seem right. Kate used to manage these Units and she said she also noticed frequent minor property damage to the Unit – nothing ever bad enough to stand out, but now Tony mentioned what he saw, she realised there may be a pattern. They decide to unpack and discuss the behaviours they have noticed and use the CHP Toolkit to do this. Tony realises that as a male tenancy manager, Zahra might be uncomfortable to talk to him if anything was wrong. Tony also knows, through his training in domestic and family violence, that domestic violence often starts or gets worse during pregnancy.



## *Zahra*

Tony and Kate decide to ask Zahra to come in to the office – just to finalise some paperwork and give them some information about when the baby is due to arrive. Tony asks Kate to call the household in the hope of getting Zahra alone. Joseph picks up the phone and insists on coming with Zahra. Tony and Kate struggle to find a reason to get Zahra alone. Tony then realises they have the kids play area in one of the office rooms – so when the family arrive, Kate leads Zahra and Tommy into the play room. Tony stays with Joseph in the office and asks the routine questions. Kate asks Zahra if everything is ok. Zahra is clearly upset and has some light bruising around her neck but as her level of English isn't great, Kate isn't able to understand what's going on. As Zahra's first language is Indonesian, Kate gets the interpreting service on the line and they are able to get onto an interpreter. Kate wants to know if Zahra would like some support and help. Zahra answers yes.

Tony then rings the local domestic violence service that works with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse women. He explains the situation and has Zahra's permission to pass on her details. An Indonesian woman from the service contacts Zahra and makes an appointment for Zahra to come in to see her.

Later that week Tony is notified by the service that the police would be coming later that day to apprehend Joseph. The notes Tony took relating to the property damage and his reasons for contacting the domestic violence service are all filed and able to be used in Court if required. Tony learns that Zahra has been experiencing domestic violence for all of their relationship. Joseph is charged and Zahra moves into the local refuge until Joseph's court date – where he is sentenced.





## Scenario three working with an SHS youth service

### *Katie*

Katie is an 18yr old living in a transitional property that is supported by a youth service. Katie has never had a great relationship with her parents and ran away from home when she was 16. She found herself in a youth refuge, who then helped her find her feet, get a job and move into this property on her own for the next year.

She's going pretty well, and has started to date an older man, Max, at her work. He is lovely, he buys her lots of gifts and takes her out to nice dinners. He spoils her with new clothes and treats her like a princess. She is starting to really fall for him. Max tells her that he is going to look after her, and she doesn't need to worry about money anymore as he will always look after her. He gives her money to go out with her friends –but always wants photos of what they are doing and where they go. He even wants photos of the outfits she wears out – she sends him a selfie every time she leaves the house.

### *Jodie*

Jodie is Katie's support worker at the transitional property. Katie has been going really well, and has been much happier lately than ever before. She's started dating someone new – and Jodie sees how happy it's making Katie. Katie meets with Jodie every month. After a while Jodie notices that Katie has started postponing their meetings. She seems to be coming more and more disengaged and doesn't want to chat to Jodie. When Jodie finally gets hold of Katie she tells Jodie that she doesn't need her anymore because she has Max and he is looking out for her now. Jodie is a bit concerned about this, as she knows she's only been dating Max for a couple of months and that he's a fair bit older than her. She tells Katie that as part of her being able to stay in transitional housing she has to check in with Jodie. Katie is really angry and says that soon she will move in with Max anyway so she won't need her and the property.

### *Katie*

Katie really wants to move in with Max. For some reason, he keeps saying that it's too soon – but they spend every night together anyway. Katie is sick of having to talk to Jodie about what she's doing. She is annoyed that Max doesn't want to live with her – he seems obsessed with her in every other way. He constantly wants to see photos of her and asks her what she's been doing whenever they are apart. He even wants to know where and what she ate for breakfast. Lately he's been commenting that the skirt she bought is a bit tight – she knows she's been putting on a bit of weight but she thought she looked good. Max doesn't seem to like it and she thinks maybe that's why he doesn't want to move in with her. Katie puts herself on a diet and Max seems really happy about it.

Max also has started going through Katie's phone. He looks through all her text messages every time he sees her and she thinks that he's been logging into her Facebook and reading what is happening on there. She doesn't mind though because she's got nothing to hide. The other day she picked up his phone and thought she may as well do the same. He was so angry – he slammed it out of her hand and gave her a fright. She's a bit confused why he can do it, but she can't.

Whenever Katie and Max argue he gets so angry at her, and tells her he can't believe she is arguing with him after he has given her so much. After all – he's paid for her dress, her watch, her earrings and helps pay her rent. Katie knows Max is right so she shuts up and doesn't say anything.



*Jodie*

Jodie is becoming increasingly worried about Katie. She notices that she's lost a heap of weight, and is starting to dress very differently from before. Jodie learns that Max is buying all of Katie's clothes now. Jodie asks Katie if she's been going well and if she's been exercising (as she notices her weight loss). Katie tells Jodie that Max likes her trim so she's been trying to go to the gym twice a day.

Jodie is concerned. She asks Katie to tell her a bit more about Max and their plans. Katie explains to Jodie that she doesn't have time because Max will be waiting and he gets really angry whenever she's late and he'll be wondering what she's doing for so long. Jodie insists that Katie book in another appointment with her in two weeks' time, since they've missed the last few. Katie reluctantly agrees.

In the meantime, Jodie calls 1800RESPECT and talks to the counsellors around her concerns with Katie and her relationship with Max. Jodie thinks that maybe she's overthinking it, and that Katie is in a happy and healthy relationship for an 18 year old. The counsellors explain to Jodie that Max's behaviour does sound troubling. The counsellor helps Jodie feel confident in raising her concerns with Katie at their next meeting. Jodie knows that Katie trusts her, and she doesn't want to jeopardise that. She knows that this trust is important and that if Max's controlling behaviour becomes worse, Jodie might be the only safe person Katie has.

*Katie*

Max has become a bit of a jerk. She still loves him, but is getting sick of him constantly asking questions around who she has been with and why. He even made her put this application on her phone that tracks where she is. He says it's to keep her safe but she thinks he's becoming a bit paranoid. Every time she brings it up he loses it – he even slapped her once. It wasn't that bad, but it left a big red mark and she was shocked. He apologised and said he'd never do it again.

She goes to see her support worker Jodie. Jodie is nice and Katie trusts her, so when Jodie starts asking her a few questions about Max and if she's happy – Katie breaks down. She realises that she's not happy, even though she loves Max so much. She relies on him for everything and she couldn't live without him – but she hates how he makes her feel sometimes and that she doesn't have any privacy anymore.

Jodie explains that there is a great hotline called 1800RESPECT that she can call who give over the phone professional counselling. Katie doesn't want to go and see another service as she's been to so many over the years, but ringing someone could be ok. Katie rings them and finds someone who completely understand what Katie is going through. She doesn't push her to leave Max or to break up with him – she just listens. Katie starts to realise how much she's missed being listened to. She starts to resent Max, and knows deep down that he's not the one for her.

Eventually, with the help of Jodie and 1800 RESPECT – Katie ends her relationship with Max.



## Scenario four working with an Aboriginal tenant

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### *Casey*

Casey is an Aboriginal women living in a CHP in regional New South Wales. She has been in an on again / off again relationship with Darren, the father of her three children, for the past 10 years. Darren is a violent man, particularly when he drinks. Casey has previously taken an AVO out against Darren, but had a very bad experience with the police when doing so. When she was younger, she had her children temporarily removed because of Darren's ongoing violence and is terrified of losing them again. She worked very hard to regain care of her children. She does not trust social workers and child protection workers as she believes they don't understand what she has been through, nor how hard she has had to work to be where she is today.

Casey loves Darren and strongly believes he is a good father to their children when he is not on the grog. She wants their relationship to continue, but doesn't want the grog or violence to be part of their relationship.

### *Fiona*

Fiona is the community liaison worker at the CHP where Casey lives with her children. Fiona knows of Casey's and Darren's tumultuous relationship and knows that Darren has been violent towards Casey in the past. Casey keeps to herself and when Fiona tries to engage with her, Casey is wary and does not share much. She seems very reluctant to talk to Fiona about what is going on or how her children are.

One day, Fiona is alerted by another tenant that Casey and Darren have been arguing and that there has been some significant damage to the property. She needs to talk to Casey to see if she is ok and try to get her some help. Fiona is worried that Casey may end up losing her property as there has been damage to the property a few times now.

Fiona makes an appointment with Casey, who clearly doesn't want to engage with her. Fiona recognises that as a non-Aboriginal woman, Casey may distrust her. Fiona asks Casey whether she would prefer to work with an Aboriginal worker, saying that she can arrange that if Casey would like. Casey asks where the Aboriginal worker is from, and when Fiona tells her, she says no. Casey explains to Fiona that the Aboriginal worker is her cousin's partner and she doesn't want her to know any of her family business.

### *Casey*

Casey is very unsure of Fiona at first, but likes that she offered to get an Aboriginal worker, even though she said no to the offer. Casey likes that Fiona seems to understand why she might distrust her as a non-Aboriginal woman. This made Casey feel more at ease, almost as though Fiona understood some of what she had been through.

Casey attends the meeting with Fiona, who greets her with a big smile. The office is bright and welcoming and she feels safe there. Fiona explains that she only wants what is best for Casey and her children, saying that she is there to support Casey and advocate for her needs. Fiona says that she is also not there to judge Casey or tell her what to do. Casey feels more relaxed and starts to open up to Fiona about what has been happening. Fiona says she thinks that Casey should talk to the police, but



Casey definitely does not want to do this. Casey is worried that she will lose the property if she does not call the police. Fiona doesn't force her to do anything, she listens and understands why Casey might not want to talk to the police. Fiona gives her a few options around what she could do to help herself and her children feel safer.

### *Fiona*

Casey comes to meet with Fiona and she is clearly terrified. Fiona tries to make her feel as relaxed as possible. She explains that she understands if Casey doesn't want to share anything with her, but tells her that she is worried about her and wants her to be happy and feel safe.

After Casey tells Fiona some of what Darren has been doing, Fiona recommends that Casey contact the police. Fiona sees Casey immediately shut down. Casey clearly does not want the police to be involved. Fiona understands that Casey has had terrible experiences with the police before. She explains that there are now police officers called Domestic and Family Violence Coordinators who are trained specifically in domestic and family violence. Fiona gives Casey the card for one of the police officers, just in case Casey wants to call them one day.

Fiona also explains to Casey that there are a number of wonderful services in her area that can help her. She tells her about the local Men's Shed that Darren might like to go to, where they talk about addressing violence and alcohol abuse. She tells her about the local Aboriginal support service for women only where Casey can get support and where the kids can go to playgroup. She also tells her about the local refuge and gives her the number for Womensline. She explains that if Casey ever feels unsafe and needs to leave her house, that she can call Womensline and they can help her find a local refuge to sleep in. Fiona also explains that the CHP can help to make her property a bit safer and change the locks or put locks on the windows if she chooses to end her relationship with Darren. Casey says she doesn't want to end the relationship – and Fiona makes no judgement regarding that decision.

### *Casey*

Casey feels like she has a lot of options going forward. She talks to Darren about his behaviour again and he says he is sorry. She tells him about the local men's behaviour change program and says that she thinks he should go. Darren agrees. He doesn't want to be abusive and lose Casey and their children again. Darren starts going to the men's program that Casey told him about.

Casey visits the local Aboriginal women's service where the kids can go to playgroup and she can enjoy some time having a yarn and a cup of tea with the women there. She doesn't have to share anything with them, but she eventually starts seeing one of the counsellors there regularly. She never calls the Domestic and Family Violence Coordinator but she hears good things about them from some of the other women so she keeps her card just in case Darren is violent again. She feels supported in these decisions. She doesn't feel judged like she has in the past.



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