

## Background Guidance on Screening Practices for Child Support Workers

- DV victims are frequently reluctant to share their history with strangers. It's critical to build trust through an interactive process that empowers a victim by respecting their self-knowledge and choices
- The Program's goal is to assist the custodial parent in achieving financial stability by having the noncustodial parent provide consistent and reliable financial support. Assessing if a safety concern exists can provide direction on how to proceed to reach this goal.
- We ask questions to get information on domestic violence or safety concerns to make this process safe for the victim and children, and to provide information, resources, and referrals, as is appropriate for their situation.
- DV victims, and their children, may have suffered trauma that can affect the victim's ability to process information and participate in the process.
- It's important to provide opportunities for the victim to share important information at all stages of the interview, and during subsequent contact points, to develop trust in the process and the case manager's supportive role.
- It's also essential to provide repeated opportunities to ask questions and receive information for a procedurally just and transparent process.
- Validate the importance of what is shared by the victim and support them as they disclose information.
- Respecting the victim's right to make choices for themselves and their children is a key strategy for engagement.
- Don't force disclosure—that should not be the goal. Instead, provide repeated opportunities for universal education on domestic violence and how the child support agency can enhance survivors' safety throughout the child support process.

## Model Framing Language and Screening Questions

Caseworkers: This section is a script of framing language and screening questions to use with both the applicant and the respondent to promote the opportunity for disclosure of a safety concern. *Italicized language should be read to the customer.*

- *The New York State Child Support Program is committed to making the child support process as safe as possible for you and your child(ren).*
- *We take the safety of families applying for child support seriously. There are parts of our process that may introduce a safety concern for you. We may be able to modify and/or eliminate some of our procedures to help.*
- *You may have concerns that Child Protective Services (CPS) will become involved if you disclose family violence. Child Support workers focus on child support. We are only required to make a report to CPS if we have reasonable cause to suspect a child is being harmed or in imminent danger of harm. CPS is not involved in any decision to set or enforce child support.*
- *I am going to read through a few statements. Your responses are confidential and will not be shared with the other parent.*
  - *I feel safe around the other parent.*
  - *I trust the other parent to respect me and not hurt me.*
  - *I can safely pursue child support.*
  - *I am comfortable with the other parent having parenting time with our children.*
  - *I am comfortable meeting together with the other parent at the Child Support office.*

### Model Framing Language and Screening Questions (continued)

If the customer answers **no** to these statements:

- Acknowledge that they are in a very difficult situation.
- Be supportive and listen.
- Ask if there is an order of protection issued against the other parent.
- Let the customer know that you can talk privately and explain resources, policies, and procedures that can be put in place to help keep them and their children safe during this process.
  - Proceed to **Safety Options and Resources**.

If the customer answers **yes** to the statements:

- *I hear you, but because this is such a complicated subject I am going to read through a few other experiences for your response. Your response is confidential and will not be shared with the other parent.*
- *The other parent:*
  - *Has access to your finances.*
  - *Threatens to harm your child(ren)/or pets.*
  - *Puts you down, yells at you, calls you names, or tells you you're worthless.*
  - *Monitors your activities (who you see, where you go) and/or your social media.*
  - *Has threatened or attempted suicide.*
  - *Has threatened you if you pursue child support.*
  - *Has used a weapon against you or threatened you with a lethal weapon.*
  - *Hits, slaps, kicks, pushes, or punches you, pulls your hair or in some way hurts you.*
  - *Forces or coerces you to do things sexually that make you uncomfortable.*
  - *You have an order of protection against the other parent.*
- *These all suggest a potential for safety concerns that may be considered during the child support process. Have you experienced anything similar to the statements I read?*
- If the customer answers **no** advise the customer:
  - *If anything should change, you can update information about your safety at any time during this process, or at any time in the future. Things change and we want to help you stay safe.*

*If you, or a friend or relative needs help now or in the future, I am going to provide you with information about resources.*

- Everyone should be provided information about their local domestic violence program and the NYS Domestic and Sexual Violence Hotline information.
  - Proceed to **Safety Resources**.
- If the customer identifies with any of the examples, advise the customer *that these examples all suggest a potential for safety concerns that may be considered during the child support process.*
  - Proceed to **Safety Options and Resources**.

## Safety Options and Resources

It is important for the Child Support Program to provide all customers with the safety options and resources that are available to them. The scripts below provide an example of how to offer the information:

### Safety Options:

- *If the Child Support Program is aware of your safety concerns, we have policies and procedures in place to help. I can explain what actions can be taken to help you access our services safely.*
- Provide the available safety options listed below
  - *If you cannot safely receive mail at your address, we can generate and file an Address Confidentiality Affidavit to obtain permission from the court to use an alternate mailing address.*
  - *You can request telephone or video testimony instead of an in-person appearance in court.*
  - *A request can be made to the Court to not reveal your location, residence, or employer.*
  - *The Court can offer additional precautions before, during, and after the hearing for your physical safety.*
  - *Your location/residence or employment information can be removed from petitions, notices, or any required financial disclosure. However, the name of the county is on all official court documents and cannot be removed.*
  - *Your laboratory appointment for genetic testing to establish parentage can be scheduled separately from the other parent.*
  - *Your child support case can be marked to keep your personal information confidential.*

Additional safety options for applicants/recipients of Temporary Assistance:

- *Violence or your fear of violence may be 'good cause' to allow you to receive public benefits without cooperating with the Child Support Program. A domestic violence waiver and/or good cause determination can release you from all or part of the requirements to cooperate with us.*
- *You can request a domestic violence waiver or a good cause review when you apply for Temporary Assistance or anytime thereafter if you feel that filing for child support will put you and/or your child(ren) at risk of harm.*

### Safety Resources:

- *We often work with parents who have experienced violence or are afraid of the other parent. I have information about resources that are available in our area. Provide your local DV resource information and the NYS resource information below. If you need to talk to someone immediately about safety.*

### NYS Domestic and Sexual Violence Hotline

**Call: 1-800-942-6906**

**Text: 1-844-997-2121**

**Chat: [www.opdv.ny.gov](http://www.opdv.ny.gov)**

*Highly trained advocates are available 24/7/365 to talk confidentially with anyone experiencing domestic or sexual violence, seeking resources or information, or questioning unhealthy aspects of their relationship.*