



NSWPF STATEWIDE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SAFETY ASSESSMENT TOOL (DVSAT)

The NSW Police Force (NSWPF) Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool (DVSAT) will be implemented statewide across all Local Area Commands (LACs) from 1 July 2015.

What does this mean for police?

From an operational police perspective it will involve the use of the NSWPF DVSAT at all domestic violence (DV) incidents, the results of which will be electronically referred to specialist DV support services.

What is the DVSAT?

The DVSAT is a tool developed for police to identify the level of threat of future harm, particularly serious injury or death, to a victim of domestic violence. The DVSAT is central to the Safer Pathway (streamlined victim referral pathway) which is the second element in the *It Stops Here* domestic and family violence reforms.

Safer Pathway is modelled on DV risk assessment processes used in other Australian and international jurisdictions which have seen significant success in reducing the levels of re-victimisation and serious injury to victims. Safer Pathway, incorporating the DVSAT, was launched in September 2014 in Waverley and Orange. While the DVSAT is being implemented in all LACs from 1 July 2015 the broader reforms under *It Stops Here* are being implemented in a staged rollout over the next 3 – 5 years.

The DVSAT is made up of two parts: Part A & Part B.

Part A contains 25 risk identification questions to be asked of people in intimate partner relationships. The questions are based on research that has identified specific behaviours and circumstances commonly found in intimate partner homicides.

There are five basic underlying themes:

1. The background/current environment of the offender/partner.
2. The threat of violence.
3. The dynamics of the specific relationship.
4. The presence of children.
5. Sexual behaviours/assault.

Part B relates to all DV incidents (intimate and non intimate) and is intended to capture information such as the level of fear felt by the victim, the reasons for those fears, and most importantly allows for an officer to use their professional judgement if they see fit to do so.

The DVSAT identifies a victim at one of two threat levels – either ‘at threat’ or ‘serious threat’. Victims that are deemed at ‘serious threat’ are automatically referred to a SAM which will be held fortnightly and chaired by a senior police officer (Crime Manager). This meeting will also be attended by other agencies and a safety action plan will be created to reduce the risk of harm to the victim.

What amounts to a ‘serious threat’ level?

Victims can be assessed at serious threat based on:

1. 12 or more ‘yes’ answers in Part A
2. Police have used their professional judgement to determine the victim is at threat
3. Meeting the NSWPF standard for repeat victimisation

How will it work?

Police who attend a domestic violence incident will investigate and take action where appropriate as they would normally. However, they will also ask the victim the 25 risk identification questions on the DVSAT and record the answers in their notebook. When the investigating officer returns to the police station they will create an event on their computer and transfer the answers from their notebook to the DVSAT screen. They will then answer the questions in Part B on the screen. The investigating officer is required to complete the DVSAT prior to the end of their shift.

When the DVSAT is completed, it will be automatically, electronically referred to the Central Referral Point (CRP) along with the contact details of the victim and a short description of the event. The CRP will then forward the DVSAT to a Local Coordination Point (LCP) based on the postcode for where the victim lives. The LCP will contact victims and assist them in obtaining support and referral to other specialist services.

What are the expected benefits?

1. The use of the DVSAT will allow for a consistent approach by police to identify the level of threat of future harm to DV victims.
2. Increased information exchange between government agencies.
3. Improved agency accountability to ensure that other agencies will play their part in assisting and supporting victims of domestic violence.
4. Reduced re-victimisation: the experience of international and Australian jurisdictions, that use similar models, has been that victims are less likely to be re-victimised because of the increased support available to them and the increased information available for agencies to make informed decisions.
5. Improved victim safety.

For further information about *It Stops Here* and the Safer Pathway reforms visit

<http://www.domesticviolence.nsw.gov.au/>