

# Tips for phone and internet providers



Telecommunications  
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assisting consumers experiencing family violence

## Train all frontline staff to recognise the impacts of family violence

Training should be **developed in consultation with family violence specialists**. Training should also be clear about how staff are expected to interact with consumers, including when to ask further questions and when to record information about risks applicable to the consumer.

## Create a dedicated internal referral process to specially trained staff or a specialist team

Where frontline staff are not specially trained, it is best for frontline staff to **refer interactions from consumers experiencing family violence to a staff member with specialised training** or to a specialised team. This process should be clear about what frontline staff should do if they are unsure if family violence is a factor, and how the internal referral is to be noted on the system. This process should be underpinned by proper privacy training and an understanding about when and how to record sensitive information.

## Create a direct contact process for family violence affected consumers

A direct process could be achieved by introducing a **dedicated phone number, email address, or online form** with specific options for consumers experiencing family violence to contact their provider. It is important that these processes are regularly monitored and requests are prioritised and actioned quickly and sensitively.

### We have seen providers do this by:

- Setting up a specialised team and reconfiguring systems and processes so all staff know where and how to transfer family violence affected customers
- Embedding ongoing training at regular intervals to frontline staff who specialise in family violence
- Making a list of contact details for support services available to consumers identified as experiencing family violence

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## Minimise service loss when aware of safety risks

This could be achieved by **preventing the automatic suspension or disconnection of a service because of non-payment or a failed transfer**. Consumers should be offered interim ways to stay connected for their safety, such as prepaid mobile or internet services.

## Offer alternative ways a consumer can verify their identity for account access

It is important that providers **listen to the consumer to determine the safest way they can be asked to verify their account**. Providers could **consider offering alternative ways to verify identity**, for example, by sending a unique verification code to the consumer's phone number or an additional PIN or password of the consumer's choosing as an additional security measure.

## Check account authorisations with the consumer

When aware of safety risks, care should be taken to **confirm with the consumer the right people are authorised on the account**. The consumer should be informed that authorised persons can disconnect services so the consumer can make an educated decision about the risk.

## Confirm contact details and authorised representatives

The consumer's contact details and authorised representatives should be verified as being up to date as soon as the consumer says they are experiencing family violence. Providers should **ask consumers how they can be safely contacted** and make a note that future requests to change contact and representative details should be checked carefully.

### We have seen providers do this by:

- Implementing a change of ownership process where the family violence affected customer is the end-user of a phone number, but the perpetrator is the account holder
- Putting measures in place to ensure fast reconnection can be provided if a family violence impacted customer tries to transfer to a new provider but no validation request is received

### We have seen providers do this by:

- Using one-time-password authentication via SMS where practical
- Placing system restrictions on a mobile number being disconnected or ported where there are safety risks
- Implementing a process where authorised representatives who are not reconfirmed in a set period are automatically removed

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## Allow staff to offer tailored solutions

Tailored solutions allow providers to **address consumers' needs on a case-by-case basis**. Empowered staff could, for example, ask the consumer what parts of a plan they may need to retain or offer to convert a post-paid service to a prepaid service.

## Authorise staff to offer highly flexible payment arrangements

Flexible arrangements should recognise a **consumer experiencing family violence may need more time than usual to pay off a debt**, may only be able to pay very small regular amounts, or may not be able to start paying off a debt straight away.

### We have seen providers do this by:

- Getting the specialised family violence team to collaborate with the financial hardship team to assess and tailor available options
- Looking at the essential parts of a service for the customer to be safe and be able to afford services to adopt the right solution
- Offering to waive charges and cancel contracts where a customer has been coerced into signing up for products or services