

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to fighting or violence might have nightmares, worry about being away from you, have trouble in school, or become withdrawn or aggressive.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?

* The use of gendered pronouns in this document reflects the reality that most victims of domestic violence are women, and most perpetrators of domestic violence are men. However, domestic violence occurs in gay and lesbian relationships and can be equally dangerous in a same-sex relationship as in a heterosexual relationship. Less frequently, a woman may be violent and abusive with a male partner. Change pronouns as needed.

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?