

## Investigation Relationship Interview Protocol

**Instructions for the Investigator:** This Relationship Interview Protocol is designed to screen for the presence of domestic violence and coercive control and their effects on the children in a household. The protocol begins with an initial screening for the presence of a partner or ex-partner. Once a partner or ex-partner who has contact with the children is identified, the relationship is screened for the presence of domestic violence/coercive control. If domestic violence or coercive control is identified, then the protocol helps 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 family regarding the possible presence of domestic violence or coercive control. The fourth part helps you synthesize and evaluate the information you received.

Using this protocol will help you develop a plan that:

- Accounts for the risk the batterer represents to the children
- 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
- Utilizes strategies that intervene directly with the batterer to reduce the risk to the children

**Important:** Screen for domestic violence/coercive control regardless of the initial allegation. Domestic violence can be an underlying cause, an aggravating factor or a co-occurring issue in cases of medical and educational neglect, physical abuse and neglect, substance abuse or mental health issues.

While the exact progression of an investigation will vary depending on the nature of the allegations, socio-economic or 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 her prior and current safety planning, critical supports and financial resources, and (3) attempt to intervene with the abuser 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

### Determine if primary caretaker is in a relationship:



- Are you currently involved in a relationship (of any type)? If yes, for how long?
- If you are not currently in a relationship, are you in contact with the children's other parent(s)? If yes, what is the nature and extent of that contact?

### **Important: Carefully review!!!**

- **If there is no current relationship and there is no contact with the other parent of the children, confirm this with the children and other sources of information. If confirmed, then there is no need to proceed with further evaluation for domestic violence.**
- **If there is a current partner or the children's other parent (ex-partner) may represent a risk for domestic violence, then you must proceed with the interview protocol below to determine if domestic violence/coercive control is present.**

### 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 potential areas of control and 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.
- 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?

\* This term is inclusive of ex-partner's who have an on-going relationship with the children.  
July 30, 2006

**If domestic violence is identified, use the following questions to help you work with the survivor to develop a plan. If no domestic violence or coercive control is identified, then you can stop and continue protocol with child(ren).**

### **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?
- Has (partner)'s behavior ever made you feel afraid for the safety of your children? In what way(s)?
- Have you or 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's?
- 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 partner's level of violence more explicitly**



- What has been the worse violence your (partner) has done?
- Overall, is (partner)'s 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? (in the past or would in the future.)
- Has (partner) ever been threatening or violent to anyone other than you?

### **Explore the primary caretaker's safety planning more explicitly**



- What are your hopes with regard to this relationship?
- What do you do day-to-day to reduce the negative impact of the abuse on the children?
- If (partner) were to become violent today, what options do you have?
- 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 abuser accountability, go to page 7.**

## B. Questions for Children

### Explore the children's relationship with the partner or ex-partner



- 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?
- Do (caretaker) and (partner) ever fight?
- 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 and (choose age appropriate word) 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?

**If domestic violence is confirmed, the following will help in further assess the adverse impact the abuser's behavior may be having on the children. If no domestic violence or coercive control is identified, then you can stop and continue protocol with the partner or ex-partner.**

### Explore the children's reactions to the violence:



- Can you tell me about the most recent time (or referral incident) when (caretaker) and (partner) were 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 children's perceptions of the family and the abuser.



- Tell me some good things about your family.

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

### Notes:

## C. Questions for Partner or Ex-partner

### Exploring the partner or ex-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 your partner's parenting?
- Have your disagreements or arguments ever turned physical? Describe what happened?
- Have you ever pushed, pulled, slapped, punched, kicked or hit anyone in your family?
- Would you describe yourself as being jealous or having a temper?

**If domestic violence is confirmed, the following will help you to develop a plan for intervening with the abuser. If no domestic violence or coercive control is identified, then you can stop the protocol interviewing process.**

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



- Can you tell me about the most recent instance when you have been abusive or violent toward (caretaker)?
- 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 affected the children?
- How does your violent or abusive behavior impact you?

### Explore the partner's prior attempts to end his abuse and the steps he 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 (caretaker) leaves, what are you willing to do to continue to support your children financially?
- If you move out or (caretaker) leaves, will you be able to stay away for a period of time?
- 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 abuser (accidentally or on purpose)?
- 2) Has the abuser engaged in “cruel and unusual” punishment?
- 3) Has the abuser used the child to control, hurt or threaten survivor?
- 4) Has the abuser deprived the child of basic needs (e.g. medical visits, food, etc)?
- 5) Has the batter “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) Identify the survivor’s prior safety planning (formal and informal).
- 2) What resources does the survivor have to keep herself and her children safe?
- 3) Does she 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 she needs to remain safe?

**When possible, only substantiate against the abuser and not the survivor.**

After gathering this information, work with the survivor to create a safety plan that builds on her prior safety planning, her critical supports, financial resources and attempts, when possible, to keep her and the children together. (Expecting fluidity in the situation, e.g. the abuser to altering his tactics of abuse, and using the court/criminal justice system to reduce the risk to the children and adult survivor should always be a regular part of any case plan).

### C. Batterer intervention & accountability planning

- 1) Does the abuser identify the effects of his behavior on the children or say that his behavior is a problem?
- 2) Is the abuser willing to take steps to reduce the risk he represents to the children?
- 3) Can the police/criminal justice system be used to reduce the risk he 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 abusers should include the following steps: (1) a service agreement that identifies specific actions the abuser needs to take, (2) using the power of criminal justice system or juvenile court to reduce the risk abusers represent or enforce his compliance with DCF (e.g. criminal court conditions that the abuser comply with DCF), and (3) includes a substantiation of the abuser for the child abuse and/or neglect.