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An Overview of a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)





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Origin of the Evaluated MARAC Model

The first MARAC started in Cardiff in 2001 in response to the need (identified by local agency experience and Domestic Homicide Reviews) for a dedicated multi-agency domestic abuse forum.

The aim was to enable the sharing of information and development of an action plan to increase the safety of victim-survivors and their children while also holding perpetrators accountable for their behaviour.

An evaluation of the MARAC pilot showed a reduction in repeat victimisation, with 40% of survivors suffering no further abuse a year after their MARAC referral (those who did experience further abuse felt able to report it much earlier, demonstrating a significant increase in public confidence). There are now over 300 MARACs operating across the UK.



I am pleased that Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) are operating in every local authority in Scotland... MARACs enable different agencies to work together to support victim-survivors of domestic abuse. Together, these agencies can share their knowledge to create better plans that keep people safe.

Minister for Equalities and Older People, Christina McKelvie (2022)

MARAC in Scotland

The first MARAC in Scotland began operating in 2005. Since August 2022, there are now 35 operational MARACs representing all 32 local authority areas across Scotland. This means a victim-survivor identified as being at high-risk of serious harm or homicide because of domestic abuse can expect to receive a coordinated multi-agency intervention anywhere in Scotland.



Contact Us

Please contact Scotland@SafeLives.org.uk for further information or questions in relation to this resource.

Visit the SafeLives website to find out more about our work, access a range of resources for professionals, and explore our training and support.



Scottish MARACs



Find your local Scottish MARAC

Need to refer a case into MARAC?

Use SafeLives online [‘Find a MARAC’ tool](#) to find the contact details for all Scottish MARACs here.



What is a MARAC?

A MARAC is a local meeting where representatives from statutory and non-statutory agencies meet to discuss individuals at high-risk of serious harm or homicide because of domestic abuse. The meeting offers a safe space for agencies to share relevant, proportionate information about current risks. Afterwards, the Chair will summarise and invite agencies to volunteer actions to reduce risk and increase safety, resulting in a tailor-made action plan. Each case should take between 12 and 15 minutes from start to finish, requiring focus. At the heart of the MARAC is the working assumption that no single agency or individual can see the complete picture of the life of a victim-survivor, but all may have insights that are crucial to their safety. Ensuring that the victim-survivor is supported throughout, and their needs represented at the MARAC, is crucial to managing risk, improving and maintaining safety, and reducing repeat victimisation.

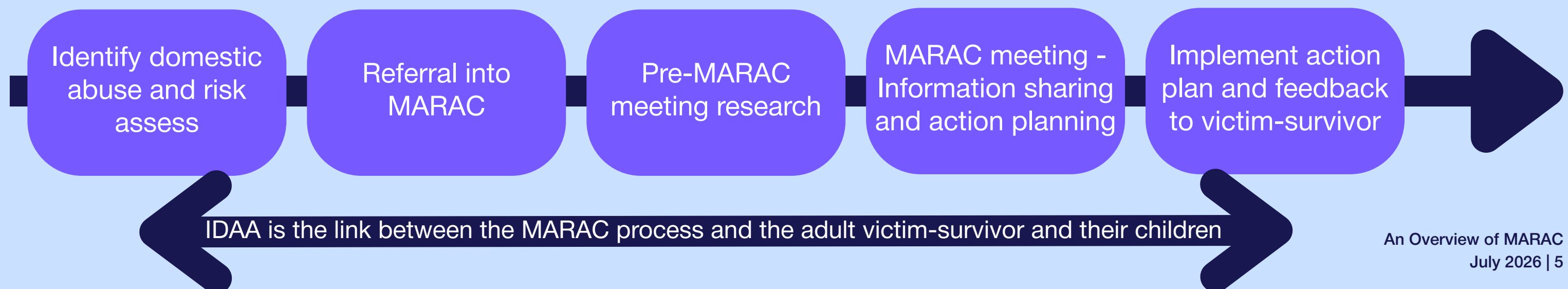


MARACs are an invaluable service in keeping people safe and alive. Quite frankly I believe I am here today because of the safety measures put in place resulting from my MARAC.

Authentic Voice Panel Member

The MARAC Process: More than a meeting

MARAC is a process and should not be confused with a service or intervention. Once a case has been heard at a meeting, it will not be revisited at future MARACs unless a repeat referral is made. Only incomplete actions should be revisited at subsequent meetings. It's important to note that much of the MARAC process starts before the meeting is held; the IDAA supports the victim-survivor from the point of referral and beyond the MARAC meeting to ensure their risk is managed and safety plan updated; MARAC agency representatives have safety planning responsibilities before and after the MARAC meeting; and the Chair has an additional level of responsibility to ensure that all risks have been mitigated through the multi-agency action plan. Ultimately, responsibility for the effective operation of MARAC lies with the Steering Group, who should have close links with the Chair, Coordinator and MARAC representatives as well as strategic leads within each local authority



Aims of MARAC

There are four aims of MARAC.

The primary focus of MARAC is to safeguard adult victim-survivors who are at high risk of serious harm or homicide because of domestic abuse. MARAC also makes links with other agencies and systems to safeguard children and manage the behaviour of perpetrators, as well as putting in safety measures to protect agency staff.

**Protect adult
(and child/ren)
victim-survivor**

**Make links with other public
protection arrangements
in relation to children,
perpetrators and
vulnerable adults**

**Protect
agency
staff**

**Address the
behaviour of
the perpetrator**

Roles at MARAC

Operating an effective MARAC is made more difficult (and in some cases impossible) without the key roles outlined below. For MARAC to achieve its four aims, SafeLives have identified nine core agencies for MARAC to be effective. Depending on local circumstances, additional agencies may also attend MARAC – this should be outlined in local operating and information sharing protocols.

Coordinator

The MARAC Coordinator establishes effective communication between all parties who attend MARAC. They carry out administrative duties such as circulating the MARAC meeting agenda and minutes. In some areas, Coordinators also have a development role.

Chair

MARAC Chairs set the tone and uphold professional standards at MARAC. As well as maintaining a focus on risk and supporting the role of the IDAA, MARAC Chairs facilitate the meeting and uphold confidentiality and appropriate information sharing. Before drawing a case to a close, the MARAC Chair must be satisfied that all risks identified have been mitigated by an action.

Independent Domestic Abuse Advocate (IDAA)

IDAAs (or domestic abuse specialists working to the same high standards as an IDAA) play an integral role in championing the voice of the victim-survivor during MARAC and appropriately holding other agencies to account for keeping them at the centre of the conversation and resulting action plan.

Steering Group

A MARAC Steering Group is made up of senior representatives from each agency that attends MARAC. Responsibility for the effective operation of MARAC lies with the Steering Group, who should have close links with the Chair, Coordinator and MARAC representatives as well as strategic leads within each local authority.

Agency Representatives

The evaluated MARAC model identifies nine agencies that represent the baseline for being able to assess and address risks for the whole family. A MARAC Agency Representative should consistently attend MARAC and be empowered by their agency to effectively participate in the process by: identifying high-risk domestic abuse and making a MARAC referral; researching cases ahead of MARAC; sharing relevant and proportionate risk-focused information at the meeting (for all vulnerable parties, including the perpetrator); and volunteering actions for their agency in response to the risk of harm identified.

The nine Core Agencies for MARAC in Scotland are:

1. Local Police
2. IDAA or equivalent (Specialist service working with victim-survivors)
3. Justice Social Work
4. Children and Families Social Work
5. Education
6. Health (including the physical and mental health of adults and children)
7. Drug and Alcohol Recovery Services
8. Housing (including homeless)
9. Adult Social Work

Referral Criteria

There are four MARAC referral criteria that professionals can use to refer a victim-survivor at high-risk of serious harm or homicide because of domestic abuse into MARAC. It is important that anyone who has been assessed as high-risk of harm is referred to MARAC. A referral criterion must be cited to evidence the legal authority to share information.

Visible High-Risk

This is an assessment based on actuarial data, involving the use of risk indicators to assess the probability of serious harm or homicide. For domestic abuse cases, the number of 'yes' responses to questions on the DASH RIC usually determines the level of risk. SafeLives recommends that 14 'yes' responses on the DASH RIC would result in a referral to MARAC. However, completing the DASH RIC is not a simple 'tick box' exercise and even where there is a lower number of 'yes' responses, professional judgement and the victim-survivors' perception of risk should be used to inform the overall assessment of risk.

Professional Judgement

Professional judgement involves an assessment of the severity of risk based on an individual professional's consideration of a situation. Professional judgement will use the information from the DASH RIC (if available) to inform this judgement. This form of assessment relies heavily on the skill and experience of the professional to make an informed decision about risk. In domestic abuse situations, professional judgement will be informed by the professional's knowledge of domestic abuse and its manifestations. Referrals to MARAC can be made based solely on professional judgement. However, it is the professional's responsibility to articulate what their concerns are and the reasons for the referral. Professional judgement should never be used to 'downgrade' an actuarial risk assessment.

Potential for Escalation

The potential for escalation can be assessed by looking at the frequency and/or severity of abuse. It is common practice for services to determine that there is a potential for serious harm or homicide when three domestic abuse incidents have been identified in a 12-month period. For example, three attendances at A&E, three Police callouts or three calls to make housing repairs. This should alert professionals to the need to consider a referral to MARAC.

Repeat Referral

SafeLives defines a repeat as ANY instance of abuse between the same victim-survivor and perpetrator(s), within 12 months of the last referral to MARAC. The individual act of abuse does not need to be reported to the police, or be violent or threatening. It must be considered within the context of a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour. Some events that might be considered a 'repeat' incident may include, but are not limited to:

- Unwanted direct or indirect contact from the perpetrator and/or their friends or family
- A breach of police or court bail conditions
- A breach of any civil court order between the victim-survivor and perpetrator
- Any dispute between the victim-survivor and the perpetrator(s) including over child contact, property, divorce/separation proceedings etc.

10 Principles Of an Effective MARAC

The 10 principles underpin an effective MARAC process and support everyone involved to deliver the four aims of MARAC. At the core of each principle is the safety of the victim-survivor, which needs to be considered at all stages of the process.

1 Identification

All agencies respond to disclosures and use a common risk assessment tool (or refer clients to a specialist domestic abuse agency). Domestic abuse is seen as 'everyone's business'.

2 Referral to MARAC and IDAA

All victim-survivors who meet the MARAC threshold are referred to MARAC and IDAA.

3 Multi-agency engagement

Agencies that can contribute to safeguarding victim-survivors at high-risk, associated children and vulnerable adults attend the MARAC.

4 Independent representation and support for victim-survivors

All victim-survivors experiencing high-risk domestic abuse are offered the support of an IDAA; their views and needs are represented at the MARAC meeting, which is seen as 'everyone's business'.

5 Information Sharing

MARAC agency representatives share relevant, proportionate, risk-focused information, and the MARAC is governed by an up-to-date information-sharing protocol.

6 Action planning

Multi-agency action plans address the risk to the victim-survivor, safeguard children and adults at risk, and manage perpetrator behaviour.

7 Number of cases

The MARAC hears the recommended number of cases.

8 Equality

The MARAC addresses the unique needs of victim-survivors from marginalised communities and can respond effectively.

Operational support

9 There is sufficient support and resources to support effective functioning of the MARAC including a commitment to continuous evaluation and development through the recording, analysis and reporting of MARAC data.

10 Governance

There is effective strategic support and leadership of the MARAC and IDAA response, and agencies work together effectively.