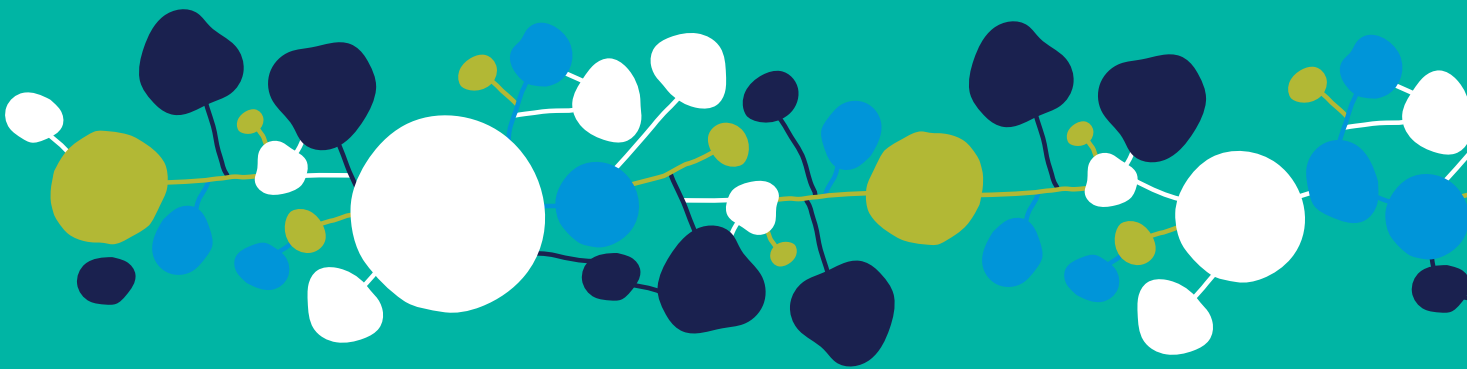


PRACTICE GUIDE 7: A SAFE, SUPPORTED AND CAPABLE WORKFORCE



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This practice guide provides information, resources, tools and practice tips about worker capability and safety, including what it is, why it is required, who is responsible and how it should be managed safely and effectively.

A safe, supported and capable workforce applies to universal and specialist workers and services.

REMEMBER: All adults must comply with their existing legal obligations under mandatory reporting laws – see Practice Guide 4- Shared Legal Responsibilities.

It is best practice to inform the client of your responsibility to report DFV, and child abuse and neglect, as early as possible in the interaction, provided this does not compromise their safety.

NOTE: IF THE CLIENT (OR ANY OTHER PERSON) IS IN IMMEDIATE DANGER, CONTACT POLICE.

What is worker capability and safety?

Worker capability and safety refers to processes, systems, policies and resources aimed at enhancing workers' skills in the area of DFV risk assessment and management, and protecting workers' health, safety and well-being. Appropriate supports include:

- professional development and mentoring to accurately understand DFV and trauma, the causes and consequences of DFV, assessment of and the appropriate responses to risk, relevant legislation, the evidence base, effectively building rapport, networking and providing culturally safe services;
- clinical supervision that assists workers to develop their skills in assessing and responding to DFV risk;
- vicarious trauma identification and management;
- worker risk assessment processes, and safe home visiting and outreach policies and practices.

Why is worker safety important?

Undertaking DFV risk assessment and management is not easy. Finding the right responses for people requires skill, determination, creativity and patience, especially in remote and very remote areas. Hearing traumatic stories is often difficult and can have long term effects on workers.

Appropriate supports for DFV workers enhance effective assessment and responses to DFV, as well as worker safety.

Vicarious trauma management

An important component of trauma-informed practice is acknowledging the risk of vicarious traumatisation.

Vicarious trauma includes detrimental impacts to workers' emotions, energy, memory and cognitions as a result of exposure to traumatic materials. When workers are exposed to traumatic material e.g. a client's story of DFV, vicarious trauma should be conceptualised as a work, health and safety hazard.

Effective systemic processes to support the early identification and resolution of vicarious trauma impacts are key to ensuring worker wellbeing. The strategies recommended for effective vicarious trauma management include:

- Providing education to workers about vicarious trauma: this should enable workers to accurately identify vicarious trauma impacts, differentiating them from other workplace-based and more generalised stressors, and assist workers to identify useful mitigation strategies to implement when vicarious trauma impacts are present.
- Risk reduction: The development of organisational strategies to reduce the risks associated with vicarious trauma impacts is an important component of effective vicarious trauma management. Assisting workers to effectively leave work at work and find refuge from exposure to traumatic information (both within the workplace and in their communities) can reduce the risk of serious impairment from vicarious trauma. Providing access to specialist support (such as debriefing and counselling) is also part of organisational responsibilities.
- Risk reduction can be challenging in small communities where workers live alongside others whose traumatic experiences they know.
- Monitoring vicarious trauma impacts: Systems that assist workers and their managers assess and identify the type and severity of vicarious trauma impacts present at any time may be formal or informal. Formal measurement will include the implementation of valid and reliable psychometric measurement. Informal measurement can be enacted using self-assessment worksheets or conversations with supervisors.

Related resources

1800 RESPECT (freecall: 1800 737 732) offers information, as well as telephone and online counselling for workers experiencing work related stress and trauma as a result of their work in the DFV area.