

SCREENING FOR CHILD EXPOSURE TO INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE (IPV): GUIDELINES FOR CLINICAL PROVIDERS

This fact sheet aims to help child and family clinical providers talk with children and adolescents who may have been exposed to Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). Child exposure to IPV is increasingly recognized as a form of child maltreatment. Children exposed to IPV have increased rates of behavioral and physical health problems, including depression, anxiety, violence toward peers, self-harm, attempted suicide, abuse of drugs and

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alcohol, running away from home, risky sexual behavior, sexual abuse, relationship violence, abuse of a household pet, and committing sexual assault. Evidence shows that children who grow up in households with substantial parental relational dysfunction have higher mortality rates and increased morbidity as adults. Making questions about IPV part of your routine assessment will help to de-stigmatize the topic.

Step 1: Ask open ended questions about the relationships, discipline, and conflict resolution within the home environment.

“Tell me a little bit about how people get along in your family.”
“What happens when somebody gets in trouble or somebody is disappointed in somebody else?”
“If someone gets in trouble, what does that look like?”
“What do your parents do for discipline?”
“If your parents disagree about something, what happens?”
“How do the other kids in your family [siblings] get along?”

Step 2. Offer validation that the child or adolescent deserves a healthy and safe relationship, and that you want to support them in a way that would be helpful and safe for them.

Step 3. Call your local Child Protective Services (CPS) if you suspect the child has been exposed to abuse or neglected. Whenever possible, include the parent(s) in the phone call to CPS. Consider saying to the parent:

“Relationships can be difficult and made even more challenging by stressors within and outside the home. In what you have told me, I have become concerned about the impact of the challenges at home on your child’s well-being. When I have these concerns, I need to talk to Child Protective Services about how best to support your child and your family.”

OPTIONAL:

“I would like for us to make the call to child protection together. Would you like to join me in making that call?”

Try to answer any questions that the parents have, without making any absolute statements. Child protection responses can vary and it is best not to predict what they will or will not do, but rather, to outline the different possibilities of response.

To find your state or local number to report child abuse or neglect reporting please visit:

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/>