

Information Collection Protocol for Child Protection Investigations

The Information Collection Protocol for Pre-Commencement:

The Pre-Commencement activities begin the process for direct involvement with the family-the Family Functioning Assessment. The conditions that prevail are often not conducive to effective information collection. Even though the Family Functioning Assessment is often adversarial, it does not have to be so. This does not mean that the activity is easy, or that workers will not encounter hostility, resistance or anger. However, you must be able to create an atmosphere in which family members can talk. This atmosphere should be neither interrogational nor punitive. The Information Collection Protocol will assist you in creating that atmosphere.

The protocol will provide a uniform, systematic, and structured approach to all family situations where a child may not be safe. Applying this information collection protocol creates a situation in which you are in control of the process which allows you to gather sufficient information to make decisions, determine with a higher degree of accuracy what is occurring, and insure that all family members are seen and involved.

The foundation of information collection is the six domains. These domains form the basis for intervention and sufficiency of information collection. Throughout intervention, staff must be aware of the domains and seek to identify information to inform sufficient information collection across all six domains.

The six domains for information collection are:

1. Extent of Maltreatment
2. Surrounding Circumstances that Accompany the Alleged Maltreatment
3. Child Functioning
4. Adult Functioning
5. General Parenting Practices - the overall, typical, parenting practices used by the parents/legal guardians
6. Disciplinary Approaches/Behavior Management Strategies used by the parents/legal guardians, and under what circumstances

Pre-Commencement:

Pre-commencement begins for the Child Protection Investigator (CPI) at the time they receive the intake. The purpose of pre-commencement activities is to prepare the worker for information collection, as well as ensure a systematic and structured approach with the family that creates the atmosphere for information collection.

Pre-Commencement Actions and Planning Prior to contacting the family.

The CPI should begin by thoroughly reviewing the information gathered at intake. Special attention should be paid to information which was unknown to the intake process, but which may influence the threats to child safety.

- It is important to consider any previous knowledge about the family that may be available from files, records, and other staff or service providers.
- Access case information, including all Department history, through FSFN desktop. Casebook and Personbook functionality provides an overview of the case and person history with the Department and should guide the worker to key areas within the Case Record for further information regarding the family.
- Anticipate whether information suggests that the CPI may need to conduct one or more interviews-such as if the child needs a forensic interview or if the child is currently receiving medical treatment and the interview will be limited. Additionally, thought should be given to where interviews should be conducted and when. Having sufficient time to complete all the protocol interviews, or as many as possible or are necessary, should be considered prior to beginning the initial contacts.

Seek consultation and/or teamwork with external subject matter experts and agency partners to assist in developing the Family Functioning Assessment intervention strategy including:

- What information is known with regard to child functioning, general parenting, discipline/behavior management, and adult functioning from case records?
- Is the allegation narrative clear? Is it representative of present danger?
- Are there collateral information sources?
- Response time to initiate the report.
- Are there worker safety concerns?
- Plan for contacting the family.
- Are there questions about information collection? In particular, what is the focus of information collection needed surrounding the six domains?
- You begin the "focus" on the household family and your purposes as you form your plan.
 - How you introduce the referral.
 - How you explain yourself, who you are, why you're there, what the agency mission/goal/purpose is – that being to protect children first and foremost and to make every effort to preserve and maintain families, as well as to provide assistance and services to accomplish that.
 - How you manage parent anger over the report or CPI interference.
 - How you will interview all necessary persons.
 - How you will manage and balance information needs against relating to parents/children.
- How you will manage time:
 - number of interviews;
 - extensive, relevant information gathering;

- your organizational skills;
- your technical ability in content and skill; and
- balancing time demands against client focus.

General Considerations:

To effectively proceed through the information collecting/interviewing portion of Family Functioning Assessment, you must consider a number of crucial issues.

Engaging and Assessing the Parent(s).

The most successful interviews will likely be associated with the parent(s)' sense of worker respect which has occurred during the process.

Who is the agency's client? This is a question that may seem far too obvious, but it needs consideration. We accept that the child and the family are the client. However, the primary point of communication, involvement, and decision making is the parent(s)'. This does not reduce your concern for the child or the family in the sense of intervention, but it directs you to attending to the parent(s) through recognizing how key they are to change.

Engaging and assessing the parent can be enhanced through a number of actions:

You should identify with their feelings and the situation from their point of view. What do things mean to them?

- Give parents information. To do so empowers them.
- Use an approach that reduces your power and authority.
- Seek assistance from the parent(s) in completing the Family Functioning Assessment process.

Controlling Yourself.

This relates to two areas of self-control: controlling your emotions (intimidated? over-identifying? insensitive?) and controlling your focus or concentration.

As an agency or contracted child protection investigator, you likely are inundated with work demands and heavy case activity. When you are with a particular client, the pressure you are under must not show. You must control yourself to the extent that you avoid other work concerns and give the parent and children your entire attention.

How effective are you at focusing yourself, your attention, your concentration and your observations? Skill in focusing demands that you are able to "spotlight" on the parent/child/situation in penetrating ways **while you appear relaxed, calm and**

genuine is essential. You must be able to focus yourself as you respond to the parent/child situation in appropriate and purposeful ways.

Controlling yourself includes self-awareness and management of your values and intentions.

You must remain open as you proceed to understand the situation. You must be relaxed; unoffended; not defending yourself, your agency, or your purpose for being in the home.

Self-control should also be thought of as including depersonalizing verbal assault from clients. Client negative emotion, even against the agency or you, should be expected. This should not be held against the client but rather embraced and processed.

It may be difficult to balance being sensitive/gentle with being firm, but it is critical that you remain resolute about the importance of what you are doing and the need to have the client involved.

Controlling yourself demands that you recognize clients in positive, open terms. Avoid stereotypes!

How you present yourself to the client/child/family is a part of controlling yourself. This refers to the professional "state of being" which you represent. You are a representative of the agency and the state.

Among the most personal areas that we have to control is the feeling of not being liked or appreciated which often occurs during the Family Functioning Assessment at investigation.

As you proceed with the Family Functioning Assessment-Investigation interview(s), you are working with a particular agenda:

- Inform the parent(s)/legal guardian(s) or caregiver(s) of the concern being expressed about their family. "What do you think about there being others who are concerned about how your family is doing?"
- Identify the parent(s)/legal guardian(s)' or caregiver(s)' concerns about their situation and about agency intervention. "What is it like for you to have Department intervention or a child protection investigation? How do you feel about all of this?"
- Identify challenges, difficulties, limitations and/or strengths, which explain the family situation.
- Evaluate allegations set forth in the intake and any others identified during the course of the investigation.
- Identify/understand danger to children.

Information Collection Protocol for Child Protection Investigations

Commencement:

To the extent possible and practicable, family members should be seen in a specific order to provide a method of gaining the broadest understanding of the family's situation. The order is dependent upon where the identified child is located at the time the Family Functioning Assessment begins. One of the major benefits of the protocol is that it enables you to use information from one interview to assist in the next interview.

While the protocol suggested here relates to the initial contacts, it must be remembered that the entire Family Functioning Assessment process relates to all interviews, not only the initial contacts.

Application of the Protocol:

Effective application of the protocol will include:

- Privacy should be provided to all family members.
- You should be prepared to spend a sufficient amount of time with the family members so that the individuals do not believe they are of little, or no, importance to the interviewer.
- You should prepare for the interviews in such a manner as to be able to discuss relevant issues while controlling emotional responses.

Variance in Protocol:

If the protocol cannot be followed, it is important that documentation provide an explanation as to the reasons why the protocol cannot be carried out.

Commencement with Child in the Home:

1. Introduction with parents
2. Interview with identified child
3. Interview with siblings
4. Interview with other household members, as relevant
5. Interview with non-alleged maltreating parent
6. Interview with alleged maltreating parent
7. Closure with parents/family

Commencement with Child Not at Home:

In situations where the child is not at home at the beginning of the Family Functioning Assessment, the order begins with the identified child, **wherever that child is**, then proceeds as above without introduction with parents. When a child has been removed by law enforcement, interview/see the child first before meeting with the parents.

Protocol Commencement: Interview with Parents/Legal Guardians **Introduction with the Parents/Legal Guardians**

You must notify parents of their rights at the commencement of the Family Functioning Assessment. At the beginning of the Family Functioning Assessment and at your introduction when questions of rights and participation arise, you can provide the parent with the following information concerning his/her basic rights:

Florida – Rights and Responsibilities Brochure

Note: Do not assume that ANY client knows how to read. It is important that the parents' rights be explained. It is crucial that interviews be conducted with an interpreter, including a sign language interpreter, as the case dictates.

- Parents have a right to know what the verbally summarized content of the report entails but not the identity of the reporter.
- Prior to the commencement of any legal proceeding, the parents' interaction is voluntary.
- The parent cannot be compelled to appear at any conferences, produce documents, visit any place, or otherwise reveal any information.
- If the Department initiates a legal proceeding, the parent has a right to an attorney, to a hearing, and to present witnesses for his/her case.
- If the parent cannot afford an attorney, a court appointed attorney might be provided, if qualified.
- Parents have all their civil rights as guaranteed under the U.S. Constitution.

When discussing rights, it is useful to use regular language rather than legal terms. The important issue as related to implementing this protocol is that you demonstrate full respect for the parent's dignity and rights.

You must complete introductions, which include who you are, what your agency is about, your purposes, and the essence of the report. You should emphasize your intent to help and understand.

It is critical that, during the introduction, you present yourself in a calm, flexible, and spontaneous manner. Your first priority is to accommodate and address the parent(s)' responses.

- Remain "where the parent is" in terms of concerns, emotions, and reactions.
- Stay in the "here and now" with the parent(s)—(how they are feeling, reacting, thinking).
- Identify with the parent(s)' feelings and concerns. Accept emotion. Let them “vent” or express themselves.
- Observe and understand/appreciate the parent(s)'/caregiver(s)' responses:
 - Emotional responses and reactions;
 - Attempts to defend themselves;
 - Denial and disclosure;
 - Expressed explanations, rationale, and justification;
 - Reality perception;
 - Reasoning; and
 - Communication clarity and cohesiveness.
- When covering the report, probe into the parent(s)'/caregiver(s)' perception about the reason for the report.
 - "What do you think may have lead to someone having a concern about your family to contact the Abuse Hotline?"
 - “Who do you think may have contacted the Department with a concern about your family?” (This is a good way to gather information about potential collateral resources.)
 - While avoiding reporter identity, do not avoid discussing the fact and reality that the family was reported.

During the introduction, allow the parent(s) to talk about the maltreatment issue, but also plan to come back to it later.

- To the extent that you are nondirective about the maltreatment or allegations during the introduction, you are more likely to avoid parent(s) building defenses and arguments immediately which will have to be overcome to proceed.

- In order to remain in the "here and now," it will be important to allow the parent(s) to talk out their feelings and concerns about the allegations and to give their explanations. However, at a reasonable time, you should be prepared to move the interaction to broader concerns. Take the initiative away from them at the appropriate time.

Example:

"I can appreciate that you are very concerned about what has been reported about you, and we need to talk about it in more detail so you can share with me your perspective about the report and about your family as well as talk with me about what you want. But for now, let's move on into you helping me understand and get to know your family...."

During the introduction, you should begin assessing the immediate situation for the present danger, which could suggest a timely response by you to protect yourself, seek help, and/or protect a child.

Soliciting assistance from the parent(s) in understanding the family concludes the introduction.

- Ask the parent(s) to assist you in completing the interviews. Parent(s) can arrange for interviews with the family members and can select a private place for the interviews.
- Tell parent(s) that you expect them to take the responsibility to participate to increase your understanding.
- Seek the parent(s)' perception about all matters. Consider and acknowledge their cognitive reasoning and feeling responses, which influence your understanding.

Your work is a professional endeavor based on professional methods and practices. Share with them that you routinely proceed toward understanding what is occurring through the application of a particular approach. Explain how you wish to proceed. Ask them to assist you by arranging for a private place to conduct interviews. Reassure them about your openness and your intent to review the situation at the conclusion of the interviews.

Protocol Commencement: Interview with the Identified Child

Your initial introduction to the child should be clear. Tell the child who you are and what you are doing here. How you speak with the child will vary depending upon how the agency became aware of this child and also based on the age and developmental status of the child. It is critical that you do not frighten the child. Additionally, you must not avoid the reason for your being involved with the family.

Once the introductions have been completed, time should be spent in getting to know the child and giving him a chance to know you. This should be purposeful. When

building rapport with a child, do not speak to him about unimportant matters. Such a misuse may limit time as well as create anxiety for the child. Initial questions can focus on the family.

All interactions with the child, as well as questioning, should be followed up with comments, thoughts, and other questions, which are indicated by the child's response. It is also critical to ask questions appropriate to the child's age, developmental ability, and comfort level. Young children can 'recite' time but more often than not, do not know "time" conceptually. It is important to understand child development throughout.

Here are some sample questions, which can be used to initiate the interview:

Family

- Who is in your family? (Family Functioning)
- Who lives at home with you? (Family Functioning)
- What kinds of things does your family do together? (Family Functioning)
- How do you get along with your brothers/sisters? What kinds of things do you do with them? (Family Functioning)
- Tell me about your mom, dad, brother, grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc. (Support)
- What are the 'rules' in your house? (Family Functioning)

Child

- What kinds of things do you do in school? Who is your best friend at school? Your favorite teacher/subject? Any areas where you have problems? Are there times when things are easy? (Child Functioning)
- Who do you hang out with at school? Who are your friends? (Child Functioning)
- Do you belong to any clubs, or participate in any organized activities? Play any sports? Who is your favorite (football, baseball, soccer, etc. – child's interest) team? (Child Functioning)

Parent

- How do you get along with your mom/dad? (Adult Functioning/Parenting)
- What happens when things aren't going well with mom/dad? What happens if

- you break one of the rules in the house? How do your parents react? (Adult Functioning) What kind of things do they do? (Parenting and Discipline)
- What about your brothers/sisters, how do your parents deal with your brother/sisters? (Adult Functioning/ Parenting)
 - Do your parents belong to any organizations, have any friends etc.? (Support) Who are your parents' friends?
 - When mom and dad aren't getting along, how do you know? What does that look like? If they are not getting along and you walk in the room, what do you see? What do you hear?
 - Let's talk about alcohol and drugs a little. Tell me what kinds of drugs you know about, or have seen. Where did you learn about these? Have you seen any of these at home? Mom or dad taking or using any of these? What is mom/dad's behavior like when you see or think they are using this drug? Where are you when mom/dad use this drug? How often does mom/dad behave like that? (repeat for alcohol)

By approaching the child initially without focusing on the possible maltreatment, you create an environment in which the child may feel freer in talking with you about difficult subjects. At the same time, you gather information, which will help you assess and analyze the current situation and make decisions. The above questions can be asked during the initial contact with the identified child. Remember, depending upon how things occur, if you have not gathered that type of information early, seek it as the interview continues.

At a point in time when the context suggests, you want to seek information about the possible maltreatment. When seeking information about the nature of the maltreatment and the actual maltreatment, you must pay attention to anxiety and other emotions, and respond accordingly.

Maltreatment

Note that as applicable to a child's visible physical injuries:

Inquire of the child's explanation of physical injuries

Note for each injury observed:

- Size-
- Location on body-
- Color-
- Does observed injury appear consistent with explanation based on knowledge, skills, experience, training, education?

Consult Child Protection Team (CPT) as may be required.

Here are some sample questions, which can be used to explore the alleged maltreatment:

- As I mentioned to you earlier, I talk to lots of kids and families when someone has a worry or concern about them. Would you help me understand why someone might be worried or concerned about you or your family? (*You will need to decide the need to be more specific which may be influenced by the age of the child.*) Let's talk about what happened at your home last weekend? (Maltreatment)
- What else happened? (Maltreatment) (As a rule you will often ask this type of question to fully explore with the child the extent of the maltreatment.) What happened next?
- Has anything like this happened to you before? Has anything like this happened to your other brothers/sisters? (Maltreatment) When was the last time? Explore history, increasing frequency, etc.
- What did your other parent (if there is a non-alleged maltreating parent) say, do, etc.? (Nature)
- When this occurred, how did it happen? What was happening around the home (situation) when this occurred? What else was occurring? (Nature)

As you proceed toward the end of this interview, you should consider how the child is feeling (Child Functioning), any fear he is experiencing (Child Functioning), determine where he is going after the interview (Child Functioning), assess his level of vulnerability (Child Functioning), and inform him of your next steps and when/how you will get back to him.

The information here reflects only general guidance. It should be recognized that sufficient information collecting would require that you probe much deeper and inquire about subject matter more broadly. Your understanding of child functioning, the maltreatment, and parent functioning increases as you dig deeper with the child. Normally speaking, you might expect to interview a child up to a half hour depending on his responsiveness and verbal accessibility. More than half an hour is likely too taxing for most children. Younger children may be even less tolerant.

Protocol Commencement: Interviews with Siblings

Following the information gathering during the interview with the identified child, you interview that child's siblings similarly to that with the identified child. The purposes of these interviews are:

- To determine what has been happening with those children (Maltreatment). Information from the identified child will help you decide about the likelihood of those children having experienced some maltreatment.

- To gather further information about the family's functioning (Family Functioning).
- To gather further information about the parents' actions, behaviors, and emotions (Adult Functioning/Parenting).
- To gather information about the siblings, their behaviors, feelings, and emotions (Child Functioning).
- To assess the siblings' level of vulnerability (Child Functioning).
- To seek information which you were unable to gather from the identified child.

The process of interviewing siblings is similar to that of the identified child. It should be emphasized that a significant proportion of these interviews is formed from the foundation of interview and results of the interview with the identified child.

Your approach should focus on providing a comfortable atmosphere for the child and paying attention to the feelings and emotions of the child (Child Functioning).

Although individual situations will determine the timing of when to interview siblings, as a rule you should conduct these interviews at this point. Possible reasons for not conducting these interviews at this time may be based upon the need for emergency action (regarding the identified child), the accessibility of the siblings, and the need to become involved with the parent(s). Any determination not to interview the siblings should be documented.

The sample questions provided to you for interviewing the identified child can be used during sibling interviews.

Protocol Commencement: Interview with Non-Alleged Maltreating Parent

[Note: This protocol is designed for a two-parent/caregiver family; admittedly many cases involve single parent households or families that include adults whose role in the family is not well defined in relation to the children. When employing this protocol, it becomes necessary for the CPI to make adjustments to how this guidance applies to a particular case. That includes how to proceed in interviewing, inquiries, skills, and use of self. Note: If the alleged maltreating person is not the child's biological parent, it is important at the beginning of the interview to establish the person's relationship in the family and with the child in particular. If the person does include significant caregiving as a responsibility, it is important to determine the nature, expectations, and limits of that involvement.]

The interview with the non-alleged maltreating parent is critical for a variety of reasons:

- It is this parent who may be required to provide protection for the child(ren).
- The non-alleged maltreating parent will often be the first parent who is informed of what intervention may mean to the family.
- An assessment of this parent's behavior/feelings must be made to determine the safety of the child(ren).
- Your interaction with the non-alleged maltreating parent will often determine your approach to the alleged maltreating parent.

Interviewing skills and techniques with the non-alleged maltreating parent will focus on extensive use of feeling and support techniques. Additionally, your comfort in using reality-orienting techniques is essential.

The key to the interview with the non-alleged maltreating parent is to involve this person in a joint effort with you. Often, asking the non-alleged maltreating parent to make a choice between the child and the alleged maltreating parent is a mistake. This approach will not work because it requires a person in crisis to decide something, which he or she cannot or will not. The preferred approach is to ask that parent to join with you in making the environment safe for the child, as well as the alleged maltreating parent.

The circumstances of the interview with the non-alleged maltreating parent will determine the process of the interview and the order of questions/responses. Usually, you will talk to the parent about the reason you are involved. You must be prepared to deal with hostility, anger, and varying levels of denial. This should not be assumed to indicate, by itself, that the parent cannot assist and protect the child.

It should be noted that in situations of neglect of children, the distinction between a non-alleged maltreating parent and an alleged maltreating parent is not as clear as it is with physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional maltreatment. You need to explore the family functioning with each parent and ensure the issues related to protection are examined.

Here are some example questions, which you may use in this interview:

Child

- Tell me about your child. What is he or she good at? What do you think are your child's strengths? What do you think are your child's challenges? What does he or she struggle with?
- How does your child behave/act in general? Tell me about your child's behaviors

that “push your buttons,” escalate you, or cause you to feel angry? (Child Functioning)

- Tell me about your child’s friends. (Child Functioning)
- In what ways have you tried or are willing to try to keep the child and the alleged maltreating parent from being alone with each other? (Child Functioning)
- Does the child have any current or past health related problems that affect him today? (Child Functioning) Describe them for me.
- Does the child have any current or past developmental challenges? Educational challenges?
- What are the disciplinary approaches you use? Under what circumstances?

Parent

- Tell me about yourself—about your feelings, and about what is happening. How do you think things have been between you and your spouse (partner)? Explore with the non-alleged maltreating parent the feelings that the CPI believes are being exhibited and follow up on those. (Adult Functioning, History, Family Functioning)
- What is the most special thing about parenting your child? The most difficult thing? (Parenting)
- Explore with non-alleged maltreating parent how they believe their child is doing, what they are experiencing. Examine issues relating to bonding, attachment, concern, empathy, worry, anxiety, etc. (Adult Functioning, Parenting)
- Tell me about the family that you grew up in. What types of things did you do? What are some of your fond memories? Your sad or hurtful memories? How were you disciplined? What did you get in trouble for growing up? What were the rules or behaviors around drinking and drugs? Hitting? Sex? How often do you/your children talk with or see your parents/siblings/relatives? (History)
- What do you do with your friends? Who are your friends? What do you share with your friends? (Support)
- Do you belong to any groups, organizations, religious affiliations, etc.? (Support)
- What about Alcohol/Drugs (type/frequency/amount)? Describe your drinking?
 - Are you currently prescribed any medications? Reasons, frequency, effect on behavior?
 - Were you prescribed any medication? What is/was it?

- Any prior hospitalizations? For? Where? / Psychotropic medication / hospitalization?
- Have you ever had a Mental Health diagnosis? For? When?
 - Were you prescribed any medication? What is/was it?
 - Any prior hospitalizations? For? Where? / Psychotropic medication / hospitalization?
- How do you and your partner resolve conflict?
- How do you / partner manage his/her daily life and how does the parent generally adapt in life? Employment? Income?
- When things are going well, how do they manage? When things are not going well, how do they manage?
- What is the family's daily routine?

Family

- What types of things are you responsible for in the home and with the family—chores, routine, structure, meals, etc.? (Family Functioning, Parenting)
- How do the family members show they care about each other? What affection is demonstrated? (Family Functioning)
- Who gives orders in the home? Who is in charge? (Family Functioning)
- What happens when the orders given are not followed? (Family Functioning)
- Talk about the marriage/relationship. What are the things that make it good? Things you wish you could change? Communication difficulties? Sexual relationship? (Family Functioning)
- Tell me about your folks. What about extended family members? What about neighbors, are they helpful to you and you to them? (Support)
- Influences regarding the demographics, extended family, and family functioning are gathered through a variety of observations during the initial interview and subsequent interviews.

Maltreatment

- What are your thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and beliefs about the maltreatment? (Nature)
- Do you have any information, which suggests the non-alleged maltreating parent

has been involved in maltreatment? *If yes, explore this with the parent in a direct, yet non-adversarial manner.* (Maltreatment)

- Explore with the non-alleged maltreating parent the alternatives to provide protection to the family. Can this person, with your assistance, do such? (Nature)

Reaction to Intervention

- You should assess the non-alleged maltreating parent's reaction to intervention at the end of the initial interview, as well as during subsequent interviews. The focus here is on the level of openness this parent has to the agency being involved with the family.
- Explore with the parent the meaning of intervention. Have they had assistance before (this state or any other state)? What was the reaction and response to that assistance?
- You should explore your own strengths and limitations in working with the family, including the agency's capacity to respond and the availability and accessibility of community resources.

Protocol Commencement: Interview with the Alleged Maltreating Parent

[Note: If the alleged maltreating person is not the child's biological parent, it is important at the beginning of the interview to establish the person's relationship in the family and with the child in particular. If the person does include caregiving as a responsibility, it is important to determine the nature, expectations, and limits of that involvement.]

The interview with the alleged maltreating parent may cause you a variety of concerns, such as:

- What will the person's reaction be?
- Will the level of anger, hostility, or denial make it impossible to interview the parent?
- What should the alleged maltreating parent be told?
- How should I interact with the parent?

These concerns may be influenced by assumptions about the person based upon the report, or what you have learned through previous interviews. You must avoid interviewing the alleged maltreating parent in an aggressive manner. This usually results in an adversarial relationship, which is not necessary. Do not focus on getting the alleged maltreating parent to admit what they have done.

The purposes of this interview are to:

- Explore with the parent the family situation from a perspective of what is happening in the family, which may be threatening to the child's safety.
- Assess the parent's ability to become involved with the agency, focusing on controlling for the child's safety.
- Identify family conditions, which may require further study (such as substance use, domestic violence, emotional disturbance).
- Share with the parent what has occurred related to the other interviews.

In order to effectively intervene with the alleged maltreating parent, you must be aware of, and in control of, your feelings. Critical to this interaction is seeking information from the parent rather than "proving" guilt. To the extent that you can exercise a nonjudgmental attitude, the results from the initial interview and subsequent interviews with the alleged maltreating parent will provide essential information in order to make necessary decisions at Family Functioning Assessment. You should seek information from all aspects of the family. It is critical to use observational skills as well as verbal skills and techniques to properly assess all aspects of the parent's functioning, especially his behavior and feelings.

The order of the interviewing process will be determined by the actual situation. However, you can expect the parent will want to know the reason for your presence. **While you should let the parent know in general the reason for your presence, it is not recommended that all the information concerning the maltreatment and other reported concerns be presented initially. To do so would cause the interaction to slide into a series of accusations and denials.** Focusing on feelings and joining the client's resistance regarding his parenting is a more useful and effective approach with the alleged maltreating parent.

Here are some sample questions, which may be used during this interview:

Child

- Tell me about your child. How does your child respond to you? Is the child easy-going? Difficult? What do you mean? (Parenting)
- What type of things do you expect your child to do around the house, with siblings, for you? (Parenting)
- What type of behaviors and emotions does your child show? (Child Functioning)
- Does your child have friends? (Child Functioning)
- Does your child have any health-related problems that affect the child today?

(Child Functioning)

Parent

- Tell me about yourself, about your feelings, and about what is happening. How do you think things have been between you and your spouse (partner)? *Explore with the alleged maltreating parent the feelings that the worker believes are being exhibited and follow up on those.* (Adult Functioning, History, Family Functioning)
- What is the most special thing about parenting your child(ren)? The most difficult thing? (Parenting)
- Explore with the alleged maltreating parent how they believe their child is doing, what the child is experiencing. Examine issues related to bonding, attachment, concern, empathy, worry, anxiety, etc. (Adult Functioning, Parenting)
- Tell me about the family that you grew up in. What types of things did you do? What are some of your fond memories? Your sad or hurtful memories? (History)
- What do you do with your friends? Who are your friends? What do you share with your friends? (Support)
- Do you belong to any groups, organizations, religious affiliations, etc.? (Support)
- What about Alcohol/Drugs (type/frequency/amount)? Describe your drinking?
 - Are you currently prescribed any medications? Reasons, frequency, effect on behavior?
 - Were you prescribed any medication? What is/was it?
 - Any prior hospitalizations? For? Where? / Psychotropic medication / hospitalization?
- Have you ever had a Mental Health diagnosis? For? When?
 - Were you prescribed any medication? What is/was it?
 - Any prior hospitalizations? For? Where? / Psychotropic medication / hospitalization?
- How do you and your partner resolve conflict?
- How do you / partner manage his/her daily life and how does the parent generally adapt in life? Employment? Income?
- When things are going well, how do they manage? When things are not going well, how do they manage?
- What is the family's daily routine?

Family

- How do the family members show they care about each other? What affection is demonstrated? (Family Functioning)
- Who gives orders in the home? Who is in charge? (Family Functioning)
- What happens when the orders given are not followed? (Family Functioning)
- Talk about the marriage. What are the things that make it good? Things you wish you could change? Communication difficulties? Sexual relationship? (Family Functioning)
- Tell me about your folks. What about extended family members? What about neighbors, are they helpful to you and you to them? (Support)
- Describe how roles are developed, assumed, and carried out in the home. Who does what? How is it decided who will do what in the home? (Family Functioning)
- Influences regarding demographics, extended family, and family functioning are gathered through a variety of observations during the initial interview and subsequent interviews.

Maltreatment

- When you begin to talk to the parent about the maltreatment, minimal information should be given at that point in the conversation. It is critical that you not engage in a battle of wills; refocus the parent to their own feelings.
- What do you want to do about this? How can we make sure nothing like this happens again? (Maltreatment)
- Tell me what has been going on with you. Have you been under stress? What from? Drinking? Marital problems? Job-related problems? (Nature)
- At an appropriate time, you should always share your belief about the maltreatment with the alleged maltreating parent. There is no need to "beat" this to death. This represents your belief based on what you know to the point of interviewing the alleged maltreater. It is your conclusion based on other interviews and other sources of information.

Reaction to Intervention

- You should assess the alleged maltreating parent's reaction to intervention at the end of the initial interview, as well as during subsequent interviews. The focus here is the level of openness this parent has to the agency being involved with the family. You should not expect the parent to embrace the agency in making this assessment.
- Explore the issue of what intervention means to the parent. Have they had assistance before? What was the reaction and response to that assistance?
- Explore your strengths and limitations in working with the family, including the agency's capacity to respond and the availability and accessibility of community resources.

Closure with Parents/Family

Following the completion of the interviews, you should reconvene the parents or family as appropriate. Share with them a summary of your findings and impressions. The summary of interviews closure with the family may occur after the initial contacts, but that is unlikely. So, here, closure refers to the time when all interviews are done with the family. You might think of this as the last contact you have with the family prior to completing and documenting the Family Functioning Assessment.

Seek individual responses concerning perceptions and feelings. Take care not to reopen the whole process.

As a result of the information collecting that has occurred during all the interviews and at the point of closing, it is critical that you have a full understanding of any maltreatment and the circumstances surrounding the maltreatment.

- You must be certain that your understanding of the maltreatment gained from your interviews includes: sufficient information, precise explanations, parent(s)' rationale, parent(s)' emotional response concerned with the discussion on maltreatment, and the quality of the parent(s)' response.

Reassure them that you have been seeking to understand the family, which will require time to think about the information.

