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DV-ACT Assessments

DV-ACT can provide a number of expert assessments as detailed below. Assessments can be produced at any stage including cases that are in the family courts. The following information gives brief details of what each assessment includes, however, our assessors are highly experienced and can answer further questions if requested.

We show below the typical breakdown of hours for each type of assessment, giving the maximum cost expected. DV-ACT charges £88/hour (plus VAT) and should the costs be split between the parties we are happy to continue while prior authority is sought providing that the fees that extend beyond the rates set by the Legal Aid Agency, both hourly rates and the number of hours, are met by the Local Authority.

Timescales given are dependent upon clients attending all appointments offered by the assessor and are subject to change. Please contact us at info@dvact.org for our current timescales.

Risk assessment of perpetrators – assesses the risk towards the victim and children by the domestic violence perpetrator. This includes an interview with both the perpetrator and victim wherever possible. The report will include:

- static risk indicators, such as lethality, use of weapons and history of violence;
- dynamic risk factors, such as denial of culpability, remorse and victim empathy;
- history of domestic violence and the possible impact on the child;
- likelihood of further exposure of the child to domestic violence;
- parent's understanding of the impact of the domestic violence on children;
- range of factors that may have contributed to domestic violence risks;
- prognosis for treatment and a risk management plan.

Vulnerability assessment of victims/survivors – Alongside identifying vulnerability to future abuse, the impact of the abuse on the victim's parenting will also be assessed, including:

- mother's background, including exposure to violence as a child and any violence in previous relationships;
- history of domestic violence and the possible impact on the child, and likelihood of further exposure of the child to domestic violence;
- mother's understanding of the impact of the domestic violence on children;
- static and dynamic vulnerability indicators, including ability to assess risk and prioritise safety, ability to access support and understanding of domestic abuse;
- range of factors that may have contributed to domestic violence risks;

- recommendations for risk management strategies and treatment options.

The timescale for completion of a vulnerability or risk assessment of one parent is 4-6 weeks (please contact us for assessor availability). A breakdown of hours for a typical single assessment of one parent is as follows:

8	hours interview time with client/s
5	hours reading and consultation
1	hour setting up the assessment (setting up interviews, obtaining all necessary documentation and filing the report)
3	hours quality assurance (supervision, proofing and editing)
15	hours writing and filing the report
32	<i>Total</i>
<i>Please note that if clients do not attend appointments we will continue to complete the assessment without their input. For further information please see our terms and conditions.</i>	

Joint risk and vulnerability assessment – An assessment of both parents (please note that all clients are seen separately), including all the elements of risk and vulnerability assessments outlined above but also giving a clear picture of the dynamics of the relationship, the likelihood of separation/reconciliation and the particular safeguarding issues raised by the parental relationship.

The timescale for completion of a joint vulnerability and risk assessment of both parent is 6-8 weeks (please contact us for assessor availability). A breakdown of hours for a typical joint assessment is as follows:

10	hours interview time
8	hours reading and consultation
2	hours setting up the assessment (setting up interviews, obtaining all necessary documentation and filing the report)
5	hours quality assurance (supervision, proofing and editing)
20	hours writing and filing the report
45	<i>Total</i>
<i>Please note that if clients do not attend appointments we will continue to complete the assessment without their input. For further information please see our terms and conditions.</i>	

Risk and vulnerability assessments of 3 subjects – An assessment of both parents and an additional family member (please note that all clients are seen separately), including all the elements of risk and vulnerability assessments outlined above, but also giving a clear picture of the dynamics of the relationships and the particular safeguarding issues raised by the parental relationship.

The timescale for completion of a joint vulnerability and risk assessment of 3 family members is 8-10 weeks (please contact us for assessor availability). A breakdown of hours for a typical assessment of 3 people is as follows:

15	hours interview time
9	hours reading and consultation
2	hours setting up the assessment (setting up interviews, obtaining all necessary documentation and filing the report)
5	hours quality assurance (supervision, proofing and editing)
25	hours writing and filing the report
56	<i>Total</i>
<i>Please note that if clients do not attend appointments we will continue to complete the assessment without their input. For further information please see our terms and conditions.</i>	

Preliminary Report – Provides an outline of static risk factors and an indication of dynamic factors giving an early view on treatment suitability and prognosis for change, where there is an urgent need for an overview of risks prior to a full report being completed.

There is a flat fee of £200 for a preliminary report. With regards to timescales we will always try to meet a court or other important date for a preliminary report, please contact us to confirm that we can meet the required date.

Third Party Carer Assessment – Examines whether any potential carer has an adequate understanding of domestic violence and their ability to protect the children in their care. Including:

- the impact of domestic violence on the child/children;
- the ongoing risks;
- ability to protect the children under specific circumstances (for people being considered as alternative carers).

Family Assessment – Considers other domestic abusers in the home, for example older adolescents or other adults. This assessment will include interviews with all parties with the assessment report providing the following:

- static and dynamic risk and vulnerability indicators;
- identifies risks and the principal source of danger;
- recommendation of risk management strategies and treatment options.

Timescales and costs can be provided upon request as it is dependent upon the number of family members that are involved and the availability of specialist assessors.

Sex Offender Assessments – these are undertaken by our specialists in sexual offending and will identify risk management plans where offenders have close contact with a family.

Timescales and costs can be provided upon request as it is dependent upon the complexity of the case and the availability of specialist assessors.

Interim and final programme reports – where a client has completed an assessment with us and attends a behavioural change programme as part of the risk management strategy, DV-ACT can provide reports at the midway and final stages of the programme. These assessments include:

- interviews with the client/s and with programme staff;
- a consideration of any new developments in the case;
- details of the client’s engagement with the programme material;
- a view on whether the client’s risk or vulnerability has been reduced;
- further recommendations for risk management.

Expertise of DV-ACT Assessors

In 2004 the Womens Aid Federation of England published a report which described the cases of 29 children from 13 families who were murdered by their fathers during contact. Following the publication of this report a central recommendation was made that “a process of risk assessment should be undertaken by the court in every case in which domestic violence has been alleged or admitted, before a consent order is made”. These recommendations were endorsed by the President of the Family Division in subsequent practice directions.

Since 2005 a number of agencies with experience of working in domestic violence have developed processes for producing risk assessments. In 2012 a coalition of the leading Domestic Violence agencies issued guidelines (*Guidelines for the commissioning of expert Domestic Violence risk assessments*) to assist those that commission expert domestic violence risk assessments, to identify an appropriate expert. The guidance provides a list of key competencies (including relevant knowledge and expertise) that all experts carrying out domestic violence risk assessments need to possess.

Those undertaking domestic violence assessments should have applied knowledge of risk assessment methodology, and the capacity to apply findings from the research literature to the specifics of the case, as well as considerable direct experience within the particular field of domestic violence (Bell 2006, Newman, 2010)¹. They should also have the necessary skills and expertise to interview and assess victims to ensure a robust and informed assessment.

It cannot be assumed that professionals such as psychologists, psychiatrists, or those with experience in other areas of child protection work, have the specialist knowledge and experience to assess the complex risks to children presented by domestic violence.

All DV-ACT assessors are highly qualified and possess the competencies and expertise outlined in the guidelines. Assessors are educated to at least graduate level from relevant fields and have at least ten years of experience of direct work with domestic violence perpetrators and victims.

¹Bell, M. &McGoren, J. (2003). Intimate partner violence risk assessment model. Ulster: Barnardos.

Newman, C (2010). Expert Domestic Violence Risk Assessments in the Family Courts: Respect.