

APPENDIX 4: INTERMEDIATE ASSESSMENT CONVERSATION MODEL

The table below outlines an example conversation model. It provides guidance on the context and importance of the prompting questions to support your use of the **Adult Person Using Violence Intermediate Assessment Tool (Intermediate Assessment Tool)**.

Sections 1–5 within the **Intermediate Assessment Tool** are signposted throughout the guidance, so you can record the information you gather into the tool.¹

The **Assessment conversation model** proposes an interview flow from the commencement of your engagement, exploring the person's:

- ... presenting needs
- ... relationships
- ... behaviours, needs and circumstances and their impact on family members and themselves
- ... motivations for engaging with services.

Consider the level and type of involvement your service has with the person using violence, their level of active engagement and motivation for support, and adapt the flow of prompting questions as appropriate to the situation.

¹ References in this appendix to 'Sections' mean those in the Intermediate Assessment Tool, unless otherwise specifically stated.

You can use this guidance to support your interaction with the person using violence in one or across a series of sessions to inform your risk assessment. Applying the model of Structured Professional Judgement and your engagement skills and experience will enable you to navigate the conversation in a safe and non-collusive way.

Be prepared for these prompting questions to elicit emotional responses from the person using violence. Refer to Responsibilities 1 and 3 for more information on considerations for safe, non-collusive communication when working with a person using family violence. Responsibility 4 also has guidance on closing the conversation safely.

Further questions to elicit information regarding risk factors are explored in **Responsibility 7**. If a service user is not ready to engage with specialist services, you can seek secondary consultation support around this.

Making a connection and building a professional relationship with the service user

Leading questions

Before we talk about what brought you here today, tell me a bit about yourself. I'm interested to find out who you are so I can better support you.

Following questions

Tell me about:

- ... your work*
- ... where you live and with who*
- ... activities, sports, or community activities you are involved with*
- ... any cultural community connection you have.*

Are there activities that you are involved with regularly or occasionally?

What do you like doing when you are not at home or work?

Are there things that you don't do that you would like to do?

How would you describe yourself to others?

What would you like me to know about you?

Why is this important to consider for family violence risk assessment?

Responses to these questions will start the process of building a picture of the person in their context. Knowing who the person resides with will give you an indication of who may be most affected by the person's presenting needs and help you identify victim survivor/s.

At this stage, you may observe the presence of beliefs or attitudes (**Section 1**) and any environmental factors that contribute to the person's choice to use violence and reinforce, support, excuse or minimise their behaviours (such as friend, group or workplace cultures).

You may also identify protective factors (**Section 2**), including positive influences in the person's life, that may reduce risk (for example, family or a community member who role models safety and wellbeing).

While not asking directly about risk factors, the person's responses to the questions may provide insight into risk (for example, financial issues, unemployment, mental illness, alcohol or drug use, lack of support networks – **Section 3**).

Their responses may also identify isolation and withdrawal from family, friends and community.

Practice considerations

Asking open, invitational questions about who they are indicates to the person using violence you are genuinely interested in them as a person, not just for the reason they have presented at your service.

This will increase your understanding of the person, their circumstances and environment. It may also help you uncover the person's perceptions or expectations about themselves and others, which may provide insight into their intention or choice for using violence (refer to [Responsibility 2](#)).

If it is part of your professional practice, you may choose to use an ecomap (refer to [Appendix 16](#)) to help you explore with the person their relationships, supports, connections to work, friends, community and other services. This may highlight aspects of the person's world that are important to them, as well as lacking supports or relationships with others. It may also reveal their willingness to actively engage in a conversation with you at this time.

It is important to observe any feelings of shame as the person starts to share their story with you. If the person feels judged by professionals or services through real or perceived experiences of discrimination or stigma, this may impede help-seeking and future engagement with services. Refer to guidance on shame in [Section 12.1.14](#) in the *Foundation Knowledge Guide*.

If the person talks about trauma in their life, it may reveal their level of stress and anxiety in attending and engaging in the session. Trauma may also be used as an excuse for their use of violence and abuse, shifting responsibility onto the trauma and away from the choices they have made (refer to [Section 10.4](#) on trauma and violence-informed practice in the *Foundation Knowledge Guide* for further information). Referral to a specialist service to address their trauma might be the most appropriate response if your role or service is not to undertake trauma work.

Asking about why they are at your service

Note: your experience and knowledge will assist you in these discussions. If you are not qualified or skilled to address additional presenting issues, you should link the service user to the appropriate service.

Leading questions

Tell me about what brought you here today.

What is the most pressing issue you would like to discuss?

Following questions

What are your thoughts on why you've come to this service?

What would you like to get out of this?

How did you find out about our service? Were you referred by someone?

How do you feel about the referral?

Where the person has attended your service before or another service for the same presenting need:

What was that experience like for you? What did you find helpful/not helpful?

How have you found your interactions with other services?

How does your (presenting need X) affect you?

How does your (presenting need X) affect your [family member, partner, children]?

What are you most worried about?

What would others in your life say they are most worried about in relation to your (presenting need X)?

Are you noticing yourself behaving in ways that you don't normally?

How does this affect you and others around you – your [family member, partner, children]?

Why is this important to consider for family violence risk assessment?

Presenting needs may contribute to the person's use of family violence and coercive control (**Section 2**). The presenting need may not be family violence, but relate to family violence risk factor/s (for example, unemployment/disengagement from education, drug and/or alcohol use, mental illness/depression, financial difficulties – **Section 3**), or be masking their use of violence (for example, they use the presenting need to justify, minimise or deny the use of violence).

The person's understanding (description) of their presenting needs will provide insight into:

- ... who they hold responsible for 'causing' the presenting needs to be in their life (for example 'stress at work is causing me to drink too much')
- ... their belief in their capacity/confidence to exert control over their own behaviour and choices (self-efficacy) (**Section 4**)
- ... their motivation/s for addressing the presenting needs and other issues or challenges they face (**Section 4**)
- ... how they understand the impact of the presenting needs on others in their life (capacity for empathy)
- ... their ability to reflect on self and engage in challenging conversations, demonstrated by their physical, emotional and verbal behaviours and presentations.

If the person describes having a diagnosis of depression or depression symptoms, assess for severity, including degree of hopelessness. Deteriorating mental health, including experiencing suicidal ideation, are particular risks associated with suicide and homicide–suicide among people who use violence.

Practice considerations

Exploring the person's presenting need will assist in your assessment of its impact on relationships and identity and contribute to early understandings of the type of narrative likely to be presented about their use of family violence. You can use this to determine when it may be safe and appropriate to prompt further about the links between their presenting needs and their use of violence.

You may also identify supports the person requires to address presenting needs and circumstances that contribute to family violence risk, current and historical patterns of engagement with services, and the person's readiness and motivation to accept further professional intervention ([Section 2 and 4](#)).

Aboriginal people and people from diverse communities may experience multiple layers of discrimination and barriers to opportunities, including barriers to accessing employment or housing. While this may result in instability across aspects of a person's life circumstances, it does not in itself indicate an increased risk of family violence for these communities.

It is important to understand the context surrounding the person's presenting needs (for example, long-term discrimination when attempting to gain employment) to understand how it may impact the presence of family violence risk factors (for example, perpetrator unemployed) and extent to which they impact on victim survivors (for example, victim survivor being forced to work and hand over income to the person using violence).

You should also consider how the presenting needs have changed recently to bring the person into contact with your service (for example, whether mental health and symptoms have changed recently), and whether the presenting needs are co-occurring with others (for example, gambling with alcohol or drug use). This information may support you in your analysis of risk and formulating your rationale for risk level ([Section 5](#)).

Asking about important people and relationships

Leading questions

Could you describe what your relationship is like with your family/people who are important to you? This can be family, close friends, communities you are part of.

Can you tell me a little about your family growing up?

Following questions

Who is in your family?

Who are the important people in your life?

Who would you go to for help?

Are there other people or community members who you consider to be family or like family?

Who do you live with?

What are your memories of how you were raised? (positive and negative)?

What is your relationship like now with your parents, siblings, grandparents, extended family members?

Do family members visit and/or stay at your home?

[if children]

In what ways do you think your life until now has shaped the way you relate to your children, partner, family members?

Why is this important to consider for family violence risk assessment?

Responses about the person's relationships with family and people important to them will further contribute to your understanding of the person in their context.

As the person shares information with you, you may start to observe narratives (beliefs or attitudes) and behaviours (verbal expressions) about family members as well as their perception of relationship dynamics ([Section 1](#)).

You may hear about experiences of childhood, and norms within broader family life and social circles, which may provide further context to understand their intent or choice in using violence. You may also identify possible risk factors including victim survivor/s' experiences of isolation or controlling behaviours ([Section 3](#)).

Responses to questions about help-seeking in family, friendship and community contexts will provide you with some indication of who, if anyone, the person engages with for emotional support. If the person does not identify anyone, you can explore who they ideally would like to be able to approach for help and the reasons this feels inaccessible.

You may uncover narratives about social norms and beliefs about help-seeking and feelings about pressure to conform to these beliefs. You may also be alerted to potential risk if the person is isolated and also experiences depression, extreme sadness or hopelessness. This may be an indicator of suicide risk.

Responses to questions about childhood and families of origin may indicate possible adverse childhood experiences, including experiences of family violence, trauma, and systemic discrimination and marginalisation.

It is important to observe whether the person adopts a victim stance, identifies with violence as a learned behaviour, or uses these conversations as opportunities to deflect or hide their responsibility for their own behaviours.

Practice considerations

If it is part of your practice, you may choose to use a genogram (refer to [Appendix 13](#)) to help you explore with the person their relationships with family members, including families of origin and families of choice, as well as those close connections who the person identifies as family in their life, including friends and community members.

You should explore any relationships the person using violence has with children, including children and step-children in current or past intimate relationships, children they provide care to, and any children they may have contact with as part of a short-term or dating relationship. This conversation will assist you to identify whether the person has a parenting or caring 'identity' or role.

It is important to apply an intersectional and trauma and violence-informed lens when using a genogram with the person using violence.

Being aware of who is involved in this person's life may assist you and the person using violence to identify appropriate people they can draw upon for support in addressing their family violence risk (refer to the [Intermediate Safety Plan](#) at [Appendix 8](#) and [Intermediate safety planning conversation model](#) at [Appendix 9](#)).

Asking about adult victim survivors

Leading questions

Can you tell me more about your partner/family member? (who you have identified as an adult victim survivor; if known, use their name throughout discussion, if not known, ask their name).

Following questions

How would you describe your family member [adult victim survivor/s] in five words (adjectives) with a couple of examples of why you chose these?

Where the relationship is an intimate partner:

How long have you been/were you together?

What was it that brought you together?

Where the relationship is not an intimate partner:

How would you describe your relationship with them?

How long have you provided care for them/lived with them?

For all relationship types:

What does your family member do?

What do they like doing?

How do they spend their time?

What would you say their strengths are?

What would you say their weaknesses are?

How do you think they might describe (see) themselves?

Why is this important to consider for family violence risk assessment?

These conversation prompts seek to elicit the narrative (beliefs or attitudes) of the person using violence in relation to the victim survivor, including beliefs of power in relationships and expectations of behaviours and roles (**Section 1**).

Responses may indicate the presence of a range of risk factors, including but not limited to, controlling behaviours, obsession/jealous behaviour and emotional abuse (**Section 3**). You may observe verbal behaviours, such as the person speaking in degrading ways and criticising the victim survivor's abilities and decisions.

You may also identify the victim survivor is in some way reliant on the person using violence for care and/or financial support (for example, for migration purposes, older people, people with disability, stay at home parent). If this is identified, consider ways to ask about the behaviours of the person using violence that may elicit further information about any targeting of the victim survivor's identity, experience, or exploitation of dependence throughout your conversation. This information may provide you with some insight about their pattern of coercive controlling family violence behaviours (**Section 5**).

You may also observe whether the person using violence has an ability or willingness to empathise with the victim survivor's point of view.

You should familiarise yourself with **Section 1** to consider the range of narratives and behaviours that may indicate the use of family violence.

Practice considerations

Throughout your conversation, it is important to consider ways to bring the voice and lived experience of the victim survivor into the room.

As a practitioner, you should use the name of family members (where known), particularly if they are a victim survivor, throughout your conversation with the person using family violence. Not using the person's proper names can be a way the person using violence chooses to objectify or further display power over the victim survivor.

If it is within your service's usual course of business to invite a family member to receive support from the organisation, or for the family member to attend the service with the person using violence, consider whether it is safe and appropriate to do so. The person using violence may attempt to suggest the victim survivor also needs 'help', which may be an invitation for you to collude with the narrative the person using violence has about the victim survivor's capacity, needs and circumstances.

If the family member does engage with your service for a discussion about the relationship or support needs of the person using violence, it is important to ask about family violence separately. Refer to victim survivor-focused MARAM Practice Guides.

Note: discussions relating to family violence should not occur in the first instance with a couple or family group. This should only occur with consent from the victim survivor or family member and where your assessment of risk through Structured Professional Judgement determines it safe to do so. A discussion with the victim survivor or family member alone should be considered. If not possible, a secondary consultation with a specialist family violence service working with victim survivors is advised.

If applicable: **Asking about ex-partners**

Note: If the person is in a current relationship, you should use your knowledge of the person to identify appropriate timing to have a conversation exploring their relationship with their ex-partner/s.

Leading questions

Tell me about your past relationships/your relationship with your ex-partner (if known, use their name throughout discussion, if not known, ask their name).

Following questions

How would you describe the relationship?

How would you describe the reasons for the relationship ending?

When you think back on this relationship, are there things you learned that you have taken into your current/future relationships?

Why is this important to consider for family violence risk assessment?

Information about the timing (recency) of separation, who instigated the separation and how the person using violence makes sense of the separation are critical to risk assessment. Separation is a high-risk time and can be linked to homicide-suicide risk (**Section 3**).

The person using violence may be unable to accept that the separation has occurred, may be hopeful that the relationship will be reunited, may place blame with the ex-partner, and/or may not be willing to negotiate any separation-related processes, such as parenting orders and division of assets.

You may observe narratives or physical and verbal behaviours that indicate anger and resentment, jealousy, obsession and controlling behaviours.

You should consider the risk assessment and practice considerations outlined above (asking about adult victim survivors) when observing the responses of the person using violence about ex-partners.

The narrative of the person using violence about past relationships may provide insight into current or future relationships and assist you to identify patterns of violent and coercive controlling behaviours (**Section 5**).

Practice considerations

When discussing separation, the person using violence may present as:

- ... distressed, despondent, anxious or agitated
- ... hostile or angry towards the victim survivor
- ... not accepting of the separation and post-separation outcomes (financial and parenting).

During these conversations, it is important to pay attention to invitations to collude, and any experiences or feelings you have of the person attempting to intimidate, manipulate or control you and the conversation (**Section 1**).

Seek support and advice from colleagues and supervisors for support in your responses and to ensure your own safety. If you are concerned that the person using violence may increase their risk, refer to **Responsibility 4** for guidance on closing the conversation safely and proactively share information with relevant services.

If applicable: *Asking about children*

Leading questions

I'd like to talk some more about your children/step-children/children you provide care to and your relationship with them. Can you tell me about them? (if known, use their name throughout discussion, if not known, ask their name).

Following questions

What are they like? What is it about each of them that you love?

What do they like doing? What do they not like doing?

When [child] gets angry or upset, how do they behave?

When they see you or your ex/partner/other carer unhappy, distressed or angry, what do they do? Do you think they are they worried about you? Do they express being worried or anxious about their own safety?

If child/ren are accessing support from services: How do you show your support to [child] around their engagement with X service/professional?

If the person has contact with children within a dating relationship context: What is your relationship like with [dating partner's] child/ren?

Why is this important to consider for family violence risk assessment?

Through the person using violence's responses about each child, you may start to build an understanding of the types of relationships the person has formed with children in their life (for example, they take on a disciplinary role), how they place value on children (for example, the person's narrative may indicate they are considered possessions), and how they empathise with or respect children's decisions or needs (for example, 'my child makes a big deal out of nothing, just like their mother') (**Section 1**).

You may also start to build an understanding of how the person views their parenting or caring identity or role, including whether they accept their role, feel an expectation to accept a parenting role, or assume a parenting role early in a dating relationship.

You should observe any narratives indicating the person's sense of entitlement to relationships with children, including forcing themselves into children's lives where it may not be safe or appropriate for them to have a parenting or caring role.

The narrative the person uses may indicate that children are exposed to family violence, its impacts or being directly targeted by the person's violence (**Section 3**).

Each child and young person in a family will have different experiences of the violence and some may be targeted more than others.

Targeting includes expressing hostility, resentment or indifference towards a child, using tactics to isolate a child from their other parent, culture and/or community supports, isolating a child from health, mental health and wellbeing, medical and educational services, threatening to enforce mental health treatment as a form of control, or using highly authoritarian parenting practices.

Risk may increase where the children are not biologically related to the person using violence (**Section 3**).

Where the person using violence discloses that their child/ren are accessing mental health and wellbeing services, including counselling, you may consider prompting for how the person using violence engages with or feels about the service's involvement. You may observe narratives that indicate control over the child/ren's access to services, hostility towards services, or are degrading or critical of their child/ren for requiring support.

Practice considerations

Throughout your conversation, it is important to consider ways to bring the voice and lived experience of children as victim survivors in their own right into the room.

Although children can be a strong motivator for change for people using family violence, they are also commonly targeted for abuse, or used as tools to further the abuse, coerce and control the other parent.

Depending on your relationship and level of disclosure from the person using violence about their behaviours and use of coercive control, there may be opportunities to discuss the impact of violence on children and family functioning.

This includes through direct or indirect exposure to their use of violence, ongoing behaviours towards the other parent, and the use of systems to isolate children from the non-violent parent/ carer.

Refer to guidance on using parenting as a motivator for change in risk assessment (**Responsibility 3**) and risk management (**Responsibility 4**) to support your practice. You can record any identified motivation related to children in **Section 4**.

Consider your mandatory reporting obligations to Child Protection (**Responsibility 4**).

Depending on the person using violence's responses, you may consider whether it is safe, appropriate and reasonable for your engagement, and the safety of all family members, to notify the person about requirements to report to Child Protection. If you are unsure, use a secondary consultation with a specialist perpetrator intervention service to seek their advice about informing the person using violence.

Where you are unsure about assessing the risk and needs of children through the narrative provided by the person using violence, it is important to seek secondary consultation from a senior practitioner or supervisor within your own organisation, or from another appropriate service provider.

If applicable: *Asking about parenting*

Leading questions

Can we talk about you as a parent and the role you play?

Following questions

Tell me about yourself as a parent. What roles and responsibilities do you take on as a parent/in the home?

How do you and your partner decide on parenting roles? What roles and responsibilities for parenting/in the home do you notice your partner taking on?

How do you work with your partner to support your child/ren?

Are there times when being a parent is hard?

When things get hard how do you manage these situations?

Do you think your child/ren are struggling with what is going on at present?

Tell me about how you discipline your child/ren?

What was your experience like of being parented?

Why is this important to consider for family violence risk assessment?

People who use violence often engage in behaviours that cause damage to the relationship between an adult victim survivor / non-violent parent/carer and their child/ren.

These can include tactics to undermine capacity and confidence in parenting and undermining the child–parent relationship, including manipulation of the child’s perception of the adult victim survivor.

This can have long-term impacts on the psychological, developmental and emotional wellbeing of children, and it indicates the person using violence’s willingness to involve children in their abuse.

These prompting questions seek to elicit information about the person using violence’s behaviour towards the other parent, including narratives about the other person’s parenting, assumed expectations about parenting roles, and established parenting norms.

You should familiarise yourself with **Section 1** to consider the range of narratives and behaviours that may indicate the presence of risk factors specific to children and document identified risk factors in **Section 3**.

Practice considerations

Parenting practices and norms across all families is varied. It is important to be aware of and understand culturally relevant family and parenting norms, such as for families within Aboriginal and diverse communities, in order to understand and contextualise the person’s behaviour and identify family violence.

While it may be tempting for the person using violence to focus on the non-violent parent/carer’s behaviours and perceptions of skill and capacity. It is critical that you bring the person’s attention back to themselves through use of a **balanced approach to engagement**.

You may use statements such as *‘It’s helpful to hear about how you understand [name’s] parenting. I’m wondering about how you understand your own parenting – how would you describe that?’*.

If applicable: *Asking about parenting with an ex-partner*

Leading questions

Can you tell me what parenting is like for you as a separated family?

Following questions

What is your relationship like with your ex-partner?

How does this impact on the children?

How do you manage shared parenting?

How do your child/ren feel when they leave you?

How do your child/ren feel when they leave their [other parent/s]?

Are there any court orders in place that we need to be aware of that talk about the children?

Do you think it's important for the children that they see their parents being friends?

Why is this important to consider for family violence risk assessment?

Some people who use violence may provide a narrative that they are a safe parent. This is often presented through statements that seek to explain their behaviours as 'only' directed at adult victim survivors and not towards children.

It is important to note that violence directed towards an adult victim survivor/non-violent parent/carer and safe parenting are incongruous. The use of family violence is a harmful parenting choice.

Through these conversation prompts, you may uncover risk factors (**Section 3**) related to:

- ... undermining the other parent's relationship with children
- ... use of violence at times of child handover
- ... adherence to court-ordered arrangements, including behaviours that indicate the non-return of children
- ... third parties, including family members, friends or others, who may monitor or support child contact arrangements
- ... the use of systems to continue their violent and coercive controlling behaviours, including through family law proceedings and reporting to Child Protection.

If you identify risk to third parties, you should document this in **Section 5**. If it is appropriate to your role and you have a built a professional, trusting relationship with the person using violence, you may be in a position to further explore risk to third parties.

You can also seek secondary consultation with specialist perpetrator intervention services about the person using violence's presentation and risk, and to identify options for engaging with third parties for risk assessment and risk management.

Practice considerations

Having conversations with people who use violence about their co-parenting relationships and children can be challenging for professionals. A range of family violence behaviours and tactics may emerge that are difficult and uncomfortable to hear.

It is important to continuously reflect on your own assumptions, values and beliefs as you work with the person using violence and seek supervision and support from senior practitioners.

People who use violence may not provide accurate or holistic information about their children and the non-violent parent/carer. You should be attentive to indicators demonstrating the person using violence's pattern of behaviour to understand the impacts on children, the non-violent parent/carer, and overall family functioning.

You can document your observations about the person's pattern of behaviour and impacts in **Section 5** and use this to inform your determination of risk level.

Using a **balanced approach to engagement** can help you to navigate this conversation with the person using violence, who may present to you with conflicting beliefs and behaviours about themselves as a parent – a belief they are a 'good' parent while acknowledging the use and impact of family violence on children.

Where appropriate to your role and relationship with the person using violence, you may use the person's cognitive dissonance to enhance motivation to engage with services, address their violence and parenting and set goals for safety.

Using the presenting need to ask about person's use of family violence

Note: If safe, appropriate, and reasonable to do so, you may use these prompts to link what you have noticed about how the person has responded to previous questions to explore family violence risk indicators.

Leading questions

You came here because of [presenting need, such as drug use, homelessness, etc.].

In our discussions you have described disagreements or fighting at home.

Can we talk about this more? I am concerned for you and your family.

Following questions

Can you talk me through what is happening for you?

You have indicated that what is occurring is a lot more fighting. Can we talk some more about what fighting looks like?

... What happens when you and your family member fight?

... What does this look like?

... How do you feel when this happens? Do you regret this or feel ashamed?

... Who else is around when this happens?

... How often does it happen? When was the last time it happened?

... Has there ever been any police or court involvement?

... How do you think your [presenting need] relates to your behaviour?

Are there any [court/ intervention] orders in place that I need to know about?

Can you tell me about how the [court/intervention] orders came about?

Why is this important to consider for family violence risk assessment?

Asking directly about family violence behaviours using the person's chosen words to describe situations can contribute to your understanding and assessment of risk. By inviting the person to tell their 'story', you can listen for:

- ... how they make sense of their use of violence
- ... the types of violence they are ready to acknowledge (noting they may not think some of these behaviours are violent)
- ... what strategies they use to harm, control or dominate victim survivor/s
- ... any emerging patterns of behaviour
- ... how they understand the impact of their violence on others
- ... any evidence that behaviours are increasing in frequency or severity (for example, 'we are fighting more, it used to be one a month').

You can document observed or disclosed risk factors caused by the person using violence's behaviours in [Section 3](#) and patterns and timeframes related to frequency and recency in [Section 4](#).

Through discussions on the presence and conditions of court orders such as a family violence intervention order, you may uncover risk factors related to the person's use of family violence. This can include narratives that indicate controlling behaviours, stalking, emotional abuse and breaches of orders.

While people who use violence often significantly under-report their use of violent and coercive controlling behaviours, their descriptions are key to informing how you approach conversations about safety planning and undertake collaborative risk management.

If you have identified the adult victim survivor is dependent on the person using violence for care and/or financial support, you may ask further prompting questions to uncover information relevant to their particular circumstances and any behaviours that target the victim survivor's identity, experience, or dependence.

For example, *'what does police/court involvement mean to your family member's migration application?'*, *'what does this "fighting" mean in relation to your family member's mobility?'*

Behaviours that target the victim survivor form part of the person's pattern of coercive controlling behaviour and can be documented at [Section 5](#) to form part of your process for determining the level of risk.

Practice considerations

The relationship you have built with the person and level of disclosures made throughout your conversation should give you an indicator of the depth of family violence specific questions you can ask the person without risking them having an elevated emotional response, or escalating risk to victim survivors.

You may already have intake and assessment processes that ask a broad range of questions to help you understand the person in their context, including to seek clarification on all legal issues. These questions can be a useful 'in' to commence discussing family violence matters.

It is important to be aware of any feelings of shame as the person discloses their use of violence with you. Refer to [Section 12.1.14](#) in the *Foundation Knowledge Guide* for more information on shame.

It is important to maintain a **balanced approach to engagement** while the person using violence tells their 'story'. You can use professional curiosity to ask questions to understand the context of the person's behaviours and invite them to reflect on their own actions rather than that of others.

Asking about others' experience of their use of violence and past strategies to stop

Leading questions

Tell me about what is and isn't working for you and your family when you use violence / fight?

Following questions

Are there times when you feel unsafe?

Do you think there are times when those people close to you [partner/ children/ other family members] feel unsafe or afraid?

How do you feel about your behaviour?

I am wondering what you want to do about this.

Do you want to look at changing your behaviour? Would you like to 'check in' on your actions and get some information about how others in similar situations have found this helpful?

What are you getting really tired of? What kinds of strategies have you tried in the past to change your actions? What has worked, even in the short term?

Why is this important to consider for family violence risk assessment?

Exploring the person's understanding of their use of violence, including what is and isn't working for them, may indicate their capacity and/or willingness to display empathy for victim survivor/s and readiness to discuss the possibility of changing their behaviour. People who use violence may attempt to dismiss these questions, commenting that:

... violence is inevitable as a result of someone or something else that 'triggered' them

... the violence (for example, fighting) isn't bad, comparing it to others' violence

... it doesn't matter what they do about it because the 'problem' sits with the other person (victim survivor).

These types of responses will give you an indication that family violence risk is likely to continue. This will contribute to your understanding of the person's intent or choice for using violence (refer to **Responsibility 2**).

Practice considerations

Professionals should be particularly attentive to rationalising, minimising and justifying narratives. If the person continually evades taking responsibility for their behaviour and adopts a victim stance, it may not be appropriate to your role and responsibilities to pursue this conversation.

Keeping the person engaged with your service in order to address their presenting needs may be the best opportunity you have to keep the person in view of the system. Their continued engagement with you will provide opportunities for ongoing monitoring of risk and collaborative and coordinated risk management.

Narratives of denial, minimisation, justification and blame are designed not only to keep up appearances to community services but also as a means by individuals to protect themselves against feelings of shame. The experience of shame impairs decisions for help-seeking and can increase risk of family violence towards victim survivors, as well as harm to self.

It is important to maintain a respectful, non-judgemental and strengths-based approach when working with the person using violence, to increase the likelihood of their continued engagement with your service. For more information on creating safe, non-collusive communication practices refer to **Responsibilities 1 and 3**.

These conversation prompts seek to understand how the person using violence is making sense of their behaviours and the extent to which they are able to separate themselves from their behaviours, marking the starting point of conversations to explore motivation (**Section 4**).

Exploring motivations to address presenting needs and/or use of violence

Note: these questions are posed to support the person using violence to explore what is important to them and how this might look differently in the future for themselves and their family.

Leading questions

While we are addressing the issue/s that brought you here are there other areas of your life that you might like to work on?

We talked about the need to make changes in your life to address the needs you have, so can we talk about how we might put this into action?

Following questions

If you were to describe the person you want to be, what might that look like?

If you made changes to your life, what impact do you think this might have on your relationship with your family/partner?

If you made changes to your life, what impact do you think this might have on you and your relationship with your children? What kind of parent would you want to be? How do you want the kids to see you in one year, or five years?

How important is this difference for you and your family?

Let's talk about what small things you can do now to change. What things can we put in place now?

Why is this important to consider for family violence risk assessment?

Throughout your risk assessment process, and ongoing professional relationship, you may identify a range of motivations, both short and long-term, that the person using violence holds (**Section 4**). Short-term motivations may include experiencing crisis, including through homelessness and police and court involvement, while long-term motivations tend to arise from their values, such as becoming a better parent, or having healthy and loving family relationships.

If the person preferences short-term motivations and cannot identify and connect with longer-term ones, their capacity for engaging in conversations to address their risk to victim survivors may be limited.

It is important to identify and understand the person's motivation at various points in time to make best use of the opportunity you have to assess risk and create a safety and risk management plan. You can document motivations and readiness in **Section 4**.

Practice considerations

Strengths-based approaches when working with the person using violence provides opportunities for them to identify and articulate what they can do to address their needs. Steps towards taking responsibility and ownership for their goals, decisions, actions and behaviours related to presenting needs can form the foundation for addressing their use of family violence.

The person's role as a parent can be a significant motivator for change. While you may uncover motivation through your ongoing professional relationship with the person using violence, it is not expected that you will work with them to address parenting and/or violence, unless it is within the scope of your role to do so.

Consider the person's readiness and motivations to address parenting in the context of their use of family violence and explore options for a referral to an appropriate service to respond to their specific need.

Determining if it is safe, appropriate or reasonable to engage with parenting as a potential motivator for change is outlined in **Responsibility 4**.
