

Domestic Violence Interview Guide

(Form and Instructions)

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INSTRUCTIONS FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INTERVIEW GUIDE

Talking about Domestic Violence

This interview guide is designed to help you identify domestic violence and coercive controlling behaviors in family law cases. It should be used with all adults who are parties, or who play a parental role in a case, regardless of gender, marital status, sexual orientation, or parenting status. Screening for domestic violence is often complicated by the fact that victims: (1) may not know why it might be in the interests of their children or themselves to disclose abuse; (2) may be unclear or concerned about the ramifications of disclosure; (3) may not trust you with information about domestic violence, in spite your good intentions; and (4) may not perceive that their current level of risk warrants disclosure. For these and other reasons, victims are often reluctant to disclose abuse. Screening for domestic violence, therefore, is not a one-time event, but should occur periodically over the course of your involvement in the case. Bear in mind that talking about abuse may be an emotionally difficult experience for the interviewee, as well as for you. It is important to plan accordingly.

Introduction to the Interviewing Guide

The **first column** of this guide seeks general information across seven broad topic areas: (1) personal interactions; (2) access to resources; (3) children and parenting; (4) control of daily life; (5) emotional abuse; (6) physical abuse; and (7) sexual abuse. Below each broad topic area are examples of the kinds of things you might ask about in order to help you identify whether domestic violence is, or may be, present. Research shows that asking behaviorally specific questions is the most effective method of screening for abuse and coercive control.

Learning about these seven broad topic areas can help you identify important issues in the case. It can help you assess the relative capacities of the parties to meaningfully participate in alternative dispute resolution processes. It can help you recognize the kinds of protections that ought to be put in place to ensure that court proceedings are safe and effective. And, it can help you and the parties with whom you are working to determine together what the most beneficial and realistic outcomes might be for themselves and their children.

The **second column** suggests follow-up areas to explore when any domestic violence issues are identified or disclosed under column one. These discussion areas will help you gain a deeper understanding of the nature, context, severity and implications of domestic violence and coercive controlling behaviors.

The **third column** contains a checklist of key concepts, behaviors, and dynamics to listen for in the narrative responses to the questions asked in columns one and two.

Practical Considerations

For safety reasons, care must be taken in determining where, when and how to conduct this interview. *The interview should not be conducted in the presence or proximity of any other party or interested person* unless s/he is an advocate or support person and it is determined that the

presence of that person will not create any confidentiality problems or threaten any applicable professional privilege, such as the attorney-client privilege.

Before conducting the interview, you should explain to the interviewee:

- (1) That the professional standards that guide your work require that you look into certain issues in every case, including domestic violence, and that knowing about any history of domestic violence will help you carry out your functions and fulfill your professional responsibilities.
- (2) What your specific role and function is in relation to the case, including:
 - □ What you were appointed, hired or referred to do;
 - ☐ How you intend to do it;
 - □ What you will and won't share with the court, the opposing party, and others; and
 - □ Whether the information will appear in the record and/or a pleading or report.
- (3) The scope and/or limits of confidentiality and your duty to report suspected child abuse and certain serious crimes.

If a person discloses domestic violence, you should:

- (1) Obtain as much information as possible in order to fully understand its implications, without confining yourself to the topics listed in this guide;
- (2) Assess with the person the risks s/he may be facing, including risks of injury, death or other dangers, especially those arising from disclosing abuse; and
- (3) Refer the person to a qualified domestic violence advocate for safety planning assistance and a more in-depth risk assessment, as appropriate.

Remember that risk from domestic violence is never static, that it is difficult to predict, that it can fluctuate over time, and that it often escalates once it has been disclosed and/or the parties separate.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INTERVIEW GUIDE

Adapted from Client Screening to Identify Domestic Violence Victimization, Domestic Abuse Committee of the Family Law Section of the Minnesota State Bar Association, 2010; Holtzworth-Munroe, Beck & Applegate (2010), Mediator's Assessment of Safety Issues and Concerns; and Janet Johnston, et al., IN THE NAME OF THE CHILD (2d ed.), Springer Publishing Co., 2009.

1. Personal Interactions	Discussion Areas:	What to Listen For:
A. Let's start by talking about your current relationship with B. How comfortable are you interacting with now? Being alone together Meeting face-to-face Talking by phone Emailing or texting Public encounters C. Do you have any concerns, fears or anxieties that I should be aware of? D. What worries you most?	 Quality of interactions Ability to express views Trust in other's judgment Reliance on other's word Cost of disagreement Post-separation changes Prior separations Snapshots Happiest moments Most worrisome moment Scariest moments Decision-making history Stressors Violence Alcohol/drugs Physical/mental health Criminal activity Poverty 	□ Autonomy □ Control □ Balance of power □ Fear/danger/safety □ Vulnerability □ Dependability/predictability □ Dis/honesty/deception □ Dis/respect □ Manipulation □ Coercion/intimidation □ Degradation/humiliation □ Degradation/humiliation □ Sabotage □ Surveillance □ Volatility □ Jealousy/possessiveness □ Entitlement
2. Access to Resources	Discussion Areas:	What to Listen For:
A. I'd like to get a sense of your economic wellbeing.B. Do you have access to your own resources, like	 History/detail Ability to meet basic needs 	 □ Control/Rulemaking □ Dependence □ Isolation □ Denial of financial support
money, bank accounts, food, housing, transportation and healthcare?	3. Ability to meet obligations	☐ Child abuse/neglect☐ Child dependency☐ Blackmail☐
C. Who decides how you spend your money and manage your financial affairs?	4. Recent changes	 □ Financial sabotage □ Forced criminal activity □ Prostitution/pornography □ Theft/drug trafficking

3. Children/Parenting	Discussion Areas:	What to Listen For:
A. Let's talk about your children.		 □ Direct physical abuse □ Child sexual abuse □ Moral corruption □ Pornography □ Racism/sexism □ Criminal activity
B. Do you have any concerns about your children or fears for their safety?	1. What worries you most?	□ Post-separation violence □ Intimidation/trauma/terror □ Children treated as property □ Lack of attunement to kids □ Denial of kids' feelings □ Boundary violations
C. How are parenting time arrangements currently being worked out? Division of duties Parenting skills/capacities Parenting concerns/conflicts Children's adjustment Access/exchange issues Satisfaction with the plan	2. Capacity for joint decisions a. Common beliefs/values b. Parental involvement c. Trust in parental judgment d. Support of other parent e. Respect for other parent f. Nurture/support of kids g. Conflict resolution skills h. Developmental stage(s)	□ Parenting styles □ Inconsistent parenting □ Erratic role reversals □ Unstable home environment
D. Has ever used or threatened to use the children to manipulate, control, or monitor you?	 3. Interference with care 4. Undermining authority 5. Threats to: a. Take children away b. Harm children c. File CPS reports d. Deport e. Evict 	 □ Minimizing kids' needs □ Denying effects of violence □ Punishing kids being kids □ Criticizing kids being kids □ Lack of empathy for kids □ Drawing kids into abuse □ Grilling kids for information □ Using kids as weapons
E. How are your children doing now?	6. Post-separation changes	□ Children acting out □ Children using violence □ Children mimicking abuse □ Children withdrawn/clingy □ Age-inappropriate behaviors □ Torn allegiances/loyalties □ Changes in school work □ Changes in social life

4. Control of Daily Life	Discussion Areas:	What to Listen For:
A. I'd like to get a sense of	1. Detail	☐ Micro-management of life
how much freedom you have in your everyday life.		□ Rulemaking □ Demands for obedience
☐ To come/go as you please	2. Frequency	□ Compliance/resistance
☐ To manage your own time	1 3	☐ Monitoring/surveillance
☐ To make own decisions	2.6	
☐ To set your own priorities☐ To interact with others☐	3. Severity	□ Disrespect of privacy
Can you talk a little about		☐ Disregard of boundaries
that?	4. Intent of other's behavior	□ Jealousy/possessiveness
		□ Expectations of loyalty
B. Is there anything that gets	5. Meaning of behavior to you	
in your way of doing the	5. Wearing of behavior to you	□ Entitlement/privilege
things you want or need to		□ Power/control/omnipotence
do?	6. Effect on:a. Interactions	
C. Has ever:	b. Relationships	□ Fear/intimidation/dread
□ Followed you	c. Communications	□ Danger/insecurity
□ Often checked up on you	d. Self/children	□ Unpredictability/instability
☐ Examined your mail/email☐ Examined phone records	e. Parenting skills/capacities	
☐ Hacked into email/accounts		□ Stalking
☐ Grilled you/timed activities	7. Change:	□ Hostage-taking
□ Used others to spy on you	a. Over time	□ Trafficking
☐ Invaded your space/privacy☐ Misused social network sites☐	b. Pre/post pregnancyc. Pre/post separation	
iviisused social network sites	c. The post separation	
D. Has ever		
physically restrained you, forbidden you from leaving,		
made you do things you		
didn't want to do, or		
punished you for defying		
his/her wishes?		
E. Has ever shown		
up unannounced, contacted		
you against your will, or left something for you to find in		
order to scare or intimidate		
you?		

5. Sexual Abuse	Discussion Questions:	What to Listen For:
A. While it is uncomfortable to talk about these kinds of things, it's very important for me to know if ever pressured or forced you to do sexual things that you did	 1. Detail 2. In front of whom? □ Children □ Family □ Friends 	□ Safety/risk/lethality □ Sexual assault/coercion □ Degradation/humiliation □ Use of pornography □ Control/intimidation/terror
not want to do or that made you scared, uncomfortable, or ashamed. Has anything like that ever happened?	 □ Co-workers □ Public □ Nobody – just in private 3. Frequency	□ Escalation□ Jealousy/possessiveness□ Capacity to negotiate
	4. Severity	□ Relative bargaining power □ Capacity to co-parent □ Capacity to communicate
B. Has ever interfered with your decisions about birth control, pregnancy, and/or safe sex?	5. Intent of other's behavior6. Meaning of behavior to you	□ Danger to children□ Moral corruption of kids
	7. Effect on:a. Interactionsb. Relationships	☐ Impact on children ☐ Threat of child abuse ☐ Trauma/fear/anxiety
C. Has ever used your image, or forced or pressured you to use your own image, to engage in	c. Communicationsd. Self/childrene. Parenting skills/capacity	☐ Inappropriate boundaries ☐ Primary perpetration
sexting or pornography?	8. Change:a. Over timeb. Pre/post pregnancyc. Pre/post separation	☐ Offensive/defensive wounds ☐ Proportionality of force ☐ Criminal justice response ☐ Protection orders ☐ Defiance of authority
D. Is there anything else you think I should know about's sexual behavior towards you?	9. Injuries10. Medical attention11. Hospital visits12. Calls for help/to police	□ Response to abuse □ Fight □ Flight □ Freeze
	12. Cans for help/to police13. Arrests14. Convictions/sanctions15. Orders for protection16. Protection order violations	LI FICEZC

6. Physical Abuse	Discussion Areas:	What to Listen For:
A. Let's turn to your	1. Detail	□ Safety/risk of danger
personal safety, both now		□ Potential lethality
and in the past. Has	2. In front of whom?	□ Recent escalation
ever used or threatened to	□ Children	□ Fear/dread/doom
use physical force or	□ Family	0 4 1 1 2 11 2
violence against you or the children?	□ Friends □ Co-workers	□ Control, intimidation
cinuren:	□ Public	☐ Manipulation ☐ Entitlement/privilege/power
☐ Hold, pin down, restrain	□ Nobody – just in private	□ Rulemaking
☐ Kneel, stand or sit upon	1 1000dy Just in private	□ Demands for obedience
☐ Tie up, bind, gag	3. Frequency	□ Compliance/resistance
☐ Push, shove, shake, grab	4. Severity	□ Humiliation
☐ Scratch, pull hair, shave hair		□ Autonomy/personhood
□ Twist arm	5. Intent of other's behavior	□ Equity/trust/security
		□ Predictability/stability
□ Bite	6. Meaning of behavior to you	□ Capacity to negotiate
□ Spit on	7 1765-4	□ Relative bargaining power
□ Urinate upon	7. Effect on: a. Interactions	□ Capacity to co-parent
□ Slap	b. Relationships	□ Capacity to communicate
☐ Hit or punch	c. Communications	☐ Ability to meet kids' needs
□ Kick or stomp	d. Self/children	□ Differentiation of self/other
☐ Strike w/ or throw object at	e. Parenting skills/capacity	□ Trauma/fear/anxiety
-		☐ Healthy attachments
□ Choke, strangle	8. Change:	□ Appropriate boundaries
□ Burn	a. Over time	□ Perspective of children
□ Poke, stab, cut	b. Pre/post pregnancy	
= Withhald for 1/2-11-4:	c. Pre/post separation	☐ Hopelessness
☐ Withhold food/medication	0 Injurios	□ Futility
☐ Disable medical equipment	9. Injuries10. Medical attention	□ Primary aggressor
	11. Hospital visits	□ Proportionality of force
B. What's the worst thing	11. Hospital Visits	☐ Offensive/defensive wounds
has ever done to you?	12. Calls for help/to police	□ Criminal justice interveners
	13. Arrests	☐ Defiance of authority
	14. Convictions/sanctions	
	15. Protection orders	□ Response to abuse
C. What's the scariest thing	16. Protection order violations	□ Fight
has ever done to you?		□ Flight
		□ Freeze

7. Emotional Abuse	Discussion Areas:	What to Listen For:
A. Let's talk more about	1. Detail	□ Attacks on sanity
how you and relate to		□ Attacks on dignity
one another. Can you		□ Extreme cruelty
describe how treats	2. In front of whom?	☐ Humiliation/embarrassment
you as a person?	□ Children	
	□ Family□ Friends	= Entropment/peralygic
B. Does ever:	□ Co-workers	☐ Entrapment/paralysis☐ Hopelessness/futility
☐ Insult you or put you down	□ Public	☐ Trauma/fear/anxiety
□ Ridicule you in public	□ Nobody – just in private	□ Sabotage
□ Purposely humiliate you	1 Nobody Just III private	□ Sabotage
□ Play mind games	3. Frequency	
	3. Frequency	□ Obsessive jealousy
C. Does ever:		□ Narcissism
□ Intimidate you	4. Severity	□ Entitlement
□ Yell or scream at you	J	
□ Act aggressively toward you		
	5. Intent of other's behavior	□ Blackmail
D. Does ever:		□ Access to weapons
☐ Get jealous or possessive		
☐ Accuse you of infidelity	6. Meaning of behavior to you	
E Danie and interfere		□ Seemingly innocent acts
E. Does _ ever interfere with:	7. Effect on:	with hidden meaning
□ Your work/school life	a. Interactions	
☐ Your social life	b. Relationships	□ Response to abuse
□ Your sleep	c. Communications	□ Fight
☐ Your healthcare/medications	d. Self/children	□ Flight
	e. Parenting skills/capacities	□ Freeze
F. Has ever threatened		
to:		
□ Kill you or the children	8. Change:	
□ Kill him/herself	a. Over time	
☐ Harm you or the children	b. Pre/post pregnancy	
☐ Harm someone you care for	c. Pre/post separation	
☐ Harm or kill pets		
G. Has ever:		
□ Destroyed your property		
☐ Threatened you w/ weapon		
□ Put your life in danger		
□ Disabled car/equipment		
☐ Driven recklessly to scare		

Implications of Domestic Violence for Safety and	Parenting:
Immediate Safety Concerns:	Risk Assessment Factors: ☐ Increase in frequency/severity ☐ Access to firearms ☐ Recent separation ☐ Unemployment ☐ Use or threat to use lethal weapon ☐ Threat to kill ☐ Avoidance of arrest for dom.viol.
See Risk Assessment Factors and Questions $1(A)$ - (D) , $3(B)$, $4(E)$, $5(F)$ - (G) , $6(A)$ - (C) , $7(A)$ - (D)	□ Step-children□ Forced sex□ Attempted strangulation
Immediate Economic Concerns:	☐ Illegal drug use ☐ Alcohol dependency ☐ Control of daily activities ☐ Violent or constant jealousy ☐ Assault during pregnancy ☐ Threatened or attempted suicide ☐ Threat to harm children ☐ Belief in capacity to kill ☐ Stalking
See Questions $2(A)$ - (C) , $4(C)$, $5(E)$	☐ Major mental illness
Immediate Parenting Concerns:	
See Questions 1(A)-(C), 2(A)-(C), 3(A)-(E), 4(A)-(E), 5(E)-(G), 6(A)-(C), 7(A)-(D)	
Long-Term Concerns:	