

Policy – Family Violence

Policy

Southern Rural Water understands the significant impact that family violence can have on our customers, employees and the communities we serve.

We are committed to ensuring customers and employees affected by family violence have access to support when they need it and in a way the best meets their individual circumstances.

We seek to create a safe and supportive environment by treating our customers and employees with respect, empathy, sensitivity and confidentiality.

We are committed to addressing the impact of family violence by raising awareness through the organisation and connecting with family violence support services to provide appropriate support.

This policy seeks to establish clear direction for supporting customers and employees who may be affected by family violence. It accords with *Clause 10 - Water Industry Standard – Rural Customer Service*.

Definitions

Family violence is defined under the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic)* as:

- (a) Behaviour by a person towards a family member of that person if that behaviour:
 - (i) is physically or sexually abusive; or
 - (ii) is emotionally or psychologically abusive; or
 - (iii) is economically abusive; or
 - (iv) is threatening; or
 - (v) is coercive; or
 - (vi) in any other way controls or dominates the family member and causes that family member to feel fear for the safety or wellbeing of that family member or another person; or
- (b) behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear or witness; or otherwise
- (c) be exposed to the effects of behaviour referred to in paragraph (a)

Any references to 'we' is a reference to Southern Rural Water.

Who is affected?

This policy applies to all directors and employees of Southern Rural Water.

Training

Southern Rural Water recognises that creating awareness and building capability within the organisation is the foundation to supporting customers and employees in need.

Southern Rural Water ensures staff are trained to identify and assist customers and employees affected by family violence.

Ongoing training is provided to employees to support the continued application of this policy to:

- identify customers and employees who may be affected by family violence
- deal appropriately with customers and employees affected by family violence
- apply this policy and related policies and procedures to customers and employees affected by family violence.

As a minimum all staff receive basic on-line training to gain an awareness and understanding of issues relating to family violence, including Southern Rural Water's policy, the different types of family violence, barriers to disclosure, identifying indicators of people who may be experiencing family violence and referral options.

Our customer facing teams receive additional specialist training to assist with handling customer disclosures, providing support and empathy and handling perpetrator interactions.

Case managers receive ongoing additional training so that they can effectively respond to complex issues associated with family violence, so that they can work with customers in a respectfully and appropriate manner.

Our contact officers receive additional specialist training to provide support to employees affected by family violence.

Employee Support

Southern Rural Water recognises that employees may be subject to, and/or exposed to situations of violence and/or abuse in their personal life that may impact on their performance at work. The organisation is dedicated to providing workplace safety and support to employees who may experience family violence.

Employees affected by family violence may take family violence leave in accordance with the provisions of Southern Rural Water's Enterprise

agreement. All requests for Family Violence Leave are taken in strict confidence.

Employees affected by family violence may seek changes to their working conditions including:

- a change to their work location
- a change to their work hours through an Individual Flexibility Agreement
- changes to their hours and patterns of work
- a job re-design and changes to duties
- temporary relocation to other suitable employment where possible within Southern Rural Water
- a change to their Southern Rural Water telephone extension, mobile phone and email address to avoid contact with the perpetrator
- any other appropriate measure.

We support all reasonable requests.

Family Violence Leave is available to perpetrators of family violence who require time off work to attend behaviour change, educational and support programs. The employee must provide acceptable proof of attendance to these programs.

No information is kept on the employees personnel file without their express written permission.

Employees affected by family violence can seek support from:

- Southern Rural Water contact officers
- Southern Rural Water People and Culture team
- Southern Rural Water's Employee Assistance Provider
- relevant trade unions
- external service providers/counselling services.

Contact details of Southern Rural Water's Employee Assistance Provider and External Service providers are available on our website or by contacting Southern Rural Water People and Culture team.

We do not tolerate employees committing family violence in the workplace. Disciplinary action is taken against the perpetrators of family violence undertaken in the workplace.

Potential hazards exist for employees who may be working from home. Managers and supervisors need to be aware of such risks.

We do not initiate adverse action against an employee if their attendance or performance at work suffers as a result of experiencing family violence.

Further details of the support Southern Rural Water provides, how it is provided and how it can be accessed are contained in Southern Rural Water Family Violence Guidelines for Employees

Customer Support

Southern Rural Water is committed to provide confidential support and assistance to customers experiencing family violence by providing resources and referral to family violence support services and access to hardship payment arrangements, including protection from debt collection.

Confidentiality

Southern Rural Water promotes customer safety by providing for the secure handling of information about those who are affected by family violence.

We:

- assign a Case Manager to act as the sole contact person for each customer affected by domestic violence.
 - maintain a 'red flag' system ensuring customer information is not shared with any other party (unless lawfully required to do so) or Southern Rural Water employees.
 - incorporate additional identification checks (e.g., passwords) to protect confidential information.
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Debt Management

Southern Rural Water recognises that family violence can sometimes lead to or enhance financial challenges.

We are committed to supporting those who have experience family violence with a suite of financial assistance options, including:

- affordable payment arrangements
- debt relief
- referrals to support networks including free and confidential financial counselling
- suspending debt recovery action in relation to their water bill.

We support all such reasonable requests.

We may waive or suspend all or part of a debt based on:

- the amount of the debt
- the circumstances in which the debt was incurred (including if it was incurred as a result of financial abuse)
- whether the debt should have been raised
- what payment assistance options have been (or could be) effective
- the customer's personal circumstances and capacity to pay the debt.

Even if only one account holder is affected by family violence, we immediately pause all debt collection activity on joint accounts (including no additional debt collection costs or interest) and ensure that water supply is not restricted because of the debt.

To remove these barriers and ensure that customers on joint accounts are able to conveniently access the same debt assistance pathways as other customers affected by family violence we:

- take steps to ensure customer confidentiality is protected from other persons on the account
 - ensure that customers can access support without having any contact with the perpetrator
 - take the same tailored approach to managing joint debts as we do for individual accounts.
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Case Managers Southern Rural Water recognises the trauma associated with domestic violence and seeks to establish as single point of contact so affected customers do not have to re-tell their story.

We:

- maintain a panel of case managers, specifically trained to assist customers affected by family violence
 - appoint a single case manager for each affected customer.
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Referral *Southern Rural Water recognises the complex nature of family violence situations and seeks to support customers and employees affected by it.*

In addition to the appointment of case managers, we maintain a list of specialist family service providers who provide support to people affected by family violence. The case managers can advise customers of the specialist family service providers.

**Policy
Availability**

We maintain the following to support this policy:

- Family Violence Customer Guidelines (CI)
- Family Violence Employee Guidelines (CI)
- Customer Fact Sheet
- List of specialist family service providers

This policy, along with a customer fact sheet and list of organisations that provide specialist family violence services are:

- published on our website
 - available from Southern Rural Water offices.
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Review This policy was approved by Southern Rural Water's Board at the meeting held in September 2023.

It is due for review by Southern Rural Water's Board at the meeting to be held in September 2026.

Related Policies & Standards Relevant policies and standards include:

- Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth)
- Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic)
- Health Records Act 2001 (Vic)
- Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (Vic) Personal Safety Intervention Orders Act 2010 (Vic)
- Privacy & Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic)
- Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)
- Southern Rural Water Employee Enterprise Agreement
- Southern Rural Water Hardship Guidelines (CI)
- Southern Rural Water Privacy Policy
- Water Act 1989 (Vic)
- Water Industry Act 1994 (Vic)

Communication This policy will be made available on Southern Rural Water's external website and internal intranet (Source).

Contact For more information, please contact the General Manager, Strategy People & Culture