

Helpful Things to Say to or Ask a DV Offender^{*}

This is not a script and you are not expected to say everything on this list. These are concrete examples of statements and questions that can help you work effectively on DV cases. **Please note that both engagement and accountability statements need to be used in the same conversation.**

Building rapport

1. Both fathers and mothers are important in the lives of their child(ren). You are important to your child(ren).
2. Why do you think you're here today?
3. Talking about these things can be really hard—sometimes people feel judged and defensive. I just want to hear your point of view.
4. We heard a lot of good things about you from your partner and your child(ren) (*give specific examples*). It sounds like you are really trying to be a good father (*provider, stepparent, etc.*).
5. (*If needed*) You appear to be angry. That's understandable, although I'm worried that it might get in the way of our really hearing each other and talking about your child(ren). Do you need to take a break for a few minutes before we continue?

Engaging the DV offender as a parent and exploring his relationship with the children

1. In our experience, most men** really want to be good parents. What do you think it means to be a good parent? A good partner to your wife/girlfriend?
2. Can you tell us about what you do with your child(ren)? What does it look like when things are going really well between you and your child(ren)? What would I be seeing you do?
3. What do you feel you do really well as a parent/provider? Are there things you think you could do better?
4. What worries you about your child(ren)? What do you think your child(ren) might be worried about?
5. Our goal is to figure out with you what needs to happen so your child(ren) is kept safe and feels secure. Even though we may not see eye-to-eye on everything, I think we share that goal—do you agree? Can you tell me what you have done to keep your child(ren) safe?
6. We know that men get a lot of messages as they're growing up that shape their beliefs about relationships and how to be a man. Sometimes it can be hard to sort through those messages and figure out how **you** really want to be in a relationship. How do you think men earn respect in families? How do you earn respect in your family?

^{*} Adapted from *Accountability and Connection with Abusive Men in Child Protection: A New Approach to Increasing Family Safety*. F. Mederos (2004). Futures Without Violence (formerly Family Violence Prevention Fund).

^{**} The use of gendered pronouns in this document reflects the reality that most victims of domestic violence are women, and most perpetrators of domestic violence are men. However, domestic violence occurs in gay and lesbian relationships and can be equally dangerous in a same-sex relationship as in a heterosexual relationship. Less frequently, a woman may be violent and abusive with a male partner. Change pronouns as needed.

Accountability for behavior and making changes

1. Children are often aware that one parent is threatening or hitting the other, breaking things, etc., even if you've tried to protect them. What has the child(ren) seen and/or heard in your home?
2. When you were a child, was there ever violence in your home? How did that make you feel? I believe you want your child(ren) to have better memories than that. How do you want your child(ren) to remember his or her childhood? How do you want your child(ren) to remember you?
3. What do you wish people had done to protect you when you were growing up? What do you think would help your child(ren) right now?
4. Children exposed to fighting or violence might have nightmares, have trouble in school, or become withdrawn or aggressive. Older kids might use drugs or alcohol, be violent themselves, or struggle academically. How do you think your child(ren) may have been affected by your behavior?
5. Do you know that there's a place where you can get help and support for yourself? Are you interested in checking it out? It would be a really positive step for you and would show your family and us how much you want to be a good parent. *(Describe the Batterer Intervention Program [BIP].)*
 - a. *(If the DV offender is in a BIP)* Can you tell me something about what you've learned? Have you made changes in your life as a result? *(If you get only a cursory answer, or "no")* Do you understand that going to the group is only part of what needs to happen? We need to see that you're applying what you're learning to your life. How are your child(ren) and your partner safer than they were in the past?
6. Men who do these things can change, and we can help you get connected to services that will help.

DV offender substance use and mental health-related issues

1. Do you use any illegal or prescription drugs, or drink alcohol? Under what circumstances?
2. In what ways does drinking or using drugs make your life easier? How does it make life harder?
3. Have you been clean or sober at times in the past? What made that possible?
4. People who are using drugs or alcohol might do things they wouldn't do otherwise, or they might not be able to keep their child(ren) safe. How do you think your use of drugs or alcohol affects how you act? How can you make sure your child(ren) is safe, whether you're using or not?
5. Do you have a mental health diagnosis? Do you take medication?
6. *(If the diagnosis is depression)* Can you tell me about when you first started feeling depressed/like it was hard to get out of bed in the morning, etc.? How did that affect your ability to do the things you needed to do?

Exploring cultural role models as a potential motivator of change

1. When you were growing up, were there men in your community whom you admired and respected? What did they do, or how did they behave, that made you admire and respect them?
2. It sounds like you saw a lot of violence in your home as a child. Did you know other men in your community who acted differently than your father did, who treated their families with respect?
3. How do you want your children to remember you? What kind of legacy do you want to leave for them? What do you want them to learn about what it means to be a (*Latino, African-American*) man? (*This question is important regardless of cultural background, and can be adapted appropriately.*)

Respectful limit setting/dealing with tense situations (*if applicable*)

1. When you behave in this way (*describe what has just happened*), it is threatening/disruptive and we can't get anything done. We want to get your side of things. I know that the process doesn't feel good. I understand that you are upset, but if this behavior continues I'll have to end the meeting and ask you to leave.
2. We need to be able to continue this conversation in a way that helps us make a good decision. You may not be aware of it, but you are (*interrupting, getting very loud, making threatening gestures, etc.*). This has to be a two-way conversation. Can we continue?
3. Sometimes people feel like they are being judged – I don't think you're a bad person and I want to hear what you have to say. However, if you aren't able to (*sit down, lower your voice, etc.*), I'll have to end our conversation.
4. We may not be able to agree on this point right now, and that's OK. I suggest that we think it over and come back to this later. I would like to ask you about something else, though. Could you tell me more about (*what you and your child(ren) do for fun, how the child(ren) is doing in school, etc.*).

Universal messages about the effect of violence on relationships

1. Even if children don't show they're upset, witnessing this kind of behavior does affect them. I know you are not trying to scare your child(ren) or create bad memories, but this is likely to happen. Please get help. Do it for your child(ren). Try the Batterer Intervention Program.
2. Your behavior will have a lifelong impact on your child(ren). It's never too late to turn it around. You have the power to change things.
3. You are an example for your child(ren) in everything you do. They/he/she will carry these memories of you forever.
4. When you hurt your partner, you also hurt your child(ren).
5. As parents, we are teaching our children all the time. What do you want to teach your child(ren)?