



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Transitional Assistance
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Field Operations Memo 2010-35
September 20, 2010

To: Transitional Assistance Office Staff
From:  John Augeri, Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations
Re: Domestic Violence (DV) General Procedures

Overview

The Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) has a Domestic Violence Unit consisting of Domestic Violence (DV) Specialists, four Regional Coordinators, and a Director at Central Office. DTA created the DV Unit to help victims of domestic violence achieve economic self-sufficiency, safely. DTA has also issued regulations (106 CMR 203.110) that support victims of domestic violence and allows certain requirements to be waived, if necessary.

Purpose of Memo

The purpose of this memo is to provide written guidance about domestic violence procedures to promote continued collaboration in the domestic violence process with case managers and DV Specialists.

Domestic Violence Protocols

Case managers may be informed of domestic violence issues at any point during the application process or at any point thereafter. All applicants and clients must be informed about the availability of domestic violence services, including good cause waivers from certain TAFDC participation and program requirements. See 106 CMR 203.110 for more information. When domestic violence is acknowledged or if a case manager feels that the safety of the client and/or the child(ren) is in jeopardy, a referral to a DV Specialist should be made.

**Domestic Violence
Protocols**
(continued)

Available in DTA Online, in the Field Operations tab, is a listing of DV Specialists and the TAOs they cover.

Note: If the case manager believes a Child Abuse/Neglect report (51A) should be filed for a domestic violence related case, the supervisor, the DV Specialist and the DV Liaison **must** be consulted to determine the safest way to proceed, as domestic violence may escalate in response to the filing of a 51A.

Confidentiality

It is critical that case managers and DV Specialists carefully protect the confidentiality of all clients. However, in situations where a client specifically expresses concerns about confidentiality of case information due to domestic violence, the case manager must offer the client the opportunity to further restrict access to case information. A case can be assigned a Heightened Level of Security (HLS) indicator for increased confidentiality safeguards. The HLS indicator can only be assigned with the client's consent. Persons who ask for the HLS indicator must be informed that no information regarding the case will be discussed over the telephone, neither to the client nor to anyone else. This restriction includes Recipient Services and other centralized phone lines operated by the Department. In addition, the client should be informed that the use of the HLS indicator will prevent them from using "My Account Page" through the Virtual Gateway which allows clients to view important information about their food, cash and/or health assistance benefits. Once the HLS indicator is activated, the SSN will display in red in BEACON. See Field Operations Memo 2008-23 for more information. Additional guidance regarding the HLS indicator is forthcoming.

**Domestic Violence
Specialist Overview**

In addition to assisting with domestic violence waivers, DV Specialists are qualified to provide many services to victims of domestic violence. Victims of domestic violence should be referred to the DV Specialist so that they may receive information about these services. The client however may choose to refuse this referral. Due to the unique issues associated with cases involving domestic violence, case managers and DV Specialists should work collaboratively. When changes occur (e.g., address changes, terminations, etc.), the case manager and the DV Specialist must share the information.

**Domestic Violence
Specialist Overview**
(continued)

DV Specialists play a critical role in the waiver process by meeting with the client to:

- assess the client's safety and ability to comply with certain TAFDC program rules;
- assist in completing domestic violence waiver requests, Family Cap waiver and/or exception requests; and
- offer referrals and other domestic violence related services to the client and his or her children.

DV Specialists are also responsible for completing follow-up assessments, which assess the client's safety, medical issues, city/town restrictions or any other pertinent issues that need to be addressed. In addition the DV Specialist notifies the DV Liaison and the DV Unit Director of each new waiver applicant.

**Domestic Violence
Specialist
Responsibilities**

To the extent possible, the DV Specialist will:

- contact or meet with any applicant or ongoing client who raises domestic violence issues and/or concerns and schedule follow-up appointments, as necessary;
 - contact or meet with Department employees and anyone else who asks for their services;
 - assess the safety and trauma issues of the applicant or client; help develop a safety plan; and refer the family for services, as appropriate;
 - assist in fully completing a *Request for a Waiver of TAFDC Program Requirement(s) Due to Domestic Violence* form, if appropriate. Ensure adequate details are provided, and answer any domestic violence related questions the applicant or client may have;
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**Domestic Violence
Specialist
Responsibilities**
(continued)

- in collaboration with the case manager, identify documents which may be helpful to submit with the *Request for a Waiver of TAFDC Program Requirement(s) Due to Domestic Violence* form and assist the client to obtain these documents, if appropriate;
- notify the case manager, supervisor, DV Liaison, and the DV Unit Director that the client is applying for a DV Waiver;
- assist the client with any collateral contacts (e.g., Probate court for any court documents, Registry of Vital Records and Statistics for birth and/or marriage certificates)
- inform the case manager of any relevant information that arises during a discussion between the client and DV Specialist;
- explain good cause for non-cooperation with child support enforcement to all clients and inform the case manager of any new information, when domestic violence has been identified; and
- assist the client, when domestic violence has been identified, in pursuing child support safely when good cause has not been requested.

**Address
Confidentiality
Program**

The Address Confidentiality Program (ACP) is a program administered through the Office of the Secretary of State for persons facing domestic violence safety risks. Clients accepted into this program are issued a card with a Chelsea, MA P.O. Box address. This identifies the client as participating in the ACP. The P.O. Box address provided through the ACP is used as the program participant's legal residence, as well as work and/or school address. Case managers should be aware that any person participating in this program who applies for DTA benefits cannot provide their street address as it would result in their termination from the ACP. Any applicant participating in the ACP must be referred to the DV Specialist.

Questions

If you have any questions, please have your Hotline designee call the Policy Hotline.
