

# Northern Ireland Domestic Abuse Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference **MARAC**

**Working together to reduce  
the risks for domestic  
abuse victims at risk  
of serious harm**

**Guidance for professionals**

Personal, Professional,  
Protective Policing



Department of  
**Health, Social Services  
and Public Safety**  
[www.dhsspsni.gov.uk](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk)



Department of  
**Justice**  
[www.dojni.gov.uk](http://www.dojni.gov.uk)



## What is Domestic Violence and Abuse?

In Northern Ireland domestic violence and abuse is defined as **‘threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, verbal, sexual, financial or emotional) inflicted on one person by another where they are or have been intimate partners or family members, irrespective of gender or sexual orientation’**

As well as physical violence, examples of abuse can involve:

- undermining your self-confidence,
- threats to others including children,
- controlling behaviour such as isolation from friends and family,
- restricting access to money, personal items, food, transportation or the telephone
- destruction of personal property
- stalking

Domestic violence and abuse is about a past or current partner, or a member of your family trying to have power and control over you. It can happen to anyone.

Domestic abuse includes unlawful activities such as forced marriage, ‘honour’ based crimes and female genital mutilation. Extended family members may condone or even share in the pattern of violence.

## What is a MARAC?

MARAC stands for Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference. It is a short focused meeting and the aim is to increase the safety and well-being of the adults and children who have been exposed to domestic abuse. Up to 20 cases are heard at each MARAC meeting.

It is a meeting where agencies discuss the risk of serious harm to people experiencing domestic abuse in their local area, and make safety plans to support those at high risk.

Actions will be agreed and taken by those agencies present to reduce the risk of further violence and reduce the risk of it happening again.

If a case comes to the attention of an agency and there are concerns that require an immediate response, an Emergency MARAC will be called.

## Why have a MARAC?

Only those who have been identified as being at “high” risk of harm from domestic abuse are discussed at a MARAC. The MARAC provides a means of sharing information between agencies. Sharing information means agencies can get a clearer picture of the situation and can better understand the needs of the people experiencing domestic abuse. Agencies at the MARAC then try to provide the right help to make someone safer and reduce the risk.

## What is the key element of MARAC?

The key element of MARAC is the domestic abuse risk assessment (CAADA- DASH-NI) which will have been carried out by practitioners from any agency supporting people affected by domestic abuse. The CAADA-DASH-NI is a nationally evaluated risk assessment tool developed from analysis of previous domestic homicides.

The risk assessment has three main objectives:

- To assess the risk of domestic abuse to all victims
- To gather detailed and relevant information from victims that could be shared with other agencies if the level of risk becomes 'high'
- To identify those that need more intensive support and multi-agency action planning
- To make agencies aware of the risk posed by the dangerous offenders

Where appropriate, information gathered during these risk assessments will be shared among relevant agencies to reduce the risk levels and promote the safety of high risk victims and their children.

## Who is referred to MARAC?

People are referred to MARAC because they have been identified as being at 'high' risk of current or future harm from domestic abuse upon completion of the CAADA-DASH-NI. The thresholds for referral are one or a combination of the following:

- Professional judgement of the agency worker on the client's situation
- 14 or more positive (yes) answers to questions 1 – 24 on the risk assessment form (CAADA-DASH-NI)
- Escalation – 3 or more Police callouts in 12 months or an increase in the severity of the abuse

The Police will refer on professional judgement only.

If the victim does not meet the MARAC threshold you continue to offer the victim understanding and offer the additional service of a specialist domestic abuse support agency.

## Issues of consent

When the victim reaches the threshold for MARAC you should, where appropriate, discuss your concerns with the victim, inform them of the MARAC and seek to gain their consent to share information with other agencies. In most cases, people give their consent to be discussed at the MARAC.

In a small number of cases, someone may be referred to the MARAC without their consent. This only happens where there is an urgent need to protect that person and/or their children. The legal grounds for sharing information without consent are covered under the Data Protection Act and the Human Rights Act (Art 2 & 3).

Individual agencies should make a decision to refer someone to MARAC and they will have clear policies and procedures about how and when they do this.

## Who attends the MARAC?

Those representing their agency at MARAC will have the authority and decision-making powers to offer resources to create a safety plan for the victim and their children. Each case is discussed for up to 15 minutes. The key agencies attending MARAC are:

- The Police Service of Northern Ireland
- Health & Social Care Services
- Education
- NI Housing Executive
- Probation Board NI
- Women's Aid
- Victim Support NI
- Men's Advisory Project

Designated agencies will attend, as required, to speak on behalf of those they are supporting. For example, this could include someone from a Housing Association or voluntary or community organisation.

## Referral Process

If you identify a case that you believe to be high risk you should first discuss it with your manager. If your manager is experienced in domestic abuse risk assessment, he/she will assist you to complete the MARAC risk assessment and complete a referral if assessed as 'high' risk. Otherwise, you will need to contact your agency lead or your agency representative who attends the MARAC meetings in your area.

## Does the victim attend the MARAC?

No. The referring agency will present the case at MARAC and they will also act as the voice of the victim.

## What happens at the MARAC meeting?

Everybody at the MARAC meeting has to sign a confidentiality agreement before the meeting begins.

Each agency representative at the meeting shares information that is relevant and proportionate to each case and this is combined with a timely assessment of the victim's needs. This information sharing identifies the current level of risk upon which the tailored action plan is based. The action plan should increase the level of safety of the victim, children, other vulnerable parties and agency staff.

## Is the perpetrator informed of the meeting and the safety plans?

No. It would defeat the purpose of the MARAC if the perpetrator was informed about the safety plan. The perpetrator may become aware of the meeting taking place but should **not** be informed of the safety plan.

Participants should take extraordinary care **not** to inadvertently inform the perpetrator of any element of the safety plan.

## What happens after the MARAC meeting?

After the MARAC meeting each agency will take away the actions they volunteered to assist the victim and ensure these are implemented.

The agency representative, who has acted as the voice of the victim at the meeting, will contact the victim and inform them of the safety plan and the support that agencies are offering.

The agency representative will contact their local MARAC Administrator to confirm that actions they volunteered at the meeting have been implemented.

As a result of the MARAC you may have been given actions by your MARAC representative, which you have an obligation to complete. Alternatively another agency may have referred a case you are currently involved in. In these cases you may also be given actions by your MARAC representative to complete.

## What if there are further incidents of domestic abuse?

In cases where there is a subsequent incident of abuse, such as actual abuse or threats of abuse, patterns of stalking or harassment, and disclosures of rape or sexual abuse, and these occur within 12 months of the original MARAC hearing, a victim should be referred again immediately following your agency guidelines and procedures. Such cases are deemed a repeat case.

## For more information

In the first instance contact your agency MARAC representative for your area.

**Please contact the MARAC Coordinator  
Jackie Gaskin on**

email: Jackie.Gaskin@psni.pnn.police.uk

Tel: 0845 600 8000

### **24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline**

Tel: 0800 917 1414

Email support: 24hrsupport@dvhelpline.org

Text 'support' to 077 9780 5839

***open to all women and men affected by domestic violence***



