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| Engaging with adults using family violence to reduce risk to children |
| Resource for child protection practitioners |
| OFFICIAL |

## Engagement with the adult using family violence (AUFV)

The purpose of engaging with the adult using family violence (AUFV) is to understand their role in the child’s life as parent (and also as the partner of the adult victim survivor where applicable) and their understanding of the impact of their behaviour on the child and adult victim survivor. It is also to gain insight into their attitude and violence affirming narratives, and their readiness to change.

Engagement should only be done when attempts have been made to engage separately and safely with the child and adult victim survivors.

Engagement should focus on:

* keeping the child and adult victim survivors safe and promoting the child’s wellbeing and development
* working collaboratively with the adult victim survivor to keep the child safe and strengthen the relationship between them
* informing the assessment of risk posed by the AUFV including correctly identifying the predominant aggressor and understanding patterns of behaviour and coercive control to mitigate and manage risk
* informing the analysis across the four dimensions of risk assessment, this will inform a Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM) rating and the overall risk assessment (consequence and probability of harm)
* service collaboration including working in partnership with Victoria Police, the Courts, family violence services, family services and the universal service system to hold AUFV to account, keep them in view and keep the child and adult victim survivor safe.

## Considerations for engagement with the AUFV

The following considerations should inform safe engagement with the AUFV, including:

* child protection practitioner (practitioner) safety – planning required to engage safely with the AUFV
* prioritising victim survivor safety and not colluding with the AUFV
* any history of violence or abuse by the AUFV toward professionals
* current location and safety arrangements in place for the child and adult victim survivor
* practitioner competence and confidence to work with AUFV – work with a more experienced practitioner when engaging with the AUFV
* potential for AUFV escalation and need for additional support
* follow up with the child (as appropriate) and adult victim survivor after engagement with the AUFV.

## Observable signs – Identifying AUFV

For information about observable signs to identify narratives or behaviours used by the AUFV see [Observable signs – identifying adults using family violence](https://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/specialist-resources/family-violence/observable-signs-identifying-adults-using).

## Process of engagement with AUFV: adhering to the SAFER children framework

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| **Step 1: Prepare and review existing information and evidence** |
| * Review Client Relationship Information System (CRIS) records for all parties, including parents and any other children. This can include reviewing the Essential Information Categories (EIC) from prior interventions. To do this change filter to view ‘all’ factors within the EIC tab on CRIS. Instructions can be found in the December 2023 SAFER Newsletter on the [SAFER page](https://dhhsvicgovau.sharepoint.com/%3Au%3A/r/sites/CPLHub/SitePages/About-SAFER.aspx?csf=1&web=1&e=YE97Cp) on the Child Protection Learning Hub (CPLH).
* Review the L17 Portal to obtain a pattern of prior family violence incidents and AUFV’s relationship to victim(s).
* Review criminal history check for relevant adults, including the AUFV.
* Obtain any information regarding corrections involvement.
* Review any assessments, including MARAM assessment by agency partners, treatment, or medical reports for all parties.
* Check the AUFV’s involvement with Correction Victoria services, men’s services, and other services.
* Check the victim survivor’s involvement with specialist family violence and other services.
* Check children’s attendance at school/childcare/maternal child health or treatment services.
* Share information via the provisions in the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (CYFA), the Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS) and the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS), which allow information to be shared without consent where appropriate (such as related to safety of a child or risk posed by an AUFV).
* Sort information and evidence according to the EIC and evidence based factors. Remember the serious MARAM evidence-based risk factors appear in orange in CRIS – these are the factors associated with increased risk of the victim being killed or seriously injured.
* Store the information gathered in the ‘S’ tab in case practice in CRIS and use the information and evidence to complete the analysis in the ‘A’ tab.
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| **Step 2: Prepare for initial visit/interview with the child and adult victim survivor first** |
| * Use the [S and A practice tools](https://dhhsvicgovau.sharepoint.com/sites/CPLHub/SitePages/SAFER-Practice-Tools-and-Resources.aspx) and prompt tool to inform your investigation plan. This includes reviewing the evidence based factors within the Family Violence EIC and the four dimensions of analysis to inform a thorough interview and risk assessment or review risk assessment (which embeds MARAM rating). Advice on how to do this is in the ‘How can the S and A practice activities help inform an investigation plan’ factsheet found on the [SAFER page](https://dhhsvicgovau.sharepoint.com/%3Au%3A/r/sites/CPLHub/SitePages/About-SAFER.aspx?csf=1&web=1&e=YE97Cp) on the CPLH.
* Where possible, plan and schedule initial visit/interview with the adult victim survivor and child victim survivor (unannounced visits can increase risk to adult victim survivors, especially if the AUFV resides there).
* If unannounced visit is unavoidable, coordinate a joint visit with Victoria Police.
* If the AUFV is present, DO NOT attempt to interview the child or adult victim survivor; focus on the AUFV, explain the reason for the visit, arrange an alternative time to visit, preferably at a department office or police station. Explain to both parents that separate interviews are part of the process.
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| **Step 3: Interview the adult victim survivor (consider joint visit with specialist FV service or police)** |
| * Seek the adult victim survivor’s view on:
	+ their relationship with the AUFV;
	+ their experience of family violence (note patterns, contexts of risk escalation);
	+ the children’s experience of family violence;
	+ impact of family violence on their relationship with their children and capacity to parent;
	+ their wishes for the relationship and the violence;
	+ protective factors; and,
	+ their own self-assessment of risk.
* Explore their assessment of current safety and situational variables that increase and decrease safety.
* Develop a safety plan and provide information regarding available support services. Read the February 2024 SAFER Newsletter on the [SAFER page](https://dhhsvicgovau.sharepoint.com/%3Au%3A/r/sites/CPLHub/SitePages/About-SAFER.aspx?csf=1&web=1&e=YE97Cp) for advice on where and how to record a safety plan on CRIS.
* If serious risk factors are identified, take action to address the immediate safety needs of the child and adult victim survivor. This may include assisting the adult victim survivor and child to seek emergency accommodation and other supports.
* Obtain their permission to interview the children before interviewing the AUFV.
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| **Step 4: Interviewing the AUFV** |
| Consider practitioner safety in planning interview or visit – including location and who should be present. Advise the child (as appropriate) and adult victim survivor of the interview, noting further safety planning may be required.* Observe and ask prompting questions to gather perspectives on the AUFV’s use of violence. Focus on most recent incident, identify family violence risk factors (noting any serious risk factors; invite them to provide as much detail as possible).
* Use the MARAM AUFV prompt tool to assess risk based on their narratives and behaviours you observe. The prompt tool supports engaging in ways that do not increase risk for the victim survivors or lead to confrontation and collusion.
* Apply a balanced approach to engaging with the AUFV by engaging in ways that avoid reinforcing the AUFV’s behaviour or validating their violence-supporting narratives, without increasing risk to victim survivors. Maintain a parenting lens when interviewing the AUFV. Being a parent can motivate change.
* Seek the AUFV’s perspective on the relationship (remain/separate?), the impact of violence on the adult victim survivor and the relationship between the child and adult victim survivor.
* Seek the AUFV’s understanding of impact of the family violence on each child.
* Explore the role of substance use, mental health, culture, and socio-economic factors and how they relate to any patterns on the AUFV’s use of violence and controlling behaviours.
* Explore the AUFV’s attitude towards any court orders or treatment services.
* Explore the AUFV’s willingness to work with services to address their use of violence and what they would hope to achieve (acknowledgement of concerns and motivation to change).

**DO NOT disclose any information provided by the adult victim survivor or the child victim survivor – focus on reported concerns, known history or the AUFV’s disclosures.*** Conclude by first setting expectations based on content of interview (transparency) – for example advise you will be in contact and what you expect of them.
* Contact the adult victim survivor to advise them you have spoken to the AUFV, inform of any concerns for their or children’s safety (such as the AUFV became agitated, terminated the interview, or made threats).

*In consultation with the adult victim survivor, consider need to report to police any matters of concern.***Complete the risk assessment or review risk assessment which includes the MARAM risk rating and consult with Senior Child Protection Practitioner – Family Violence/Specialist Family Violence worker or Principal Practitioner/Practice Leader** |