FAMILY VIOLENCE SUPPORT

QUALITY AREA 2 | ELAA version 1.2

> The MARAM Framework outlines four pillars, each with a description of a Framework requirement for organisations to align their policies, procedures, practice guidance and tools.
>
> Early Childhood Education and Care services are not expected to have aligned their policies, and procedures to the MARAM Framework from Term 2, 2021. Instead, it is acknowledged that MARAM alignment is a maturity model and will evolve over a period of time as more guidance and contextualised information is realised.

PURPOSE

This policy outlines the range of support available to children, families and staff affected by family violence and outlines Heathmont East Preschools's reporting requirements in relation to family violence.

POLICY STATEMENT

VALUES

Heathmont East Preschool is committed to:

- zero tolerance to family violence
- promoting collaborative, multi-agency practice and information sharing
- promoting a shared understanding of family violence across the community, including Aboriginal and diverse communities
- providing a culturally safe response, recognising victim survivors as the expert in their own experience and including and supporting them to make decisions about their own safety and wellbeing.

SCOPE

This policy applies to the approved provider, persons with management or control, nominated supervisor, persons in day-to-day charge, early childhood teachers, educators, staff, students, volunteers, parents/guardians, children, and others attending the programs and activities of Heathmont East Preschool.

RESPONSIBILITIES	Approved provider and persons with management or control	Nominated supervisor and persons in day-to-day charge	Early childhood teacher, educators and all other staff	Parents/ guardians	Contractors, volunteers and students
R indicates legislation requirement, and should not be deleted					
Fulfilling legal obligations, including mandatory reporting and duty of care obligations *(refer to Definitions) (refer to Attachment 1)*	R	R	R		R
Undertaking child safety reviews and developing an action plan to maintain Child Safe Standards *(refer to Definitions)* at Heathmont East Preschool	R	√	√		√
Following processes in identifying family violence *(refer to Attachment 2)*	R	R	R		R
Ensuring processes for responding to and reporting are followed when there are significant concerns for the safety, health or wellbeing of a child at the service	R	R	R		R
Creating a culturally safe environment *(refer to Definitions)* for safe disclosure of family violence and respond to disclosures sensitively, with empathy and without judgement	√	√	√		
Collaborating with specialist services to make an informed decision and promote collaborative practice around children and families where relevant *(refer to Attachment 2)*	√	√	√		
Staff identified byHeathmont East Preschool to use the Information Sharing Schemes *(refer to Definitions)* can proactively share and request relevant information and must respond to requests from	R	R	R		

other information sharing entities *(refer to Definitions)* under the Child Information Sharing Scheme and Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme. Both schemes are relevant where a child is involved in a family violence context.					
Sharing relevant information under privacy law or other legislative authorisation *(refer to Privacy and Confidentiality policy).*	R	R	R		
Engaging with specialist services or professionals who are appropriately qualified to support the particular needs of the child or family *(refer to Attachment 2)*	√	√	√		
Ensuring confidential information is only shared with relevant authorities to the extent necessary to promote the wellbeing or safety of a child or group of children, consistent with the best interests of that child/ren *(refer to Privacy and Confidentiality policy).*	R	R	R		R
Maintaining co-operative relationships with appropriate services and/or professionals in the best interests of children and their families	√	√	√		
Notifying the approved provider or person with management or control immediately on becoming aware of a concern, complaint or allegation regarding the safety, health and welfare of a child at Heathmont East Preschool		R	R	R	R
Maintaining confidentiality at all times *(refer to Privacy and Confidentiality Policy)*	R	R	R	√	R
Keeping up to date and complying with any relevant changes in legislation and practices in relation to this policy	R	√	√		√

BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATION

BACKGROUND

Family violence is a widespread and serious problem in Australia, which can have serious consequences for individuals, families and the community. Family violence has profoundly negative effects on children, whether they are directly targeted, witness the violence or are aware of the violence in the family. Children can suffer from a variety of physical, spiritual, emotional, mental and developmental effects as a result of family violence. Long term effects of trauma from family violence can be carried into adulthood and result in a range of detrimental emotional, mental and behavioural problems.

Family violence differs from other forms of violence; it is generally underpinned by a pattern of coercion, control and domination by one person over another. While family violence can begin at the start of a relationship, it can also increase and change over time. There are times where there is increased risk, including pregnancy and separation (or attempted separation). Family violence is generally part of a longer-term pattern, rather than a one-off event.

The Royal Commission into Family Violence (the Commission) delivered its report in March 2016, with 227 recommendations. The Commission recommended the review and redevelopment of the Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework (also known as the Common Risk Assessment Framework [CRAF]), and to embed it into the Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic) (FVPA). The Victorian Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM) updates and replaces the CRAF and is informed by consultations with more than 1650 practitioners, subject matter experts, and evidence-base reviews.

The MARAM Framework outlines:

- an approach to practice which is underpinned by the framework principles
- four conceptual 'pillars' for organisations to align their policies, procedures, practice guidelines and tools
- information to support a shared understanding of the experience of risk and its impact on individuals, families and communities
- expectations of practice that are underpinned by a shared understanding of the range of roles across the service system, and consistent and collaborative practice
- an expansion of the range of organisations and sectors who will have a formal role in family violence risk assessment and risk management practice.

The MARAM Framework can be used by all services that come into contact with individuals and families experiencing family violence. The MARAM Framework creates a shared responsibility between individual professionals, services and whole sectors. This allows the service to provide more options to keep victim survivors safe, and for a stronger, more collaborative approach that can keep perpetrators in view and accountable for their actions and behaviours.

The Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS) *(refer to Definitions)* has been established under Part 5A of the Family Violence Protection Act 2008, enabling relevant information to be shared between prescribed information sharing entities [ISEs] *(refer to Definitions)* to assess and manage family violence risk. The Child Information Sharing Scheme [CISS] *(refer to Definitions)*, established under Part 6A of the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005, enables prescribed ISEs *(refer to Definitions)* to share information with each other in order to promote the wellbeing and safety of children, including in situations where family violence is suspected or established as being present. Guidelines issued under each of the information sharing schemes require ISEs *(refer to Definitions)* to refer to the MARAM Framework where family violence is present.

The Information Sharing Scheme does not change child safety obligations. It complements existing privacy laws *(refer to Privacy and Confidentiality Policy)* and will enhance the ability of early education and care services to meet child wellbeing and safety responsibilities under the

Child Safe Standards *(refer to Definitions)* and comply with mandatory reporting and other reporting obligations.

The Information Sharing Scheme will enable services to request and share information and collaborate earlier and more proactively to support outcomes for children and their families and streamline their experience across services. It removes barriers for ISEs *(refer to Definitions)* to share information as they allow information to be shared before serious risk or threat occurs, allowing earlier identification of needs or issues and early support for children and families. Furthermore, while mandatory reporting is often a one-way information exchange, CISS *(refer to Definitions)* and FVISS *(refer to Definitions)* allow ISEs *(refer to Definitions)* to request information back and have an ongoing dialogue to promote the wellbeing and safety of children and manage dynamic risks.

Child Link will be a web-based platform that displays information about a child to authorised key professionals who have responsibility for child wellbeing and safety. Child Link will show limited but critical information, such as a child's participation in early childhood and education services. Information displayed on Child Link will only be accessible to authorised users. Most users will be professionals who have regular contact with children and families and will be able to identify and intervene early where there is a wellbeing or safety concern. Professionals will need to be authorised by a designated senior staff member within their service to gain access to Child Link. Child Link will become operational by December 2021, with authorised professionals progressively onboarded from 2022 onward. Professionals will have to undertake mandatory training before gaining access to Child Link.

LEGISLATION AND STANDARDS
Relevant legislation and standards include but are not limited to:

- Child Safe Standards (Vic)
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005
- Child Wellbeing and Safety (Information Sharing) Regulations 2018 (Vic)
- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)
- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010
- Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011
- Family Violence Protection Act 2008
- Family Violence Protection (Information Sharing and Risk Management) Regulations 2018
- National Quality Standard, Quality Area 2: Children's Health and Safety and Quality Area 6: Collaborative Partnerships with Families and Communities
- Privacy and Data Protection Act 2013 (Vic)

> The most current amendments to listed legislation can be found at:
>
> Victorian Legislation – Victorian Law Today: www.legislation.vic.gov.au
>
> Commonwealth Legislation – Federal Register of Legislation: www.legislation.gov.au

DEFINITIONS
The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy. For regularly used terms e.g. Approved provider, Nominated supervisor, Notifiable complaints, Serious incidents, Duty of care, etc. refer to the Definitions file of the PolicyWorks catalogue.

Child: a person who is under the age of 18 years (which includes infants and adolescents).

Child FIRST: A Victorian community-based intake and referral service linked with Family Services. Child FIRST links vulnerable children, young people and their families to support services, including where required Child Protection

Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS): enables Information Sharing Entities (ISEs) (refer to Definitions) to share information to promote the wellbeing or safety of children.

Child Protection Service (also referred to as Child Protection): The statutory child protection service provided by the Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing to protect children and young people at risk of abuse and neglect. This service also works closely with Family Services (including Child FIRST) to support the assessment and engagement of vulnerable children and families in community-based services

Child Safe Standards: Promotes the safety of children, prevent child abuse, and ensure organisations have effective processes in place to respond to and report all allegations of child abuse.

Culturally safe: to practice in a culturally safe way means to carry out practice in collaboration with the service user, with care and insight for their culture, while being mindful of one's own. A culturally safe environment is one where people feel safe and where there is no challenge or need for the denial of their identity.

Duty of Care: a common law concept that refers to the responsibilities of organisations and staff to provide people with an adequate level of protection against harm and all reasonably foreseeable risks of injury. In the context of this policy, duty of care refers to the responsibility of education and care services and their staff to provide children with an adequate level of care and protection against foreseeable harm and injury.

Family violence: behaviour that occurs in family, domestic or intimate relationships that is physically or sexually abusive; emotionally or psychologically abusive; economically abusive; threatening or coercive; or is in any other way controlling that causes a person to live in fear for their safety or wellbeing or that of another person. In relation to children, family violence is also defined as behaviour by any person that causes a child to hear or witness or otherwise be exposed to the effects of the above behaviour. This definition includes violence within a broader family context, such as extended families, kinship networks and communities.

Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS): enables Information Sharing Entities (refer to Definitions) to share information to facilitate assessment and management of family violence risk to children and adults.

Information Sharing Entities (ISEs): are authorised to share and request relevant information under the Child Information Sharing Scheme and the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (the Schemes) and required to respond to requests from other ISEs. All ISEs are mandated to respond to all requests for information.

Mandatory reporting: The legal obligation of certain professionals and community members to report when they believe, on reasonable grounds, that a child is in need of protection from harm.

A broad range of professional groups are identified in the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 as 'mandatory reporters', including:

- all educators with post-secondary qualifications in the care, education or minding of children and employed or engaged in an education and care service or a children's service
- all proprietors, nominees of a children's service, approved providers, and nominated supervisors of an education and care service.
- educators registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT).

SOURCES AND RELATED POLICIES

SOURCES
- Child protection in early childhood (PROTECT): www.education.vic.gov.au
- Family Violence Multi Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework Practice Guides: www.vic.gov.au

- Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework: www.vic.gov.au
- Foundation Knowledge Guide: www.vic.gov.au
- Information Sharing and Family Violence Reforms Contextualised Guidance: www.vic.gov.au
- MARAM Framework: summary for organisational leaders: www.vic.gov.au

RELATED POLICIES

- Child Safe Environment and Wellbeing
- Compliments and Complaints
- Delivery and Collection of Children
- Incident, Injury, Trauma and Illness
- Inclusion and Equity
- Interactions with Children
- Participation of Volunteers and Students
- Privacy and Confidentiality
- Staffing
- Supervision of Children

EVALUATION

In order to assess whether the values and purposes of the policy have been achieved, the approved provider will:

- seeking feedback from early childhood teachers, educators, staff, parents/guardians, children, management and all affected by the policy regarding its effectiveness. This can be done via surveys, questionnaires and formal or informal interviews with stakeholders
- monitoring implementation, compliance, complaints and incidents in relation to the policy and procedures
- keeping up to date with current legislation, research, policy and best practice
- observing changes to the service environment e.g. increased/decreased enrolments
- revising the policy and procedures in light of the above
- notifying all stakeholders affected by this policy at least 14 days before making any significant changes to this policy or its procedures, unless a lesser period is necessary due to risk *(Regulation 172 (2))*.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1: Mandatory reporting
- Attachment 2: Identifying family violence

AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the approved provider of Heathmont East Preschool on 12/05/2025.

REVIEW DATE: 12/05/2028

ATTACHMENT 1. MANDATORY REPORTING

Early childhood Education and Care services are well placed to identify family violence risk, respond to disclosures, and support affected students and families.

Mandatory reporters include Victorian Institute of Teaching registered early childhood teachers, early childhood workers, other persons in licensed and approved early childhood services are also mandatory reporters. This includes:

- all educators with post-secondary qualifications in the care, education or minding of children and employed or engaged in an education and care service or a children's service
- the proprietor or primary nominee of a children's service, or the approved provider or nominated supervisor of an education and care service.

All mandatory reporters must make a report to Victoria Police and/or DFFH Child Protection *(refer to Definitions)* as soon as practicable if, during the course of carrying out their professional roles and responsibilities, they form a belief on reasonable grounds that:

- a child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm as a result of physical injury and/or sexual abuse; and
- the child's parents have not protected, or are unlikely to protect, the child from harm of that type.

It is a criminal offence not to report in these circumstances.

Mandatory reporting requirements, duty of care and the Child Safe Standards *(refer to Definitions)* must be followed as outlined on the PROTECT website.

Refer to the *Child Safe Environment Policy* and/or the Four Critical Actions for early childhood services as a reference guide on how to report and respond to disclosures, suspicions or allegations of child abuse including family violence.

For more detailed information and guidance on responding to child abuse and family violence under PROTECT, refer to: Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Early Childhood Services.

Family Violence Support | Date Reviewed March 2025

Heathmont East PreSchool | Telephone 03 8799 4423
Email heathmont.east.kin@kindergarten.vic.gov.au

The below information has been adapted from the Department of Education and Training Family Violence Support School Operations Policy.

The Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic) defines family violence as behaviour towards a family member where the behaviour:

- is physically or sexually abusive
- is emotionally or psychologically abusive
- is economically abusive
- is threatening or coercive or
- in any other way controls or dominates the family member and causes that family member to feel fear for the safety or wellbeing of that family member or another person.

A child can be the victim to any of these behaviours.

Family violence includes any behaviour by a family member that causes a child to hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of family violence, including violence between adults and/or adolescents in the home. Coercive and controlling behaviours are common across all experiences of victim-survivors. These behaviours add up to a pattern of abuse and violence which build and maintain fear of escalation to physical and sexual violence.

What to look out for in children
Awareness of family violence and child safety risk indicators form part of your professional judgement and inform your decision about what action to take. While most of the risk indicators listed below do not necessarily mean that family violence or abuse is present, it is important to recognise they may indicate that family violence is occurring, or other child wellbeing issues are present. Any concerns, doubts or observations need to be shared with the approved provider and /or nominated supervisors.

The below information has been adapted from the MARAM? Practice Guides, Responsibility 2: Identification of family violence risk, the Victorian State Government, 2020

Family violence risk indicators include:

General observable signs of trauma for a child or young person that may indicate family violence is occurring
Signs of trauma can manifest as either physical, emotional or behavioural and can include:
Being very passive and compliant
Showing wariness or distrust of adults
Demonstrating fear of particular people and places
Poor sleep patterns and emotional dis-regulation
Becoming fearful when other children cry or shout
Developmental regression (i.e. reverting to bed-wetting)
Bruises, burns, sprains, dislocations, bites, cuts
Fractured bones, especially in an infant where a fracture is unlikely to have occurred accidentally
Poisoning
Internal injuries
Wearing long-sleeved clothes on hot days in an attempt to hide bruising or other injury
Being excessively friendly to strangers
Being excessively clingy to certain adults

A strong desire to please or receive validation from certain adults

Excessive washing or bathing

Unclear boundaries and understanding of relationships between adults and children

Excessive sexualised behaviour/advanced sexual knowledge

Violence or sexualised behaviour to other children.

Signs of trauma for a child (unborn to young child)

Observable signs of trauma that may indicate family violence for:		
an unborn child	**a baby (under 18 months)**	**a toddler**
Poor growth and neural development caused by rushes of maternal adrenalin and cortisol Injuries sustained via injury to mother or by the perpetrator targeting the unborn child directly (such as inflicting blows to mother's stomach)	Excessive crying Excessive passivity Underweight for age Significant sleep and/or feeding difficulties Reactions to loud voices or noises Extreme wariness of new people No verbal 'play' (such as imitating sounds) Frequent illness Anxiety, overly clingy to primary caregiver	As for baby (under 18 months), and also: Excessive irritability Excessive compliance Poor language development Delayed mobility Blood in nappy, underwear

Age-related signs of trauma that may indicate family violence in a child or young person

Many indicators may be expressions of trauma that may be observed through the presentation, behaviour or circumstances of a child or young person. Some indicators are related to trauma from specific forms of family violence, including sexual abuse (indicated by #) or emotional abuse (indicated by *), or indicate signs of neglect

Observable signs of trauma that may indicate family violence for:		
a pre-schooler	**a primary school-aged child**	**an adolescent**
Extreme clinginess Significant sleep# and/or eating difficulties Poor concentration in play Inability to empathise with other people Frequent illness Poor language development and/or significant use of 'baby talk' Displaying maladaptive behaviour such as frequent rocking, sucking and biting# Aggression towards others	Rebelliousness, defiant behaviour Limited tolerance and poor impulse control Temper tantrums or irritability, being aggressive or demanding* Physical abuse or cruelty of others, including pets Avoidance of conflict Showing low self-esteem* Extremely compliant behaviour, being passive, tearful or withdrawn* Excessively oppositional or argumentative behaviour	As for primary school aged children, and also: School refusal/avoidance (absenteeism/disengagement) Criminal or antisocial behaviours, including using violence against others Eating disorders Substance abuse Depression Suicidal ideation Risk-taking behaviours Anxiety

HEATHMONT EAST preschool

Adjustment problems (for example, significant difficulties moving from kindergarten to school) Anti-social play or lack of interest in engaging with others	Risk-taking behaviours that have severe or life-threatening consequences Lack of interest in social activities Delayed or poor language skills* Experiencing problems with schoolwork# Poor social competence (few or no friends, not getting on well with peers, difficulties relating to adults)*# Acting like a much younger child* Poor school performance Poor coping skills Sleep issues# Bed wetting# Excessive washing Frequent illness Complaining of headaches or stomach pains# Self-harm Displaying maladaptive behaviour# Displaying sexual behaviour or knowledge unusual for the child's age# Telling someone sexual abuse has occurred# Complaining of pain going to the toilet Enacting sexual behaviour with other children Excessive masturbation	Pregnancy Controlling or manipulative behaviour Obsessive behaviour Homelessness or frequent changes in housing arrangements

Source: Victoria State Government, 2021. Family Violence Multi Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework: Practice Guide. Melbourne, p.102 - 105

Further information about the identification of family violence, including a more extensive list of physical and behavioural indicators, can be found in Child Protection and Child Safe Standards (PROTECT), under Identify signs of child abuse.

Known risk factors relating to severe risk of family violence for families are:

- physical harm or threatened to harm a member of household, including pets
- recent separation of parents, including separation under the same roof
- harm of, or threat to harm a child

- mother/carer/partner (e.g. for adolescent) is pregnant
- child under one years of age in the household
- isolation

- financial difficulties
- Child Protection previous or current involvement
- behaviour indicating non-return of child
- threat of suicide or previous attempts
- unemployment of person perpetrating family violence
- alcohol or drug misuse of person perpetrating family violence.

Supporting children and families experiencing family violence

It is important to be aware that family violence is likely to be an issue in your community and to address the violence and affirm the right of those affected to live free from violence. If you notice signs or indicators of family violence, or a child, parent or carer discloses family violence, accept this and provide appropriate information and support *(refer to the External resources section below)*

Information for parents about family violence, including family violence supports, can be found on the Family violence page

Family violence support during emergency and traumatic situations

Family violence incidents and risk can increase during emergency and traumatic situations and in the aftermath of these situations.

During these times family violence and other wellbeing and safety issues for children and their families can be impacted by

- isolation from support networks
- inability to seek and access support services
- difficulty telling someone what is happening at home (disclosing)
- family violence or abuse for the first time
- increased unemployment, financial and housing insecurity
- limited ability for community members, peers or services to monitor known issues.

Mandatory reporting requirements, duty of care and the Child Safe Standards continue to apply during or following emergency or traumatic situations and should be followed as outlined on the PROTECT website.

External resources — advice and support for services and for parent/guardian experiencing of disclosing family violence

SAFE STEPS (24/7)

This Victorian state-wide family violence crisis support service for women and children includes accommodation (refuge) options and information in 10 languages. You can contact safe steps by phone or email at anytime or online chat through their website Monday to Friday 9am to 9pm.

- 1800 015 188
- safesteps@safesteps.org.au
- www.safesteps.org.au

1800RESPECT (24/7)

This national service can provide counselling advice and support for people experiencing family violence. The website has resources in 29 languages. The service also provides debriefing to those providing to support to people experiencing family violence including family, friends and professionals.

- 1800 737 732
- www.1800respect.org.au

THE ORANGE DOOR

The Orange Door is a free service for all adults, children and young people who are experiencing or have experienced family violence and families who need extra support with the care of children.

Early childhood teachers/Educators can also seek expert advice, other relevant information and referral options from area-based specialist family violence services. To locate your local specialist family violence service visit:

- Orange Door website

INTOUCH

State-wide family violence support for Multicultural women and men, their families and communities. They can provide information and referral options for family violence, support relating to visas, family court issues and case management.

- 1800 755 988
- www.intouch.org.au

DJIRRA

Djirra is an Aboriginal Family Violence Legal Service supporting Aboriginal people who are experiencing or have experienced family violence (women and men). Djirra also assists non-Aboriginal people experiencing family violence who are parents of Aboriginal children.

- 1800 105 303
- Legal Services team: info.afvls@djirra.org.au

MEN'S REFERRAL SERVICE

State-wide phone service providing support and information for men who are concerned about their behaviours or have used violence.

- 1300 766 491
- www.ntv.org.au