

## Overview of Assessment of Children's Exposure to Domestic Violence

### Question:

What if you cannot interview the child alone? (For example, if you are doing in-home interviewing, the parent is hovering or not allowing the child to have his own space.)

When confronted with this situation, the first question to think about is: Why is this parent reluctant to leave the area or to have me interview this child? It is important to assess the possible reasons which may include the following:

1. Age/developmental stage: what is the age of the child? A parent may be reluctant to leave a young child with someone they do not know, particularly to talk about emotionally sensitive topics, and the child may demonstrate anxiety or wariness about being left alone.
  - a. Possible worker responses:
    - i. If the child is very young (age 4 or younger) it may too stressful or upsetting to separate the parent and child. Adapt your interview accordingly.
    - ii. IF the child is from 5-12, ask the parent to explain the interview process to the child. Obtain the parent's support or permission for doing the interview separately. Explain something about it yourself; say how long it will last; offer the child an activity that will make him/her more comfortable.
    - iii. If the child is an adolescent, explain that it is Department practice to give adolescents privacy in talking with a worker. If the parent refuses, you must adapt accordingly.
2. The parent's and the child's understanding of the purpose of the interview. What have they been told? Do they understand what will happen during the interview? Is the child fearful of talking about family business? Has the child been directly told not to talk to the interviewer?
  - a. Possible worker responses:
    - i. Clarify the purpose of the interview with the parent. Assist the parent in explaining the purpose of the interview
    - ii. Ask the parent to reassure the child that it is OK to talk about what has been going on in the family
    - iii. If you suspect that the child is fearful or has been directly told not to talk to you, do not interview the child separately.
3. Direct interference by a parent who wants to hear what the child is saying, or does not want the child to talk about certain things.
  - a. Possible worker responses:
    - i. Ask the parents directly if you might have some time alone with the child. Explain that this is the usual procedure for your interview

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process.

- ii. ii. If a parent refuses, either conduct a general exploratory interview (school, hobbies, some very general questions about the family, etc. , or do not interview.

Summary: Do not compromise the child's psychological and physical safety by putting pressure on the child to talk when he/she is not comfortable doing so, or when you are concerned that a parent may be intimidating or interfering with the interview. If you are in doubt about the safety of the situation, do not interview the child; gather as much information as is possible from other sources and note in your report that you were not able to interview the child and your assessment of the reasons the interview did not occur.