



## Screening for Domestic Violence

Updated May 2016

Domestic Violence (DV) often is an underreported and unrecognized crime. DV creates safety, power, and control issues; when DV is not identified it diminishes responders' ability to provide effective and safe responses to families. DV screening should be a routinely administered with each family. The practice of routine DV screening not only increases the likelihood of DV being reported, but it also increases the likelihood that providers will be able to identify DV when it is disclosed.

Screening for DV and assessment of identified DV should only be instituted as part of a larger DV initiative among all entities which includes training to build knowledge and skill development, collaboration among responding entities, and the development of proper procedures and policies. Without this careful review of current knowledge and patterns of practice as well as policies and procedural guidelines, providers might misuse information about DV screening and inadvertently increase the danger to DV survivors and their children. Screening and responding to DV are only meaningful when adequate policies, procedures and services are in place.

Keep the following points in mind when screening for DV:

- It is imperative that DV screening questions be asked without causing further risk of harm to DV survivors and their children. When asking DV screening questions, each family member should be interviewed separately. The DV screening questions should be preceded with a framing statement in order to introduce and normalize the questions. An example might be: **“I have some questions that I ask everyone I work with. I’m going to ask you these questions now.”**
- All efforts should be made to screen families in the client’s language of choice and cultural barriers should be identified during screening.
- Ask behavioral questions that seek descriptions of behavior and not just the impact or meaning of behaviors.
- Ask questions in a calm, matter-of-fact manner. When responses are vague or confusing, briefly ask further questions for clarification.
- Always thank the person for the information.

### Suggested DV Screening Questions:

1. “Have you been hit, kicked, punched, or otherwise hurt by someone within the past year? If so, by whom?”
2. “Do you feel unsafe in your current relationship?”
3. “Is there a partner from a previous relationship who is making you feel unsafe now?”
4. “Have you ever felt controlled or isolated by a current or past partner?”

If there is a “yes” answer to any of the four questions, DV is indicated.

**Supporting DV Survivor Disclosures:**

It can be very difficult for a DV survivor to make disclosures about the abuse they are experiencing. It is very important that survivors be made to feel comfortable and supported when disclosing their sensitive information. It is also important to validate their experiences. Support and concern can be expressed to survivors as with the following statements:

1. “I believe you.”
2. “I am concerned about your safety and well-being.”
3. “I imagine this situation must be very difficult for you.”
4. “You are not alone.”
5. “Thank you for telling me.”