

Multi-Agency Practitioner Guide

to Information Sharing and Referral Procedures for MARAC

(Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference)

For Statutory and Voluntary Sector
Organisations and Practitioners in Devon

Part of Devon Against Domestic Violence & Abuse Partnership's Strategy



Adva Training

It is important to note that before using this *'Multi-Agency Practitioner Guide to Information Sharing and Referral Procedures for MARAC'*, practitioners must have attended the adva training day:

"Tackling Risk Assessment in Domestic Violence & Abuse"

The training provides comprehensive guidance for practitioners and managers on identifying and screening for risk factors as well as guidance around completing the adva **Initial Risk Assessment Form** (*Appendix 5*).

This training is available throughout Devon.

For more information and to book a place, please visit www.adva.org.uk or call Claire Heaver, adva, on: **01392 382233**.

Acknowledgements

This Practitioner Guide has been researched and compiled by **Jodie Das**, *adva trainer*; **Amber Steer-Frost**, *Devon County Council*; **Susannah Hunter**, *adva*.

A big thanks to all contributing partner organisations.

Multi-Agency Practitioner Guide

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Agencies which need to be signed up...

to the Multi-Agency Practitioner Guide to Information Sharing and Referral Procedures for MARAC

Devon and Cornwall Constabulary
CAFCASS (Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service)
Devon and Cornwall Housing Association
Devon County Council – CYPS (Children and Young People Services)
Devon County Council – ACS (Adult and Community Services)
Devon County Council – DAAT (Drug and Alcohol Team)
Devon Partnership Trust
Devon Primary Care Trust
East Devon District Council – Housing
Exeter City Council – Housing
Exeter Women’s Aid
Mid Devon District Council – Housing
National Probation Service – Devon and Cornwall Area
North Devon District Council – Housing
South Devon Healthcare Trust
South Devon Women’s Aid
South Hams District Council – Housing
Teignbridge District Council – Housing
Torrige District Council – Housing
Victim Support (Devon) – Newton Abbot
West Devon Borough Council – Housing
Women’s Aid North Devon

The Nominated Holder of the police ‘*Protocol for the Sharing of Information, on incidents of domestic violence in Devon & Cornwall, between Statutory Authorities, Housing Providers, Voluntary and Charitable Agencies*’ is **John Ellis**, Information Manager, D&CC. This is the definitive and overarching Protocol for this Practitioner Guide.

Purpose

The primary objective of the adva (Against Domestic Violence and Abuse) partnership strategy 2005-2008 is to increase safety of victims of domestic violence. The purpose of this Practitioner Guide, for organisations and practitioners from statutory and voluntary sector agencies, is to set out the importance of identifying risk factors in domestic violence cases and how to effectively and safely share this information on a multi agency basis.

The Practitioner Guide operates in tandem with the police *'Protocol for the Sharing of Information, on incidents of domestic violence in Devon & Cornwall, between Statutory Authorities, Housing Providers, Voluntary and Charitable Agencies'*, which is the definitive and overarching Protocol for this Practitioner Guide.

The Crime & Disorder Act 1998 is the primary legislative tool, common to all crime reduction Protocols. It therefore forms the basis of this Practitioner Guide which aims to do the following:

- **assess domestic violence situations**
- **identify risk**
- **exchange information with relevant authorities so that risk may be effectively managed and ultimately reduced, by a combined agency response known as Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC).**

Where certain conditions are satisfied, Section 115 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 enables any person to disclose information for the purposes of any provision of the Act to a relevant authority, or to a person acting on behalf of such an authority. The overriding main purpose of the Act is the prevention of crime. The Crime & Disorder Act 1998 does not override existing legal safeguards on personal information. Any disclosure made must be in accordance with the law (*see Appendix 1: Law Governing and Enabling Disclosure*).

Introduction

Extensive research shows that no one single agency can manage risk effectively, but working in partnership with other agencies to manage risk in domestic violence cases, can substantially reduce risk of future violence, more severe harm and mortality, therefore increasing the safety of victims and their children.

Domestic abuse is a critical issue for many agencies and there is no prescriptive response that can be used in all cases. Research has shown that on average a domestic abuse victim will need to visit ten agencies in their effort to move on from an abusive relationship. It is therefore imperative that agencies provide a co-ordinated response to support the victim.

Adva will be seeking agencies' commitment to the principles outlined throughout the Practitioner Guide, by asking them to "sign up" to it. If you haven't already done so and wish to "sign up" to the Practitioner Guide, please contact Roy Tomlinson, Community Strategy Officer, Chief Executives Directorate, Devon County Council, on 01392 382563. Alternatively email: roy.tomlinson@devon.gov.uk.

We hope that you find this Practitioner Guide helpful; should you have any further queries regarding the MARAC process, please do not hesitate to get in touch with the adva team on: 01392 382233.

What are the aims of the MARAC?

- To share information to increase the safety, health and well being of victims – adults and their children
- To determine whether the perpetrator poses a significant risk to any particular individual or to the general community
- To construct jointly and implement a risk management plan that provides professional support to all those at risk and that reduces the risk of harm
- To reduce repeat victimisation
- To improve agency accountability
- To improve support for staff involved in high risk domestic violence cases

Definitions

adva

Against Domestic Violence and Abuse partnership in Devon

MARAC

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference

Domestic violence

For all MARAC procedures and information sharing, the following definition of domestic violence will be used: *'any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults, aged 18 or over, who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender and sexuality. Family members are defined as mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister and grandparents, whether directly or indirectly related, in-laws or step-family.'*

(National definition of domestic violence taken from The ACPO *Guidance on Investigating Domestic Violence* 2004.)

The national definition of domestic violence applies to cases where a victim and perpetrators are over 18. There may be cases where a victim who is under 18 years of age is being subjected to abuse by a partner or former partner who is over 18 years. Such a case falls within the ACPO *Guidance on Investigating Child Abuse and Safeguarding Children* (2005), which defines a child as a person under the age of 18. There may, however, be cases where it will be appropriate to apply the principles of the ACPO *Guidance* as well as the above guidance.

PLEASE NOTE: the Initial Risk Assessment form (Appendix 5) is designed for use with intimate partner domestic violence only.

In addition to the *'Definitions'* section of the *'Protocol for the Sharing of Information, on incidents of domestic violence in Devon & Cornwall, between Statutory Authorities, Housing Providers, Voluntary and Charitable Agencies'*, this Practitioner Guide supplements this list with the definition of 'a repeat incident'.

A repeat incident of domestic violence

For all MARAC procedures and information sharing, the following definition of 'a repeat incident' will be used: *"any incident of domestic violence experienced by a victim that occurs within a twelve month period"*. This includes either the same or different perpetrator.

Repeat victimisation is identified by using the following criteria:

- The number of reported domestic violence incidents.
- The number of crimes as a result of a reported domestic violence incident.
- The number of repeat victims of crime (including harassment) following domestic violence.

Repeat victimisation is a major issue in domestic violence and abuse – we will identify repeat victimisation and ensure it informs our responses as appropriate, highlighted through the MARAC process.

Data Subject

Section 1 of the Data Protection Act 1998 defines a data subject. In summary it is an individual who is the subject of personal data. In practice the MARAC might share personal information on people wider than the direct victim(s) i.e. anyone affected by a safety plan, eg subsequent partners, children, other family members, etc.

Personal data

Section 1 of the Data Protection Act 1998 defines personal data. In summary, it is information which relates to a living individual who can be identified from the information or from any other information the data controller holds or is likely to come into the possession of. It also includes expressions of opinion about the individual and any intentions of the data controller in respect of that individual.

Data Controller

Section 1 of the Data Protection Act 1998 defines a data controller. In summary it means a person who jointly or alone or in common with other people, decides the purposes and the manner in which personal data will be processed.

Processing

Section 1 of the Data Protection Act 1998 defines processing. In summary it means obtaining, recording, holding, using, disclosing or destroying data.

Sensitive personal data

Section 2 of the Data Protection Act 1998 defines sensitive personal data. In summary it is personal data which consists of information relating to a person's racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious beliefs or other beliefs of a similar nature, trade union membership, physical, mental health or condition, sexual life, criminal offences (alleged or committed) and proceedings, disposal or sentence for such offences.

Risk

Relates to the Risk of serious harm that your client and their children may be facing. This is defined as *'Harm which is life threatening or traumatic and from which recovery, whether physical or psychological, can be expected to be difficult or impossible.'*

Why Assess Risk in Domestic Violence Cases?

Risk assessment, in cases of domestic violence victims, means trying to identify those victims who are at most risk of experiencing abuse in the future. Accurate risk assessments serve several important objectives. First, risk assessment tools can provide a structured way for responding agencies to gather detailed information from victims particularly during the immediate aftermath of an incident. This information when passed to other agencies can ensure up front identification of needs and services to meet those needs. For example, some victims will require more intensive advocacy or support to proceed with a case or leave their partner than will others. It also provides an enhanced "paper trail" of evidence should the victim choose not to go forward with the case, helping prosecutors make more informed decisions about whether to proceed with cases when victims retract, for example in the "public interest".

A second related reason is that risk assessment can help save scarce criminal justice resources, by helping identify those victims in particularly dire situations that will require more intensive assistance from police or other agencies. It is hoped that expending more resources or effort “up-front” for these victims will pay off in terms of preventing future incidents, as it is well known that incidents of domestic violence tend to escalate in severity over time. It is for this reason that some view risk assessment in cases of domestic violence as “homicide prevention” (Dr A Robinson, 2004: Domestic Violence MARAC’s for Very High-Risk Victims in Cardiff, Wales: A Process and Outcome Evaluation).

Third, when embedded within multi-agency frameworks risk assessment helps more agencies become aware of the most dangerous alleged offenders, helping to keep their workers safe. Typically, police and maybe probation would be the only agencies privy to this information. By sharing risk assessment information, it is possible to keep health visitors and others aware of households where they could be at higher risk of harm, such as those where weapons are present.

Why Share Information?

Benefits to victims and their children

Responsible information sharing enables:

- Timely action to be taken to protect clients and children from further abuse
- Comprehensive risk identification and safety planning based on a full account of the facts and circumstances of each clients situation
- The right sort and combination of advice, support and advocacy to be offered at the right time based on a full and accurate account of the client’s needs and history, including other service contact and use
- Clients to avoid the added distress of having to repeat details of their history or experience of DV and other circumstances each time they encounter a different service

Benefits to agencies

Responsible information sharing enables:

- Agencies to work together to protect domestic violence victims and children in an informed and cohesive way
- Duplication of effort to be avoided (e.g. in record taking, service provision etc)
- Agencies to feel confident that they can provide a comprehensive, safe, quality service to clients, within the provisions of the law
- Agencies to enhance their reputation for professionalism and credibility with clients and other agencies by demonstrating their competence in this area

Safety and Justice: Sharing personal Information in the context of domestic violence – an overview.
Home Office Development and Practice Report.

Before Conducting an Initial Risk Assessment with a Victim of Domestic Violence

- Never do a Risk Assessment if the person is with the perpetrator!
- Before you start the adva Initial Risk Assessment form, it is important to let the person know that you may have to pass on some information, should they come out as experiencing High or Very High Risk
- Explain to the person that Agencies work together in Devon in order to maximise the protection of victims of domestic violence – their safety is priority!
- Remember to establish whether the perpetrator knows if a disclosure has been made.
- Check to see what the victim feels about risk increasing if the perpetrator finds out about the disclosure

When you pass information on to another agency, remember to inform them whether the perpetrator is aware of the information being passed – this information is crucial in overall risk management.

Conducting an Initial Risk Assessment

The adva Initial Risk Assessment Form contains 20 questions. When you have completed this form with a client, by asking all of the questions, please highlight the category of risk that you think applies to your client; Standard, Medium, High or Very high. This will largely depend on the number of “yes” responses you receive, however please be aware that the victim’s perception of risk is of utmost importance. There may be circumstances with only one yes response to “causes significant concern”, but they are such that make the victim or you as a worker feel are grounds for very high risk

Remember that “Risk” relates to the Risk of serious harm that your client and their children may be facing. This is defined as: *‘Harm which is life threatening or traumatic and from which recovery, whether physical or psychological, can be expected to be difficult or impossible.’*

Further information regarding these categories is as follows:

1. Standard / Medium Risk

While risk indicators may be present, it is deemed neither imminent, nor serious. Explain that nobody needs to live with domestic violence and abuse and that there is support out there. Hand out leaflets with appropriate phone numbers for your area and ask the person to keep you informed about their safety

2. High Risk

There are identifiable features of risk or serious harm. The potential event could happen at any time and the impact could be serious. Where any agency assesses risk as high, information requires sharing. *(Please see following section – What Happens Next?, page 9).*

3. Very High Risk

There is an imminent risk of serious harm. The potential event is more likely than not to happen imminently and the impact could be serious. There may be a need for immediate intervention. After discussion with your line manager/colleague, it may be necessary to notify the Police and/or Children and Young People's Services immediately, without the consent of the victim. Where any agency assesses risk as very high, a MARAC should be requested – see next section.

Additionally:

- All reported domestic related incidents/crimes involving a pregnant woman should be referred to the MARAC, irrespective of the assessed level of risk and whether or not it involves a crime
- All cases involving an individual's ethnicity or minority community status as a significant factor in the abuse taking place, should be referred to the MARAC, irrespective of the assessed level of risk and whether or not it involves a crime

WHEN THE CATEGORY IS HIGH OR VERY HIGH, INFORMATION MUST BE SHARED!

What Happens Next?

Standard / Medium Risk

Offer to make a referral to Victim Support, if consent is given, or to other support agencies including Women's Aid Outreach, for specialist help and support. It is important to remember that risk is dynamic and should be monitored. It is also important to stress that they can and should always contact the police in an emergency. Hand out leaflets with appropriate phone numbers for your area and ask the person to keep you informed about their safety.

High Risk

In this case agencies have a "duty of care". Sharing information enables a practitioner to ensure all relevant information relating to risk has been obtained and informs other agencies about safety concerns regarding an individual/s. While information sharing is important, a high risk category will not activate the MARAC process. It is important to note however that additional information gathered from other agencies may increase a risk assessment from high risk to very high risk (see below). According to the Data Protection Act, high "risk of harm" makes it necessary to share information.

- With the Police and the Domestic Violence Officer
- With the Health Service if the client is injured
- With Children and Young People's Services if children are involved

Also ask if the woman wants support from Women's Aid for Safety Planning or Outreach support or if she needs a refuge space. Men can be given the MALE helpline number for advice.

The fact that you have to pass this information on to somebody else may come as a shock for the person who has just disclosed to you the risk they are living with. Explain exactly what you are going to do and check if this will put the victim or her/his children at risk. Discuss the refuge as an option.

Very High Risk

This requires an immediate referral to the MARAC

A practitioner should undertake the following procedures:

- Speak to the person, when safe to do so, and explain exactly what you will do
- Check if they need medical attention
- Check what other agencies are already involved
- Ring the Police
- If children are involved, Children and Young People's Services will have to be informed
- Inform the person about refuge spaces and safe emergency housing
- Refer to MARAC

Also ask if the woman is willing to be supported by Women's Aid or MALE if it is a man. Safety Planning is especially important if children are involved.

This process needs to be continually checked. Remember that a person can go from standard risk to very high risk in a matter of days!

Referring to the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)

(Please see Appendix 2: Flowchart of The MARAC.)

- The adva Initial Risk Assessment Form should be sent by **fax only** (please refer to the Sharing Information Securely section on page 15) to one of the following MARAC administrators dependent on where you are based in the County:

Rose Edgington – Exeter, East and Mid Devon *Tel: 01392 262218 Fax: 01392 262235*

Sue Speed – North Devon and Torridge *Tel: 01271 335214 Fax: 01271 335215*

Julia Stanbury – West Devon, Teignbridge and South Hams *Tel: 01626 336552 Fax: 01626 362395*

- You should also inform your local Domestic Violence Officer and/or Independent Domestic Violence Advocate
- State that you request the information to be included in the MARAC process
- As well as the adva Initial Risk Assessment Form, please also provide by fax, Appendix 6 MARAC Referral Form and ensure that it contains the following information for MARAC purposes:
 1. Name of victim, DOB and address
 2. Name of perpetrator, DOB and address
 3. Name/s of children residing in household, DOB
 4. Schools attended by children
 5. Name of G.P, Health Visitor and Practice
 6. Any issues such as pregnancy or ethnicity

7. If the perpetrator is the parent to the children, and which children, if known
8. Relationship of the victim to the perpetrator

- Please also complete and fax Appendix 7: **Information Sharing without Consent Form** if you are sharing information without consent (*please refer to sections on: Public Interest, Vital Interest and When Not to Seek Consent, pages 13, 14 & 15*).

Next Stage

On receipt, the MARAC administrator will pass the Initial Risk Assessment Form to the Domestic Violence Officer (DVO) who, in partnership with the Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA), will discuss the completed risk assessment on every reported and recorded domestic violence incident and establish whether immediate action is required i.e. police involvement if this is needed. The referral will be logged on the Police Data Base as a “non crime” domestic violence incident. Domestic violence incidents constituting ‘very high’ risk will be made subject of a Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference, which will be held on a monthly basis. The MARAC as a whole will monitor risk levels of all cases referred to it on an ongoing basis, until it is felt that risk has substantially reduced. The MARAC will also decide if the incident log is changed to a “crime” domestic violence incident and what procedures will follow.

Where the domestic violence incident is subject of ‘high’ risk, a MARAC will not be convened, but the DVO/IDVA works in partnership with the referring agency to ensure the following has been provided:

- [Victim Information leaflet](#)
- [Domestic Violence leaflet](#)
- [Consider Victim Support Services \(with consent\)](#)
- [Liaison with partner agencies where appropriate](#)
- [Consider Crime Prevention advice if appropriate](#)
- [CIS warning marker – Domestic Violence Offender if appropriate](#)

This procedure must take into account whether the perpetrator is aware of agency involvement. No letters should be sent if this will increase the risk to the victim. Decisions regarding how the victim is informed will be discussed on a case by case basis between the DVO, IDVA and referring agency.

Convening the MARAC

- Prior to the MARAC, the victim will be notified in writing of the intention to discuss their case at the conference, and the reasons in doing so – unless it is decided by the referring agency that this will increase risk to the victim. In cases such as these, the DVO/IDVA will liaise with the referring agency regarding the best way to inform the victim.
- Senior representatives from each agency will attend and represent any referrals made from their particular area. They will also supply any information requested from partner agencies at the MARAC meeting. Either a senior representative from one of the agencies or a Police Officer not below the rank of Inspector will chair the meeting.

Prior to the meeting

At least within a minimum of 8 days, all agencies attending will be given details as listed below in order that adequate research can be carried out and agency participation and contribution maximised:

- Name of victim, DOB and address
- Name of perpetrator, DOB and address
- Name/s of children residing in household, DOB
- Schools attended by children
- Name of G.P, Health Visitor and Practice
- Any issues such as pregnancy or ethnicity
- If the perpetrator is the parent to the children, and which children, if known
- Relationship of the victim to the perpetrator

The Agency chairing the meeting will be responsible for the minutes.

Agencies always considered for a MARAC meeting

- **Children and Young People's Services**
- **Adult Services**
- **Police**
- **Health** (midwifery, health visitors, child protection nurse and hospital staff as appropriate)
- **Probation**
- **Housing**
- **Education** (where relevant)
- **IDVA**

Representatives of other statutory or voluntary agencies may also be invited to attend the meeting depending on whether those agencies have (or may have) any specific involvement with the subject, e.g. Women's Aid, Housing Associations, Community Psychiatric Nurses etc. They will be required to sign the MARAC Confidentiality Declaration (*see Appendix 3: MARAC Confidentiality Declaration*).

In domestic violence or abuse incidents which are categorised as 'very high' where children are resident/present in the home, it will be the decision of the Children and Young People's Service, as to whether or not a strategy meeting is convened, in addition to the MARAC, based on the information provided to them and that held within their systems.

The MARAC will determine which cases should be referred to the MAPPA process (Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements) based on where the joint, informed assessed level of risk posed by the perpetrator to others, meets the required threshold. (*Please see Appendix 4: MARAC and MAPPA Process Flowchart*).

Guidance on Sharing Information

Confidentiality

All staff (temporary and permanent) working with service users, clients, children and young people are bound by a legal duty to protect confidential information that they may come into contact with during the course of their work.

What does confidential mean?

A duty of confidence arises when one person discloses information to another, in circumstances where it is reasonable to expect that the information will be held in confidence. The duty of confidentiality arises out of the common law duty of confidentiality, professional obligations and also staff employment contracts (including those for contractors). This legal duty is not embodied in an Act of Parliament but has been built up from case law where practice has been established by individual judgements.

Sharing confidential information

Confidence is only breached when the sharing of **confidential** information is not authorised by the person who provided it or by the person it is about. If the information was provided on the understanding that it would be shared with a limited range of people or for limited purposes, then sharing in accordance with that understanding will not be a breach of confidence. Similarly, there will not be a breach of confidence where there is explicit consent to the sharing.

While in some circumstances it could be assumed that a person may understand that their information needs to be shared between agencies (e.g. between health and social care), this may not necessarily be the case. Every effort must be made to ensure that they have a good understanding about how their information will be used and who it may be shared with.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you have explained to a person how information will be shared in various situations and that they consent to that sharing - unless you have an overriding legal power to share without consent.

Use of interpreters and confidentiality

Where an interpreter is required, practitioners should discuss the necessity of confidentiality with the interpreter in advance and then discuss with the service user through the interpreter at the beginning of any meeting. It is recommended that a regulated interpreter is used to ensure confidentiality is maintained.

Sharing confidential information without consent

The duty of confidentiality can extend to information relating to deceased individuals and that duty must be upheld. If you do not have consent from a living individual to share their confidential information because, for example you can't locate them or if they have refused to give consent, there are occasions when you can still disclose this information lawfully, for example if the disclosure is necessary and can be justified to be in the **public interest**.

In these cases the question of whether there is a public interest in disclosing the information must be judged by the practitioner on the facts of each case. Overriding a refusal of consent to share confidential information should not be taken lightly. Any decision to override a refusal must be clearly documented stating the reasons why. If you have serious concern about a child or young person you should not necessarily regard a refusal of consent as a barrier stopping you from sharing confidential information.

Public Interest

There may be circumstances when you want to share personal information with other agencies when you don't have consent to do so from the person whose information you want to share. You are permitted to make a disclosure without a person's consent if you strongly believe that the disclosure is in the best interests of society. For example, if the disclosure would assist in preventing crime and disorder, apprehending or prosecuting offenders, or protecting the health and safety of employees and members of the public or for national defence.

The term 'public interest' cannot easily be defined but, in essence it is something which is in the interests of the community as a whole, a group within a community or even an individual. It should be remembered that public interest is not the same as 'interesting to the public'.

There are also public interests, which in some circumstances may weigh against sharing, e.g. the public interest in maintaining public confidence in the confidentiality of certain services. Whenever you wish to share information in the 'public interest' you must weigh up the public interest in disclosing the information against the public interest in **withholding** the information.

Vital Interest

'Vital interests' is a term which has been used for many years but not many practitioners really understand what it means. The Information Commissioner's Office has defined vital interests as: ***'matters of life or death or for the prevention of serious harm to the individual'***.

There may be many occasions when you wish to share information about someone for the protection of their vital interests when you may not have their permission to do so, *for example*:

- you are unable to locate their whereabouts
- they are under the influence of illegal drugs or alcohol
- they have refused to provide consent
- they are unconscious
- they are incapacitated by medication/lack of medication
- they are not physically or mentally capable of providing consent

If the disclosure you wish to make will, in your opinion, protect a child, young person or an adult's vital interests then you can lawfully disclose their information to another person or agency. However, you must ensure that the information provided is adequate for the purpose of the disclosure, relevant to the disclosure and not excessive for that purpose.

There are circumstances when you must share limited information for the protection of a person's vital interests:

- When there is evidence that the child, young person or adult is suffering or is at risk of suffering serious harm.
- Where there is reasonable cause to believe that a child, young person or adult may be suffering or is at risk of suffering serious harm.
- To prevent serious harm or death of a child, young person or adult.

Sharing Information Properly

- Only share information which is necessary.
- Only share information with the person or people who need to know.
- Check that the information is accurate and up to date.
- Make sure you share information in a secure way
- Establish with the recipient whether they intend to pass it on to other people and ensure they understand the limits of any consent which has been given.
- Inform the person the information is about and, if different, any other person who provided the information, of the sharing, if it is safe to do so.

When Not to Seek Consent

Obtaining consent is good practice but information may be shared without consent if there is a public or vital interest or other legislation permits it.

DO NOT seek consent if asking for it would:

- Place a child or young person at increased risk of significant harm
- Place an adult at risk of serious harm
- Prejudice the prevention or detection of crime
- Lead to an unjustified delay in making enquiries about allegations of significant harm

Sharing Information Securely

Sending personal information by fax:

Do not fax personal or confidential information unless it is absolutely necessary.

- Mark the cover sheet '*Strictly confidential, intended for the addressee only. In the event of an error please contact the sender immediately.*
- Information should be restricted to the minimum necessary and only those items that are essential to the purpose of the disclosure. Information should be anonymous where possible to limit identification of the service user when it is not relevant.
- Telephone the recipient to ensure that they are aware a confidential fax is about to be sent, to confirm that an identified individual will collect and deliver it and that safe receipt will be confirmed.
- Use pre-installed numbers wherever possible to minimise the risk of misdialling. Double check the fax number before sending.

Sharing personal information verbally:

- Take care to ensure that confidentiality is maintained in verbal discussions especially if you may be overheard by those who do not need to know.
- Make sure you know who you are talking to over the phone and check that the individual is the right person to speak to.
- If you don't recognise the person calling or the telephone number given, ask the caller for their name, job title, department and switchboard number and call them back by asking the switchboard to put you through to them.

Sending personal information by post:

- Mark post 'Personal and Confidential - to be opened by the addressee only' and clearly state the name and full work address of that person.
- Make sure envelopes and packages are effectively sealed and have the correct postage.
- Inform the designated recipient that the information has been sent and ask them to contact you if the information is not received within the expected timescale.
- Limit the amount of personal information disclosed to those details necessary for the designated recipient to carry out their role.

Sending personal information by email:

Do not email confidential information unless it is absolutely necessary and you know that the transmission is secure (e.g. encrypted).

- When sending information within an attachment the document should be password protected.

Security Agreement

The partners to this agreement will ensure that information shared and disclosed is protected in line with their Information Security Policy. The protection will follow the baseline security measures listed below:

Responsibilities:

- Each partner agency will abide by the relevant legislation outlined in this Practitioner Guide and in the police 'Protocol for the Sharing of Information, on incidents of domestic violence in Devon & Cornwall, between Statutory Authorities, Housing Providers, Voluntary and Charitable Agencies', which is the definitive and overarching Protocol for this Practitioner Guide, to ensure lawful and appropriate sharing of information.
- Disclosure via fax to a secure listed fax number will be the preferred method of the delivery of the requested information. This will ensure that accurate information is passed direct to the MARAC Co-ordinator, and that an audit trail is established.
- Due to the insecure nature of the internet no personal data to be shared should to be supplied via e-mail. Secure fax [for example, a fax in the office of the contact person who represents your agency at the MARAC meeting] can be used.
- Agencies signed up to this Practitioner Guide should respond to formal requests for Disclosure of Personal Data within 8 days of receipt of the request. However, it is acknowledged that there may be occasions when the Disclosure is required more urgently.
- Each partner agency has an identified officer who shall be responsible for data protection and confidentiality on their behalf.
- Each partner agency will ensure all persons having access to the data have been instructed in, and understand, their data protection responsibilities and their duty to protect the legislation.

Physical Security

Approved security measures are in place to protect the information:

- Each partner agency has secure locks on doors and windows.
There are a limited number of key holders, all of which are authorised personnel.
- Paper-based information will be stored in locked filing cabinets.
- Waste materials containing sensitive information will be shredded.
- Security checks will be carried out annually by a security firm.

Computer Systems

- All information will be maintained on a secure password protected database.
- Access to information will be restricted to authorised personnel from each partner agency.

Disclosures at Meetings

- Each partner agency will comply with the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998.
- Agencies who anticipate making Disclosures at meetings should ensure they are empowered to do so and that such Disclosures are permitted by all relevant legislation.
- Such Disclosures should be recorded within the minutes of the relevant meeting and the relevant agency shall ensure that these minutes are retained for at least six (6) years.
- It is suggested as a model of good practice that those agencies making Disclosures at meetings should clarify all issues reasonably relevant to any intended Disclosure, to include without limitation confidentiality issues and powers to make the Disclosure, prior to the commencement of the relevant meeting.

Complaints Procedure

Any complaints with regard to the sharing of information should be in writing to the agency who supplied the information. This agency will handle the complaint in accordance with their own Complaints Procedures.

Appendix 1

Law Governing and Enabling Disclosure

Descriptions of all relevant legislation and other material are set out below and provide clear guidance regarding agency responsibility for sharing information relating to those experiencing domestic violence.

1. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (Section 115)

Section 115 of The Act provides a power (not an obligation) for information sharing between relevant responsible public bodies (e.g. Police, Health, Social Services) and co-operating bodies (e.g. Women's Aid, Victim Support, Home Start) involved in the implementation of the local crime and disorder strategy where there is written agreement/protocol.

In addition, Section 115 of the Crime and Disorder Act stipulates that any person, who would not have the power to do so, will have the power to disclose information for the purpose of any provision of the Crime and Disorder Act i.e. to protect the public interest and to detect and prevent crime. Domestic Violence risk assessments aiming to prevent victimisation, harassment and homicide fall within the provisions of Section 115 of the Act.

This power must be exercised in accordance with the relevant legislation.

2. The Human Rights Act 1998

The following articles relate to information exchange relating to domestic violence cases.

Article 2.1 states *'that everyone's right to life will be protected by law'*.

Article 3 states that *'No one shall be subjected to torture or degrading and inhuman treatment'*.

Article 6 stipulates *'the right to a fair trial'*.

Article 8.1 states *'Everyone shall have the right to respect for his private and family life... there shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right, except in accordance with the law... for the prevention of the disorder of crime... or for the protection of the rights and freedom of others'*.

For the purpose of this Practitioner Guide Article 2.1, 3, 6 and 8.1 will be adhered to. The principle of 'proportionality' - a common theme running through the legislation - will be adhered to. In the context of information exchange, any disclosure of information would be restricted to the minimum required to meet the objectives of the Practitioner Guide, i.e. to prevent repeat victimisation.

3. The Data Protection Act (1998) (the Act)

3.1 Schedule 1 of the Act contains eight data protection principles, these are summarised below:

1. Personal data shall be processed fairly and lawfully and shall not be processed unless one of the conditions in Schedule 2 of the Act is met and in the case of sensitive personal data, one of the conditions in Schedule 3 is also met.
2. Personal data shall be processed for limited purposes and cannot be further processed in a way which is incompatible with those purposes.
3. Personal data shall be adequate, relevant and not excessive for the purpose.
4. Personal data shall be accurate and where necessary kept up to date.
5. Personal data shall not be kept for longer than is necessary.
6. Personal data shall be processed in line with the data subject's rights under the Act.
7. Personal data shall be kept secure to prevent unauthorised or unlawful access, loss, destruction or damage to personal data.
8. Personal data shall not be transferred to a country outside the European Economic Area unless that country can ensure that it has an adequate level of protection for the rights and freedoms of data subjects.

3.2

With regard to Principle 1, the conditions that might apply to the processing of personal data and sensitive personal data under this Practitioner Guide, are below.

These are summarised for ease of reference and are numbered as they are shown in the Act:

Schedule 2 – Conditions relevant to processing *personal data* (see definition on page 6)

1. The data subject has given consent.
3. The processing is necessary to comply with any legal obligation.
4. The processing is necessary in order to protect the vital interests of the data subject (matters relating to life, death or serious harm).
5. The processing is necessary
 - a) for the administration of justice
 - d) for the exercise of any function of a public nature exercised in the public interest (e.g. child protection, crime prevention or detection etc).
6. The processing is necessary for the 'legitimate interests' of the organisation or for any third party to whom the data are disclosed, as long as the processing does not cause unwarranted prejudice to the rights and freedoms of the data subject.

A lot of the information shared with regard to domestic violence cases will be regarded as sensitive personal data e.g. if the information contains details about a person's physical or mental health or condition or details about an offence which a person has committed or been accused of.

In such cases, practitioners must be able to satisfy at least one condition from Schedule 3 of the Data Protection Act and one from Schedule 2.

Schedule 3 – Conditions relevant to processing *sensitive personal data* (see definition on page 6)

1. The data subject has given explicit consent.
3. The processing is necessary - a) to protect the vital interests of the data subject or another person in a case where i) consent cannot be given by the data subject or ii) the data controller cannot reasonably be expected to obtain the consent from the data subject or b) in order to protect the vital interests of another person, in a case where consent by the data subject has been unreasonably withheld
6. The processing is a) for the purpose of, or in connection with legal proceedings (including prospective legal proceedings), b) is necessary for the purpose of obtaining legal advice, or c) is necessary for establishing, exercising or defending legal rights.

In addition to Schedule 3, relevant conditions can also be found in Statutory Instrument 2000 No. 417 (Processing of Sensitive Personal Data Order 2000)

1. The processing, a) is in the substantial public interest, b) is necessary for the purposes of the prevention or detection of any unlawful act and c) must be carried out without the explicit consent of the data subject sought so as not to prejudice those purposes.

3.3a Section 29(3) of the Data Protection Act 1998

Personal data are exempt from the 'non-disclosure' provisions if disclosure is required for the prevention or detection of crime or the apprehension or prosecution of offenders. This exemption can only be used if the application of the 'non-disclosure' provisions would prejudice those purposes.

3.3b Non-Disclosure Provisions

- The first Data Protection Principle (with regard to processing personal data fairly)
- The second, third, fourth and fifth Data Protection Principles
- Section 10 of the Data Protection Act – right to prevent processing likely to cause damage or distress)
- Section 14(1) to (3) of the Data Protection Act – right to rectification, blocking, erasure and destruction

NB Section 29(3) does not exempt organisations from the need to satisfy a condition in Schedule 2 of the Data Protection Act when processing personal data, or in the case of sensitive personal data, a condition in Schedule 3 as well.

3.4

For the purpose of processing personal and sensitive personal data under this Practitioner Guide, each agency must have a valid and up to date registration with the Information Commissioner and must adhere to the Data Protection Principles.

4. Children Act 1989

Section 17 – general duty of local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need, and so far as is consistent with that duty, to promote the upbringing of such children by their families.

Section 47 – places a responsibility on agencies to share information with the local authority where there is reasonable grounds to believe a child is or is likely to suffer significant harm.

5. The Adoption and Children Act 2002

Section 120 – As of January 2005 this section amends the Children Act 1989 and extends the definition of harm to cover “Impairment suffered from seeing or hearing the mistreatment of others”.

This section also applies to children witnessing domestic violence.

6. Children’s Act 2004

Section 10 – promote co-operation to improve wellbeing

Section 11 – arrangements to safeguard and promote welfare

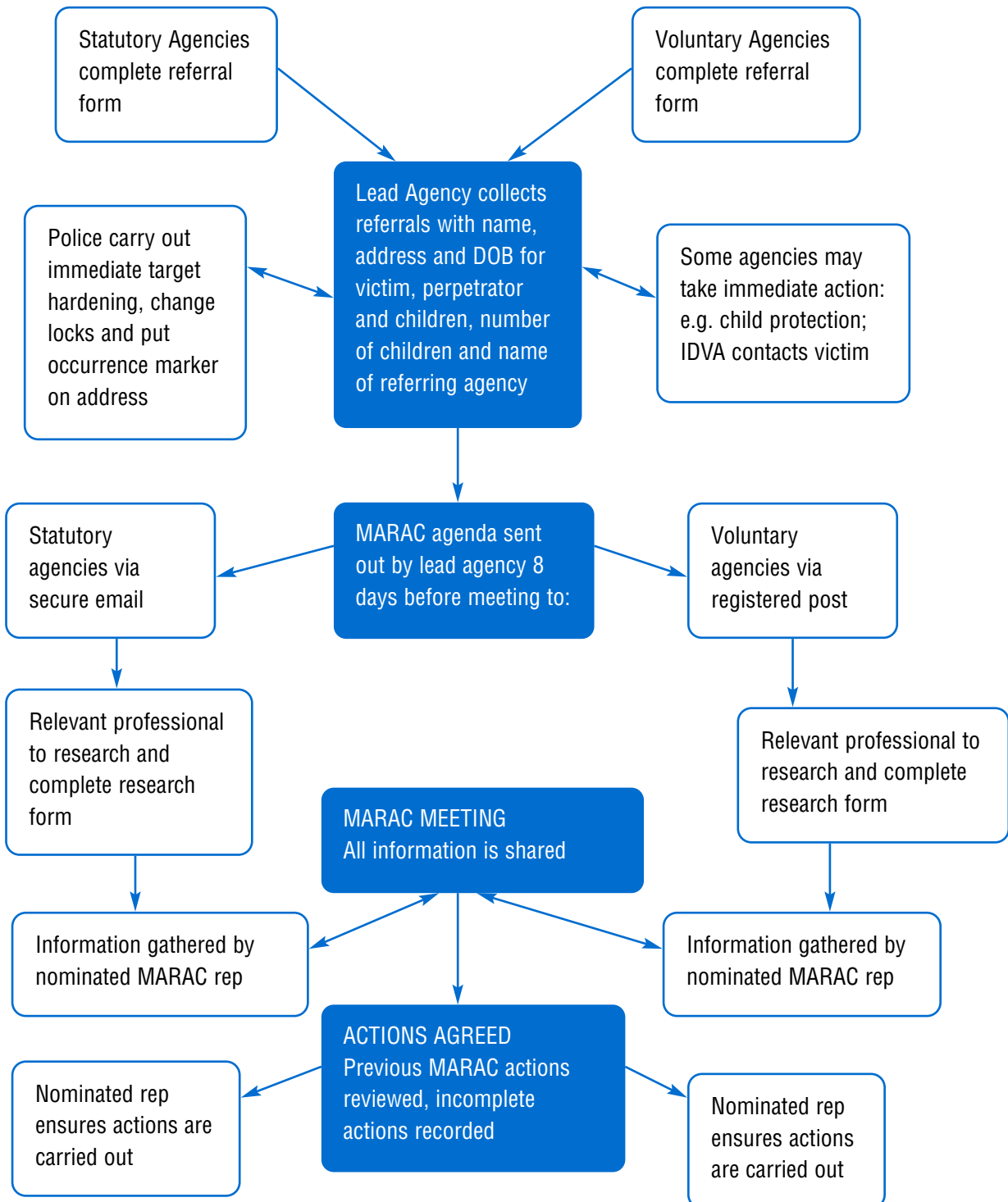
7. Common Law Duty of Confidentiality

Duty of confidentiality is not absolute. Disclosure of confidential information can be justified if:

- you have consent, or
- you have a legal duty or power, or
- it is in the public interest, or
- it is necessary to protect someone’s vital interests

Appendix 2

Flowchart of The MARAC



This flowchart was designed by CAADA (Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse) and has been reproduced in this guide by their kind permission. Please check the CAADA website www.caada.org.uk regularly for updated versions of their material.

Appendix 3

MARAC Confidentiality Declaration

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference

Date: _____

The Chair of the meeting reminds all concerned of the protocols within the Agreed Domestic Abuse Sharing of Information document.

Information discussed by the agency representative, within the ambit of this meeting is strictly confidential and must not be disclosed to third parties who have not signed up to the 'Domestic Abuse Information Sharing Protocol', without the agreement of the partners of the meeting. It should focus on domestic violence and child protection concerns and a clear distinction should be made between fact and opinion.

All agencies should ensure that the minutes are retained in a confidential and appropriately restricted manner. These minutes will aim to reflect that all individuals who are discussed at these meetings should be treated fairly, with respect and without improper discrimination. All work undertaken at the meetings will be informed by a commitment to equal opportunities and effective practice in relation to race, gender, sexuality and disability.

The purpose of the meeting is as follows:

1. To share information to increase the safety, health and well being of victims – adults and their children;
2. To determine whether the perpetrator poses a significant risk to any particular individual or to the general community;
3. To construct jointly and implement a risk management plan that provides professional support to all those at risk and that reduces the risk of harm;
4. To reduce repeat victimisation;
5. To improve agency accountability, and
6. Improve support for staff involved in high risk DV cases.

The responsibility to take appropriate actions rests with individual agencies; it is not transferred to the MARAC. The role of the MARAC is to facilitate, monitor and evaluate effective information sharing to enable appropriate actions to be taken to increase public safety.

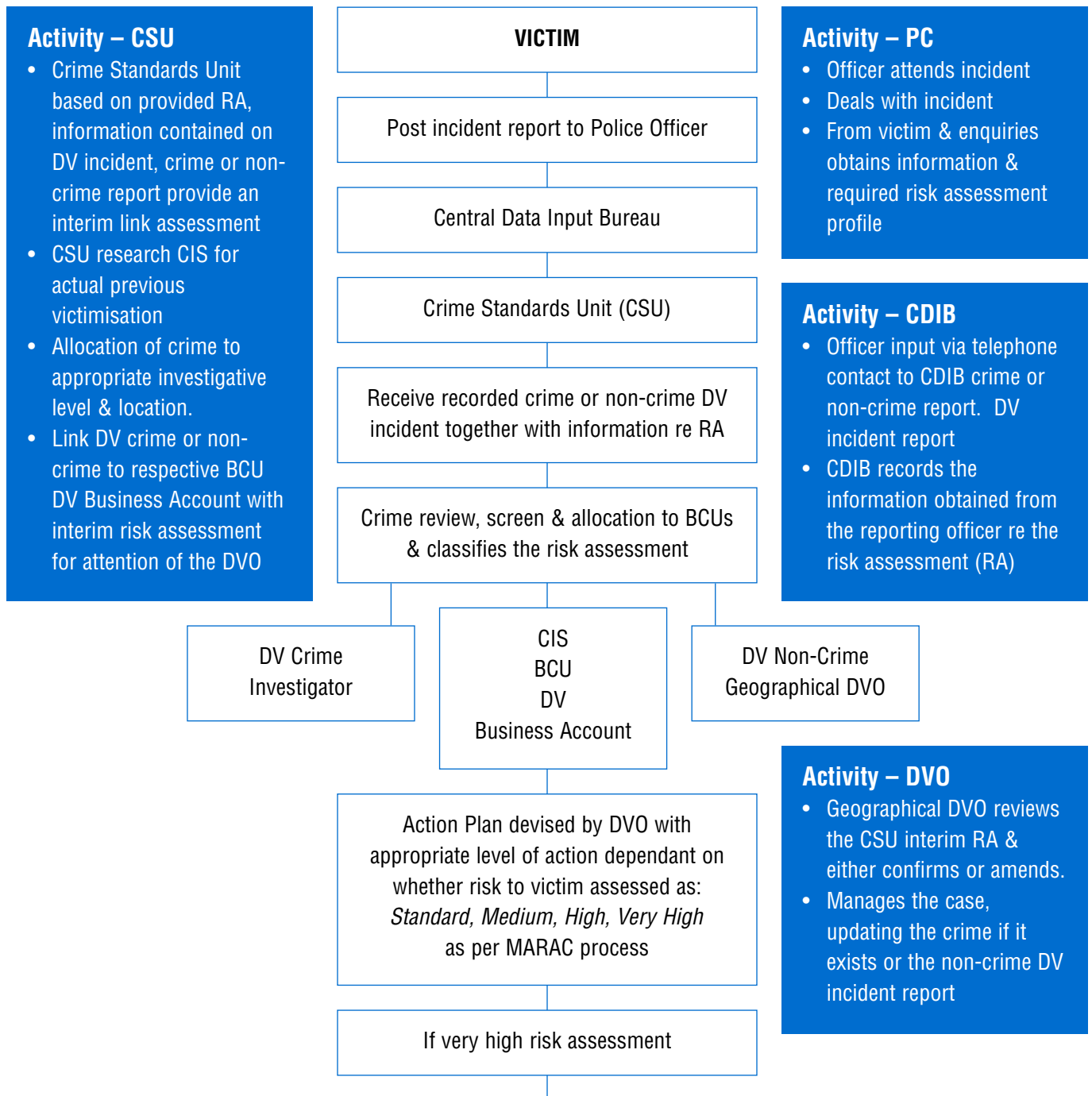
BY SIGNING THIS DOCUMENT WE AGREE TO ABIDE TO THESE PRINCIPLES.

This document was designed by CAADA (Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse) and has been reproduced in this guide by their kind permission. Please check the CAADA website www.caada.org.uk regularly for updated versions of their material.

Appendix 4

Domestic Violence MARAC and MAPPA Process Flowchart

Following Reported Incident



Activity – CSU

- Crime Standards Unit based on provided RA, information contained on DV incident, crime or non-crime report provide an interim link assessment
- CSU research CIS for actual previous victimisation
- Allocation of crime to appropriate investigative level & location.
- Link DV crime or non-crime to respective BCU DV Business Account with interim risk assessment for attention of the DVO

Activity – PC

- Officer attends incident
- Deals with incident
- From victim & enquiries obtains information & required risk assessment profile

Activity – CDIB

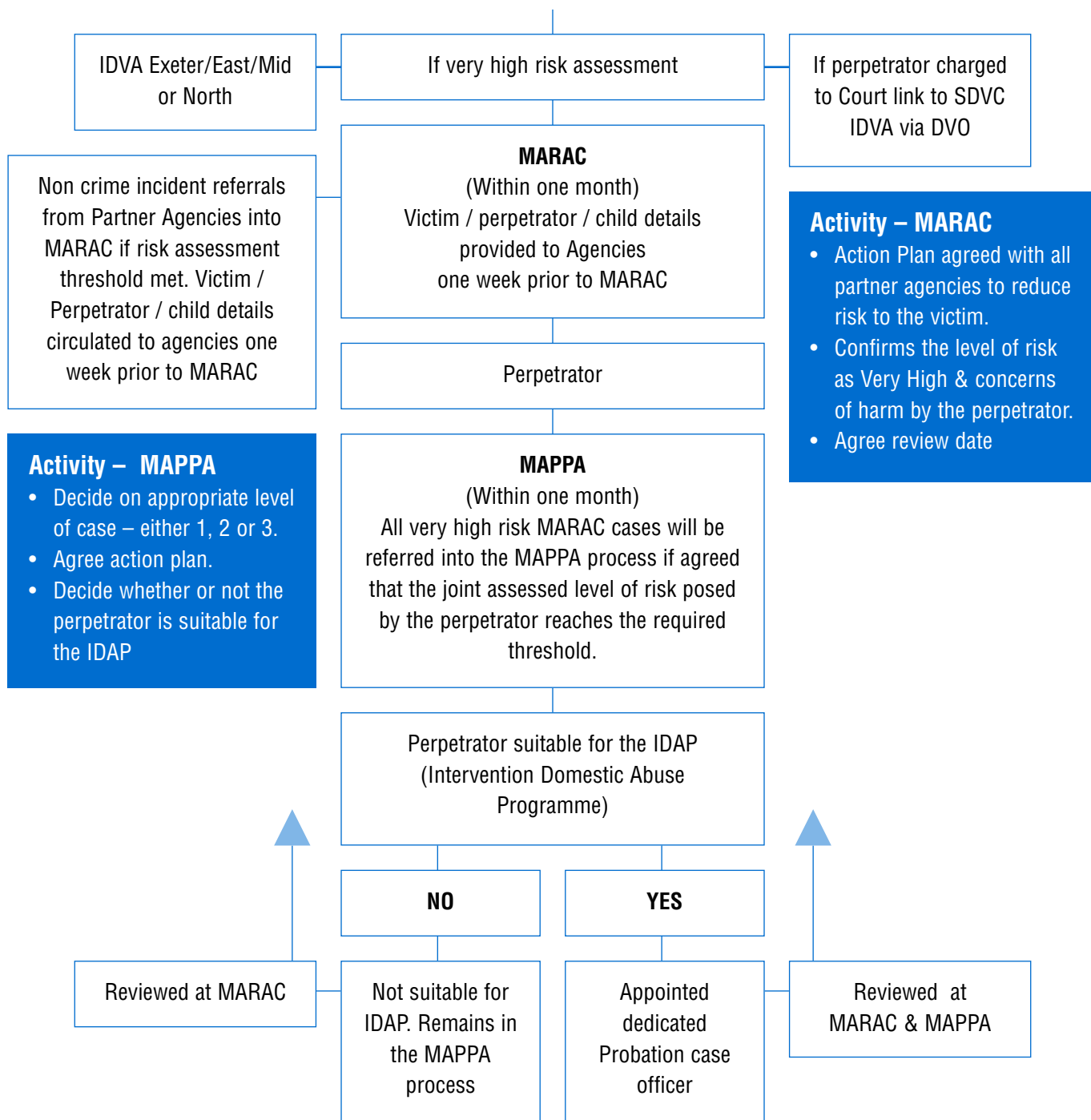
- Officer input via telephone contact to CDIB crime or non-crime report. DV incident report
- CDIB records the information obtained from the reporting officer re the risk assessment (RA)

Activity – DVO

- Geographical DVO reviews the CSU interim RA & either confirms or amends.
- Manages the case, updating the crime if it exists or the non-crime DV incident report

The above actions are instigated within 24 hours (except at weekends)





- MARAC** - Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference
- MAPPA** - Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements
- CDRP** - Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership
- CDIB** - Central Data Input Bureau
- CIS** - Crime Information System
- BCU** - Basic Command Unit
- DV(O)** - Domestic Violence (Officer)
- IDVA** - Independent Domestic Abuse Advocate
- SDVC** - Specialist Domestic Violence Court

Appendix 5

Devon ADVA Initial Risk Assessment for agencies

NB: where there is more than one 'YES' tick within a section, count as one YES for scoring.

RISK FACTORS	Please ask the following questions:	YES tick	NO tick	Notes (including 'answer refused')
1. Criminal Record	Does your partner/ex-partner have a criminal record? If so, what for? If 'yes', is the record domestic abuse-related?			Significant concern <input type="checkbox"/>
2. Injuries	Has the current incident resulted in injuries? What are the injuries? If 'yes' does this cause significant concern?			Significant concern <input type="checkbox"/>
3. Weapons Consider 'weapons' to include kitchen knives or any other household object e.g. ashtray	Has your partner/ex-partner ever used a weapon or any other object (thrown or otherwise) to hurt you? If 'yes', does this cause significant concern?			Significant concern <input type="checkbox"/>
4. Threats to kill	Has your partner / ex-partner or anyone else threatened to kill you? If so, who? Has your partner / ex-partner threatened to kill the children? Do you believe the threats? If 'yes', does this cause significant concern?			Significant concern <input type="checkbox"/>
5. Controlling behaviour	Has your partner / ex-partner expressed / behaved in a jealous way or displayed obsessive tendencies? Does your partner / ex-partner try to control what you do, e.g. stop you from seeing your family, friends, GP etc? If 'yes', describe in summary: If 'yes', does this cause significant concern?			Significant concern <input type="checkbox"/>
6. Stalking Behaviour in an obsessive manner indicates heightened risk. Defined as a course of conduct involving 2 or more events of harassment causing fear, alarm, distress of 4 types: • phone calls, texting, letters • unsolicited gifts or cards • loitering outside home or work • damaged property	Does your partner / ex-partner persistently call / make contact with you / follow / harass you which causes you to feel afraid, alarmed or distressed?			
7. Pregnancy / New Birth 30% of dv starts or can intensify during pregnancy or new birth	Are you currently pregnant? (please see Guidance on risk levels overleaf) Have you had a baby in the last 6 months?			
8. Separation Issues Victims trying to terminate relationships, or participating in child contact processes face increased danger. The first 3 months of separation are particularly dangerous	Have you recently separated from your partner (within last 3 months)? Are you planning to separate? Have you told your partner that you are planning to separate from them? Are you afraid your partner may abduct your child(ren)?			
9. Child Contact	Are there any issues with your partner / ex-partner over child contact arrangements (if applicable)? If so, what?			

10. Strangulation is a common cause of death in domestic murders	Has your partner / ex-partner put their hands around your neck at any time during this incident or in any past incidents?		
11. Escalation Increases in frequency & severity indicate greater risk. The severity of violence tends to escalate after each incident	Is the abuse becoming worse and / or happening more often?		
12. Sexual Assault Those who are sexually assaulted are subject to more serious injury & perpetrators are more dangerous	Does your partner / ex-partner do or say things of a sexual nature that makes you feel bad or that physically hurt you or someone else? (If somebody else, please specify who.)		
13. Suicide	Have you or your partner / ex-partner ever threatened or attempted to commit suicide? If 'yes', which of the following? Client <input type="checkbox"/> Partner / ex-partner <input type="checkbox"/>		
14. Fear	Are you very frightened? (note victim's perceptions indicating what they think the accused will do)		
15. Fear	Are you afraid of further injury or violence?		
16. Fear	Are you afraid that your partner / ex-partner will harm the children?		
17. Fear	Are you afraid your partner / ex-partner will kill you?		
18. Finance	Is your partner / ex-partner experiencing / recently experienced financial problems?		
19. Drugs / Alcohol / Mental Health	Does your partner / ex-partner have: an alcohol problem? drugs problem? diagnosed medical or mental health issues?		
20. Isolation Consider whether the victim faces particular barriers to seeking help	Do you feel isolated for any of the following reasons? living in a remote rural area; living in a close knit community; lack of support from family & friends or family & friends are suspected as part of the abuse; isolation due to sexuality or lifestyle; physical or mental disability; in a forced marriage.		

TOTAL number of 'YES' ticks (count one per section)

Workers Perception
What are your views of the client's risk?

If there are NOT 10 'YES' ticks BUT YOU BELIEVE CLIENT SHOULD BE REFERRED to MARAC, then refer him / her.

Name of Worker & Agency (print): _____

Date: _____

Guidance on classifying risk levels

10 or more 'YES' ticks **OR** 4 'Significant concern' ticks (Qs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) **OR** if woman is pregnant
6 – 9 'YES' ticks **OR** 3 'Significant concern' ticks
1 – 5 'YES' ticks **OR** 1 or 2 'Significant concern' ticks
0 'YES' ticks

Very High Risk (MARAC referral)
High Risk
Medium Risk
Standard Risk

HEALTH WARNING Front-line workers must be aware that this is a risk indicator checklist and not a full risk assessment. It is a practical tool that can help you identify which of your clients should be referred to MARAC and where you should be prioritising the use of your resources. Risk is dynamic and you need to be alert to the fact that risk can change very suddenly. *Risk indication is more about balancing information with current practice, knowledge and previous experience and then making a judgement about whether there is a strong possibility that a person is at risk of serious harm.* Thanks go to CAADA and South Wales Police Force and Women's Safety Unit in Cardiff for their innovative work in establishing this MARAC and risk-assessment process.

Please check the adva website www.adva.org.uk for the most up-to-date version of this Risk Assessment Form as it is subject to change.

Initial Risk Assessment v.1 October 2007

Appendix 6

MARAC Referral Form

Private & Confidential

To Lead Agency:

Tel:

Fax:

Date:

Victim: Name and Date of Birth

Address of Victim:

Perpetrator: Name and Date of Birth

Address of Perpetrator:

Children: Names and Dates of Birth

Address of Children:

School:

GP / HV:

Number of 'ticks' on checklist (possible total 20):

Reasons for Referral:

Background and Risk Issues:

Why does this case require a multi-agency approach?

Is the person referred aware of the MARAC referral? YES / NO

Is it safe to send a MARAC letter? YES / NO

ATTACH RISK ASSESSMENT (and Information Sharing Without Consent form if necessary)

Referring Officer and Agency:

Telephone:

Mobile:

Email:

Address:

This form was designed by CAADA (Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse) and has been adapted for this guide. Please check the CAADA website www.caada.org.uk regularly for updated versions of their material.

Appendix 7

Information Sharing Without Consent Form

Private & Confidential

CLIENT INFORMATION

Date:

Name & address of Client:

Names and D.O.B. of children:

CONCERNS

	<i>Immediate risk/crisis</i>	<i>Risk identified through risk assessment</i>
Child(ren) at risk / Danger to child(ren)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Danger to client	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Client poses a risk to self or others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

[Check that consent form does not cover this situation and/or you do not have consent.]

Risk Assessment _____ (no. of YES ticks out of 20)

(You may not have the opportunity to complete a formal RA in an emergency. If you have, please attach it.)

Details of incident/information causing concern: (include source of information)

LEGAL AUTHORITY TO SHARE

Legal power (please tick 1 or more below)

- Prevention and detection of crime (Crime and Disorder Act 1998)
- Prevention/detection or crime and/or apprehension or prosecution of offenders (DPA, sch. 29)
- To protect vital interests of the data subject; serious harm or matter of life or death (DPA, sch. 2 & 3)
- For the administration of justice (usually bringing perpetrators to justice (DPA, sch. 2 & 3)
- For the exercise of functions conferred on any person by or under any enactment (police/social services) (DPA, sch. 2 & 3)
- In accordance with a court order
- Overriding public interest (Common law)
- Child protection – disclosure to social services or police for the exercise of functions under the Children Act, where the public interest in safeguarding the child’s welfare overrides the need to keep the information confidential (DPA, sch. 2 & 3)
- Right to life (Human Rights Act, art. 2 & 3)
- Right to be free from torture or inhuman or degrading treatment (Human Rights Act, art. 2 & 3)

Protocol relevant _____

BALANCING CONSIDERATIONS

All practitioners should consider the following:

- Pressing need
- Respective risks to those affected
- Risk of not disclosing
- Interest of other agency/person in receiving it
- Public interest in disclosure
- Human rights
- Duty of confidentiality

PRACTITIONER COMMENTS:

Internal consultations: (e.g. names, dates and advice/decisions)

External consultations: (e.g. Home Office guidance [0],[0], Information-sharing Helpline)

CLIENT NOTIFICATION

Client notified of disclosure(s)? YES / NO Date:

If not, why not?

KEEP A RECORD

Record the following details in the case file:

- Date info shared
- Agency and named person informed
- Method of contact (by email, letter, phone call)
- Legal authority for each agency

REVIEW

Date for review of this situation: _____

(Review to include feedback from the agencies informed as to their response.)

_____ is responsible for ensuring the situation is reviewed by this date.

Signed and dated by caseworker

Signed and dated by manager

This form was designed by CAADA (Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse) and has been adapted for this guide. Please check the CAADA website www.caada.org.uk regularly for updated versions of their material.

Notes

Notes

For more information about adva and other related training courses:

Phone: 01392 382233

Email: info@adva.org.uk

adva partnership, Room G41, County Hall, Exeter EX2 4QD

www.adva.org.uk

