
ACCESS & VISITATION PROPOSED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PLAN GUIDELINE FOR CONTRACTORS

The topics below must be included in your Domestic Violence Plan. Submit that plan with your Response.

Definition of Domestic Violence

- How does your organization define domestic violence and how will your program apply this definition in its practices? How will this scope and definition affect eligibility for parenting time assistance?

The Tarrant County Domestic Relations Office (DRO) defines domestic violence as a pattern of behaviors, including actions or threats of a physical, sexual, emotional, economic, psychological, or technological nature, used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over, and negatively influence the behavior, decisions, or actions of another individual that is part of the familial relationship. Such pattern of behaviors can be either severe or continuous in nature and includes any behaviors intended to threaten, alienate, intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, coerce, blame, or injure.

The DRO applies this definition in our practices daily as employees are trained how to recognize domestic violence, deescalate conflict, and report imminent threats and harm to the appropriate authorities with many employees having years of experience and holding professional licenses inclusive of such trainings.

All parents subject to court ordered possession and access are eligible for parenting time assistance. The DRO is prepared to help facilitate close relationships even when given the presence or threat of domestic violence or neglect. The DRO recognizes the policy of this state “to encourage frequent contact between a child and each parent for periods of possession that optimize the development of a close and continuing relationship between each parent and child.” Texas Family Code: Policy and General Applications of Guidelines 153.251(b). It is the goal of the DRO to help facilitate such relationships for all families.

Screening

- Describe your proposed domestic violence screening process and how the program will provide opportunities for disclosure by persons causing harm and survivors during and after the screening process. Additionally, describe staff training on this specific topic.

Domestic Violence screening is a multifaceted process. First and foremost, participants / applicants are requested to self-disclose domestic violence. Requests for self-disclosure are included in the DRO intake forms, applications, and one on one interviews. Additionally, employees review court orders for non-disclosures and family violence findings and when

appropriate and authorized employees review medical, criminal, and family protective service records. Finally, caseworkers are highly experienced and able to recognize potential signs of Domestic Violence in a one's body language, physical appearance, demeanor, and in the way one relays information and answers or fails to answer questions.

Services Offered

- Contractors may use discretion when deciding if people who have experienced or perpetrated domestic violence will be offered Access & Visitation services. If services will be offered: explain which services. If services will not be offered: explain how you will communicate program ineligibility. NOTE: Contractors must not disclose the basis of ineligibility to the other parent.

Any parent subject to court order will be offered appropriate Access & Visitation services. Access and Visitation services may include:

- Mediation,
- Counseling,
- Visitation Enforcement,
- Co-Parenting Education,
- Parenting Plans Development,
- Alternative Dispute Resolution Services,
- Supporting Co-Parenting for Never Married Parents,
- Parenting Plan Modifications, including Clarifications,
- Guidelines for Visitation and Alternative Custody Arrangements, and
- Monitored and Supervised Visitation, Including Neutral Drop-Off / Pick-Up.

In the event services will not be offered or are otherwise terminated, the caseworker or their professional supervisor will directly reach out to each parent via a phone call or a meeting to discuss the parent's ineligibility. The basis of ineligibility will not be disclosed to the other parent. Such communications are generally followed up with a letter and email. The Court may also be notified when required that services will not be offered from the DRO. Reason for termination of services / the forfeiture of eligibility usually occur when a parent is non-compliant; meaning a parent fails to participate as ordered or requested, including late arrivals or no shows, continues to discuss litigation directly with the child(ren) after being repeatedly instructed not to, or makes remark or takes action that is threatening, vulgar, or severely inappropriate or offensive in nature that hinder the effectiveness of the services provided.

- Referrals
 - Describe the domestic violence referrals the program will offer participants, both victims and perpetrators, at the various stages of program participation.

The DRO refers individuals to various programs:

- Tarrant County District Attorney's Office. Protective Order attorneys in the Tarrant County Criminal District Attorney's Office represent victims of family violence, dating violence, stalking and sexual assault who seek protective orders. Anyone seeking assistance may call the Protective Order office at (817) 884-1623 between 7:45 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday – Friday.
 - National Domestic Violence Hotline 24/7 hotline for those experiencing domestic violence 1-800-799-7233 TTY: 1-800-787-3224
 - One Safe Place provides comprehensive services to those affected by domestic violence giving survivors the best and safest options to move forward. They provide 24-hour emergency shelter, transitional housing with subsidized rent, counseling for survivors and their children, case management and legal support. (817) 916-4323 www.onesafeplace.org
 - SafeHaven of Tarrant County provides services to those affected by domestic violence. Services include 24hr emergency shelter for individuals and families experiencing domestic violence. (877) 701-7233 www.safehaventc.org
 - The Women's Center inspires and empowers women, men, and children in the Tarrant County community to overcome violence, crisis, and poverty. 817-927-4040 <https://www.womenscentertc.org>
 - Legal Aid of NorthWest Texas- Fort Worth offers free civil legal help to low-income Texans who wouldn't otherwise be able to secure legal representation. 817-336-3943 <https://internet.lanwt.org>
 - Methodist Justice Ministry provides free legal representation and ongoing support to vulnerable community members impacted by family violence, child abuse, and child neglect. 817-339-2407 <http://www.methodistjusticeministry.org>
- Explain your proposed referral process for domestic violence services.

The Program Staff utilizes their expertise and discretion to refer a participant to domestic violence services at any time during the participation of services; however, most referrals are made at the onset of services. Participants are informed about domestic violence including what constitutes domestic violence and community resources specific to their situation. Participants, including victims, perpetrators, and family members experiencing a history of or the presence of domestic violence, are counseled on services provided by the DRO that might best match their family's needs and situation. Additionally, every participant is provided a list of domestic violence resources.

The Program Staff's mandatory reporting of abuse and neglect to Family and Protective Services or the local authorities is not considered part of the referral process. Such reporting,

while possible during cases involving domestic violence, is save and separate from the domestic violence referrals presented to participants.

Safety Protocols

- Explain in detail your proposed practices and protocols once domestic violence has been identified. Describe minimum safety precautions that will apply to all program participants whether in-person or virtual.

It is the goal of the DRO to identify the potential or presence of domestic violence prior to the commencement of services. The DRO treats all cases as if there is the presence of or the high likelihood of domestic violence. Should domestic violence that was previously undisclosed be identified during services, the DRO employee will make referrals and reports to the proper agencies, entities, and organizations as appropriate and required.

All program participants, whether in-person or virtual, are made aware of the expectations concerning conduct and must sign an acknowledgement thereof. This includes acknowledging and understanding that the service provider, including service monitors and supervisors, may terminate services at their discretion for perceived violations therefrom.

The DRO operates exclusively in the Tarrant County Family Law Center, a court building. All services, except community visitation services and virtual services, are provided onsite. Uniformed County Sheriff Deputies are present during all operations, including during the providing of Access and Visitation Services. Visitors to the building are subject to metal detection screening and searches as well as removal by the Deputies for violations of conduct or unlawful actions.

- What, and with what frequency, is your proposed plan to train staff to follow these practices and protocols, including your eligibility and referral process?

The program staff is a Licensed Master of Social Worker (LMSW) in good standing with the Texas Behavioral Health Executive Council. As an LMSW he completes over 30 hours of training approved by the State. All DRO Employees that hold a State regulatory license, for example the master's level social workers, professional counselors, and attorneys, must each complete a minimum of 15 hours annually of course work and training specifically approved by the State. Since we work with families experiencing high conflict, employees include domestic violence training as part of their professional development.

Domestic violence trainings are regularly provided onsite or virtually at no cost the employees through local, county, and state agencies. Many of the trainings are often open to all DRO employees, including those employed in roles not requiring a license.

Additionally, employees conduct regular staff meetings and host educators, assistant district attorneys, practitioners, trainers, and resource providers with expertise in domestic violence so that employees are better informed about the latest practices, research, and findings.

Finally, all employees are annually trained on the safety protocols of the building and immediately included on any updates thereto.

- If you plan to secure subcontracted staff or services, describe how you will ensure subcontractors will comply with this Domestic Violence Plan.

The DRO does not subcontract program services through outside vendors or agencies. The DRO does not employ subcontractors. “Subcontractors” affiliated with the DRO may be limited to recommended monitors for community visits and are contracted directly by the program participants. Any recommendations provided by the DRO are required to be experienced with families and children, undergo a background check, and trained in domestic violence. Recommended individuals are invited and highly encouraged to participate in the group trainings offered to all DRO employees.

Training and Education

- What is your proposed process for raising awareness of domestic violence issues amongst all program staff?

The program staff has been working the previous contract for the past number of years. The program staff will continue to adhere to or exceed the four hours of domestic violence training as required by the contract. Employees, including the Director and Assistant Director, continuously share education and training opportunities with one another, including those related to domestic violence. The expectation is that program staff will continue a heightened awareness of domestic violence issues.

- Which local domestic violence service providers do you propose to collaborate with to receive the required, annual four-hour domestic violence training and to create and maintain a network of resources for customers?

The DRO collaborates closely with One Safe Place of Fort Worth. <https://www.onesafeplace.org>. One Safe Place is a comprehensive crime prevention agency devoted to preventing crime and violence in Tarrant County's neighborhoods, schools, and homes. The DRO participates in many of the trainings, workshops and conferences offered by One Safe Place's Family Justice Center. One Safe Place's family justice center brings together a multi-agency network, under one roof, dedicated to providing coordinated services to victims of domestic violence and their children. Their model has proven successful across the country and has been designated as a best-practice model for domestic violence intervention and prevention by the U.S. Department of Justice.