



## **Family Violence Policy - Customers**

## 1 POLICY STATEMENT AND PURPOSE

Gippsland Water (GW) recognises family violence is a serious and widespread issue that affects the whole community and that as an essential service provider it has a role to play in changing the prevalence of violence within families.

This policy outlines the support available to all customers who may be experiencing or perpetrating family violence. It acknowledges that customers may choose to directly disclose a previous experience of family violence or that they are currently living in a violent relationship. It also acknowledges that some customers might provide indications of family violence during interactions with customer service operators, particularly in relationship to capacity to engage with GW or make payments.

Further, the policy recognises that some customers who use violence in family relationships may disclose (either directly or indirectly) concerns about violent or abusive behaviour to customer service employees.

This policy:

- Recognises that family violence is unacceptable in any relationship.
- Ensures that customers impacted by family violence are treated with dignity, respect, and compassion and with sensitivity to age, culture, ethnicity and sexual orientation.
- Regards the safety of victims and their children as priority.
- Recognises that the process of leaving a violent relationship is often a long and gradual one.
- Ensures that customers who indicate or disclose family violence are able to access support from GW regardless of their current financial capacity.
- Ensures that with any disclosure GW will take great care to treat the customer with sensitivity and ensure confidentiality

### IMMEDIATE SAFETY RISK

If an employee believes there is an immediate risk to a customer's personal safety (or that of their children), they should encourage the caller to end the call and contact the Police immediately on **000**. If there is a direct threat to the customer, it may be necessary for the employee to contact emergency services on their behalf.

As soon as possible, the employee should:

1. Alert their team leader or manager;
2. Enact strategies to ensure the safety and privacy of the customer prior to further correspondence.

## 2 RESPONSIBLE OFFICER

Manager Customer Assistance

## 3 KEY DEFINITIONS

This policy applies to all customers of Gippsland Water.

Gippsland Water defines Family Violence as behaviour by a person towards a family member that is:

- Physically or sexually abusive; or
- Emotionally or psychologically abusive; or
- Economically abusive; or
- Threatening or coercive; or
- In any other way controls or dominates the family member and causes that family member to feel fear for their safety or wellbeing of that family member or another person.
- Behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of behaviour referred to above.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4 REFERENCES

In an **emergency** or **crisis situation**, encourage the caller to end the call and contact the Police immediately on 000. If there is a direct threat to the customer, it may be appropriate to contact emergency services on their behalf.

#### Support agencies and resources

Agency	Phone	Website	Services provided
<b>Family Violence Support</b>			
1800RESPECT	<b>1800 737 732</b>	1800respect.org.au	National 24-hour Domestic & Family Violence and Sexual Assault Line
Safe Steps	<b>1800 015 188</b>	wdvcs.org.au	24/7 Domestic & Family Violence Crisis Response including referral to refuge services for women and children. Arranges support for Pets in Crisis program
Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention & Legal Services	<b>1800 105 303</b>	fvpls.org	Culturally-specific assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims/survivors of family violence and sexual assault
Another Closet	<b>1800 656 463</b>	anothercloset.com.au	24/7 information, support & referral service specifically for LGBTIQ community
Men's Referral Service (Victoria)	<b>1300 766 491</b>	ntvmrs.org.au	Specialist support and counselling for male victims of family violence or men wanting to change their behaviour
inTouch Multicultural	<b>1800 755 988</b>	intouch.asn.au	Assistance and information for women & children from

<sup>1</sup> Family violence has the meaning given in section 5 of the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* (Vic).

Centre Against Family Violence			CALD backgrounds living with family violence.
Gippsland Centre Against Sexual Assault	<b>5134 3922 (BH) 1800 806 292 (AH)</b>	gcasa.org.au	Counselling, referral and support for victims (male & female) of sexual assault or violence.
LaTrobe Community Health	<b>1800 242 696</b>	lchs.com.au	Counselling for women and children affected by family violence. Provider of Men's Behaviour Change programs
Quantum Support Services	<b>1800 243 455</b>	quantam.org.au	Family violence support for women and children within the Baw Baw, Latrobe and Wellington Shires. Including safety issues, housing, legal, education and ER.
<b>Crisis &amp; Support Lines</b>			
Lifeline	<b>13 11 14</b>	lifeline.org.au	24/7 counselling & referral service for people in a crisis situation
Child Protection Crisis Line	<b>1300 655 795 (BH) 13 12 78 (AH)</b>	dhs.vic.gov.au	For reporting of immediate concerns about the welfare of a child
KidsHelpline	<b>1800 55 1800</b>	kidshelpline.com.au	24/7 counselling & support for kids (5-25 years) dealing with issues such as FV and mental health
Beyond Blue	<b>1300 224 636</b>	beyondblue.org.au	24/7 support to people experiencing anxiety or depression
MENSLINE	<b>1300 78 99 78</b>	mensline.org.au	24/7 support, information and referral service for men with family and relationship issues
<b>Legal Services</b>			
Gippsland Community Legal Service	<b>1800 004 402</b>	gcls.org.au	Confidential, free legal advice, advocacy & support. Includes intervention orders and family law issues.
Women's Legal Service Victoria	<b>1800 133 302</b>	womenslegal.org.au	Free legal telephone advice, counselling and referrals to do with relationship breakdown and/or FV
WIRE (Women's Information and Referral Exchange)	<b>1300 134 130</b>	wire.org.au	Free information and referral for women across a variety of issues including family violence, health, relationships, housing and financial issues.

## 5 APPLICATION / PROCESS

## TYPES OF SUPPORT FOR CUSTOMERS

Gippsland Water offers a variety of support for customers experiencing family violence including:

- Automatic allocation to the Customer Care Program, regardless of their current financial capacity
- Confidentiality and respectful treatment of the issues discussed
- Financial assistance tailored to the individual's needs including an affordable payment arrangement, advice and assistance with URGs and concessions, debt relief options and referral to independent financial counselling services
- Referral to family violence support agencies
- Exemption from water restriction notifications and actions
- Exemption from legal action and cost recovery processes
- Referral to other agencies and authorities that can assist
- With permission of the customer communicating with other utilities or agencies to avoid the customer needing to repeat their circumstances

### 5.1 Safety and Confidentiality

A safety alert on the customer account will signal Customer Service Operators that family violence risks have been previously discussed. The alert will prompt employees to exercise extra caution in relation to the account and to check if additional points of identification are required or there are restrictions in place on the account.

Employees will be actively encouraged to discuss any concerns with their team leader or manager.

### 5.2 Evidence Requirements

Gippsland Water recognises that family violence is a complex and sensitive issue for customers to discuss with their service provider. In order to prioritise customer safety and privacy, GW does not require customers to provide evidence of family violence.

### 5.3 Employee Training

All customer service employees are required to complete training designed to assist them to identify and respond to issues associated with family violence. The training will ensure that employees are equipped to work effectively with customers and ensure any issues they disclose are treated with respect and confidentiality. Employees will also develop awareness of external organisations that support individuals experiencing family violence to enable them to make appropriate referrals when required.

Employees will also be encouraged to identify customer behaviour and attitudes that reinforce family violence. Where a customer expresses concerns about their behaviour

towards family members, it is expected that customer service employees will acknowledge the issue and provide referral to an appropriate support agency.

## **6 POLICY APPROVAL AND REVIEW**

This policy is to be reviewed by the Manager Customer Assistance every three years, or as required.