NEW YORK STATE OFFICE OF CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

Helpful Things to Say to or Ask a Non-Offending Parent (NOP)

Adapted from "Team Decision-making and Domestic Violence: Guidelines for Facilitators" (Appendix A), (2009) Family Violence Prevention Fund (now Futures Without Violence).

This is not a script and you are not expected to say everything on DV cases. These are concrete examples of statements and questions that can help you work effectively on DV cases. **This conversation should take place when the DV offender is NOT present.**

Establishing a partnership/building rapport

1. I'm worried about your safety as well as your child(ren)'s safety. What are your worries?
2. I'm sorry about what has been happening to you and your child(ren). How can we help?
3. Does he* understand why we're meeting with you alone? We are aware that our being involved can make things more dangerous for you.
4. People sometimes stay with partners who treat them badly, or even hit them. They do this for a lot of reasons—for financial support, out of love, they feel sorry for them, they're afraid to leave, they can't afford to leave, they have a child together, and so on. Can you tell me about your situation?
5. My office will make every effort to avoid sharing with your partner anything you tell us about his behavior. We won't tell him what you've said (unless you tell us we can), but if, for instance, his attorney requests records that contain this information, we will let you know what's happening.

Exploring DV offender's relationship with and impact on the child(ren)

1. When things are going really well between your partner and the child(ren), what does that look like? What is he doing? What is the child doing? Do they have fun together? Does he help with schoolwork? Does he know their friends?
2. What has the child(ren) seen and/or heard? Even if parents try to protect them, children are often aware that a parent is threatening the other, hitting the other, breaking things, and so on, even when parents try to protect them. What have you done to try to protect your child(ren)?
3. Children exposed to fighting or violence might have nightmares, worry about being away from you, have trouble in school, or become withdrawn or aggressive. Older children might use drugs or alcohol, become violent, or struggle academically. How do you think your child(ren) might have been affected by the violence in your home?
4. Has your partner ever hit or scared the child(ren)? Has he ever assaulted you while you were holding your child *(e.g., pushed you, slapped you, punched you, grabbed you)*?
5. Are you ever afraid to leave your child(ren) alone with him?

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6. What worries you about your child(ren)'s behavior? What do you feel good about?
7. Have you talked with your child(ren) about what to do if he becomes violent? Safety planning with kids can help them feel safer because they know what to do *(go to a neighbor's house, stay out of the fight, call 911, etc.)*.

Assessing danger and risk

1. What does your partner do that makes you most afraid?
2. Has he ever threatened to kill you, the child(ren), or himself?
3. Has he ever threatened to take the child(ren) and leave?
4. Does he seem depressed *(e.g., does he have trouble getting motivated to go to work or take the kids to school, does he sleep a lot)*? Does he have a mental health diagnosis? Does he take medication?
5. Is he an extremely jealous person? How do you know when he is jealous? What does he say or do?
6. Does he drink or use drugs? How frequently? How does he behave when he's using?
7. Does he have access to weapons? Has he ever threatened to use them on you?
8. Are his behaviors getting worse, or is the violence happening more frequently?
9. What's the worst thing he's ever done to you? Has his behavior seemed bizarre in any way?
10. When you've taken steps to protect yourself or the child(ren) in the past *(e.g., leaving, filing an order of protection, fighting back, keeping him from hitting the child[ren], etc.)*, how has he responded?
11. Have there been nonviolent periods when you felt that he had changed and things were going really well in your relationship? What was happening at that time? What was different for you and for him? Did you see different behaviors in the child(ren) during that time?
12. How do you think he will respond to our agency being involved with your family?

Substance abuse and mental health issues *(if applicable)*

The purpose of the questions below is to promote child safety and identify service needs.

Prescription Medications

1. Are you taking any prescription drugs? For what conditions?
2. Do you take your medications regularly and at the correct dosage? If not, does your partner have anything to do with your not taking your medications or taking too much of them?

Illegal Drugs and/or Alcohol

1. Do you use illegal drugs or have a problem with drinking too much?

2. In what ways does drinking or using drugs make your partner's abuse easier to bear? How has it made your life harder?
3. Were you using before the violence began? How has your use of drugs or alcohol changed since you became involved with him? Do you use with him? Does he encourage or force you to keep using? What does that look like? What's going on when that happens?
4. Have you been clean or sober at times in the past? What made that possible for you? What was going on in your life at that time?
5. People who are being hurt and are using drugs or alcohol have a harder time keeping themselves and their children safe. How can we help you make sure your child(ren) will be safe, whether you're using or not?

Mental Health Issues

1. Have you ever received a mental health diagnosis? Have you ever been treated for a mental health issue? What was the outcome?
2. Do you often feel depressed *(have trouble getting out of bed in the morning, feel worthless, etc.)*?
3. Can you tell us about when you first started feeling depressed? How does this affect your ability to do the things you need to do for yourself and your child(ren)?

Assessing and planning for safety

1. What do you do to keep you and your child(ren) safe when your partner is being controlling or abusive? How has this worked in the past? Are there things you've tried that haven't worked?
2. What does the child(ren) do to stay safe when your partner becomes abusive? How does the child(ren) know when to do that? How has that worked in the past? Are there things that haven't worked?
3. Who among your family or friends know what's been happening, or who could you tell? Who has been helpful in keeping you and your child(ren) safe?
4. We'd like to connect you with someone who can help with DV safety planning. Is it OK to call them now?
5. I'm concerned about what might happen when you go home *(with or without)* the child(ren). What do you think your partner will do? How can we help you and your child(ren) stay safe?
6. If I need to reach you or want to check in about your safety, how can I contact you safely? Should I call you, or will you call me? Should we communicate through a third person? *(e.g., if the NOP's mother speaks to her every day, the mother can check in about safety and let you know so you don't raise the partner's suspicions by calling frequently.)*
7. Is there anything else I can do to help?

Planning for engagement of the DV offender

1. What do you think can we talk to him about, and what do we need to avoid?
2. What are the things about your family or relationship that he is most proud of?
3. What do you see as his strengths? How can we get started on the right foot with him?
4. We'll keep you informed about our conversations with him. We are aware that our being involved can increase danger or risk for your family.
5. Sometimes it can be helpful if we "take the heat" for the things that might happen next *(e.g., the DV offender having to leave the home, the NOP taking out an order of protection, the NOP going to stay with another family member, etc.)*. Would that be a helpful thing for us to do?

Helpful Things to Say to or Ask a DV Offender*

This is not a script and you are not expected to say everything on this list. These are concrete examples of statements and questions that can help you work effectively on DV cases. **Please note that both engagement and accountability statements need to be used in the same conversation.**

Building rapport

1. Both fathers and mothers are important in the lives of their child(ren). You are important to your child(ren).
2. Why do you think you're here today?
3. Talking about these things can be really hard—sometimes people feel judged and defensive. I just want to hear your point of view.
4. We heard a lot of good things about you from your partner and your child(ren) *(give specific examples)*. It sounds like you are really trying to be a good father *(provider, stepparent, etc.)*.
5. *(If needed)* You appear to be angry. That's understandable, although I'm worried that it might get in the way of our really hearing each other and talking about your child(ren). Do you need to take a break for a few minutes before we continue?

Engaging the DV offender as a parent and exploring his relationship with the children

1. In our experience, most men** really want to be good parents. What do you think it means to be a good parent? A good partner to your wife/girlfriend?
2. Can you tell us about what you do with your child(ren)? What does it look like when things are going really well between you and your child(ren)? What would I be seeing you do?
3. What do you feel you do really well as a parent/provider? Are there things you think you could do better?
4. What worries you about your child(ren)? What do you think your child(ren) might be worried about?
5. Our goal is to figure out with you what needs to happen so your child(ren) is kept safe and feels secure. Even though we may not see eye-to-eye on everything, I think we share that goal—do you agree? Can you tell me what you have done to keep your child(ren) safe?
6. We know that men get a lot of messages as they're growing up that shape their beliefs about relationships and how to be a man. Sometimes it can be hard to sort through those messages and figure out how **you** really want to be in a relationship. How do you think men earn respect in families? How do you earn respect in your family?

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* Adapted from *Accountability and Connection with Abusive Men in Child Protection: A New Approach to Increasing Family Safety.* F. Mederos (2004). Futures Without Violence (formerly Family Violence Prevention Fund).

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Accountability for behavior and making changes

1. Children are often aware that one parent is threatening or hitting the other, breaking things, etc., even if you've tried to protect them. What has the child(ren) seen and/or heard in your home?
2. When you were a child, was there ever violence in your home? How did that make you feel? I believe you want your child(ren) to have better memories than that. How do you want your child(ren) to remember his or her childhood? How do you want your child(ren) to remember you?
3. What do you wish people had done to protect you when you were growing up? What do you think would help your child(ren) right now?
4. Children exposed to fighting or violence might have nightmares, have trouble in school, or become withdrawn or aggressive. Older kids might use drugs or alcohol, be violent themselves, or struggle academically. How do you think your child(ren) may have been affected by your behavior?
5. Do you know that there's a place where you can get help and support for yourself? Are you interested in checking it out? It would be a really positive step for you and would show your family and us how much you want to be a good parent. *(Describe the Batterer Intervention Program [BIP].)*
    a. *(If the DV offender is in a BIP)* Can you tell me something about what you've learned? Have you made changes in your life as a result? *(If you get only a cursory answer, or "no")* Do you understand that going to the group is only part of what needs to happen? We need to see that you're applying what you're learning to your life. How are your child(ren) and your partner safer than they were in the past?
6. Men who do these things can change, and we can help you get connected to services that will help.

DV offender substance use and mental health-related issues

1. Do you use any illegal or prescription drugs, or drink alcohol? Under what circumstances?
2. In what ways does drinking or using drugs make your life easier? How does it make life harder?
3. Have you been clean or sober at times in the past? What made that possible?
4. People who are using drugs or alcohol might do things they wouldn't do otherwise, or they might not be able to keep their child(ren) safe. How do you think your use of drugs or alcohol affects how you act? How can you make sure your child(ren) is safe, whether you're using or not?
5. Do you have a mental health diagnosis? Do you take medication?
6. *(If the diagnosis is depression)* Can you tell me about when you first started feeling depressed/like it was hard to get out of bed in the morning, etc.? How did that affect your ability to do the things you needed to do?

Exploring cultural role models as a potential motivator of change

1. When you were growing up, were there men in your community whom you admired and respected? What did they do, or how did they behave, that made you admire and respect them?
2. It sounds like you saw a lot of violence in your home as a child. Did you know other men in your community who acted differently than your father did, who treated their families with respect?
3. How do you want your children to remember you? What kind of legacy do you want to leave for them? What do you want them to learn about what it means to be a *(Latino, African-American)* man? *(This question is important regardless of cultural background, and can be adapted appropriately.)*

Respectful limit setting/dealing with tense situations *(if applicable)*

1. When you behave in this way *(describe what has just happened),* it is threatening/ disruptive and we can't get anything done. We want to get your side of things. I know that the process doesn't feel good. I understand that you are upset, but if this behavior continues I'll have to end the meeting and ask you to leave.
2. We need to be able to continue this conversation in a way that helps us make a good decision. You may not be aware of it, but you are *(interrupting, getting very loud, making threatening gestures, etc.)*. This has to be a two-way conversation. Can we continue?
3. Sometimes people feel like they are being judged – I don't think you're a bad person and I want to hear what you have to say. However, if you aren't able to *(sit down, lower your voice, etc.)*, I'll have to end our conversation.
4. We may not be able to agree on this point right now, and that's OK. I suggest that we think it over and come back to this later. I would like to ask you about something else, though. Could you tell me more about *(what you and your child(ren) do for fun, how the child(ren) is doing in school, etc.)*.

Universal messages about the effect of violence on relationships

1. Even if children don't show they're upset, witnessing this kind of behavior does affect them. I know you are not trying to scare your child(ren) or create bad memories, but this is likely to happen. Please get help. Do it for your child(ren). Try the Batterer Intervention Program.
2. Your behavior will have a lifelong impact on your child(ren). It's never too late to turn it around. You have the power to change things.
3. You are an example for your child(ren) in everything you do. They/he/she will carry these memories of you forever.
4. When you hurt your partner, you also hurt your child(ren).
5. As parents, we are teaching our children all the time. What do you want to teach your child(ren)?