

Investigation Relationship Interview Protocol

Instructions for the Investigator: This Relationship Interview Protocol is designed to follow up on allegations of domestic violence and its effects on the children in the household. The protocol begins with questions about the alleged incident of domestic violence. It continues with an exploration of the extent and severity of the alleged domestic violence perpetrator's pattern of coercive control, its impact on the children and the strengths and supports of the primary caretaker. The protocol lays out a series of areas to explore in order to help you assess adverse impact and risk, develop a safety plan, and intervene with the batterer

The protocol is broken into four parts:

- A. Questions for primary caretaker,
- B. Questions for children,
- C. Questions for partner or ex-partner and
- D. Questions to help with assessment & case planning.

Each of the first three parts provides a structure for interviewing various members of a family experiencing domestic violence. The fourth part helps you synthesize and evaluate the information you received.

Using this protocol will help you develop a plan that:

- 1. Accounts for the risk the batterer represents to the children,
- 2. Builds on the survivor's prior and current efforts to protect the children (formal and informal strategies), critical supports (e.g. friends and family) and financial resources
- 3. Utilizes strategies that intervene directly with the batterer to reduce the risk to the children

While the exact progression of an investigation will vary depending on the nature of the allegations, socio-economic and cultural factors, and the style of the investigator, **you are fully responsible for seeking all the information you need to:** (1) Identify the risk the batterer represents to the children, (2) Work with the non-offending parent (survivor) to develop a safety plan that builds on prior and current safety planning, critical supports and financial resources, and (3) attempt to intervene with the batterer to keep the children safe. **The information must be included in your narrative, shared with your supervisor, and used to develop your plan.**

A. Questions for Primary Caretaker

Explore the incident



- Tell me about the reported incident. (Ask for details about where, when and how it occurred. Try to get specific details about the violence and ask questions that elicit information about the how the survivor responded, e.g. attempts to protect self and children, emotions)
- How did your children respond to this incident at the time and afterwards to the results (bruises, separation from family, incarceration of batterer, etc.)? Where were they at the time of the incident?

Explore partner's relationship with children



- How much time does (partner) spend around the children?
- How does (partner) participate in disciplining the children?
- Do you have any concerns about (partner)'s behavior with the children when you are not around?
- All couples experience conflict about children at times. Related to the children, what sorts of things do you argue or disagree about?
- Who makes the final decision on issues relating to the children?
- Does (partner) support the way you handle the children?

Explore extent and severity of the partner's control and the level of violence:




- Does (partner) try to control who you see? If yes, can you give me an example?
- Have you ever felt afraid of (partner)? If yes, can you give me an example?
- Has (partner) ever destroyed property? i.e. throwing things, breaking things, etc.
- To what extent has (partner) ever been physical with you? i.e. bumped, pushed, shoved, smacked, punched, pinched, pulled, etc.
- Has (partner) ever used or threatened to use any type of weapon or implement against you or the children? i.e. guns, knives, phones, pans, remote controls, bottles etc.
- Have the police or court ever been involved with your family because of (partner)'s violence?
- What has been the worse violence your (partner) has done?
- Overall, is (partner)'s violent behavior getting worse or getting better?
- Are you currently afraid of (partner)?
- How might (partner) react to having DCF involved?
- Does the involvement of the police and the courts make you feel safer?
- Has (partner) ever been threatening or violent to anyone other than you?

Explore the partner's risk to the children and its potential adverse impact more explicitly




- Have your children ever seen or heard (partner) act in violent or abusive way towards you? Have they ever seen the aftermath of (partner's) violence and abuse?

* * This term is inclusive of ex-partner's who have an on-going relationship with the children.
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- Has (partner)'s behavior ever made you feel afraid for the safety of your children? In what way(s)?
 - Have the kids ever been hurt, either on purpose or accidentally, as a result of (partner)'s behavior? How do the kids react during these incidents?
 - Has (partner) ever used or threatened to use the children in any way to control or hurt you?
 - Has (partner) ever interfered with your efforts to care for the children, like making it difficult for you to take them to the doctor?
 - Are the children displaying any problems or difficulties that you think are related to their exposure to (partner)'s violent or abusive behavior? (e.g. trouble sleeping, difficulties in school, aggressive behavior, withdrawal, etc.)

Explore the primary caretaker's safety planning

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- What are your hopes with regard to this relationship?
 - If (partner) were to become violent today, what options do you have?
 - What do you do day-to-day to reduce the negative impact of the abuse on the children?
 - Do you have friends, families, or others (clergy, co-workers) you can depend on to help you and your children stay safe?
 - If you left, would (partner) try to force you to come back?
 - If you left, would (partner) try to get the kids from you?
 - To keep yourself and your children safe, what has worked and has not worked for you in the past? Are those things still available to you today?
 - What can we (DCF along with the courts/police) do to help you feel safer?

For questions to help with risk assessment, adverse impact, safety planning and batterer accountability, go to page 7.

Notes:

B. Questions for Children:

If the child is aware of the domestic violence, explore the alleged incident using the following



- Tell me about the (fight, disagreement, etc) that happened (last night, yesterday, a few days ago...) between (primary caretaker) and (partner). (Ask for details about where, when and how it occurred. Try to get specific details about the violence and ask questions about that elicit information about the how the survivor and child responded, e.g. attempts to protect self and children, emotions)
- How did you respond to this incident at the time and afterwards? (What did you do? How did you feel? Explore reaction to items like injuries to parent, separation from family, incarceration of partner, etc.)

Explore the children's overall awareness of the partner's behavior:



- How much do you see (partner)?
- How do you like spending time with (partner)?
- Do (caretaker) and (partner) get along most of the time?
- What happens when (partner) is angry or unhappy?
- When (caretaker) and (partner) are fighting, upset, or are not getting along, does anybody ever get hit or hurt? (e.g. the child, parents, siblings)
- When (caretaker) and (partner) are fighting does anything ever get broken or is there loud yelling, name calling, curses, bad words, insults, etc?
- Have the police ever been called to your house? Have you ever had to leave your home because of people fighting?
- What do you do when (caretaker) and (partner) are fighting?
- Have you ever felt afraid when there is fighting in the house? If yes, what do you get afraid of? (If a child indicates they have felt afraid you can follow up with: How much time do you spend worrying about (caretaker) and (partner) fighting?) What do you do differently because you are afraid?
- For an older child: What kind of problems does the fighting create for you?

Explore other aspects of the child(ren)'s perceptions of the family and the partner.



- Tell me some good things about your family.

For questions to help with risk assessment, adverse impact, safety planning and batterer accountability, go to page 7.

C. Questions for Partner or Ex-partner:

Explore the alleged incident



- Tell me about the reported incident. (Ask for details about where, when and how it occurred. Try to get specific details about the violence and ask questions about that elicit specific information about the how the partner or ex-partner acted, e.g. what did he say, what did he do)
- How did the children respond to this incident at the time and afterwards to the results (bruises, separation from family, incarceration of one the parents, etc.)?

Explore the partner's relationship with the family



- How long have you been in relationship with (caretaker)?
- How much time do you spend with your (caretaker) children?
- What kind of activities do you do with the children?
- All couples experience conflict about children at times. Related to the children, what type of things do you argue or disagree about?
- Who makes the final decision on issues relating to the children?
- What role do you play in the disciplining of the children?
- How do you respond when the children are disobedient to the rules in the house?
- How do you react when you and (caretaker) disagree?
- How do you demonstrate, through your actions, that you support (caretaker)'s parenting?
- Would you describe yourself as being jealous or having a temper?

Explore the partner's understanding of the pattern of abuse and its impact



- Can you tell me about other instances when you have been abusive or violent toward (caretaker)?
- What do you believe is the most negative consequence of your abusive behavior?
- When you (acknowledged abusive behavior), do you know how that is for (caretaker)?
- When you (acknowledged abusive behavior), do you know how that is for the children?
- What else do you know about how your (acknowledged abusive behavior) has effected your children?
- How does your violent and abusive behavior impact you?

Explore the partner's prior attempts to end the abuse and the steps he or she is willing to now take to prevent further abuse and violence



- What are your hopes with regard to this relationship?
- Can you identify when you might become violent? Do you know your warning cues?
- What has helped you avoid violence in the past? Are those things still available to you today?
- Have you ever been involved with the police or the court? Are you currently on probation, parole or have an open case with the court system?



- Have you ever been referred to anger management or domestic violence counseling?
- Will you take steps to get rid of weapons/ get into substance abuse treatment/ engage in domestic violence counseling?
- Are you willing to move out? Do you have someone you can stay with?
- If you move out or your partner leaves, will you be able to stay away for a period of time?
- If you move out, what are you willing to do to continue to support your children financially?
- What else are you willing to do to create a safe and healthy environment for your children?

For questions to help with risk assessment, adverse impact, safety planning and batterer accountability, go to page 7.

Notes:

D. Questions to help with assessment and case planning

A. What are the effects of the domestic violence on children?

- 1) Have the children been physically or sexually injured by the batterer (accidentally or on purpose)?
- 2) Has the batterer engaged in “cruel and unusual” punishment?
- 3) Has the batterer used the child to control, hurt or threaten the survivor?
- 4) Has the batterer deprived the child of basic needs (e.g. medical visits, food, etc)?
- 5) Has the batterer “terrorized the child by exposing the child to violent, brutal, or intimidating acts or statements?”
- 6) Are their indicators of adverse emotional impact on the child?

If one of these is yes, then there are probably grounds for substantiation.

B. Survivor safety planning, critical supports and financial resources

- 1) Have you identified the survivor’s prior safety planning (formal and informal).
- 2) What resources does the survivor have to keep her or himself and the children safe?
- 3) Does the survivor have a safe place to go?
- 4) What important priorities is the survivor attempting to balance with safety (e.g. work, children’s school, childcare, religious values)?
- 5) What does the survivor say he or she needs to remain safe?

When possible, only substantiate against the batterer and not the survivor.

After gathering this information, work with the survivor to create a safety plan that builds on prior safety planning, critical supports, and financial resources. **Attempt, whenever possible, to keep the survivor and the children together.** When developing the safety plan, try to anticipate the batterer’s reaction to the plan, e.g. the batterer alters his tactics of abuse in response to the survivor’s safety plan or the actions of court/child protection.

C. Batterer intervention & accountability planning

- 1) Can the batterer identify the effects of the abusive behavior on the children or say that the behavior is a problem?
- 2) Is the batterer willing to take steps to enhance the safety and well-being of his or her children?
- 3) Can the police/criminal justice system be used to reduce the risk the batterer represents to the children?

Any service agreement with the abuser must include specific actions the abuser must take to reduce the risk to the children and his control over the family.

Intervening with batterers should include the following steps: (1) a service agreement that identifies specific actions the batterer needs to take, (2) using the power of criminal justice system or juvenile court to reduce the risk batterers represent or enforce his compliance with DCF (e.g. criminal court conditions that the batterer comply with DCF), and (3) includes a substantiation of the batterer for the child abuse and/or neglect.