

Gather Information About the Family

More comprehensive information than simply the incident of maltreatment must be learned about the family. This body of knowledge must include the extent of maltreatment, the surrounding circumstances, child functioning, adult functioning, parenting and discipline. The following are 6 background ques-

tions that should guide safety in each case. The answers will help the court assess threats of danger, child vulnerability, and protective capacities. The information will later help judges decide what to do about an unsafe child.

1. What is the nature and extent of the maltreatment?

- Type of maltreatment
- Severity of the maltreatment, results, injuries
- Maltreatment history, similar incidents
- Describing events, what happened, hitting, pushing
- Describing emotional and physical symptoms
- Identifying child and maltreating parent

2. What circumstances accompany the maltreatment?

- How long the maltreatment lasted
- Parental intent concerning the maltreatment
- Whether parent was impaired by substance use, or was otherwise out-of-control when maltreatment occurred
- How parent explains maltreatment and family conditions
- Does parent acknowledge maltreatment, what is parent's attitude?
- Other problems connected with the maltreatment such as mental health problems

3. How does the child function day-to-day?

- Capacity for attachment (close emotional relationships with parents and siblings)
- General mood and temperament
- Intellectual functioning
- Communication and social skills
- Expressions of emotions/feelings
- Behavior
- Peer relations
- School performance
- Independence
- Motor skills
- Physical and mental health

4. How does the parent discipline the child?

- Disciplinary methods
- Concept and purpose of discipline
- Context in which discipline occurs, is the parent impaired by drugs or alcohol when administering discipline
- Cultural practices

5. What are overall parenting practices?

- Reasons for being a parent
- Satisfaction in being a parent
- Knowledge and skill in parenting and child development
- Parent expectations and empathy for child
- Decision-making in parenting practices
- Parenting style
- History of parenting behavior
- Protectiveness
- Cultural context for parenting approach

6. How does the parent manage his own life?

- Communication and social skills
- Coping and stress management
- Self control
- Problem-solving
- Judgment and decision-making
- Independence
- Home and financial management
- Employment
- Community involvement
- Rationality
- Self-care and self-preservation
- Substance use, abuse, addiction
- Mental health
- Physical health and capacity
- Functioning within cultural norms

DEFINITIONS

Safe child:

Vulnerable children are safe when there are no threats of danger within the family *or* when the parents possess sufficient protective capacity to manage any threats.

Unsafe child:

Children are unsafe when:

- threats of danger exist within the family *and*
- children are vulnerable to such threats, *and*
- parents have insufficient protective capacities to manage or control threats.