

The **PERCS Conversation Guide** is a psychosocial discussion tool developed from consultations with practitioners and parents. It supports conversations between practitioners and parents around the impact of family and domestic violence (FDV) on children's mental health and wellbeing.

The guide asks you to consider five domains in the child's life. It is not intended to be prescriptive; the order and emphasis given to each domain should be tailored by the practitioner to suit their work context and the family's culture and circumstances. The six practice principles outlined in this guide will also help you in these conversations.

FDV is an ongoing pattern of behaviour intent on establishing and maintaining power and control over women and children by creating fear and intimidation. Therefore, there are separate guides for working with mothers living with violence, and working with fathers using violence.

There are **four** broad stages to the guide:



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PERCS Domains

This guide provides a pathway and example questions for practitioners to explore the five distinct domains in the child's life with parent-clients. Each domain can be significantly impacted by FDV due to the climate of fear that surrounds children, and the negative beliefs and understandings they hold in relation to the violence. Language used is a guide only and should be adapted to suit the individual worker/client. Trust may take a few sessions to develop so questions can be revisited if necessary. It is crucial to think about what the parent is feeling at the end of these conversations and to ensure that they leave with a sense of hope.



Parent-child relationship

Parent-child relationship
A safe, secure, responsive and nurturing relationship between a child and their parent/caregiver is key to building resilience.

Practitioner's role

- Identify what parents want for their relationship with their children.
- With mothers: explore the effects of the violence on the mother-child relationship, and how she has responded to protect this relationship, despite the violence.
- With fathers: identify how his violence gets in the way of this relationship.

ASK

Example question: What is important to you as a mother/father?



Emotions and behaviours

Emotions and behaviours
Children need to feel loved, safe and confident their emotions will be listened to and responded to in a nurturing way.

Practitioner's role

- With mothers: explore what she has noticed about how her children's emotions and behaviours have been affected by the violence, and how she has responded to this, despite the violence.
- With fathers: examine how he interprets his children's emotions and behaviours, and whether he is able to respond to these safely.

ASK

Example question: Could you tell me a bit about your child?



Routines

Routines
Routines and rituals provide children with a stable base, especially in times of stress.

Practitioner's role

- With mothers: identify the routines that are important to her and her children, and how these have been affected by the violence.
- With fathers: ask what he notices about the effects of his violence on his children's routines, and what he can do to help reconnect them to these routines.

ASK

Example question: What does your regular week look like with your child?



Communication (and meaning making)

Communication (& meaning making)
Respectful and effective communication can help children to express emotions and make meaning from experiences of adversity. This helps develop their resilience.

Practitioner's role

- With mothers: explore how her children have made sense of the violence, and how she might have supported the children not to blame themselves.
- With fathers: identify his responsibility for the violence and that this responsibility should never be directed towards his children.

ASK

Example question: What opportunities do you get to spend time talking with your child?



Support networks

Support networks for the child
Safe and supportive networks outside the family can be key to a child's social and emotional wellbeing.

Practitioner's role

- With mothers: explore what support networks exist for her children, despite the violence, and how these networks might support the children's wellbeing.
- With fathers: discuss how important he thinks support networks are for his children, and how his use of violence might impact these networks.

ASK

Example question: Who does your child enjoy spending time with outside of immediate family?

This evidence has been sourced from research, practice experience, and from parents shows that certain principles are important to effectively engage clients in community, health, education and social service settings. The use of the **PERCS Conversation Guide** is informed by six practice principles.

Child-aware and parent-sensitive

A child-aware approach acknowledges and considers the experiences of the client's children, including their experiences of family violence, and prevents these children being 'invisible' to services. It takes the view that children's safety and wellbeing are important to both fathers and mothers.

A parent-sensitive approach draws upon the parenting role as a central feature of meaning and motivation in the client's life. In the context of family violence, a parent-sensitive approach finds ways to have conversations about their children, their own and their children's safety, and the effects of the violence and abuse on their children's wellbeing, without stigmatising or shaming.



Curiosity

A curious stance involves taking an interest in what is happening for the client, and how their current situation, including the context of family violence, may be impacting upon their parenting, their relationships, and the way they think about and feel about themselves, rather than simply asking questions in order to identify problems and complete an assessment.



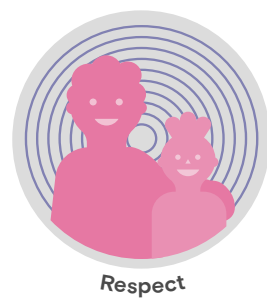
Respect

As practitioners become more familiar with the effects of men's violence on the lives of women and children, respectful practice with fathers who use violence may become more difficult. However, respectful practice with fathers who use violence ultimately supports the safety of women and children. With this in mind, practitioners can:

- remain respectful of a father's capacity to do things differently and cease his violence
- be open to the possibility he may hold values, beliefs, hopes, and strengths that contradict his practices of violence and abuse
- respect his knowledge and understanding of his children
- take a view that there is more to him and his life than his use of violence.

Respectful practice with mothers living with the effects of FDV includes:

- respecting her knowledge and understanding of her children, and of their safety
- respecting the steps she has taken to try to keep her children safe and lessen the effects of violence
- respecting her parenting efforts despite the undermining effects of violence on her parenting and her sense of self.



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Parent engagement principles



Context

Contextual understandings

Like all experiences of adversity faced by families, understanding the broader context and circumstances surrounding families facing issues of family and domestic violence remains important. However, practitioners need to take care not to imply or reinforce understandings that the context provides either an explanation or justification for the presence of violence and abuse in the family.

That is, a family's current living situation, background, financial circumstances, families of origin, families of procreation/choice, child-raising circumstances (e.g. custody, shared or single parenting), culture or spirituality or other contexts **do not** justify the use of violence, nor lessen the responsibility of the person using violence and abuse to cease their behaviour.



Collaboration

Collaboration

Collaboration involves supporting parents to recognise their own strengths, resources and ways in which things are going well in regard to parenting. It also involves empowering them to feel more confident and competent in their parenting, and providing them with choices, information and encouragement. Practitioners can work collaboratively by:

- asking parents what is problematic for them? What are they most worried about for themselves and their children? What is important to them? What might they be hoping for?
- linking these things with future steps parents can take in responding to the violence
- developing and actively maintaining trusted interagency relationships. Professionals and services that have reciprocal relationships with each other are able to respond to client's needs in a more holistic way.



Strengths & Hopes

Strengths and hopes

This involves identifying, highlighting, encouraging and building upon the hopes, strengths, efforts, capabilities and positive qualities of clients, and the resources available to them. Practitioners should demonstrate a belief that the client, as a parent, wants the best for their children. Ask questions about parenting values that underly the hopes parents have for their children, and what is important to them in their relationship with their child. Empower parents to see how things are improving to build self-efficacy. Recognise that culture is a source of rich tradition, resilience and strength for parents and children, especially among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This approach is not about minimising or ignoring the violence. Instead it allows space for parents to become active participants in finding solutions to these problems.

Delivery partners:



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