

Children & Youth Advocate Manual

Section 10: Facilitating 1:1 Conversations with Children & Youth



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Introduction & Importance

Adults sometimes feel uncomfortable talking with children and youth about domestic abuse in their families. We can be unsure about what to say, or fearful that we might do something that will make things worse. But when children do not have opportunities to talk about their experiences with abuse, they can be left feeling isolated, confused, frightened and ignored. Children may view the experiences of abuse in their families differently than their protective caregiver. Talking with children about their experiences demonstrates to them that they are cared for and respected; and is vital to helping them cope with the impact of living with domestic abuse. Meeting with the youth 1:1 should happen if the protective caregiver or youth request individual meetings AND the protective caregiver has given permission.

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Youth 1:1 Requested & Informed Consent

It is important that the protective caregiver (PC) and child want a youth only 1:1. The youth advocate should explain what a youth only 1:1 is and then give the family some time to think if they truly want this service. The PC should know that you will be talking with their child, understands your intentions, and has a general idea of what you might discuss. Make sure you talk with your supervisor about your agencies **INFORMED CONSENT POLICIES** and how to follow them. Reach out to Cody Warner if you have questions about or would like to further discuss informed consent policies. It is very important to make sure that you receive informed consent from both the protective caregiver and child. Informed consent should provide clients with:

Elements of Informed Consent

These elements of informed consent should be included with services.

NATURE & DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES

- An explanation of services.
- Expected duration of participation.
- Description of procedures the agency follows.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

A statement that participation is voluntary, that refusal or discontinuing to participate will involve NO penalty or loss of services to which the family is entitled.

BENEFITS

Description of what the families will gain from participating.

CONTACTS

Explanation of whom to contact for answers that relate to questions about services and rights to services.

RISKS & DISCOMFORTS

Description of any reasonably foreseeable harm to the family.

CONFIDENTIALITY

A statement describing the extent confidentiality of records identifying the family will be maintained.

REASONABLE ALTERNATIVES

A disclosure of appropriate alternative services that may be helpful to the family.

ASSESS UNDERSTANDING

Make sure the family is knowledgeable around the elements within the informed consent.

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Additional Elements of Informed Consent

These elements of informed consent can be included with services, as needed.

UNFORSEEABLE RISKS

A statement that the services may involve risks to the family which are unforeseeable by the program.

ADDITIONAL COSTS

Any additional costs at the families expense from participation in services

NUMBER OF PEOPLE

The approximate number of other people also receiving specific services

INVOLUNTARY TERMINATION OF SERVICES

Anticipated circumstances where family's participation may be ended by the agency.

CONSEQUENCES OF WITHDRAWING FROM SERVICES

The positive and negative steps a family will take for orderly termination of participation by the family.

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Tips for Crafting an Informed Consent Form (ICF)

Here is an example of an [Informed Consent Form](#) End Abuse used with the Statewide Teen Council.

Written in language that most can understand

For adults the ICF should be written at an 8th grade level.

Use use at least 12-point fonts with clear readability

Write in the 2nd person (you) and avoid first person (me).

Omit victim blaming language.

Label each consent form clearly in the footer if using multiple consent forms.

Tips for including the Protective Caregiver in Youth 1:1s

Some children and teens will talk more freely with an advocate if their protective caregiver (PC) is not in the room. Explain to the PC and the child that you will discuss any concerns about the safety or well-being of their child with the PC. It may be helpful to incorporate a debriefing time with the child and protective caregiver at the end of the session. During this time, the child can tell their PC what they talked about and anything else they feel is important. This provides an opportunity for the youth to feel in control of their healing process and keeps the protective caregiver informed.

Mandatory Reporting

Due to the nature of domestic abuse, intimate partner violence, and sexual assault it is important for all advocates to understand what mandatory reporting is and how it has the potential to help you, as well as, frustrate you. **LEGALLY, IN WISCONSIN, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT ADVOCATES ARE NOT MANDATORY REPORTERS.** However, funders may have agencies address child abuse reporting. For example; the Department of Children and Families (DCF) requires programs, who receive their children's program funding, to have a Child Abuse and Neglect (CAN) process and policy. Check with your director as to what you are required to do for CAN. Please **ALWAYS** follow your agencies policies and **NEVER** make the decision to report child abuse or neglect alone.

It is important to immediately let the family know that you are a mandated reporter in order to build and maintain their trust. Explain to the family the types of information you would need to report by giving examples. If the youth requests someone to talk to who is not a mandated reporter; be prepared to provide appropriate resources. (Refer to [Mandatory Reporting](#)) Also see '[Moving Toward Deeper Issues](#)' below for an example of how to talk about your agencies CAN mandatory reporting policy.

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Begin to Understand the Culture of the Family

It is the children and youth advocates' responsibility to understand cultural routines and practices. It is NOT the children and youth advocate's responsibility to make assumptions about what culture(s) the family identifies with. It is essential for advocates to understand what traditions the family celebrates, the role of culture within the family, and their culture's perspective about domestic abuse. The protective caregiver and youth may inform you of their cultural beliefs or practices that are important to their family that they would like followed while receiving services from you. Tell the family that you appreciate anything they share with you.

Example question: *"Are there any cultural considerations I should know about when working with your family? Like types of games to play with a group of mixed gender children, genres of books that can/cannot be read, or foods that can/cannot be eaten."*

Tell them that you would like to incorporate those considerations into programming and provide examples of how you would incorporate them into your programming. Ask the family if they feel that the incorporated consideration is appropriate, if they would provide any clarifications. (Refer to the [New Advocate Manual: Specific Communities](#). You will need a login to access this information and scroll to MEMBER-ONLY Resources)

Another resource to look into is the [Diversity, Multiculturalism & Anti-Oppression: A manual for Domestic Abuse Programs in Wisconsin](#). This manual is meant to help explore ways in which an anti-oppression framework can be applied to our work daily to end domestic violence.

*Please note that it is **NOT** the responsibility of that family to explain every aspect of their culture OR how to incorporate those cultural considerations into your programming. If you would like to further educate yourself about different cultures please reach out to [End Abuse](#) and we will work with you on finding [appropriate resources](#).*

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Space and Supply Considerations

Meet with children and teens in a location that is appealing to them. Offer games, books, toys or art supplies to use when they are meeting with you. Have paper, markers and fidget toys readily available. Ideally, children and youth will think of meeting with you as a chance to relax and have fun, as well as, a time to talk about their experiences. Some games are better than others for different youth and the content that you are discussing. Remember you can always try other games if the ones you are using are not working as effectively as you like.

***TIP:** If you create a game with a youth, make sure to document the rules to play again next time!*

When meeting outside of the agency, advocates should always talk with the protective caregiver AND youth about how their confidentiality may be compromised. Example: *“There may be times where we meet outside of the agency. I want you to know that I am involved with many different things in the community. People know who I am and what I do for work. We cannot always control what people think when they see me [the advocate] with you. Is it still okay if we meet outside of the agency? [If yes] If people ask what we are doing or how we know each other, what would you like me to tell them?”*

Due to the nature of our work, there may be times when there are abuse allegations from clients about the advocate they are working with. Here are some considerations to think about when working with youth individually. For further discussion, contact Cody Warner.

Have more than 1 person in the room.

Have more than 1 person attend any out of office fieldtrips.

Use spaces that have windows, with the comfortability of the youth.

Leave doors unlocked.

Know your agencies grievance procedure for these types of allegations.

Go in teams if working with someone who has experienced sexual assault.

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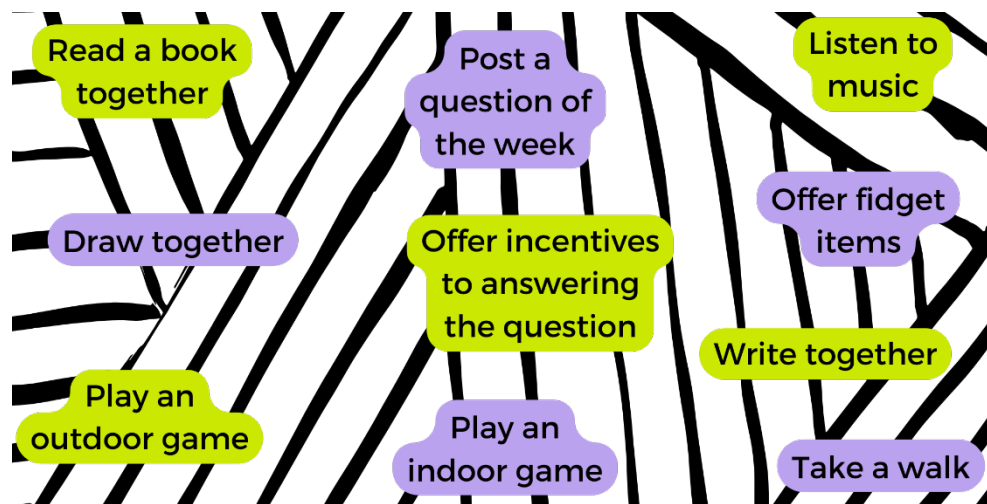
Beginning Conversations: Icebreakers and Conversation Starters

Always begin by establishing a connection with the child, taking as long as necessary for them to feel comfortable with you. The first few meetings may consist entirely of getting to know each other and building trust which is perfectly normal. It is important as an advocate to observe the youth, listen carefully and follow their lead. Make sure to have multiple interactive activities so it doesn't feel like they are coming to something that feels like their school day.

One way to establish a connection is asking the youth what they are hoping to get out of meeting with you. That way you have one measure to show progress. Talk about anything that they enjoy discussing and that makes them feel at ease. For example:



Ask the youth what activities they would like to do as a part of their time with you. Offering different activities to choose from may give them a sense of ownership. Be creative when working with youth, not all sessions need to be in the same space, and not all activities need to be followed the same way. Make sure to find a balance between fun activities and support. This is something that you will have to find and define with each child. If the youth are reluctant to talk, offer alternative activities and let them choose what they want to do.



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*Reach out to advocates on the Children & Youth listserv ([wiskidsdv](#)) or connect with other youth advocates on the **MONTHLY** Children & Youth Conference Calls. Contact the LGBTQ & Youth Program Director, [Cody Warner](#), for more information!*

Moving Towards Deeper Issues

Before discussing deeper issues, advocates should go over their agencies' Child Abuse and Neglect (CAN) Reporting Policy with the youth and make sure that they are able to understand what everything means. Do not just read the policy and assume the youth knows everything that was read. Create a way that is comfortable to you and fully explains the policy in a developmentally appropriate way. The following steps and questions may help you explain your agency's CAN reporting policy. You may need to work with your agency to come up with a developmentally and age-appropriate approach to explaining the CAN policy to younger children.

1. Read policy with youth.
 - a. Provide a copy or share a screen that they can follow along with you.
2. Ask the following questions. (Allow them time to think about the question before moving)
 - a. What is something that stands out to you from this policy?
 - i. It can be anything.
 - b. What parts of this policy are clear?
 - c. What parts of this policy are confusing?
 - d. What questions did this raise for you?
 - e. What ideas are beginning to emerge?
 - f. How would you explain this policy to someone who has not read it?

When you believe the youth understands the policy, then ease into conversations about their trauma experiences. Tell them that they can talk about whatever they want and remind them about your agency's CAN reporting policy. If the child is hesitant or becomes upset about a topic, do not pressure them to continue to talk. Use active listening, listen without judging, and do not act shocked at what they have to say. You may want to start by asking:

- What do you know about this agency?
- What do you know about this position or program?
- What are some reasons you think we are meeting?

Speak at their developmental level using words they can understand. Ask the youth if they need clarification on anything you are saying, when appropriate. Acknowledge that talking about trauma experiences is difficult and praise their courage for trying. Restate what you hear from the youth and asking for clarification is another way to build a relationship with the youth by showing you are listening and trying to understand their experience.

- Example: *"It sounds like you are feeling [EMOTION] about [PERSON] is that correct?"*
- Versus: *"Yeah, that [PERSON] is [NEGATIVE ADJECTIVE]."*

It is important to acknowledge the youth's complex feelings about their experiences. Help them understand and accept that they can feel strong negative emotions AND positive emotions toward someone. It may be beneficial to role-play the ways the youth can show or tell their caregiver how they are feeling. Providing opportunities to talk about any potential risks or benefits of telling or showing their caregiver.

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For example: “I hear that you [POSITIVE EMOTION] and you feel [NEGATIVE EMOTION] towards your [CAREGIVER]. Which is completely normal and can be hard to sort through. What are some other things that might make you feel [NEGATIVE EMOTION]? What are some other things that might make you feel [POSITIVE EMOTION]? What are some ways you can show or tell your [CAREGIVER] what you are feeling?”

Topics & Questions

Encourage children to talk about their feelings and to think of people whom they can trust to talk to about their life, no matter how big or how small. Validate their emotions, especially about the adults in their lives.

Distinguish the difference between who the person is and what behaviors the person uses. You may want to use ‘sometimes questions’ to normalize their feelings. For example: “*Sometimes kids feel angry at the adults in their home. When was a time that you felt that way?*” It may help to offer statements that do not require a response for example: “*You seem quieter than you did the last time we spoke.*”

Answer the children and youth’s questions honestly in a way that is developmentally appropriate (Refer to [Child & Youth Development](#)) and in a way that explains the situation. Validate their wishes and be realistic about what you can offer. Do not make commitments to children and teens that you cannot keep. **Make sure you are not making ANY false promises to the youth, see examples below.**

- Your caregivers are working to fix their issues.
- You are completely safe.
- You will be granted that restraining order.

Avoid using ‘why’ questions. Some youth may think ‘why’ questions imply that they have done something wrong. Avoid using ‘good or bad’ with questions, as it may suggest to the child that what happened to them is bad. Which they may internalize as they are bad because of the ‘bad’ experience that happened to them. Incorporate the basic messages that are so important to children and youth who have experienced domestic abuse.

- People should not use abuse towards anyone.
- The abuse is not your fault.
- It is not your responsibility to stop the abuse.

Here are some resources for tougher topics that may present themselves in talking with youth.

- [Coming Out](#)
- [Death](#)
- [Drug Use](#)
- [Racism](#)
- [Runaway](#)
- [Suicide Risk Factors & Warning Signs](#)

Wrapping up a Conversation

Have a clock, watch, or timer so you can let them know when there are about 10-15 minutes left. Identify what information they would like to share with their caregiver about their time with you before the caregiver comes in the space. Ask the youth if there is anything they want you to share or not share with their caregiver.

Let them know how and when you are available and consider offering a specific time that you can set aside to meet with them again. Tell them that you know that this can be a rough transition and that they will not always feel the way they do now. Try to end the session on a positive note by giving them a genuine reason to feel good about themselves or hopeful about some aspect of their life. Example: “*What is something you are looking forward to within the next week?*”

As always, there are many ways to end conversations; try to find approaches that feel comfortable to you and the family.

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Resources

[Diversity, Multiculturalism & Anti-Oppression: A manual for Domestic Abuse Programs in Wisconsin](#) Created by the Access Committee of the Governor's Council to help explore ways in which an anti-oppression framework can be applied to our work daily to end domestic violence.

[Futures Without Violence](#) offers many resources for Children & Youth Advocacy. The link will take you to their resource center where you can click on the topics on the left to refine the resources. Clicking children, youth & teens will give all their resources from webinars to digital tools to videos to manuals.

[National Child Abuse Hotline](#) Offers resources for prevention, intervention, and treatment programs. At Childhelp, our goal is to meet the physical, emotional, educational, and spiritual needs of abused, neglected and at-risk children. We focus our efforts on prevention, intervention, treatment, and community outreach. Childhelp programs and services help children from any situation and let them experience the life they deserve one filled with love. The principle theme across all of our programs is to provide children we serve with an environment of compassion and kindness.

[The National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) has a blog post on Talking to Your Children About Domestic Violence that offers what you can do with additional resources.

[Sesame Street](#) has a plethora of resources around talking with children around traumatic experiences. The [Sesame Workshop](#) YouTube account has curated playlists on specific topics as well.

Pretty Good Design has created [Your Kids Aren't Too Young to Talk About Race: Resource Roundup](#). This resource contains links to podcasts, articles, books, toys, studies, and more to help adults talk about race to youth.

*Please notify the LGBTQ & Youth Program Director, [Cody Warner](#), if **ANY** links are no longer working.*
