

# FAMILY & DOMESTIC VIOLENCE POLICY



## Purpose

Tas Gas Retail have developed guidelines to deliver flexible ongoing support for our customers who may be affected by family violence (“affected customer”). This Policy will help us respect and care for each affected customer in every interaction.

If you’re in a personal relationship that makes you feel unsafe, afraid or powerless – no matter what your background – then you may be experiencing family violence. It’s more common than you think.

If you are, or think you may be experiencing family violence, you can contact 1800 Respect (1800 737 732) for professional support. They are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Family violence can be defined as:

- physical abuse; including any use of physical force against another person
- sexual abuse; including any form of forced or unwanted sexual activity
- verbal abuse; including yelling, screaming or consistently making statements that negatively label a person
- emotional abuse
- financial abuse
- social abuse; such as preventing a person from spending time with family and friends, and isolating them from their support networks.

Common forms of violence in families include:

- spouse/partner abuse (violence among adult partners and ex-partners)
- elder abuse (an intentional act, or failure to act, by a caregiver or another person)
- child abuse/neglect (abuse/neglect of children by an adult)
- parental abuse (violence perpetrated by a child against their parent)
- sibling abuse (violence between siblings).

Family violence can also be economic in nature impacting affected customers by:

- insisting an energy account is in an affected customers name and refusing to contribute to the cost
- holding an energy account jointly and refusing to contribute to the cost
- holding an energy account in the perpetrators name and not paying bills, resulting in disconnection
- holding the account in the perpetrators name and threatening to have the service disconnected.

We understand that family violence causes many difficulties (not just financial) and we will assist affected customers to get the best possible outcomes. We train our

customer service staff to recognise customers affected by family violence, and to know what to do to help them. Keeping you safe is our main concern. You have rights to privacy, and we have a privacy policy that sets out what we do to ensure this. Visit <https://www.tasgas.com.au/help-centre/privacy-tas> for more information.

We also understand that sometimes it may not be safe to send information to your home address, so we’ve developed ways to make sure you receive the information you need, while keeping your information secure. We understand that any form of family violence may cause payment difficulty and even financial hardship. We ask that you please reach out (sooner rather than later) if this is the case with you — we have a number of ways we can help you stay connected and options available to assist under our payment support program.

For more information on our payment support program please visit <https://www.tasgas.com.au/vic/customer-service/customer-payment-support> or call us on 1800 750 750 and we can post you a copy.

## Commitment

We will have regard to an affected customer’s safety and take into account the particular circumstances of an affected customer.

We will case manage affected customers on an individual basis with consideration given to debt deferment, allocation of debt and debt collection activities, hardship and access to Utility Relief Grants and concessions.

## Skills

We will provide ongoing, annual training to all relevant employees, including new employees at the stage of initial onboarding, to:

- a) understand family violence;
- b) identify affected customers;
- c) assist and engage with affected customers; and
- d) understand the application of this Policy.

## Customer Identification

We will ensure a secure process is in place to:

- a) assess if a small customer is an affected customer;
- b) provide a method to identify the account of a customer who has been identified as an affected customer;
- c) avoid the need for an affected customer to repeatedly refer to their experience of family violence; and
- d) provide for effective ongoing engagement with an affected customer.

We will ensure your confidentiality is maintained, and once you have disclosed family violence to us, we will secure your account so that internal access is limited on an as needs basis. Your account will also be flagged so that it can be

promptly identified by our staff, and we will not remove this until you inform us otherwise.

### Financial impacts of family & domestic violence

Before taking debt recovery action, we will take into account the following, and waive any fee payable for late payment by an affected customer:

- a) the potential impact of debt recovery action at that time on the affected customer; and
- b) whether other persons are jointly or severally responsible for the energy usage that resulted in the accumulation of those arrears.

You will not be disadvantaged if you leave a situation of family violence. We will offer affected customers further payment plans, even if they have had two cancelled due to non-payment in the previous 12 months or have been convicted of an offence involving illegal energy use in the last two years, where someone else may have been jointly or severally responsible for these actions. We will waive late payment fees for affected customers and allow payment using Centrepay.

### Hardship and payment plans

We will recognise family violence as a potential cause of payment difficulties.

We will use a disclosure of family violence by you as a prompt to discuss whether you are experiencing payment difficulties and to then determine your eligibility for our payment support program.

### De energization for not paying a bill

We will not arrange for the de-energisation of an affected customer's premises unless we have taken into account:

- e) the potential impact of de-energisation on the affected customer; and
- f) whether other persons are jointly or severally responsible.

### Protection of affected customer information

We will not provide access to an affected customer's confidential information to any other person without the consent of the affected customer.

We will ask for details to verify your identity, and for added security we can also place a password on your account.

### Communication

We will ensure we:

- a) take all reasonable steps to confirm an affected customer's preferred method of communication;
- b) offer alternative methods of communication if an affected customer's preferred method is not practicable;
- c) use an affected customer's preferred method of communication in communications with them; and
- d) keep a record of the method of communication identified.

### Documentary evidence

We will not require an affected customer to provide any documentary evidence of family violence.

### Information about external support services

Provide an affected customer with information about the availability of one or more external family violence support services, as outlined in the attached table, in a manner that is safe, respectful and appropriate given the affected customers circumstances.

#### Website

We will publish this Policy on our website.

#### Review

We will review this Policy annually to ensure it remains relevant to affected customers and complies with legislative requirements.

**If you are experiencing family violence, support services are available. Please see our list below.**

#### GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS

<b>Police</b>	Law enforcement services – call if you or your child/family is in immediate danger	Call <b>000</b>
<b>Department of Human Services</b>	Centrelink, Medicare, Child Support services – social workers can provide short term counselling, support and information, and refer you to other support services	Social Work Services, Tel: 13 28 50 Multilingual, Tel: 13 12 02 <a href="http://www.humanservices.gov.au">www.humanservices.gov.au</a>

#### FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

<b>Money Minded</b>	Website to help build skills, knowledge and confidence in managing money	<a href="http://www.moneyminded.com.au">www.moneyminded.com.au</a>
<b>National Debt Helpline</b>	Free financial counselling services – get help in managing bills and debts	Tel: 1800 007 007 <a href="http://www.ndh.org.au">www.ndh.org.au</a>

#### HELP WITH LEGAL ISSUES

<b>National Association of Community Legal Centres</b>	A directory of not-for-profit community law centres in Australia, focusing on the disadvantaged and people with special needs – request legal and related services	<a href="http://www.naclc.org.au">www.naclc.org.au</a>
<b>Women's Legal Services Australia</b>	A national network of community legal centres that specialise in women's legal issues – request legal advice or a referral	<a href="http://www.wlsa.org.au">www.wlsa.org.au</a>

#### SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS

<b>Lifeline</b>	Crisis support services	Tel: 13 11 14 Open 24x7
<b>1800 RESPECT</b>	Free, confidential family violence and sexual assault counselling services	Tel: 1800 737 732 Open 24x7 <a href="http://www.1800respect.org.au">www.1800respect.org.au</a>
<b>Family Relationship Advice Line</b>	Information and advice on family relationship issues and parenting arrangements after separation	Tel: 1800 050 321 Open weekdays 8am–8pm, and 10am–4pm on Saturdays
<b>Relationships Australia</b>	Counselling, mediation and family dispute resolution services	Tel: 1800 364 277 Local call cost from anywhere in Australia
<b>MensLine Australia</b>	Telephone and online support services for men	Tel: 1300 78 99 78 <a href="http://www.mensline.org.au">www.mensline.org.au</a>
<b>WIRE Women's Information – Any woman. Any issue.</b>	Free generalist information, support and referral service for Victorian women – visit the Walk-in Information Centre, call the phone support line or start an online chat.	Tel: 1300 134 130 <a href="http://www.wire.org.au">www.wire.org.au</a> Walk-in Information Centre Level 1, 673 Bourke Street Melbourne, Vic. Open weekdays from 9:30am–12:30pm 1:30pm – 4:30pm