

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (Marac)

Overview – Last Updated March 2024



Joining the dots for an effective multi-agency response.



Ending domestic abuse

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 victims and their children and hold 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, felt able to report it much earlier demonstrating a significant increase in public confidence). There are now over 300 Maracs operating across the UK.

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 identified as being at high risk of harm anywhere in Scotland can expect to receive a coordinated multi-agency intervention. Scotland's Maracs are grouped into 12 areas, loosely based on local authorities who share resources (e.g. Through coordination or chairing arrangements) or small and neighbouring authorities.

Highlands & Islands

Orkney
Shetlands
Ross-shire & Skye
Lochaber
Western Isles
Caithness & Sutherland
Inverness, Badenoch,
Strathspey & Nairn

Grampian

Aberdeen City
Aberdeenshire
Moray

Tayside

Perth & Kinross
Angus
Dundee City

Forth Valley

Stirling
Clackmannanshire
Falkirk

Fife

Fife

Glasgow

City of Glasgow

Lanarkshire

North Lanarkshire
South Lanarkshire

Edinburgh

City of Edinburgh

West of Scotland

Argyll and Bute
East Dunbartonshire
West Dunbartonshire

Strathclyde area

Renfrewshire
East Renfrewshire
Inverclyde

The Lothians & Borders

West Lothian
East Lothian
Midlothian
Scottish Borders

South West Scotland

North Ayrshire
East Ayrshire
South Ayrshire
Dumfries & Galloway

"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)

What is a Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference?

A Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (Marac) is a local meeting where representatives from statutory and non-statutory agencies meet to discuss individuals at high risk of serious harm or murder because of domestic abuse. The meeting provides a safe environment for agencies to share relevant and proportionate information about current risks, after which the Chair will summarise and ask agencies to volunteer actions to reduce risk and increase safety through the development of 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, but all may have insights that are crucial to their safety. Ensuring that the victim 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.”

AV Panel Member

Authentic Voice

More than a Meeting

Marac is a **process** and should not be confused as 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 from the point of referral and beyond the Marac meeting to ensure their risk is managed and safety plan updated; Marac 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.

The Marac Process



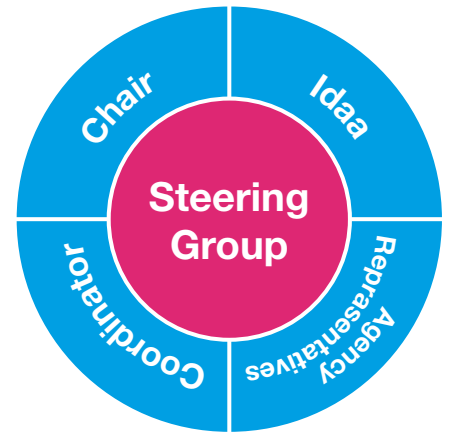
Aims of Marac

There are 4 aims of Marac. The primary focus of Marac is to safeguard adult victims that are at 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 the protect agency staff.

- Protect adult (and child) victims
- 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 components outlined below. To ensure the risks to victims (and their families) and the management of perpetrators, are jointly and comprehensively assessed and addressed, SafeLives have identified 9 core agencies for an effective Marac. 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 agenda and minutes and in some areas Coordinators have a development role too. SafeLives operate a Marac Coordinators Forum to facilitate peer support and sharing of common challenges and best practice. Please contact Scotland@SafeLives.org.uk if you're a Marac Coordinator and would like to attend.

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. SafeLives operate a Marac Chairs network; a regular meeting to exchange ideas and common challenges experienced by Chairs and hear updates on national work from SafeLives. If you wish to attend SafeLives Marac Chairs Network please contact Scotland@SafeLives.org.uk. SafeLives also regularly run Marac Chairs training which is for new and future Marac Chairs.

Independent Domestic Abuse Advocate (Idaa)

Idaas (or domestic abuse specialists working to the same high standards of an Idaa) play an integral role in championing the voice of the victim during Marac and appropriately holding other agencies to account for keeping him/her at the centre of the conversation and resulting action plan. As well as safeguarding victims, their children and multi-agency professionals, and making links with other public protection arrangements, Maracs provide an opportunity to hold perpetrators to account for their behaviour and disrupt the pattern of abuse.

Agency Representatives

The evaluated Marac model identifies 9 agencies represent the baseline for being able to assess and address risks for the whole family. A Marac 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 volunteer actions for their agency in response to the risk of harm identified.

The 9 Core Agencies for Marac in Scotland are:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| 1 Local Police | 2 Idaa or equivalent (Specialist service working with victims) |
| 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 Substance Misuse Services | 8 Housing (including homeless) |
| 9 Adult Social Work | |

SafeLives regularly run **Marac Representatives training** which is for those who are new to the role of Marac agency representative, as well as those who want to undertake refresher training. During the training, we examine the evaluated Marac model and the role of the Marac Representative.

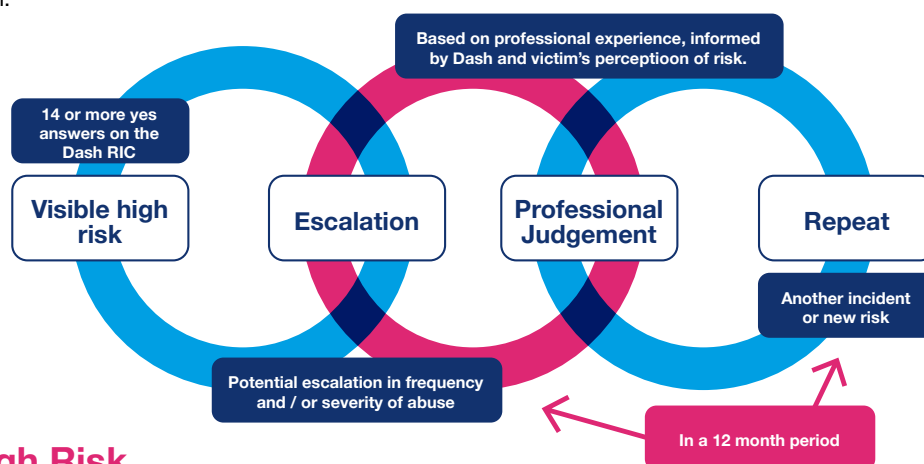
"This training gave a really good understanding of Marac and your role. I think all [Marac] representatives should attend"
Marac Representatives Training Learner

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.

Referral Criteria

There are four criteria which professionals can use to refer a victim at high risk from domestic abuse to Marac. It is important that anyone who meets the referral criteria is referred to Marac, and that one criterion is cited to evidence 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 answers on the Dash usually determines the level of risk.

SafeLives recommends that 14 'yes' answers on the Dash would result in a referral to Marac. However, completing the Dash is not a simple 'tick box' exercise and even where there is a lower number of ticks, professional judgement should be used to inform the overall assessment of risk.

Professional Judgement

Professional judgement involves an assessment of the severity based on an individual professional's consideration of a situation but will naturally use the information from the Dash checklist (if available) to inform this judgement. This form of assessment relies heavily on the skill and experience of the professional in order to make an informed decision of likely risk. In domestic abuse situations, professional judgement will be informed by the practitioner's knowledge of domestic abuse and its manifestations. Referrals to Marac can be made based solely on professional judgement. However, it is the practitioner's responsibility to articulate what their concerns are and the reasons for the referral. Professional judgement should not 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 there is a potential for serious harm or homicide when three domestic abuse events 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 and perpetrator(s), within 12 months of the last referral to Marac. The individual act of abuse does not need to be 'criminal', violent or threatening but should be viewed 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 and perpetrator
- ✓ Any dispute between the victim and the perpetrator(s) including over child contact, property, divorce/separation proceedings etc.

These events could be disclosed to any service or agency including, but not exclusive to, health care practitioners (including mental health), domestic abuse specialists, police, substance misuse service, housing providers etc.

10 Principles Of an Effective Marac

The 10 principles underpin an effective Marac process and support everyone involved to deliver these aims. At the core of each principle is the safety of the victim, 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 victims who meet the Marac threshold are referred to Marac and Idaa.

3

Multi-agency Engagement

Agencies that can contribute to safeguarding victims at high risk, associated children and vulnerable adults attend the Marac.

4

Independent representation and support for victims

All victims experiencing high risk domestic abuse are offered the support of an Idaa; their views and needs are represented at the Marac meeting is seen as 'everyone's business'.

5

Information Sharing

Marac 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, 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 victims from marginalised communities and is able to respond effectively.

9

Operational Support

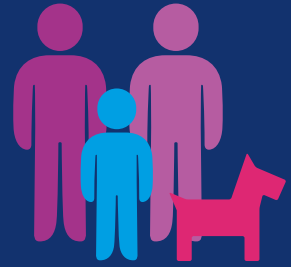
There is sufficient support and resources to support effective functioning of the Marac including a commitment to continuous evaluation and development through the recording, analysis and reporting of Marac data.

10

Governance

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

About SafeLives



We are SafeLives, a UK-wide charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse, for everyone and for good.

We work with organisations across the UK to transform the response to domestic abuse. We listen to survivors, putting their voices at the heart of our thinking. We look at the whole picture for each individual and family to get the right help at the right time to make families everywhere safe and well. And we challenge perpetrators to change, asking ‘why doesn’t he stop?’ rather than ‘why doesn’t she leave?’ This applies whatever the gender of the victim or perpetrator and whatever the nature of their relationship.

Our Scottish publication Whole Lives highlighted that every year, nearly 130,000 people in Scotland experience domestic abuse. There are over 9,000 people at risk of being murdered or seriously harmed; over 12,000 children live in these households. For every person being abused, there is someone else responsible for that abuse: the perpetrator. And all too often, children are in the home and living with the impact. Domestic abuse affects us all; it thrives on being hidden behind closed doors.

We must make it everybody’s business

What would you want for your best friend?

We want this for every person living with domestic abuse. Wherever they live. Whoever they are.

- ✓ Help made available wherever they need it _ from the police, their GP or hospital, or where they live
- ✓ Early, consistent, and tailored support that makes them safe and meets their needs
- ✓ The choice to stay in their own home and community
- ✓ The perpetrator being challenged to change and held to account
- ✓ A response that reflects the fundamental connection between the experience of adults and their children
- ✓ Agencies working together to meet their practical needs: help in areas such as housing, money, and access to justice



Joining the dots for an effective multi-agency response.



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