



## Domestic Violence Risk Assessment

This fact sheet summarises the Ask LOIS webinar on this topic, presented by Priscilla McCorrison, who is domestic violence specialist social worker. This webinar can be downloaded for free at [www.asklois.org.au/webinars/past-webinars](http://www.asklois.org.au/webinars/past-webinars).

### This fact sheet covers:

- What is a risk assessment?
- Why is it important?
- What do we ask about?
- What do we do when we identify that there are concerns about the clients / their children's safety?

### What is Risk Assessment?

Risk assessment is the process of using tools to determine the likelihood that domestic or family violence will be repeated or escalated (*Roehl and Guertin, 2000, p. 171*)

#### A risk assessment analyses has 2 dimensions:

1. How likely is it that something will occur?
2. If it occurs, what will be the severity of harm?

### Why is Risk Assessment Important?

#### Performing a risk assessment can assist in:

- General case management and monitoring a client
- Making your client a realistic safety plan
- Evaluating the risk of re-assault or homicide
- Informing police responses
- Helping victims to understand their true level of risk

### What are Risk Assessment Tools?

- Risk assessment tools have been developed to try to give a framework of factors to look at when considering the risk of domestic violence and the likelihood of re-assault by the perpetrator
- A wide range of tools have been developed, This webinar focused on the PPP Screening Test. The PPP test is an excellent tool when working with families as it assists in determining the primary aggressor in a situation. A link to a copy of this tool can be found in the Ask LOIS resource library
- Another useful tool is the Victorian Common Risk Assessment Framework (CRAF) which is useful when working with women victims. A link to this resource can also be found in the Ask LOIS resource library

### Risk Assessment: an Ongoing Process

- It is critical that risk assessment is an ongoing process because of the heightened risk of violence during separation
- Risk assessment should never be seen as a single, one-off event



- Risk changes as circumstances change
- It is important to note that research shows that clients are best able to assess their own risk
- You should undertake regular risk assessments each time you have contact with your client
- It is important to ask specifically about historical, and recent acts of violence or control because clients in ongoing domestic violence relationships often minimise their current risk in order to cope with the effects of the violence and abuse
- If a client is minimising their risk, going through a risk assessment tool such as the PPP Screening Test or CRAF with a client can help them to better understand how many high risk indicators they have so they better understand the reality of their situation

## Toolkit for Risk Assessment

Risk assessment of your client combines three elements to determine the level of risk:

1. The victim's own assessment of their level of risk
  - The victim's own level of fear and views about the likelihood of future violence
2. Evidence-based risk indicators
  - I.e., using Risk Assessment Tools such as the PPP Screening Test
3. The practitioner's professional judgment
  - If your client appears to be minimising the risk, you will need to assist the client to become aware of the real nature of the risk
  - There will be times when women are unable to accurately describe their level of fear or assess their level of risk and caution must be taken in interpreting this (*Victorian Family Violence CRAF p.56*)

## The PPP Screening Tool

- This screening tool analyses risk with reference to three factors: the potency, pattern and primary perpetrator (PPP) of the violence
- The screening tool is not a predictive device but does give a useful framework of factors to look for when considering the risk of family violence (*Family Courts of Australia: Best Practice Guidelines*)

### Part A: Potency of violence

- Level of severity, dangerousness or risk of lethality
  1. Are there any threats or fantasies of homicide and/or suicide?
    - If so, does the person have a specific plan to act on them?
  2. Are weapons available (guns, knives, etc.) indicating the means are accessible?
  3. How extreme was any prior violence?
    - Were injuries caused, and if so, how serious?
  4. Is the person highly focused upon/obsessed with the specific victim as a target of blame?
  5. Does the person express a high degree of depression, rage, or extreme emotional instability?
    - Does their behaviour indicate a propensity to act irrationally and unpredictably?
  6. Is the party recently separated or experiencing other stressful events such as, loss of job, eviction from home, loss of child custody, or severe financial problems?

### Part B: Pattern of violence and coercive control

1. Is there a history of physical violence including destruction of property, threats (to hurt self or loved ones), assault, rape or abuse of pets?
2. How fearful and/or intimidated is the partner?



3. After separation, have there been repeated unwanted attempts to contact the partner?
  - e.g. stalking, hostage-taking, threats or attempts to abduct the partner or child

### Part C: Primary perpetrator indicators

- Who is the primary aggressor, if either?
  1. Who provides a more clear, specific and plausible account of the violent incident(s)? Who denies, minimises, obfuscates, or rationalises the incident?
    - Victims are more likely to do the former; perpetrators, the latter
  2. What motives are used to explain why the incident(s) occurred?
    - Victims tend to use language that suggests they were trying to placate, protect, avoid, or stop the violence
    - Perpetrators describe their intent being to control or punish
  3. Are the types of any injuries or wounds suffered likely to be caused by aggressive acts (the perpetrators) or defensive acts (the victims)?

### What is the Next Step?

- Based on the outcomes of your risk assessment, you can then work with the client to formulate, implement and monitor a safety plan for them and provide them with the information and support they need
- See the Domestic Violence Prevention Centre's Safety Planning Pamphlet for more information: [www.domesticviolence.com.au/files/pdf/Safety-Plan.pdf](http://www.domesticviolence.com.au/files/pdf/Safety-Plan.pdf)

### Further Assistance

- If you feel you are not equipped enough to undertake a risk assessment or safety plan for your client, we suggest you contact a specialist domestic violence service on behalf of your client for further assistance.
- For example, your local Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service (WDVCAS): <http://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/what-we-do/community-partnerships/womens-domestic-violence-court-advocacy-program/womens-domestic-violence-court-advocacy-service-locations-in-nsw>

*Stay tuned; in August we will have a follow-up webinar that deals with undertaking safety planning for your client!*