

Case Study: Integrated Family Services – Joanna, Gail and Andrew

Joanna is a 15-year-old who has fled the family home to stay with a friend due to the ongoing verbal and physical violence by her father, Andrew, towards her mother, Gail.ⁱ The violence is compounded by Andrew's excessive drinking. Joanna has expressed concerns to her friend about her safety given her father's behaviour. Joanna's school Wellbeing Officer became concerned about Joanna's increasingly poor hygiene, often being tired or falling asleep in class, out of character behaviour and inconsistent school attendance and spoke to Gail about supporting the family through an Orange Door (or Child FIRST) referral. As a result, the Smith family were referred to an Integrated Family Service (IFS).

In addition to his violent behaviour, Andrew has recently been made redundant from his job, which has exacerbated his drinking. In the last serious incident before Joanna left, Gail called the police due to fears for her safety. In attending the incident, the police provided Andrew with details for a Men's Behaviour Change Program and encouraged him to attend. Police offered Gail a referral to a specialist family violence service which she declined. Despite this, a referral was made by police to the Orange Door, and triaged to Child First, due to concerns for Joanna and Gail's wellbeing and safety. Child FIRST is consulting with Child Protection regarding their safety concerns for Joanna.

Andrew has commenced his engagement with a local Men's Behaviour Change Program.

Maggie is in the Assessment and Engagement stage of her work. During her parent sessions, Gail and Andrew are focused on wanting Joanna to return home. Joanna is willing to engage with Maggie on her own. Maggie is also meeting with Gail and Andrew separately in order to assess safety.

You are Maggie, Integrated Family Service Case Worker...

Question: Can Maggie make an information request?

Answer

A Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS) and/or Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS) request could be made by Maggie. As an Integrated Family Services worker Maggie is prescribed as an Information Sharing Entity (ISE). Maggie can make an information sharing request for the purpose of:

- managing risk and safety of a child
- to promote the wellbeing and/or safety of a child (CISS)
- family violence risk assessment or risk management.

Question: Who can Maggie make an information sharing request to and why?*Answer*

Maggie can request relevant information about anyone from any ISE prescribed under the information sharing schemes that may hold information relevant to risk or wellbeing. Given the circumstances in this case Maggie could request information that informs their MARAM aligned Intermediate risk assessment, a wellbeing or needs assessment or safety planning purpose.

The following services may be relevant given what is known about the family:

Child Protection information:

- Child Protection's involvement with Joanna and her parents
- any knowledge of significant harm
- any services involved currently or previously with the family
- Any interventions
- Any information known about the father, Andrew, relevant to risk or abuse or Joanna's wellbeing
- Details of any past family violence behaviours or risk factors, including Andrew's involvement with other children or other partners.
- any MARAM aligned risk assessments or needs assessments
- any Safety Plans or case plans.

Victoria Police information:

- Andrew's past engagement with Victoria Police, any criminal record, any history of Intervention Ordersⁱⁱ
- any other behaviours known to police that may be impacting on Joanna's safety or wellbeing
- any police interventions regarding family violence not resulting in criminal offences
- any upcoming court dates
- details of Intervention orders including conditions
- any MARAM aligned risk assessments conducted or held by police.

Men's Behaviour Change Program information:

- history of service involvement
- engagement in program
- information from Andrew's risk assessment and, in particular, any changes in risk
- pending referrals
- any knowledge of further family violence, details known about past family violence perpetrated, any knowledge of breaches in intervention orders
- any knowledge of wellbeing concerns towards Joanna.

Joanna's school:

- an information request can be made with the school to get information about Joanna's school attendance and behaviour at school as the school is an ISE under Phase Two implementation.
- If Child Protection are involved, this information may be part of their records already and can be shared by child protection as an ISE to Maggie as an ISE (as well as under the CYFA).

Specialist Family Violence Service information:

- to seek secondary consult when preparing an intermediate risk assessment and safety plan
- any past involvement with Gail or Joanna
- any risk assessments or safety plans
- to get advice to prepare an intermediate risk assessment and safety plan for Gail. ⁱⁱⁱ

Information obtained by Maggie can be disclosed to Joanna and Gail if it is necessary for risk management. Maggie must seek the views and wishes of Gail and Joanna prior to any information sharing if it is appropriate, safe and reasonable to do so.

Question: Can Maggie pro-actively share information?*Answer*

Maggie can pro-actively share information with any ISE where the information is relevant to promoting Joanna's wellbeing or safety or relevant to family violence risk assessment or risk management. In this case, Maggie may choose to share with the following ISEs:

Men's Behaviour Change Program - Family Safety Contact Worker to share information about individual risk to ensure perpetrator accountability and for accurate risk management; this may include information promoting the wellbeing or safety of Joanna

Joanna's school - Under Phase Two implementation, schools are prescribed as ISEs. Schools can request and share information under the Information Sharing Schemes. Maggie is not required to seek consent from anyone due to risks to Joanna's wellbeing and safety when pro-actively sharing information. However, it is recommended that Maggie seeks and takes into account the views and wishes of Joanna and other relevant family members (Gail and/or Andrew) if appropriate, safe and reasonable to do so.

Specialist Family Violence Services - Maggie can speak to Gail about the benefits of engaging with a specialist family violence services even if it is short term engagement to conduct a thorough assessment, strong safety plan and access resources.

Question: Who should Maggie seek consent from?*Answer*

Maggie is not required to seek consent from anyone due to risks to Joanna's (a child's) wellbeing and safety. No consent is needed from Gail, Andrew, Joanna or anyone whose information is relevant, including the family Joanna is staying with. In addition, no consent is required from Gail, Andrew, Joanna, or Joanna's friend or family if there is serious threat of harm to an individual's life, health, safety or welfare. No consent is ever required from Andrew as he is the perpetrator of family violence. When requesting or sharing information about Joanna or Gail, Maggie should seek the views and wishes of Joanna and Gail (if safe, reasonable and appropriate to do so) to support Maggie's ongoing relationship with Gail. ^{iv}

Question: What record keeping responsibilities does Maggie have?

Answer

Record keeping for information sharing requires that the date of the request, the information requested, the ISE making the request, the purpose for information sharing (child wellbeing or safety or family violence risk assessment or risk management) and whether consent was obtained or the views and wishes were sought in the process. Similar information should be recorded when responding to an information request, making an information request or when pro-actively sharing information about a common client.

All workers engaging with the CISS and FVISS should have sound working knowledge of their organisation's own record keeping policies. For additional information workers can refer to the State Government website for more information www.vic.gov.au/tips-information-sharing-record-keeping

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- ⁱⁱ A child is a victim/survivor of family violence if they are directly or indirectly exposed to the effects. Joanna is therefore a victim survivor and victim of the family violence also. Joanna's father is physically assaulting her mother. He is also causing significant harm by assaulting Joanna emotionally and psychologically.
- ⁱⁱ Victoria police can share information obtained from other State's records. They have to make a separate request for this though. If you know a family has lived in another state it is important to ask for this information from Victoria Police. Contact a Family Violence Officer or Detective to obtain this information.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Unless Maggie is a family violence specialist, she would not be conducting a comprehensive assessment. Comprehensive assessments can only be done with family violence specialists. Maggie could work with the Men's Behaviour Change Program to conduct a comprehensive assessment, or she could continue to work with Joanna to encourage her engagement with a family violence service noting that Integrated Family Services (IFS) align with the MARAM Framework at the Intermediate level, however, some IFS work with families requiring 'comprehensive' assessment and respond to intermediate risk management as a minimum requirement.
- ^{iv} Having a 'views and wishes' conversation does promote ongoing relationships. It is damaging to the relationship if you seek consent, thus promising to only act with consent, and act otherwise as per your legal obligations. If consent is offered, during a 'views and wishes' conversation, it can be accepted, however it shouldn't be asked for.