

## RISK MANAGEMENT DIVISION: TRENDS AND TIPS TO SUPPORT CASEWORK

### TIPS TO OBTAIN INFORMATION FROM COLLATERALS

There may be times when a parent or caregiver is concerned about their privacy or are otherwise reluctant to share contact information for relatives, non-offending/non-custodial parents, social supports, or people who know the family and/or provide frequent care for their children. If a parent is reluctant to provide the Department with information about their supports, staff can engage the parent by asking open-ended follow-up questions or using a worry statement to explore their reluctance.

Sample Questions:

- What worries you about DCFS speaking with your relatives/supports?
- What would worry DCFS about a parent who does not want DCFS to interview relatives or supports?

**Sample Worry Statement:** *As a social worker, I am worried that if I cannot interview your mom who babysits Johnny, I am unable to gather all of the information I need to assess that Johnny's needs are being safely met.*

Once a CSW has identified a collateral who can provide information about child safety, staff may be unsure whether efforts to locate and engage with collaterals breaches confidentiality. There also may be times when fear of breaching confidentiality interferes with the types of questions staff ask. [DCFS policy on Investigation, Disposition and Closure of Emergency Response Referrals](#) guides staff to interview pertinent collateral contacts with knowledge about the condition of children. CSWs cannot disclose the identity of the reporting party, parents' drug test results, parents' statements during therapy, current/prior dependency court cases, or parents' medical information, however, CSWs can ask questions regarding statements and conduct documented in reports gathered during the investigation and case. This includes findings in police reports, medical reports, referrals, and eSCAR reports.

Below are examples of questions staff can ask collaterals about the care and well-being of each child, the parents' ability to meet the child's needs, the validity of the allegations, and the child's safety, without violating confidentiality:

**TIP:** Listen carefully to the collateral for opportunities to ask additional open-ended, follow up questions.

Assessment Areas	CSWs may ask relatives, witnesses, and collaterals the following:
Substance Abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Can you tell me what worries you may have about the parent being under the influence of substances (alcohol/drugs/ prescribed medications) while caring for the children?</li> <li>❖ Have you witnessed the parent experience rapid weight loss, severe mood swings/anger, incoherent thoughts/words, slurred speech, anxiety or paranoid/delusional thinking?</li> <li>❖ In the last few days/weeks/months, what have you noticed, or heard, regarding any changes in parent's behaviors/characteristics or relationships that would concern you about someone who is caring for the child?</li> </ul>
Intimate Partner Violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ What is working well in the parent's relationship? What concerns you?</li> <li>❖ Can you tell me what worries you may have about someone who either belittle, physically hit/being assaultive to their partner? What have you witnessed?</li> <li>❖ How have you supported one or both of the parents in dealing with their relationship?</li> <li>❖ Have you observed or been made aware of bruises, scars, cuts or black eyes on the parent?</li> </ul>

<p><b>Mental Health</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Can you tell me what worries you may have about the parent’s emotional well-being and ability to cope with stressors?</li> <li>❖ Are you aware of any past or current depression, paranoia, psychiatric hospitalizations, or use of psychotropic medications?</li> <li>❖ Have you observed or are you aware of any of the following regarding the parent: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Sleeping too much or too little? Restless/sluggish behavior? Mood swings, anxiety, agitation, rage, acting strange, self-isolation?</li> </ul> </li> <li>❖ How does the parent act or behave when they are overwhelmed? How do you support the parent when they feel this way?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Physical Abuse</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Can you tell me what worries you may have about how the parent disciplines their children?</li> <li>❖ How does the parent respond when their child is frustrated, crying, or showing difficult behaviors?</li> <li>❖ Have you ever observed or are you aware of the children having any concerning or repetitive bruises, scars, cuts, burns, injuries?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sexual Abuse</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Are you aware of the child/youth engaging in sexualized behavior?</li> <li>❖ Can you tell me what worries you may have about the child’s overall emotional well-being and ability to cope with stressors? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Can you tell me what worries you may have about how the children are doing in school?</li> <li>○ Can you tell me what worries you may have about the child/youth’s relationship with peers, siblings or other adults?</li> <li>○ Has the child/youth experienced a recent loss of interest in activities or friends they previously enjoyed?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Emotional Abuse</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ How does the parent describe their children?</li> <li>❖ How does the parent respond when the children are upset?</li> <li>❖ What is your understanding of how the parent disciplines their children?</li> <li>❖ What is working well in the parent’s relationship? What concerns you?</li> <li>❖ Have you observed or are you aware of the child struggling with any of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Loss of self-confidence or self-esteem? Social withdrawal? Loss of interest or enthusiasm? Sadness/depression? Self-isolation from activities? Desperately seeking attention or affection? Decreased school performance or loss of interest in school? Loss of previously acquired developmental skills?</li> </ul> </li> <li>❖ How does the parent ensure their children feel accepted? (SOGIE)</li> </ul>
<p><b>General Neglect</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ What does the parent know about the children’s day-to-day needs? How does the parent meet those needs?</li> <li>❖ Can you tell me what worries you may have about the parent’s ability to care for the children’s daily needs? (Consider physical illness/disability, developmental delay, lack of resources, unhoused, under employed, unemployed, incarceration.)</li> <li>❖ What supports do the parents use when they are unable to care for themselves or their children?</li> <li>❖ Is the parent able to protect the children from harm or danger by an offending parent or others?</li> </ul>