



Attorney General
& Justice

MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR MEN'S DOMESTIC VIOLENCE BEHAVIOUR CHANGE PROGRAMS

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

I am pleased to introduce the minimum standards for men's domestic violence behaviour change programs in NSW. These standards will significantly improve the safety of victims of domestic violence and assist those attending programs to stop the violence.

The standards have been developed in broad consultation with community groups including domestic violence and victims' organisations throughout NSW. The overarching principles include:

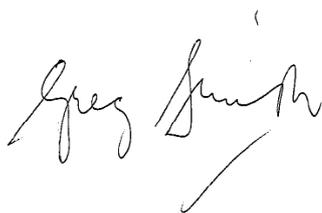
- The safety of women and children must be given the highest priority
- Victim safety and offender accountability are best achieved through an integrated, systemic response that ensures all agencies work together
- Challenging domestic and family violence requires a sustained commitment to professional and evidence-based practice
- Perpetrators of domestic and family violence must be held accountable for their behaviour
- Programs should respond to the diverse needs of participants and partners

The standards encourage a partnership approach to the provision of behaviour change programs. By directing our focus to men's offending behaviour in a way that includes a focus on support for women and children, we are not only assisting offenders to change their behaviour, we are also increasing the chance for women and children to be safe.

The NSW Government is committed to assisting agencies and services to improve the programs they deliver. We will be developing resources and training to assist them in meeting the standards.

The minimum standards provide an exciting opportunity to increase the safety of those who experience violence in NSW. They establish an important framework through which we can hold those who commit acts of violence to account and help them to change their behaviour.

I would like to thank all those who timelessly work to end this violence for their commitment and their passion, and I look forward to further supporting you in making our state safer.



The Hon. Greg Smith SC MP
Attorney General
Minister for Justice

Introduction

The NSW Government is introducing minimum standards for men's domestic and family violence behaviour change group programs.

In NSW there are currently a range of men's domestic violence behaviour change group programs. Programs are provided by government agencies as well as non-government services. They may be delivered in custodial settings, by welfare groups and by counselling services. These agencies provide a valuable service to men seeking to change their abusive behaviour.

The objective of the minimum standards is to ensure that all programs in NSW reflect good practice and are safe and effective in changing the behaviour of perpetrators of domestic violence. While there is room for variation in the methods and approaches adopted by program providers, the minimum standards set benchmarks that will apply to all programs.

Implementing the standards will require some changes for most programs in NSW. The government is committed to providing support throughout this process.

How have the standards been developed?

In 2010, an extensive review of the literature regarding program standards for domestic violence behaviour change programs occurred, and consultations were held with program providers, experienced facilitators, policy makers and victims groups across NSW. The consultations identified aspects of effective practice in behaviour change group programs for men who have been violent towards family members, and explored how victims' safety could be improved.

These ideas were developed into a series of principles that now underpin the standards.

The principles include:

- The safety of women and children must be given the highest priority
- Victim safety and offender accountability are best achieved through an integrated, systemic response that ensures that all relevant agencies work together
- Challenging domestic and family violence requires a sustained commitment to professional and evidence-based practice
- Perpetrators of domestic and family violence must be held accountable for their behaviour
- Programs should respond to the diverse needs of the participants and partners.

To which programs will the standards apply?

The standards apply to all group programs for male perpetrators of domestic and family violence in NSW. This includes programs run by government agencies in a community or custodial setting. It also includes programs run by non-government organisations.

Compliance with the standards will be required for programs to receive government funding or referrals from government agencies.

What support will there be for program providers?

Support will be provided to program providers throughout the implementation process by the provision of resources, training and guidance. This will include:

- Briefings for managers of agencies that provide behaviour change programs about the standards and their implementation
- A comprehensive practice guide examining practice issues in the delivery of programs and, in relation to each of the minimum standards, articulating what is unacceptable, acceptable and optimal professional practice
- A suite of model policy and procedures to assist program providers to comply with the standards. These can be adopted directly or can be adapted to the needs and context of the program
- A guide to registration, including the procedures for demonstrating compliance
- Access to training for group facilitators to assist them meet the requirements of the standards.

When do the standards come into force?

The Government is publishing the standards now so that providers can begin to plan for the changes that will be needed.

In May 2012 the practice guide and guide to training will be published, and seminars will be held in regional areas to explain the standards and their introduction.

In April 2012 providers will be asked to provide an assessment of the extent to which their practice meets the standards and begin to introduce changes to meet the registration requirements. This self-assessment must be completed by the end of June 2012.

By December 2012 providers must have adapted their practice and be registered as being in compliance with the standards to receive funding or referrals from the NSW Government.

How do I find out more?

The NSW Department of Attorney General and Justice is managing the implementation and registration process and will provide regular updates on implementation. To subscribe to the updates or ask specific questions please email dvstandards@agd.nsw.gov.au

THE MINIMUM STANDARDS

PRINCIPLE 1: THE SAFETY OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN MUST BE GIVEN THE HIGHEST PRIORITY

Standard 1.1: Program providers will develop and operate from written procedures that address risks to women and children

In planning behaviour change group programs, providers must give priority to the safety of women, children and victims of program participants.

Program providers must develop and implement policies and procedures regarding:

- Regular and systematic monitoring of threats or risks to safety
- Responding to perceived threats of safety including reviewing critical incidents
- Responding to criminal acts and potential breaches of court orders
- Notifying relevant authorities of possible risk to children.

These procedures will be explained to men, partners and children upon entry to the program, and thereafter as needed.

Standard 1.2: Program providers will ensure that current partners of program participants are provided with support prior to and during the program

Partner contact can be provided by an external agency, through a partnership with a local victim support service, or internally through a designated partner contact worker.

If this role is internal, the worker must be linked to program management throughout the duration of the program to ensure effective communication about participants and their partners.

When partner support is provided by an external agency, a memorandum of understanding must state the obligations of the external agency concerning the provision of victim support.

Standard 1.3: Partner support workers will prepare women for the participation of their partners in a behaviour change group program

A partner support worker will provide information on:

- Their rights, including rights to live in safety, legal protection, support and information
- The limitations of men's behaviour change group programs including the real possibility that the violence and controlling behaviours may not stop
- The participant's attendance and participation in the group including what the group will be talking about
- What the program provider will do in the event of a participant breaching a court order or committing any act of violence against them or their children

- Support services and resources.

When partner support is provided by an external agency, a memorandum of understanding must address the information to be provided to victims.

Standard 1.4: Partner support workers will complete individual risk assessments and safety plans

This will include an assessment of the likelihood and dangerousness of a participant's behaviour against evidence based risk factors and a consideration of factors that increase women and children's vulnerability such as age, disability, isolation, cultural background, religious background, family pressures, sexuality and financial dependence.

Safety planning will be individualised and include developing a plan that anticipates and minimises known risks, clarifies how a woman can respond to emergencies, identifies indicators of escalation of violence and clarifies how she can communicate with the contact support worker, agency or police emergency contacts.

When partner support is provided by an external agency, appropriate safety planning will be addressed in the memorandum of understanding.

Standard 1.5: The contact worker is to disclose to women any new expressed or perceived threat to their safety

Policies and procedures will be developed regarding actions to be taken where there is reasonable suspicion that there is an escalation or heightened threat to the safety of women and their children.

This will include procedures to ensure that information that indicates increased risk is immediately communicated by the group facilitator to the partner contact worker and the participant's partner.

Appropriate procedures for responding to any new expressed or perceived threat to women's safety will be outlined in the memorandum of understanding for external partner support agencies.

Standard 1.6: Where women and children express an interest in having ongoing contact from a partner support worker additional contact will occur for the duration of the program

Where a woman's need is identified the service (or worker) for partner contact must be delivered in a manner that supports the diversity of women and children's needs by offering a flexible and timely service.

Women and children must have access to long-term emotional and practical support through the partner support worker and/or other referral options. This will be reflected in the memorandum of understanding for external partner support agencies.

Standard 1.7: Group facilitators and partner support workers will have appropriate knowledge and training about the impact of domestic and family violence on women and children

This means that those performing this function will have:

- Formal training in domestic and family violence from a recognised training institution, which could include tertiary or vocational training from specialist domestic violence trainers
- Formal training which must include knowledge of the gendered nature of domestic and family violence, the dynamics of domestic and family violence and the effects on women and children. It will also include recognising and responding to domestic and family violence
- Knowledge of the criminal justice system and extensive knowledge of apprehended domestic violence orders and how they operate.

It is the responsibility of the program provider to ensure group facilitators and partner support workers undertake the required training. In the case of external partner support providers, a memorandum of understanding will outline knowledge and training requirements.

Standard 1.8: Partner support workers must have relevant knowledge, training and experience to enable them to support and advocate for women and children

Any person undertaking partner support work will have as a minimum:

- Experience in advocacy for victims of domestic and family violence
- Domestic and family violence case management, risk assessment and safety planning skills.

When partner support is provided by an external agency, a memorandum of understanding will outline required relevant experience.

**PRINCIPLE 2:
VICTIM SAFETY AND OFFENDER ACCOUNTABILITY ARE BEST ACHIEVED
THROUGH AN INTEGRATED, SYSTEMIC RESPONSE THAT ENSURES THAT
ALL RELEVANT AGENCIES WORK TOGETHER**

Standard 2.1: To ensure program transparency, accountability and integration program providers will develop a formal relationship with relevant local agencies

Relevant local agencies include NSW Police Force, Community Services, Corrective Services NSW, and representatives from the Domestic Violence Liaison Committee, specialist domestic violence service providers, relevant men's service providers, and other relevant local agencies.

This formal relationship should be established by the program provider and include a documented agreement (or terms of reference) about how the agencies will be involved in the development and ongoing functioning of the men's behaviour change group program. This group will be linked as a sub-group to the Domestic Violence Liaison Committee, or exist as a stand-alone Reference Group.

The purpose of the relationship will be to develop processes to:

- Ensure the integrity of the program with its theoretical base
- Ensure that victim safety remains the primary consideration of the program
- Monitor the implementation of the standards
- Develop and implement referral protocols
- Develop and implement protocols governing responses to disclosures of violence, breaches of apprehended domestic violence orders, and non-attendance and non-compliance with the program
- Review program evaluation results in order to inform and amend any future program planning and delivery

PRINICPLE 3: CHALLENGING DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE REQUIRES A SUSTAINED COMMITMENT TO PROFESSIONAL AND EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE

Standard 3.1: Group facilitators must have relevant knowledge and training

In addition to Standard 1.7 group facilitators undertaking men's domestic violence behaviour change group work will have, as a minimum, formal group work training from a recognised training institution, which could include tertiary or vocational training.

Standard 3.2: All programs will have a minimum of two group facilitators

One of those two group facilitators must have significant experience.

Significant experience means a minimum 50 hours supervised practice in delivering men's domestic violence behaviour change group programs.

Standard 3.3: Group facilitators must undertake supervision

Group facilitators must take part in formal, individual, clinical supervision to apply knowledge to practice, to develop skills, and to challenge ideas and practice.

Group facilitators who are not experienced will undertake fortnightly supervision.

Experienced group facilitators will undertake supervision at least monthly.

The clinical supervisor must have tertiary education in a relevant discipline for example, social sciences, psychology, social work, family and couple therapy as well as relevant clinical experience and knowledge of domestic and family violence.

Standard 3.4: Program providers will develop policies to ensure that group facilitators undertake ongoing professional development

Beyond the initial training required to facilitate behaviour change group programs, it is the responsibility of the program provider to ensure that group facilitators undertake ongoing professional development to build on existing knowledge and maintain an awareness of the current research and practice trends.

Standard 3.5: Behaviour Change Group Programs will have a duration of at least 24 hours over 12-weeks

Programs will vary in length and intensity, however research indicates that programs of less than 12 weeks duration are ineffective in changing behaviour.

Standard 3.6: Program providers will complete an operational review of each program focussing on process and content

To ensure the program maintains victim safety and participant accountability, and is effective in changing participant's behaviour all program providers will ensure that an operational review is

completed at the end of each program with the aim of improving the quality and effectiveness of future programs.

Program providers will ensure that records are kept of critical incidents including incidents involving partners and children and those, which occur in program sessions.

This evaluation will include:

- A review of critical incidents
- A review and critical examination of the program's content and delivery
- An examination of how the program and victim support components can be improved to further ensure victim safety
- An examination of the accessibility to and engagement with participants from a range of cultural backgrounds.

Standard 3.7: Program providers will evaluate the impact of programs on the behaviour and attitudes of group participants

Group facilitators will systematically evaluate the impact of the program on the participant's behaviour. This will include the use of a validated instrument that measures changes in participant's behaviour at appropriate intervals.

An evaluation of the impact of the program on participant's behaviour must rely on multiple sources of verification including Police reports, partner reports, worker reports as well as participant's self reports.

Standard 3.8: Program providers will contribute to an evidence base for behaviour change programs

Program providers will be required to collect data to contribute to an evidence base for the effectiveness of behaviour change group programs in accordance with a minimum data set outlined in the practice guide.

PRINCIPLE 4: PERPETRATORS OF DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE MUST BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR THEIR BEHAVIOUR

Standard 4.1: Programs must be grounded in an evidence-based theory of change

The theoretical approach of programs will vary, however it is important that programs are based on evidence of what works.

Programs must clearly articulate how the program is intended to change the behaviour of the participants. The programs content and delivery should be consistent with this theoretical base.

Standard 4.2: Program providers will document and implement thorough participant assessment procedures

A structured pre-assessment will take place with the prospective participant and the lead group facilitator. The nature and the content of the assessment needs to be clearly specified in the provider's documentation, and should include such issues as:

- Current relationship status, and relationship history
- Parenting status, and if there are family court orders in place
- History of using all forms of violent and controlling behaviours
- Capacity for using all forms of violent and controlling behaviours
- Possession of weapons
- Legal standing, including current or previous court proceedings or orders, charges or convictions, and any reports required by statutory or other bodies
- Understanding of the need for change and willingness to change
- Commitment and ability to attend group sessions
- Acceptance that throughout the group program women and children who have been affected by his violence will be contacted
- Willingness to accept the policies regarding limited confidentiality and information exchange, and responding to criminal acts and breaches of court orders

Information gained in the assessment will be used to identify any safety concerns, and determine the most appropriate group program or other intervention.

A participant will be ineligible to participate in a group program if the prospective participant:

- Is assessed as not having the preparedness to change
- Is unwilling to accept the need for ongoing risk assessment and/or accountability to victims, or
- Is violent toward their partner or children or is charged with a new criminal offence that is alleged to have occurred after they have commenced the program.

If a prospective participant is assessed as not being suitable for group work, then they must be appropriately referred.

Standard 4.3: Program providers will have procedures for engaging participants, which challenge them to acknowledge their abusive behaviour

Procedures should include participation agreements that require prospective participants to:

- Acknowledge their violent behaviour
- Show a commitment and capacity to attend and participate in the entire program
- Agree to a worker having regular contact with any women and children who might be affected by their violent and controlling behaviour
- Acknowledge they are obliged to abide by the law, including all the requirements of any legal orders in force
- Disclose their access to guns or other weapons (in which case safety risks and safety planning with their partner must be discussed)
- Agree to an ongoing evaluation, and monitoring of their progress in changing their violent behaviour and attitudes
- Agree to the provider's policies on limited confidentiality and responding to criminal acts or breaches of court orders
- Agree that information will be shared between the program provider and referring agency and with relevant government agencies where required by law.

Standard 4.4: Program content will include explicit information about the impact of domestic and family violence on women and children and women's disproportionate experience of domestic violence

Programs will provide and discuss with participants information and evidence about the effects of their violence on women, children, families and the community.

Standard 4.5: Program content will include information on different forms of domestic and family violence and provide opportunities for participants to come to an understanding about the nature of their offending behaviour

Programs will invite participants to examine and name their abusive behaviour and take a look at the details of what they have done already.

Standard 4.6: Program providers will develop procedures for non-attendance of mandated participants

Where a participant fails to attend or participate in a group program the referring agency will be notified to ensure prompt communication of a person's non-compliance.

Program providers must set and enforce clear and consistent policies to deal with non-attendance.

Standard 4.7: Program providers will have procedures for group facilitators to prevent their implicit or explicit collusion with participants' attitudes that support violence against women

Group facilitators must develop skills in identifying and responding to attitudes that support violence against women and underpin abusive behaviour, and this will be a specific focus in supervision and in the evaluation of the program.

Standard 4.8: Program providers will offer appropriate referrals to meet participant's additional needs

Participant's additional needs might include housing, alcohol and other drug support, mental health treatment, employment support, therapeutic support and other needs.

Standard 4.9: Program providers must comply with the requirements of a referring agency for a report on a participant's completion of a program

At a minimum the program provider will provide feedback to referral agencies for each of the participants completing a program.

**PRINCIPLE 5:
PROGRAMS SHOULD RESPOND TO THE DIVERSE NEEDS OF THE
PARTICIPANTS AND PARTNERS**

Standard 5.1: Program facilitators must undertake training to ensure culturally competent practice

A facilitator who is culturally competent can communicate sensitively and effectively with people who have different languages, cultures, religions, genders, ethnicities, disabilities, ages and sexualities.

Cultural competence is the ability to interact effectively with people across different cultures, this includes an awareness of one's own cultural worldview, the assumptions and biases as well as a positive attitude towards cultural differences, knowledge of different cultural practices and worldviews and cross-cultural communication skills.

Where the community's demographic reflects a particular cultural group program providers should ensure that facilitators have appropriate training to meet the needs of the community.

Standard 5.2: Programs addressing other forms of family violence will be specific to the participant's needs

The majority of men who participate in domestic and family violence behaviour change group programs do so in the context of heterosexual relationships, however men who use violence are not always heterosexual and the application of the minimum standards are therefore also relevant for men in same-sex relationships.

Programs must also consider issues of safety for gay, bisexual and/or transgender men due to the possibility of homophobic abusive behaviour from other men and facilitators in the group.