

Six Domains Tool

Extent of Maltreatment

This question is concerned with the maltreating behavior and the immediate physical and psychological effects on a child. It considers what is occurring or has occurred and what the results are (e.g. hitting, injuries, and trauma).

Observations and interviews are used to answer this question. Collateral sources of information (doctors, teachers, relatives, friends, etc.) are useful to both add to and check information gathered.

Information about extent of maltreatment includes:

- Type and Severity of maltreatment
- History of the maltreatment – Include prior child welfare history
- Description of specific events
- Description of emotional and physical symptoms
- Identification of the child and maltreating caregiver
- Identification of any cultural considerations around the maltreatment

Describe what abuse occurred:

- Physical Abuse – Describe injuries. Document with photographs, medical reports, LEA reports, etc.
- Sexual Abuse – Describe child's statements of abuse, as well as any corroborating witness accounts. Document information from Advocacy Centers, police reports, perpetrator statements, etc.
- Neglect - Inadequate food/shelter – Describe home environment and child's condition. Photograph home environment.
- Medical Neglect – Describe child's condition. Document information from medical staff.

Describe how the child was impacted:

- Any lasting results of the maltreatment: Surgery, blindness, scarring, etc.
- Any emotional and behavioral observations: Fearful, clingy, nightmares, tantrums, suicidal, running away, etc.
- Child's physical state: Hungry, dirty, medical needs, etc.

Describe details about:

- Severity – Pattern or progression of abuse.
- History – Similar prior incidents, both related to the affected children, as well as history regarding the perpetrator with other families.

Identify victims and perpetrators:

- Name who the maltreating person is. Consider if there is more than one perpetrator.
- Name the affected child or children.

Circumstances Surrounding the Maltreatment

This question addresses what is going on at the time that the maltreatment occurs. This question is concerned with understanding why maltreatment happened in this particular family.

Information about circumstances surrounding the maltreatment includes:

- The duration of the maltreatment: Multi-generational abuse? Recent stress event?
- Caregiver intent concerning the maltreatment
- Caregiver explanation for the maltreatment and family conditions
- Caregiver acknowledgement and attitude about the maltreatment
- Other problems occurring in association with the maltreatment – consider substance use or mental disturbance, etc.

Describe the intention of maltreatment

- What was parents' intention?
- Does parent acknowledge maltreatment?
- Was the parent impaired (substance abuse, mental health) or otherwise out-of-control when this happened?
- What was the situation that preceded or led up to the maltreatment?
- What is their attitude about what happened?
- Do they believe it was maltreatment?

Describe other impacts:

- Is the family isolated?
- Is violence pervasive?
- Is there anyone exercising power and control over any of the adults in the home? Did this impact the maltreatment?

Child Functioning

This question is concerned with a child's general behavior, emotions, temperament and physical capacity. It addresses how a child is from day-to-day rather than focusing on points in time, and it must consider a child's developmental level. The child's functioning should also address changes observed due to the maltreatment.

Information about child functioning includes:

- Capacity for attachment
- General mood and functioning
- Intellectual functioning
- Communication ability
- Social Skills
- Ability to express emotion
- Physical and mental health
- Functioning within cultural norms
- Developmental disability
- Medical condition
- Peer relations
- School Performance
- Independence
- Motor Skills
- Behavior

Describe child functioning:

- Describe your own observations of the child's mood, temperament, behavior.
- Utilize collaterals to inform about the child's functioning – both currently and prior to recent involvement when the family wasn't in the midst of a child welfare crisis.
- If the child is seeing a therapist or is school aged, be sure to include those sources of information.

Adult Functioning

This question is concerned with how the adults/caregivers in the family feel, think and act on a daily basis. The question focuses on adult functioning separate from parenting, though be clear: THE WAY ADULTS MANAGE THEIR DAY-TO-DAY LIVES IMPACTS THEIR CHILDREN.

Information about adult functioning includes:

- Communication and social skills
- Coping and stress management
- Self control
- Problem solving
- Judgment and decision making
- Independence
- Home and financial management
- Employment
- Domestic Violence: Consider if anyone is exercising power and control over any of the adults in the home
- Citizenship and community involvement
- Rationality
- Self care and self preservation
- Substance use
- Mental health
- Physical health and capacity
- Functioning within cultural norms

Describe adult functioning:

- What's their day-to-day life like?
- How do they make decisions? Do they talk with anyone about decisions? Do they have family/friend supports?
- Employment: How do they earn money? Have they always worked? When's the last time they had had a job?
- How is their health?
- How their day-to-day life is managed or is it chaotic?
- What is their judgment or decision-making ability?
- Are they employed – do they have financial management?
- Are they rational?
- Are they open or defensive?
- Do they have emotional control? If not, what seems to be getting in the way (substances, mental health, abuse/trauma)?

Disciplinary Practices

This question is concerned with the manner in which caregivers approach discipline and child guidance. Discipline is considered in the broader context of socialization – teaching and guiding the child. This question is broken out from parenting generally because this aspect of family life is highly related to both risk of maltreatment and threats to child safety. Answer this both from the child’s perspective and from the parents’ - Note discrepancies.

Information about disciplinary practices includes:

- Disciplinary methods
- Concept and purpose of discipline
- Context in which discipline occurs
- Cultural practices

Describe disciplinary practices:

- What does the *child* feel is the purpose of discipline - keep child’s behavior managed, to cause pain so they will learn, to teach them respect
- What does the *parent* feel is the purpose of discipline - keep child’s behavior managed, to cause pain so they will learn, to teach them respect
- What the parent’s emotional state is when disciplining
- What does the parent understand about their child’s need for safety and protection
- What does the parent understand about how their discipline impacts the child
- What is the parent’s perception of their child – is it accurate
- What are the parent’s expectations of their child – are they realistic

Parenting Practices

This question explores the general nature and approach to parenting as well as the parents' satisfaction with being a parent. Some parents have little knowledge of child rearing practices. Other parents may know what is considered "appropriate" parenting, but choose their method based on how they were raised, how their partner does it, etc.

Information about parenting practices includes:

- Reasons for being a caregiver
- Satisfaction in being a caregiver
- Caregiver knowledge and skill in parenting and child development
- Caregiver expectations and empathy for a child
- Decision making in parenting practices
- Parenting style
- History of parenting behavior
- Protectiveness
- Difference in how the parent thinks and feels about each child

Describe parenting practices - Can they detail:

- Why they became a parent
- Whether they like being a parent
- How much time they spend with each child
- Expectations for each child
- What they like to do with each child
- What each child does best
- What they like about each child
- What they don't like about each child
- What works best for each child when he/she is sad, angry, or frustrated

IV. FORENSIC INTERVIEWS

According to the National Children’s Alliance Forensic Interview standard, “Forensic interviews are conducted in a manner that is legally sound, of a neutral, fact-finding nature, and are coordinated to avoid duplicative interviewing.” (See Appendix A.) The purpose of a forensic interview is to preserve a child’s statements for use in assessing safety, criminal allegations, and treatment needs.

QUESTION TYPES

The task of a forensic interviewer is to help the child provide a complete and reliable account of events in his or her life, including abusive/traumatic experiences. The interviewer’s questions and tools can be memory cues. The interviewer should use discretion in selecting questions to elicit accurate information and facilitate complete disclosures. Interviewers are encouraged to use an hourglass continuum of questioning. Throughout the interview, interviewers should move from open-ended to more focused questions to gather clarifying information and then move back to open-ended questions.

- **Open-ended**—Open-ended questions/prompts elicit a free narrative response from recall memory.

Examples include *“Tell me why you are here today”* and *“Tell me everything from beginning to end.”* Open-ended questions are followed by prompts for more information such as, *“What happened next?”* and *“Then what happened?”* The interviewer can encourage the narrative to continue by making a narrative request such as, *“You said X happened—tell me more about X.”* Interviewers should allow the child to complete their narrative response prior to asking additional questions.

- **Focused**—Focused questions cue a child’s memory to elicit clarification and more specific detail. They are typically asked when a child has exhausted narrative recall with the use of open-ended questions. Focused questions could be used to gather sensorimotor and other details about the child’s statement. Reluctance, developmental considerations, and trauma may be reasons to use focused questions.

An example of a focused question might be *“You said grandpa spanked you. What did he spank you with?”* Once the child has responded to the direct question, it is important to return to open-ended questions. For example, an interviewer then could ask, *“Tell me all about [what grandpa spanked you with]?”*

Other examples include *“Where were you when X happened?”* and *“How did that make your body feel?”*

- **Closed-ended**—Closed-ended questions, such as multiple choice and yes/no questions, pose options and are used to clarify a disclosure or information already provided.

Closed-ended questions can also be used to clarify a previous question that seems confusing to the child. They can be helpful in gathering contextual information, particularly from young children. For example, *“Did it happen in the living room, bedroom, or someplace else?”* An example of a Yes/No question would be *“Did your mom want other people to find out what*

happened?” Once the child has provided a response to a closed-ended question, return to open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions should be used sparingly.

- **Leading**—Leading questions introduce information with a question in which the actor, an act, and a tag are included and may suggest to the child a desired response. An example would be *“Your dad touched your pee-pee, didn’t he?”* These types of questions should be avoided.
- **Coercive**—Coercive questions or statements are those that pressure the child physically or emotionally to do or say something. Examples include *“If you tell me what I want to know, you can leave the room”* or *“If you don’t tell me what happened I can’t help you.”* These types of questions should not be used.

NONVERBAL LANGUAGE

“Nonverbal” communication can play a role in a forensic interview. It may involve emotional expressions, actions, body language, and even silence. The interviewer should be aware of the impact that nonverbal communication may have on the child. Conversely, the interviewer should pay attention and note nonverbal communication from the child.

Nonverbal cues can include gestures, facial expressions, spatial distance, and vocal tones.

- **Gestures**—One of the most common forms of nonverbal communication used by children is gesturing. A gesture can be anything that incorporates a movement of the body and signifies a message. Some children shrug their shoulders, throw their hands up in the air, or storm off with heavy feet to show they are angry or upset. Gestures are typically paired with verbal communication, but they do not have to be. Each child is different, so it is important to inquire in order to learn his gestures and meanings.
- **Facial expressions**—Paying close attention to a child’s facial expressions and asking the right questions helps the interviewer understand more deeply what the child is thinking or feeling.
- **Spatial distance**—A child will typically learn a “normal” spatial distance (personal space) from his or her family, upbringing, and cultural environment. Everyone has personal space, even children. Recognizing spatial distance differences will help the interviewer understand and relate to each child. Reinforce appropriate boundaries with the child being interviewed. For example, if a child demonstrates inappropriate personal space boundaries such as lap sitting, gently reinforce an appropriate boundary by guiding the child to a seat.
- **Vocal tones**—A child’s tone of voice can help decode the message he or she is sending. If a child says he or she feels happy, but the vocal tone sounds otherwise, consider asking a few questions to determine if and why there is a contradiction between what is being said and how the child is saying it.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE INTERVIEW

Effective Ways to Facilitate Communication Throughout the Interview

- Turn off technology (or silence).

- Restrain from obvious emotional response to a child’s disclosures.
- Respect personal space.
- Do not suggest feelings or responses for the child.
- Avoid correcting behavior unless doing so is necessary for safety purposes.
- Guns should not be visible.
- Engage in active listening; say “uh-huh” or repeat the last few words of the child’s statement.
- Periodically use the child’s name.
- Try action invitation, as in, “Tell me more about [action].”
- Allow for and be comfortable with silence. Give the child time to process the question and formulate an answer.
- Ask questions that may facilitate additional details such as, “How did you feel?”

USE OF TOOLS

Children’s disclosures of abuse can be enhanced through use of tools. Tools can include writing utensils, blank paper, pictures for coloring, Play-Doh, and anatomically detailed dolls. Any items used should be readily available in the room and limited in number so as not to overwhelm or distract the child. **Before introducing tools in an interview, the interviewer should be trained in their application, benefits, and limitations.**

Use tools to:

- Elicit further detail about a disclosure that has been made
- Facilitate communication and memory retrieval by providing external cues
- Assist children with disabilities and children who are reluctant to disclose
- Clarify information provided by the child

Examples:

- **Drawing/Mapping**

Drawing by the child can facilitate disclosure as well as clarify information disclosed during the interview. Drawing by the child has the benefit of providing recall-based information, rather than a recognition-based prompt. This allows the child to provide information using their own free recall. In addition, drawing helps to organize location and can ground the child. Use of this tool may help provide a map of the room(s) in which offenses occurred, a timeline of events, body parts and positions, weapons, and other objects. Reassure the child that the drawings (or maps) can be simple and do not need to be perfect. Refer to the drawing and use it to help structure questions, including where the child and/or alleged perpetrator were, who else was there, and peripheral details of the surroundings (sounds, smells).

Example: *“You drew the bed. Tell me about the bed.”*

- **Gestures**

Gesturing by the child can include the child showing how something occurred, pointing to a body part, or demonstrating body positioning. Interviewers may request the child to gesture, or the child may provide a gesture spontaneously. When a child gestures, ask for additional clarification.

Example: *“I see you put your hand like this (gesture). Tell me more about your hand like this.”*

- **Technology-related evidence (chat logs, photos, etc.)**

Introducing external evidence during a forensic interview should be thoughtfully done, after discussions with involved multidisciplinary team (MDT) partners, and use a clearly defined protocol. If evidence is introduced, the child still may not discuss the concerns. If this is the case, respect where the child is in the disclosure process.

- **Writing**

A child can use paper and pen to write about an abuse experience when it is too difficult or embarrassing (for the child) to verbalize. The writing may be read back to the child for agreement that it is accurate. Additional questions may then be asked.

- **Anatomically detailed dolls**

Anatomically detailed dolls depict individuals of varying ages and both genders, with facial features and identifiable genitalia.

A note of caution when using anatomically detailed dolls: These tools should be used only by experienced interviewers who have had advanced training on their use and are interviewing in a Child Abuse Intervention Center (CAIC) and in accordance with MDT protocols.

Any drawings, photographs, videos, or other tools used by the child should be preserved. Interviewers should consult their state laws and/or county MDT protocols for evidence-preservation procedures.

Tips for Use of Tools

- Before introducing tools in an interview, the interviewer should be trained in their application, benefits, and limitations.
- Remember that more than one tool can be used during the interview.
- Prepare the child when introducing a tool by describing it and explaining its use.
- Have the child use their own words and labels when using tools.
- Refrain from interpreting the child’s behaviors with the tools.
- Be willing to abandon the use of the tool if it results in discomfort or a negative reaction from the child.
- Know your county/MDT protocols for introducing and preserving evidence in the interview.

Child Interviewing Guide for Child Welfare Workers

The following provides suggestions on how to begin an interview, questions to ask, and ways to close the interview. The questions are in no particular order. This list is not all inclusive and should not be used exclusively when interviewing children. Questions will need to be adapted based on the child's age and/or development

Introductions/Explain Role/Build Rapport:

- My name is: _____ I work for a place called Child Welfare. I have a really cool job. I get to talk with lots of children. I talk with them about how things are going at school and at home. (Appropriate for a younger child).
- When someone is worried about a child or teen's safety, it is my job to come talk to the child/teen and their family in order to make sure everyone is safe; **OR** people call me when they are worried or concerned about a child/teen. Do you know why anyone would be worried or concerned about you? (Appropriate for an older child/teen).
- Is it o.k. if I ask you some questions to get to know you better? You can ask me questions too. *(Remember we should be requesting the youth's permission to interview them and give them permission to end the interview).*
- What were you doing before I came? Am I interrupting anything important?

General Questions/Rapport Building & Narrative Practice

(Tip: Use child's name periodically)

- Let me make sure I have your name correct. (May want to ask child to spell first and last name to ensure you are interviewing the right child and to assess development).
- How old are you? When's your birthday?
- What grade are you in?
- What are you learning about right now?

- I'd like to get to know you better. Tell me about yourself or tell me things you like to do; i.e. hobbies, interests, etc.

(Tip: If a child tells you about a particular hobby or special event; you can ask them to tell you more about it; gathering specifics to conduct a narrative practice).

- Tell me everything that happened today, from when you woke up, until right now. (another example for narrative practice)
- Who all lives in your house?

Instructions: (Use practice examples for children 10 and under)

- If you want to take a break, or you feel like you don't want to talk to me anymore, just let me know.
- We are going to talk about real things, nothing pretend or make believe.
- It's okay to say, "I don't know," if you don't know the answer to a question.
- It's okay to say, "I don't understand," if you don't understand a question.
- It's okay to correct me if I get something wrong.
- If I ask you something that is hard to talk about, please tell me, "that's hard to talk about" and I will try to ask it in a different way.

Sample questions for 6 Domains/Screening for Abuse/Neglect

(Reminder: The following are suggestions of possible questions to ask. The questions are in no particular order. These suggestions should not be used as an all-inclusive list of questions to ask).

Screening for general safety:

- Tell me about your mom/dad/siblings (If question is too general; try asking what youth likes/dislikes about individuals).
- Is there anything you would change about anyone?

- Are you worried or concerned about anything or anyone? What are you worried about?
- Do you have any animals?
- Who takes care of the animals?
- What happens when the animals do something they are not supposed to?
- Do you or your parents have friends or family who frequently visit your home or stay with you?

Screening for Neglect:

- What's a typical day look like for you?
- Who takes care of you?
- Who cooks in your family? Has there ever been a time you were without food, electricity or water?
- What did you have for dinner last night? Breakfast this morning?
- Has there ever been a time when you were home alone or a time when there was no adult in the home?
- Do you ever get sick? What happens when you are sick?
- When is the last time you went to the doctor? What was the reason you went?
- When is the last time you went to a dentist? Do you have any teeth that are hurting now?
- Does anyone in your house take medicine?
- Tell me about your house; where do people sleep?
- Does anyone in your home have trouble sleeping?
- Do you know what drugs and alcohol are? Can you name some?
- Where did you learn about it? Do you know anyone who uses..?

Screening for physical abuse:

- What are the rules in your house?
- What happens when you get in trouble, or break a rule?
- Are the rules the same for everyone?
- What's the worst thing that has ever happened?
- When's the last time something happened? Tell me more about that.
- What happens when your siblings get in trouble?

Screening for Domestic Violence:

- What happens when the grownups in your house get mad at each other?
- How do your parents get along?
- Do you ever see adults fight? What does it look like? What does it sound like? What do people say when they are fighting?
- (If child discloses fighting); what do you do when people are fighting?
- Are there any weapons in your home? Where are they kept? Who uses them?

Screening for Sexual Abuse/Exploitation:

- Has anyone ever talked to you about body safety? Has anyone asked you to keep a secret about your body?
- Privacy means you can be alone when you want to be. Do you have privacy at your house? Does anyone come into the bathroom or bedroom while you are undressed?
- Do you ever see pictures, books, computers, movies (etc.) where people don't have clothes on?

Closing:

(Tip: If interviewing a child at school and you did not notify parent of your intent to interview, be sure to let the child know that whenever you talk with children, you need to follow-up and let their parents know, Find out where the parents are, If child indicates parent is not home; find out if child has a phone number for parent. Be sure to assess whether child has any worries or concerns about you talking with their parent).

- Is there anything else I should know that I haven't asked you about?
- If you could have three wishes in the world, what would you wish for?
- Do you have any questions for me?

(Tip: Transition the child to a positive topic. Inquire about what they will be doing next. If interviewing the child someplace other than home; find out if child needs support from an adult).