

## What is Professional Judgement and when it needs to be used for the MARAC

Professionals make judgements every day as part of their core responsibilities and as a normal part of their everyday work.

Professional Judgement can be defined as:

“Applying knowledge, skills and experience, in a way that is also informed by professional standards / knowledge, laws and ethical principles, to develop an opinion or decision about what should be done to best serve clients”<sup>1</sup>.

This judgement allows professionals to utilise their understanding of the context of the situation and client / service user, their professional knowledge and their training in order to identify concerns and take relevant action.

When using your professional judgement for high risk domestic abuse you need to be able to provide rationale for why the referral is high risk. This will enable MARAC partners to have a clear and detailed understanding as to why the DASH RIC referral is high risk.

The following points can be identified by asking the questions on the DASH RIC, but this is not an exhaustive list and other factors may be identified:

- Extreme levels of fear,
- Extreme jealousy,
- Previous attempts to leave,
- Threats / attempts to kill,
- Rape,
- Harm to children,
- Pregnancy,
- Use of weapons,
- Control or coercion,
- Patterns – increasing in severity and or frequency,
- Cultural/immigration/language barriers and or issues to disclose,
- Disability,
- Mental health.

If you have serious professional concerns that are not identified through completion of the DASH RIC, but may have been disclosed by the survivor, a third party, previous records, clearly detail this in the professional judgement section on the DASH RIC.

The Use of Professional Judgement Guidance (V2 -15<sup>th</sup> May 2020) provides contact details for agencies to discuss concerns with, some do's and don'ts when using professional judgement and things to consider that are not covered by the questions on the DASH RIC.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.collegeofdietitians.org/Resources/Professional-Practice/What-is-Professional-Judgment-\(2015\).aspx](https://www.collegeofdietitians.org/Resources/Professional-Practice/What-is-Professional-Judgment-(2015).aspx) Definition and information from the College of dietitians

The key aspects of Professional Judgement are:

1. Knowledge

Through academic and practical training professionals develop a unique body of knowledge that lays the foundation for professional judgment. Practical experience further builds knowledge, including exposure to formulating and applying professional judgment. Evidence-based practice also contributes to a professional's knowledge when contemplating the best course of action to exercise their professional judgment.

2. Professional Obligations

All professionals have an obligation to practice safely, competently and ethically. Assessing Risk - This requires a level of competence based on i) appropriate knowledge, skills and judgment; ii) a professional attitude focused on client / service user welfare; and iii) continuously upgrading knowledge, skills and judgment. Professional judgment can be an essential / key aspect when assessing risk.

Ethics - As professional judgment involves making decisions about what should be done to best serve clients / service users, professional ethics need to be considered. Professional ethics is concerned with determining which behaviour(s) reflect professional values, such as integrity, honesty and client-centred decisions.

3. Client Input

When exercising professional judgement the professional must consider knowledge, professional obligations and experience, but also the specific needs, wants and goals of clients / service users for client-centred services.

4. Experience

Practical Wisdom - Ongoing experience has a significant influence on professional judgment. Professionals will apply knowledge, skills, values and experiences when using their professional judgement. Not formally taught and learned, practical wisdom is acquired largely through work (paid or unpaid) experience, ongoing learning and informal conversations with respected peers. Practical wisdom and experience help develop and refine professional judgment. Reflective Practice - By critically considering practice, professionals can reflect and evaluate their decisions, weigh alternatives and examine outcomes.

Exercising professional judgement means taking responsibility and being able to account for your actions in all circumstances. A professional must be prepared to provide sound, evidence-based rationale to support their decisions.

There may be situations where professional judgement can be influenced / impeded by conflicts of interest / personal experience and or boundary issues with the client / service user. If this occurs consult with colleagues / managers for advice and support.

Exercising professional judgment means being accountable for good or adverse client / service user outcomes. Professionals need to provide evidence-based rationale to support their professional decision making.