

Domestic Violence/Imminent Danger Policy

City-Funded Family Shelters and Family Access Points

Domestic Violence is an incident and/or pattern of behavior used to establish power and control over another person through fear and intimidation, often including the threat or use of violence or coercion.

When domestic violence occurs in the family shelter system, the safety of the victim as well as the parents, children, residents, and staff remaining in the shelter must be protected. Every situation is unique and no one can predict what a perpetrator may be capable of. This policy is intended to provide guidelines for City-funded shelters to follow, but should not replace the shelter provider's ability to make any decisions necessary to ensure the safety of shelter residents and staff.

A. DEFINITIONS

Domestic violence occurs:

Between people in intimate relationships, including current or former husbands and wives, boyfriends and girlfriends, gay and lesbian partners, sex workers and their pimps/clients, and victims of stalking or trafficking.

Domestic violence includes one or more of the following components:

1. Attempting to cause or causing physical harm to another family or household member. This includes, but is not limited to: pushing, shoving, grabbing, punching, slapping, kicking, biting, pulling hair, threatening with a weapon, attacking with a weapon, leaving visible marks or causing bleeding.
2. Making explicit threats to physically harm a family or household member.
3. Forcing a family or household member to involuntarily engage in sexual activity through violence, threats of violence, or duress.

B. PROTOCOLS

Self-Disclosure of Domestic Violence Cannot be Grounds for Denial of Service

Self-disclosure by the victim of a recent domestic violence incident will not affect their ability to get on the wait list for shelter or to be placed in shelter by a Family Access Point. However, it may still be the basis for a denial or service at a shelter based on the discretion of the shelter provider's evaluation of safety. For example, if a victim comes to his or her case manager with a black eye reporting that s/he was just struck by her partner, the shelter may decide to move forward with a denial of service for the alleged perpetrator. If a perpetrator of domestic violence admits to committing an act of domestic violence, s/he will be denied services.

When a Domestic Violence Incident Occurs

If a domestic violence incident occurs in the shelter, the perpetrator will be denied services and must leave immediately.

The victim will be encouraged to develop a safety plan, which could include accessing domestic violence resources, counseling, attending parenting classes, or pursuing an Emergency Protective Order (EPO) or Civil Restraining Order. Family shelter staff will actively work with the victim on a safety plan that fits their situation, including providing assistance in accessing the following resources:

- Access a Domestic Violence Shelter (possibly the La Casa de las Madres Domestic Violence Response Team emergency beds)
- CalWORKs emergency hotel vouchers
- Other shelter beds outside San Francisco
- Homeward Bound
- The client's own support system

If the family chooses to exit the family shelter, the provider will make available cab vouchers or other appropriate transportation resources to allow them to reach their destination.

For families placed out of San Francisco County due to the availability of other resources, family shelters will provide transportation support for travel back to SF if needed (school, medical appointments, court, etc.) as needed for up to 15 days.

La Casa de las Madres Domestic Violence Program will work with a family shelter experiencing a domestic violence incident to make available their Domestic Violence Response Team (DVRT) emergency beds. Family shelter and La Casa staff will receive periodic training on how these beds will be accessed, how to proceed with placement of a family in these temporary beds, and continued communication after placement (see Appendix A).

Shelter providers shall consider extenuating circumstances that affect the victim's safety, including verification of a perpetrator's incarceration by law enforcement agencies and allowing the victim to return to shelter when there is no longer an imminent threat present.

Procedures to Contact Law Enforcement Agencies for the Provision of Emergency Protective Orders (EPOs) in Cases of Domestic Violence

Family Access Points and family shelters must report a domestic violence incident as a critical incident and contact law enforcement agencies in all cases of observed physical violence that take place at Access Points or in shelter, and assist clients with developing a safety plan which may include obtaining an Emergency Protective Order. While only law enforcement can request an EPO and only a judge can issue one, Access Point and shelter staff should advocate on the client's behalf if the client wishes to pursue a protective order.

Staff Training on Domestic Violence and Other Crisis Situations

All family shelter provider staff will continue to receive training in crisis intervention, de-escalation, and the dynamics of domestic violence relationships and how to support families experiencing domestic violence. Family shelters are required to submit a list of relevant trainings completed by shelter staff to HSH and the Shelter Monitoring Committee on an annual basis.

In addition, all shelter employees will be required to attend the “Safe Housing Training” by La Casa de Las Madres. This training is customized to address the needs of each program, including shelter design (e.g. size and layout of shelter, congregate or private rooms, staffing levels) with the goal of increasing staff ability to recognize domestic violence risk factors, respond to domestic violence incidents, help clients create safety plans and obtain EPO’s, and keep other shelter residents and staff as safe as possible.

Appendix A
HSH Domestic Violence Policy
HSH Family Homeless Shelters and La Casa de las Madres
Domestic Violence Response Team (DVRT) Bed Access Protocol

When a domestic violence incident occurs in a family homeless shelter in which the victim's safety requires that they leave the shelter immediately, family shelter staff must follow this protocol unless the victim refuses assistance.

1. Family shelter staff will call La Casa's hotline number at 1-877-503-1850. Staff will identify themselves as calling from an HSH family homeless shelter and request access to the DVRT beds.
2. La Casa staff will conduct a short phone intake with the victim. If the victim has stayed at La Casa before and compromised the shelter's confidential location or was asked to leave due to violence, it will preclude them from using the DVRT beds. If this occurs, or if the DVRT beds are not available, the family shelter staff will need to access other resources (such as other domestic violence programs, out-of-county shelters, or the victim's support system).
3. If the intake concludes they are eligible, and there is DVRT space available, La Casa staff will arrange to send a cab to the family shelter in order to transport the victim to La Casa.
4. Family shelter and La Casa staff will inform all supervisory staff as required.
5. Once the victim has entered, appropriate family shelter and La Casa staff will continue to communicate and work together to assist the victim with determining next steps. These may include:
 - Remain at La Casa if beds are available and La Casa accepts the family
 - Utilize La Casa's Drop-In Center to identify other DV resources
 - Access a 14-day hotel voucher through the CalWORKs program (if the victim is a CalWORKs recipient or is CalWORKs eligible)
 - Return to the family homeless shelter if the perpetrator is verified by law enforcement to be incarcerated
 - Access other resources with the family's support system
6. Family shelter staff will inform the HSH Family Emergency Services Manager of the incident and outcome.

Family shelters and La Casa agree to train their staff in these protocols on a regular and as-needed basis.