



# Case Notes in a Family Violence context

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare provide training in family violence case notes. [Click here to express your interest.](#)



Victorian Alcohol & Drug Association

## Good case notes

- Case notes should reflect key MARAM concepts: **victim survivor self-assessment**, and **evidence-based risk factors**
- Factual, descriptive, concise and easily able to be shared with other workers, supervisors, and across agencies
- Should describe **patterns of behaviour** which refer directly to the MARAM evidence-based risk factors
- Should include anything that **works well for your client** in your working relationship - so that another worker can easily pick up the case and move it forward

## Recording disclosures of family violence

- Where possible, **record the disclosure during the meeting** with the victim-survivor. You can summarise the conversation to ensure information is correct and accurate
- Recording of all disclosures and behaviours by the person using violence should be in the **victim-survivor's own words**
- Observations must be **evidence-based**
- Case note should detail **concerns and risks, safety and protective factors, and desired outcomes**. Including:
  - **Who** you consulted with, or **informed** of the disclosure
  - What were the **decisions made** and by whom
  - What was the **rationale** for any decision
  - Any **action taken**
  - What **outcome** the victim-survivor is seeking
- Create a **family violence alert** on the file to indicate whether the client is a victim-survivor or person using violence

## Changing/deleting case notes

- A change should be recorded as part of a **new case note** to reflect that a change has been made to correct an error/omission
- Provide an **explanation** for its earlier absence/inaccuracy
- Add, if possible, a **note in the margin** of the original case note referring the reader to the additional/amended detail
- A **case note should never be deleted** in light of additional information obtained at a later date - this should always constitute a new case note

## Remember

- There is a **legal obligation** to keep case notes
- Courts can **subpoena case notes** and other reports
- You may be required to **justify every entry** in your case notes
- You should ensure that your case notes are **not ambiguous** in any way
- Write your case notes **as soon as possible** after you have seen or spoken with a client, or other professionals, or after any action has been taken
- **Clients have the right to access their records**, so they should be written as accurately and clearly as possible
- Any Information obtained under the Information Sharing Schemes **can be excluded from FOI (Freedom of Information) or HRA (Health Records Act) requests**
- Refer to your **organisation's policies & procedures**
- **Seek advice** from your supervisor/team leader

## Common issues with case notes

- Case notes describe isolated incidents, but **don't identify patterns**
- **Impact of family violence on children not clearly recorded**. Lack of child-focused approach or trauma-informed lens
- Victim-survivor's **perceptions, experience, strengths not recorded**
- **Relationship** between partners described as '**conflictual**' rather than identifying family violence
- **Difficult for new workers to piece together information** that they need to manage risks and safety
- Did not use **shared understanding** and **common language** around risks and risk factors
- Not including '**next steps/actions**' - these are important as they provide practise direction

## Information Sharing: FVISS and CISS

### Which information should I document?

- The **date** of the request, the **response, pro-active sharing**
- The **name of the Information Sharing Entity (ISE)** you are sharing with, **agency and contact person**
- The **type of information** requested
- Under which sharing scheme the information sharing was considered: **FVISS, CISS or both**
- The **purpose** of sharing
- Whether you **obtained consent**, or sought the views of the parties (children, victim survivors, third parties). If not, why not?
- Whether you **notified the parties** that their information would be or has been released. If not, why not?
- The **details of the information** that was shared. Or, why was it excluded?
- The **risk assessment or safety plan** that has been made as a result of information sharing
- The **method** of sharing

### What NOT to write

- Personal **biases**, your **attitude** towards the client or family, **assumptions, stereotypical** comments, or any **offensive/culturally inappropriate** language
- Making **judgement** statements
- Sarcasm, metaphors or similes
- Avoid **acronyms** – unless you have included or explained them in full previously
- **Anything you cannot defend in court**
- Making statements when not **qualified** to do so
- Information that is **irrelevant** to the work you perform
- Consider if **third hand information** is relevant before including in case notes
- Anything outside your scope of **knowledge**

It is important to **document all the steps you have taken throughout the information sharing process, even if you do not end up sharing the information**. For example, your client may not give consent for information to be shared, which means that you cannot share information. You should make sure that you **document the conversation with the client, and any relevant information about why consent was not given**.

### Deciding not to share

You may decide not to share information based on your own judgment of the circumstances:

- **if you believe sharing will create increased risk**
- **you are aware that the information is excluded**
- **no reasonable belief could be formed that family violence is occurring**
- **It does not meet the sharing threshold**
- ISEs should be cautious in sharing information in response to a request when there is any suspicion the **person using violence has been misidentified**

It is important to **document the reason for making your decision as such information could be requested by authorities in the future**.