

Investigation Relationship Interview Process

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

The process is broken into four parts:

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

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

Using this process will help you develop a plan that:

1. Accounts for the risk the perpetrator 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; and
3. Uses strategies that directly intervene with the perpetrator 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 perpetrator 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 perpetrator 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 Caregiver

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 afterward to the results (bruises, separation from family, imprisonment of perpetrator, 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 behaviour 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 worst violence your (partner) has done?
- Overall, is (partner)'s violent behaviour getting worse or getting better?
- Are you currently afraid of (partner)?
- How might (partner) react to having social workers 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-partners who have an on-going relationship with the children.

- Has (partner)'s behaviour 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 behaviour? 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 behaviour? (e.g. trouble sleeping, difficulties in school, aggressive behaviour, withdrawal, etc.)

Explore the primary caregiver's safety planning

- 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 (padre, 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 (along with the courts/police) do to help you feel safer?

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

Notes:

B. Questions for Children:

If the child is aware of the domestic abuse, 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 caregiver) and (partner). (Ask for details about where, when and how it occurred. Try to get specific details about the violence and ask questions about it 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 afterward? (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 behaviour:



- How much do you see (partner)?
- How do you like spending time with (partner)?
- Do (caregiver) and (partner) get along most of the time?
- What happens when (partner) is angry or unhappy?
- When (caregiver) and (partner) are fighting, upset, or are not getting along, does anybody ever get hit or hurt? (e.g. the child, parents, siblings)
- When (caregiver) 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 (caregiver) 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 (caregiver) 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 perpetrator 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 afterward 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 (caregiver)?
- How much time do you spend with your (caregiver's) 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 (caregiver) disagree?
- How do you demonstrate, through your actions, that you support (caregiver)'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 towards (caregiver)?
- What do you believe is the most negative consequence of your abusive behaviour?
- When you (acknowledged abusive behaviour), do you know how that is for (caregiver)?
- When you (acknowledged abusive behaviour), do you know how that is for the children?
- What else do you know about how your (acknowledged abusive behaviour) has affected your children?
- How does your violent and abusive behaviour 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?

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- Have you ever been referred to anger management or domestic abuse counseling?
 - Will you take steps to get rid of weapons/ get into substance abuse treatment/ engage in domestic abuse 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 perpetrator accountability, go to page 7.

Notes:

D. Questions to help with assessment and work planning

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

- 1) Have the children been physically or sexually injured by the perpetrator (accidentally or on purpose)?
- 2) Has the perpetrator engaged in "cruel and unusual" punishment?
- 3) Has the perpetrator used the child to control, hurt or threaten the survivor?
- 4) Has the perpetrator deprived the child of basic needs (e.g. medical visits, food, etc.)?
- 5) Has the perpetrator "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 perpetrator 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 perpetrator's reaction to the plan, e.g. the perpetrator alters his tactics of abuse in response to the survivor's safety plan or the actions of court/child protection.

C. Perpetrator intervention & accountability planning

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

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

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

