

Family Violence Policy



Background

South Gippsland Water (SGW) recognises that family violence is a serious and widespread issue that poses a substantial risk to the health and wellbeing of local communities. As an essential service provider, South Gippsland Water actively endorses measures to support customers and employees experiencing family violence, with their safety being paramount. We recognise that the incidence of family violence is far greater than that reported to SGW.

We are committed to supporting those within our community who may be experiencing family violence. This includes:

- Ensuring customers are aware and can easily access support from SGW
- Treating those who disclose their experience with dignity and respect. Their stories are taken at face value with no burden of proof required
- Protecting the privacy, confidentiality and therefore safety of customers and their information
- Providing tailored support based on individual circumstances
- Providing referral pathways and assistance to secure expert support through referral services
- Continuing to build capacity to support customers, employees and community through effective and ongoing training

Purpose

South Gippsland Water recognises its responsibility and role in working together with the community to support those experiencing family violence, promote the health and safety of employees experiencing family violence to be able to continue to participate in the workplace, and to create a supportive work environment where employees and customers are comfortable in requesting assistance for family violence related concerns and issues.

SGW's family violence policy outlines our approach to supporting customers and employees experiencing family violence. It recognises the barriers to disclosure. We take people at their word and commit to providing support and protections for those experiencing family violence, regardless of whether they have disclosed their circumstances to us.

This policy ensures the Corporation fulfils its roles and responsibilities to its customers and employees.

Definitions

For the purpose of this policy only, the following shall mean:

Family Violence:

- a) Behaviour by a person towards a family member of that person if that behaviour:
 - i. is physically or sexually abusive; or
 - ii. is emotionally or psychologically abusive; or
 - iii. is economically abusive; or
 - iv. is threatening; or
 - v. is coercive; or

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- vi. in any other way controls or dominates the family member and caused that family member to feel fear for the safety or wellbeing of that family member or another person; or
- b) Behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of, behaviour referred to in paragraph (a).

SGW: South Gippsland Water

ESC: Essential Services Commission

Customer experiencing financial difficulty: a residential or small business customer who has the intention to pay their account but does not have the financial capacity to pay within the timeframe set out in our payment terms.

Vulnerability: a residential or small business customer who needs special care, support or protection.

Customer Support Program: a customer support program that aims to provide assistance to customers identified as experiencing financial difficulty or vulnerabilities.

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Supports available to customers

Customers who disclose to SGW that they are impacted by family violence will be directed to the Customer Support Team, who are trained to assist with a range of needs that may arise, whilst maintaining dignity and respect for each individual.

Our trained team members work with customers to tailor the support options that best meet their unique circumstances.

We appreciate that when experiencing family violence, having to retell your story can be difficult and cause trauma. The complexity of family violence situations also means that it may not always be safe to disclose this information.

A dedicated Case Manager will be assigned, meaning that wherever possible you will speak with the same team member who understands your situation.

Our team will also work with you to establish contact preferences for how and when SGW will contact you.

Protecting privacy, safety and confidentiality

Customers who are experiencing family violence are entrusting sensitive information to SGW and in return SGW take this responsibility seriously. We take steps to protect customers privacy, confidentiality and safety.

SGW has put in place procedures to manage customer accounts and contact information. As a result, the Customer Support Team can tailor account mailings and contact preferences to ensure privacy is protected. The Customer Support Team can set up mailing of duplicate accounts or create additional accounts in the event a customer relocates.

If a customer discloses a family violence situation, the Customer Support Team will work with the customer to establish their contact preferences for how and when South Gippsland Water will contact them.

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Immediate safety support

If there is an immediate safety risk or concern for customers, their children or our employees, we will contact local police or call triple zero (000) for assistance.

Application of a safety flag

Once your account is transitioned to the Customer Support Team, a flag will be applied alerting our teams that all enquiries which relate to your account are to be transferred through to our Customer Support Team.

Any requests for information will also be directed to your Case Manager or if your Case Manager is unavailable, another Customer Support Team member who is trained to effectively manage perpetrator interactions ensuring the privacy, safety and confidentiality of customers experiencing family violence are protected.

Additional identification checks

We understand that for joint accounts, perpetrators can have access to personal information that allows them to pass routine verification and identification checks. With this in mind, our additional identification check process is activated for your account to ensure your information and safety is protected. We will set up a password with you, so that we only discuss your account and private information after this additional identity check is complete.

Support options – Tailored to individual circumstances

Your dedicated Case Manager will work with you to understand your needs and challenges and tailor a support plan that best suits your individual circumstances.

Whilst our Customer Support Team is unable to provide professional counselling support, they can:

- Actively **listen** with empathy and without judgement
- **Acknowledge** your disclosure and check that you are not in immediate harm
- Apply **extra account protections** to further protect your privacy, safety and confidentiality
- Assist by working with you to develop a **suitable support plan**
- Refer you to other **external support agencies** for further assistance

Financial relief

Customers experiencing family violence automatically qualify for access to all financial relief (hardship) support available from South Gippsland Water. This includes jointly held accounts where one account holder has made South Gippsland Water aware of family violence impacts. Depending on individual circumstances these may be:

- Instalment Plan
- Extension of time
- Utility Relief Grant
- Suspension of part or full debt
- Suspension of interest accrual
- Partial or full debt write off
- Protection from further debt recovery action in relation to the water and sewerage account
- Protection from water restriction notifications and actions

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Once a customer identifies as being impacted by family violence, SGW may waive or suspend all or part of your debt based on a number of factors, including:

- The amount of the debt
- The circumstances in which the debt was incurred (including if it was incurred as a result of financial abuse)
- Whether the debt should have been raised
- What payment assistance options have been (or could be) effective
- The customer's personal circumstances and capacity to pay the debt.

If your circumstances change, your Case Manager will work with you to ensure that the debt assistance applied to your account adapts accordingly.

Joint accounts

We understand that customers on joint accounts may face additional barriers to accessing financial assistance, particularly if the other person on the account is the perpetrator. This may include not having access to financial information, being unaware of a debt and being apprehensive about the prospect of coming into contact with the perpetrator.

The Customer Support Team can set up mailing of duplicate accounts or create additional accounts in the event a customer relocates.

Even if only one account holder has disclosed their experience of family violence, we will immediately pause all collection activity on joint accounts (including no additional debt collection costs, interest or payment dishonour fees) and ensure that your water supply is not restricted because of the debt.

To remove barriers and ensure that customers on joint accounts are able to conveniently access the same debt assistance pathways as other customers affected by family violence, our Customer Care team will:

- Take steps to ensure your confidentiality is protected from other persons on the account
- Ensure that you can access support without having any contact with the perpetrator
- Take the same tailored approach to managing joint debts as it does for individual accounts

Payment support

We recognise that family violence can cause payment difficulties. If you are affected by family violence you are eligible for payment support under our Customer Support Policy. The Customer Support policy describes the full range of payment assistance options to customers experiencing payment difficulty.

Our Customer Support Team will work with you to adopt an approach to managing payments that suits your circumstances and your capacity to pay. The following payment support options are available to customers affected by family violence.

- Ensuring you receive any concession discounts you're entitled to
- Setting up an affordable and flexible payment plan you can manage
- Helping you apply for government grants that you may be entitled to like the Utility Relief Grant
- Providing our own payment matching, grants and other financial incentives

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- Access to government funded programs for plumbing assistance, where eligible
 - Providing advice on how to save water and reduce the cost of your bills
 - Recommending financial counsellors and community services support where needed
 - Checking in with you regularly to see if the support we're providing is right

Training of our people

Training our people to help recognise the signs of family violence and creating safe space for customers to disclose their experience is paramount to effectively supporting our customers and communities.

This policy was developed on the foundation of whole of organisation training to understand what family violence is and how SGW staff can support customers, their peers and the wider community in dealing with this widespread issue.

Employees receive ongoing training to build awareness and understanding of family violence. Customer facing teams such as our Customer Service and Customer Support Teams receive additional specialist training to assist with effectively handling customer disclosures, providing support and empathy. In addition, specific training regarding procedures and effectively managing accounts and confidentiality for those customers experiencing family violence.

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Referral pathways – Expert support services

We acknowledge the complex nature of family violence situations and are able to provide a range of referral pathways to help you access the assistance you require.

Customers and employees can be referred to external support networks and resources including:

FAMILY VIOLENCE – LOCAL REFERRAL SERVICES

AGENCY	SERVICES PROVIDED	WEBSITE	PHONE
Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention & Legal Services	Culturally-specific assistance to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander victims/survivors of family violence & sexual assault.	www.djirra.org.au	1800 105 303
Anglicare	Financial Counselling for those impacted by Family Violence	www.anglicare.vic.org.au	5655 2524 Korumburra 5662 4561 Leongatha 5135 9555 Wonthaggi
Bass Coast Health (Wonthaggi)	Family Violence Counselling Services within the Bass Coast Shire Council area.	www.gha2.net.au/bch	5671 3278
Gippsland Centre Against Sexual Assault	Counselling, referral & support for victims (male & female) of sexual assault or violence.	www.gcasa.org.au	5134 3922 (BH) 1800 806 292 (AH)
InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence	Assistance & information for women & children CALD backgrounds living with family violence.	www.intouch.org.au	1800 755 988
LaTrobe Community Health Services	Counselling for women & children affected by family violence. Provider of “Men’s Behaviour Change” programs.	www.lchs.com.au	1800 242 696

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Men's Referral Service (VIC)	Specialist support & counselling for male victims of family violence or men wanting to change their behaviour.	www.ntv.org.au	1300 766 491
Quantum Support (Yarram)	Family violence support for women & children within the Wellington Shires (Including safety issues, housing, legal, education & emergency relief).	www.quantum.org.au	1800 243 455
Safe Steps	24/7 Domestic & Family Violence Crisis Response including immediate transport and immediate referral to refuge services for women & children. Arranges support for Pets in Crisis program.	www.safesteps.org.au	1800 015 188
SalvoCare Eastern	Crisis response including case management, housing and emergency relief, men's behavioural programs.	www.salvationarmy.org.au/en/Find-Us/Victoria/salvocare-eastern/	1800 221 200 5662 6400
Uniting Care Gippsland (Leongatha, Yarram)	Family Violence Counselling Services within the South Gippsland and Wellington Shire Council areas.	www.ucgipps.org.au/?location=unitingcare-gippsland-leongatha-office	5662 5150 Sth Gipp Shire 5144 7777 Wellington Shire
1800 Respect	National 24 hour Domestic & Family Violence & Sexual Assault Line	www.1800respect.org.au	1800 737 732

FAMILY VIOLENCE – INFORMATION RESOURCES

AGENCY	SERVICES PROVIDED	WEBSITE	PHONE
Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria	Victorian support service and resource centre, with a clickable map giving support services and resources for different regions in Victoria and a direct link through to these sites.	www.dvrcv.org.au	(03) 9486 9866 9am-5pm M-F

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START SAFE
WORK SAFE
HOME SAFE

CRISIS & SUPPORT SERVICES GENERAL

AGENCY	SERVICES PROVIDED	WEBSITE	PHONE
Anglicare	Financial Counselling	www.anglicarevic.org.au	5655 2524 Korumburra 5662 4561 Leongatha 5135 9555 Wonthaggi
Another Closet	24/7 information, support & referral service specifically for LGBTIQ community.	www.anothercloset.com.au	1800 656 463
Beyond Blue	24/7 support to people experiencing anxiety or depression.	www.beyondblue.org.au	1300 224 636
Centrelink - Department of Human Services (Commonwealth)	Centrelink can provide extra financial support if you are in, have left, or are preparing to leave a situation where you are affected by domestic and/or family violence. Call to speak to a Centrelink social worker or find out about extra financial support.	www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/centrelink	132 850
Child Protection Crisis Line	For reporting of immediate concerns about the welfare of a child.	www.services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/child-protection	1300 655 795 (BH) 13 12 78 (AH)
Gippsland Community Legal Services	Confidential, free legal advice, advocacy & support. Includes intervention orders & family law issues.	www.gcls.org.au	1800 004 402
KidsHelpline	24/7 counselling & support for kids (5-25 years) dealing with issues such as Family Violence & mental health.	www.kidshelpline.com.au	1800 551 800
Kildonan UnitingCare	Kildonan UnitingCare is an innovative and trusted community service organisation within one of Australia's largest welfare networks.	www.kildonan.org.au	1800 002 992
Lifeline	24/7 counselling & referral service for people in a crisis situation.	www.lifeline.org.au	13 11 14

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Manna Gum House (Foster) Supported by SalvoCare	Emergency Relief, Food Vouchers	www.mannagumcommunityhouse.org.au	5682 1101
Mensline	24/7 support, information & referral service for men with family & relationship issues	www.mensline.org.au	1300 789 978
Rural Financial Counselling Service	Financial Counselling services for farming businesses.	https://ruralfinancialcounselling.org.au	5662 2566
SalvoCare Eastern	Financial Counselling, Crisis & Support Services, Housing Services, Emergency Relief, Food Vouchers, Case Management, Men's Behaviour Change	www.salvationarmy.org.au/en/Find-Us/Victoria	1800 221 200 5662 6400
WIRE (Women's Information & Referral Exchange)	Free information & referral for women across issues including family violence, health, relationships, housing & financial issues.	www.wire.org.au	1300 134 130
Women's Legal Services Victoria	Free legal telephone advice, counselling & referrals to do with relationship breakdown and/or family violence	www.womenslegal.org.au	1800 133 302

The above listed referral agencies are found in NCS-028 SGW Customer and Employee Supports: Referral Agencies and Resources Information which is published on the Customer Support Programs page of our website: www.sgwater.com.au or directly via this [link](#).

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Employee Support

Accessing Support

We understand that employees may find it difficult to disclose their experience with family violence to their colleagues. For this reason, we provide a range of avenues for employees to seek support. Employees can speak with:

- A member of the People, Safety and Culture Team
- Your People Leader
- Another South Gippsland Water leader
- A mental health first aid representative
- A health and safety representative
- Our Employee Assistance Provider 1300 687 327 – (consultants are available 24/7).

Protecting your privacy, safety and confidentiality

Employees are empowered to determine who they feel comfortable with sharing their story. South Gippsland Water will maintain your confidentiality by ensuring your circumstances are not discussed with any individual other than those you've nominated.

Additional measures can be put in place to further protect your privacy, safety and confidentiality which can be discussed and agreed in consultation with you.

Support options

We recognise that experiences of family violence may affect your ability to work. South Gippsland Water is committed to supporting employees experiencing family violence by understanding individual circumstances and working with you to determine support options that best meet your needs.

Support options may include:

- Support for disruption to performance as a result of experiencing family violence including confirming no action required, temporary variation to hours, job redesign or change to duties, or other measures as appropriate to ensure safety and support
- Relocation from existing work site, changed business contact details, or implementation of further safety and security measures
- Information about or referral to Specialist Support Services (noted earlier in this policy)
- Access to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- Access to the SGW Customer Support Program

In addition to the above support options, employees may access the following leave provisions:

- Paid special family violence leave for medical appointments, counselling, legal proceedings and other related activities. Paid special leave will be in addition to existing leave entitlements
- Employees supporting another individual experiencing family violence may access personal/carer's leave.

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Access to and review of this policy

This policy will be published on SGW’s website and customers can request a copy of this policy at any time. SGW will maintain up to date information on the website including this policy, information about SGW supports and referral services available to customers affected by family violence.

This policy is reviewed annually to ensure that it is compliant with water industry standards and where possible, best practice. The management of this process will be via SGWs document management system.

Responsibilities

General Manager Customer, Community and Strategy: is responsible for:

- Maintaining a Family Violence Policy consistent with the ESC’s Water Industry Standard – Urban Customer Service.
- Ensuring all employees receive regular up to date training and information enabling them to identify and appropriately engage with customers and/or employees affected by family violence.
- Maintaining procedures that support effective application of policy.

Line Managers: are responsible for ensuring employees are aware of policy and supporting procedures and are enabled to operate consistent with them.

SGW Employees: are responsible for ensuring they operate consistent with policy and supporting procedures.

References

Essential Services Commission – Water Industry Standards – Customer Service September 2022

PCS-003 Customer Support Policy

SCS-028 Family Violence Customer Program and Procedure

SHR-028 Family Violence Employee Program and Procedure

NCS-028 SGW Customer and Employee Supports: Referral Agencies and Resources Information (Published on our website: www.sgwater.com.au or [view here](#))

This document is to be reviewed in **August 2024** or earlier as required.

DOCUMENT APPROVAL		
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Managing Director Signature:		