

HELP Checklist

The HELP approach has four components:

- HAVE** an initial discussion about family violence
- EXPLORE** immediate risks and safety concerns
- LEARN** more about the family violence to help you determine what to recommend to your client
- PROMOTE** safety throughout the family law case

This Checklist sets out the key steps of the HELP approach for identifying and responding to family violence, which are meant to be integrated flexibly into your practice. However, we recommend that you review all of the content in the [HELP Guide](#) at least once.

HAVE an initial discussion about family violence ([HELP Guide Section H](#))

- ✓ Begin the discussion about family violence in the first meeting with a client.
- ✓ Be aware that your client may suffer from trauma, which can affect how they interact with you and the family law process (e.g. difficulty focusing, sharing or processing information or making decisions).
- ✓ Understand how overlapping identities and experiences can shape a client's perspective and compound their experiences of family violence.
- ✓ Pay attention to potential indicators, such as the ex-partner controlling aspects of their life and ask your client about them.
- ✓ Introduce the topic of family violence if the client does not bring it up. Normalize the conversation (e.g. *"I ask all my clients about their experiences with family violence..."*).
- ✓ If your client agrees to proceed, ask some initial questions to begin to identify whether family violence is a concern.
- ✓ Listen without judgment, thank the client for sharing, and offer support.
- ✓ Continue to apply the HELP approach during subsequent meetings.

EXPLORE immediate risks and safety concerns ([HELP Guide Section E](#))

- ✓ Ask the client about potential risk and safety concerns regardless of whether they have disclosed family violence.
- ✓ Ask about immediate danger and plans for staying safe. Consider referrals to appropriate community resources and whether police or child protection should be contacted.
- ✓ Discuss safe ways to contact the client and flag these clearly to your office staff.

LEARN more about the family violence to help you determine what to recommend to your client ([HELP Guide Section L](#))

- ✓ Ask about different forms of family violence based on what your client has shared in initial discussions, and explain why this information is relevant to their case.
- ✓ **Do not ask questions as a checklist**. Ask about family violence sensitively and in a way that follows the flow of the discussion with your client.
- ✓ Try to understand the seriousness, frequency and duration of family violence, and look for patterns of abusive behaviour, particularly coercive and controlling behaviour.
- ✓ Be aware that your client may have engaged in family violence.
- ✓ Revisit the issue of family violence throughout the family law case, regardless of whether there was an initial disclosure.

PROMOTE safety throughout the family law case ([HELP Guide Section P](#))

- ✓ Remember that separation is a time of heightened risk for family violence.
- ✓ Discuss with your client how the family law process can increase risk. Adopt strategies to reduce your client's risk in relation to the family law process.
- ✓ Develop a safety plan to protect your safety and that of your office staff.
- ✓ Be aware of how your cases involving family violence and the trauma experienced by your clients may be affecting you.