

# Strengthening practice in responding to domestic and family violence

A TOOLKIT FOR COMMUNITY HOUSING PROVIDERS





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## Issues of concern that could indicate domestic and family violence

Guidance tools and checklists have been developed to support good practice approaches. This includes the development of standardised processes for consistent practice within the community housing provider (CHP).

For example, a CHP might choose to incorporate the Supporting Decision Making Checklist if a Tenant Requests to Stay and the Home Safety Assessment Checklist into a procedure that supports decision making regarding home safety modifications. The checklists could provide evidence of a review process undertaken to inform requests for modifications as part of the approval process.

### *Tenant repairs that might indicate domestic and family violence*

The following list of repairs might indicate domestic and family violence is occurring within the tenancy:

- » Broken door
- » Broken lock
- » Smashed lights
- » Hole punched in the wall
- » Lost keys
- » Damage to bathroom door / lock
- » Broken windows
- » Any other damage that appears to have been caused by violence

#### **ACTION**

If one of these repairs is notified, make a referral to the Tenancy Manager for investigation with the tenant and further planning.

### *Tenant complaints or concerns that might indicate domestic and family violence*

The following tenant complaints or concerns might indicate domestic and family violence is occurring within a tenancy:

- » Nuisance and annoyance complaints
- » General phone calls received expressing concern about tenant safety or some other issue indicating a potential domestic and family violence issue

#### **ACTION**

If one of these complaints or concerns is notified, make a referral to the Tenancy Manager for investigation with the tenant and further planning.

### *Housing professional observation*

The following observations might indicate domestic and family violence is occurring within the tenancy:

- » Obvious bruising such as on the face or arms
- » Rent arrears
- » A suspected victim being prevented from speaking for themselves
- » Other recurring tenancy issues

#### **ACTION**

If one of these issues is identified, make a referral to the Tenancy Manager for investigation with the tenant and further planning.



## Supporting decision making checklist Tenant requests to stay

When a request has been made to the CHP to undertake modifications to increase safety in the property, the following questions should be explored with the DFV support service and tenant:

		YES (please ✓)	NO (please ✓)
<b>Q 1.</b>	Has the support provider / Police utilised a domestic violence safety assessment tool to assess areas of risk?		
<b>Q 2.</b>	What process has been used to guide the decision making about the safety modifications that are required to enable the tenant to remain as safely as possible within their home? » Was a structured assessment tool used to guide home safety planning?		
<b>Q 3.</b>	What evidence does your organisation require to support your decision making about home safety modifications? » A copy of a home safety assessment tool used by the DFV support service		
	» Is a DVO in place?		
	» Is a safety plan in place?		
	» Has an application been made for financial assistance available for victims of crime?		
<b>Q 4.</b>	Is a personal safety alarm being considered by the DFV support service in addition to the home safety modifications to assist a victim to maintain their safety?		
<b>Q 5.</b>	What is the time line required for undertaking home safety modifications? 1 day <input type="checkbox"/> 2 days <input type="checkbox"/> 1 week <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>		
<b>Q 6.</b>	Are you confident that you have received enough information to guide CHP decision making and planning about home safety modifications required?		
<b>Q 7.</b>	What further information do you require to assist your decision making and tenancy planning?		
<b>Q 8.</b>	Who do you need to contact to get that information?		



## Home safety assessment checklist

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Crucial to assessing a tenant's safety needs is reviewing their home – its layout, accessibility and security features. The following two audit tools have been developed to support assessment of both a stand-alone house and an apartment/unit (as the safety issues are different for each property type).

These audit tools can be used by CHPs to assess and determine what aspects of a property may need to be modified to increase a tenant's safety.

The tools are separated into two sections:

- » A home safety audit checklist – which primarily consists of walking around all areas of the home, outside and inside, to examine potential entry points and risk areas.
- » Guidance notes – this section provides some practical hints and tips on how to increase property safety features.



## Home safety assessment checklist Stand alone houses

The home safety assessment can be undertaken by any community housing employee and given to the relevant housing/tenancy worker in your organisation.

<b>OUTSIDE</b> front and backyard	<b>YES</b> (please ✓)	<b>NO</b> (please ✓)
Is the street number clearly visible from the street?		
Is the street number visible at night?		
Can people see the home clearly from the street?		
Could a person be seen hiding in the yard?		
Can you stop people from getting under the home?		
Is there sensor lighting installed?		
Does the sensor lighting work?		
Are entry and exit points adequately lit?		
Are there light timers?		
Does the letterbox have a lock?		
Is the electricity meter enclosed in a box?		
Is there an approved lock on the meter box?		
Can the garage be locked?		
Are bins, ladders etc. away from windows and gates?		
Is there a fence or lockable gate stopping easy access to the rear yard?		
<b>DOORS</b>		
Are external doors solid?		
Are the door frames solid and in good condition?		
Do all doors have good quality locks?		
Do door locks have a single bolt system?		
Do door locks have a double bolt system?		
Are the locks in good working order?		
Does the front door have a peephole?		
Is a security screen door installed?		
Are sliding doors fitted with key locks?		



<b>WINDOWS</b> and other common area access points	YES (please ✓)	NO (please ✓)
Are windows of solid construction?		
Are window locks fitted?		
Are unused windows permanently closed and secured?		
Are windows able to be locked in a partially open position?		
Can windows be opened for ventilation if needed?		
Are manhole covers locked?		
Are there louvre windows?		
Are skylights secured?		
<b>TELEPHONE</b>		
Can telephone lines be tampered with?		
Are telephones pre-programmed with emergency contact numbers?		
Has the phone number been changed?		
Is the new phone number a silent number?		
<b>KEYS</b>		
Is the location of all keys (windows and doors) known?		
Are keys out of view when the home is not occupied?		
Are security/screen door keys removed from the lock?		
<b>MONITORING SYSTEMS</b>		
Is there a security camera installed?		
Is the security camera in working condition?		
Is the security camera tested regularly?		
<b>ANY ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS</b>		





## Home safety assessment checklist Apartments / units

<b>OUTSIDE</b> Complex/Apartment Block	<b>YES</b> (please ✓)	<b>NO</b> (please ✓)
Does the complex/block of units have a secure gate?		
Is there a security door at all entry/exits?		
Is there a pin coded entry? [much harder for an intruder to enter]		
Is the street number for the building clearly visible from the street?		
Is the street number for the building visible at night?		
Can people see the block clearly from the street?		
Could a person be seen hiding outside of the block?		
Are the trees/shrubs around the complex trimmed?		
Can you stop people from getting inside the complex?		
Is there security lighting installed?		
Does the security lighting work?		
Are entry and exit points adequately lit?		
Are there light timers?		
Does the complex letterbox have a lock? (individual locks on each one)		
If there is a carpark/garage - can this be locked?		
Are bins, ladders etc. away from windows and balconies in complex?		
<b>DOORS</b>		
Are external doors solid?		
Are the door frames solid and in good condition?		
Do all doors have good quality locks?		
Are the locks in good working order?		
Does the front door have a peephole?		
Is a security screen door installed? (check balcony/patio too)		
Are sliding doors fitted with locks? (check balcony/patio too)		



## Home safety assessment checklist Apartments / units (continued)

WINDOWS/BALCONY	YES (please ✓)	NO (please ✓)
Are windows of solid construction in apartment?		
Are window locks fitted?		
Are unused windows permanently closed and secured?		
Are windows able to be locked in a partially open position?		
Can windows be opened for ventilation if needed?		
Are skylights secured?		
Is it possible to access unit/apartment from the balcony or fire escape?		
Are the sliding doors on patio/balcony secured with locks?		
Is there a security screen on the patio/balcony door?		
Are there timed/sensor lights on patio/balcony?		
TELEPHONE		
Can telephone lines be tampered with?		
Are telephones pre-programmed with emergency contact numbers?		
Has the phone number been changed?		
Is the new phone number a silent number?		
KEYS		
Is the location of all keys (windows and doors) known?		
Are keys out of view when the home is not occupied?		
Are security/screen door keys removed from the lock?		
MONITORING SYSTEMS		
Is there a security camera installed?		
Is the security camera in working condition?		
Is the security camera tested regularly?		
ANY ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS		



## Guidance notes

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The intention of these guidance notes is to assist CHPs with some practical hints and tips on what to consider when conducting a property safety audit and practical guidance on how to improve safety features.

### *Street number*

- » The property number should be easily visible day and night.

### *Landscaping*

- » Trees and shrubs should be trimmed to reduce hiding places and increase visibility to and from the street.
- » Overhanging branches should be trimmed to prevent people using them to access other parts of the property, e.g. using a tree to get to an upper level of the property.
- » All objects such as trestles, birdbaths, heavy pots and bins should be secured so as not to be used to break into windows.

### *Sensor lighting*

- » Sensor lighting should be installed around the perimeter of the property to provide more effective illumination during the hours of darkness.
- » Sensor lighting should be checked and maintained in good working order.
- » Additional sensor lighting should be installed, particularly over entry/exit points.
- » Consider using light timers to turn lights on/off when not at home.
- » Timer globes are also available.

### *Letterbox and power board*

- » The letterbox should be fitted with a suitable lock set to restrict access to mail.
- » The power board should be housed within a box to restrict tampering with the power supply.
- » The box should be secured with a lock set approved by your electricity authority.

### *Garage and garden shed*

- » The garage should be locked to restrict access and theft.
- » Roller, tilt and panel-lift doors can be secured with additional lock sets in the form of hasp and staple or padlocks.
- » The garden shed should also be fitted with a suitable lock set, to restrict access.
- » Windows within garages and garden sheds should also be fitted with locks or practical dowel to restrict access.
- » Garden tools, equipment and ladders should be locked away when not in use to prevent them being used to gain access to the home.

### *Doors*

- » External doors and frames should be of solid construction.
- » These doors should be fitted with quality deadlocks, which comply with the Australia/New Zealand Standards and Fire Regulations (Australian Building Code) to enable occupants to escape in emergency situations such as fires.
- » Chain/bolt locks are preferred.
- » Consider having a peephole installed in the door to monitor people at the door.
- » Locks should be checked and maintained on a regular basis to ensure they are in good working order.
- » Keys should be removed from locks while the tenant is absent to prevent intruders entering or leaving the home.
- » Security/screen doors can be used to provide additional protection.
- » Security/screen doors should be designed and installed to the Australian Standards.



- » Where there is a screen door, install some Perspex around the main door handle so if anyone cuts the screen it's much harder to access the main door lock.
- » Consider installing patio bolts on sliding doors.
- » Under-house access points should be secured.
- » Manholes should be locked.

### Windows

- » External windows and frames should be of solid construction.
- » Window frames should be anchored to the building to prevent easy removal.
- » It is recommended that all windows should be fitted with quality key-operated lock sets and kept locked when not in use.
- » An intruder may break glass to unlock windows. Don't leave keys in the locks.
- » Some styles of windows can be locked in a partially open position. A practical application of a piece of dowel or timber can prevent opening windows.
- » If there is a skylight in the property then this should be kept suitably secured.
- » Glass within doors and windows may also be reinforced to restrict unauthorised access via these areas.
- » The existing glass can be reinforced internally with a shatter-resistant adhesive film to reduce attacks and restrict access.
- » The existing glass may be replaced with laminated glass, again to reduce attacks & restrict access.
- » Metal security grilles or shutters may be installed to restrict access & reduce attacks. (NOTE caution should be exercised if you decide to install metal security grilles or screens. If they are not properly installed, they can trap occupants in an emergency such as a fire.)
- » If there are louvre windows, get them fixed in position if possible (because they are easy to break and see through).

### Telephones

- » Pre-program the speed dial function on the phone with the emergency number 000.
- » Place a sticker on the telephone with the emergency number and local police number.
- » Change the phone number to silent.

### Keys

- » Spare keys should not be hidden outside the home but left with trusted friends or neighbours.
- » Keys should not be left in locks or in view but should be kept in a safe location, as intruders may use them to gain entry to the property.
- » In situations of DFV, locks should be replaced when a perpetrator has moved from the property. This is to ensure no further access.

### Monitoring Systems

- » A camera system can be used to enhance the physical security of a property.
- » The system should be designed to provide maximum coverage of the home and garage.
- » Remember to regularly check the battery and test the system.
- » Window alarms.

NOTE when determining what modifications may be required at the property, avoid the 'fortress mentality'. It is important to try and get the balance right to encourage vigilance without encouraging anxiety.



## Managing domestic and family violence within a community housing provider: Work, health and safety responsibilities checklist

### Management responsibilities

- Clearly defined roles & responsibilities for all employees
- Clearly documented safe work policies & procedures that are communicated to all staff
- WHS orientation for all new staff
- Ongoing training in safe work practices for management and staff
- Continuous identification of hazards, risk assessment & elimination or control of hazards
- Consultative mechanisms & follow-up procedures
- Incident reporting procedures
- Management of violence & aggression in work environments
- Support for injured staff & return to work strategies
- Information & instructions for contractors & visitors
- System established to monitor staff movements when they undertake home visits

### Guidelines & policies for safe home visiting including:

- Tenant & environmental risk assessments
- Briefing for staff prior to visits
- Monitoring of staff movements
- Prevention & management of critical incidents
- Communication with staff & stakeholders
- Adequate supports for staff

### Staff responsibilities

- Understand management & staff responsibilities including WHS officers or WHS consultation processes
- Read, understand & comply with policies & procedures relating to workplace safety & risk management
- Attend training as required
- Understand professional boundaries
- Report all incidents & hazards immediately
- Complete office log / attendance board when leaving & returning to the office
- Raise any issues or concerns and seek support when required

### Before leaving work premises to conduct a home visit:

- Test phone / other security monitoring equipment to ensure they work
- Review the tenant management system to see if there are any alerts you need to be aware of
- Depending on advice on the tenant management system, consider taking a staff member with you on the home visit
- Ensure the office knows your exact movements and return time
- Understand that CHP staff have a key role to play, alongside their colleagues in social services, health and the police, in keeping people safe
- Understand that CHP staff are well placed to identify people with care and support needs, share information and work in partnership to coordinate responses

NOTE All material presented here is for guidance purposes only. See your organisation's policies & procedures on these issues.



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