



OPEN THE DOOR

Talking with fathers who
want to change their
coercive, controlling,
and abusive behaviors

WASHINGTON STATE COALITION

WSCADV

AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

WHO IS THIS TOOL FOR?

This tool is designed to help experienced home visitors begin conversations with fathers about their parenting and its impact on relationships by:

- Outlining questions for home visitors, survivors, and fathers to consider **before**, **during**, and **after** conversations.
- Providing guiding questions to help home visitors focus on relationships and their impact on parenting and create more opportunities for growth and change for families.

THE RELATIONSHIP IS THE KEY.



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BEFORE



GET READY



PAUSE



GATHER



ASSESS

GET READY

FOR THE CONVERSATION

DO YOU HAVE WHAT YOU NEED?

- Do you have a trusted relationship with the family?
- How comfortable are you having the conversation?
- Do you have a supportive supervisor or an experienced peer who can support you?
- Are you ready to process your own reactions to having this conversation?
- Have you considered if you are the best person to have the conversation?

HOW TO PREPARE

- Confirm the survivor is comfortable with you having this conversation.
- Are you clear about your role in the conversation?
- Home visitors can engage fathers who are co-parenting, even if they are not living in the home.
- Let your team know the details about the visit (date, time, place).
- Set up time to debrief afterwards.
- Be sure you know about resources in your community.

PAUSE

AND REMEMBER

SURVIVORS KNOW THEIR FAMILY BEST

- Does the survivor have any questions?
- Is the survivor concerned that the conversation will cause harm to them or their children?
- Do you need a release of information to talk to the father?
- Make a plan with the survivor to follow up after you have the conversation with the father.



**IF THE SURVIVOR HAS
ANY HESITATION, DO NOT
GO FORWARD.**

GATHER

THE INFORMATION YOU NEED

CHECK IN WITH THE SURVIVOR

- What is going well?
- Who are their supportive people?
- Share the questions you will ask with the survivor.
- Share your approach to the conversation with the survivor.
- Is your conversation going to cause harm to the survivor or children after you leave?

BUILD THE RELATIONSHIP

- Learn about what makes things difficult.
- What is the family/father dealing with?
- What do they need?
- What resources will you provide the family?

ASSESS

THE SITUATION AND PLAN

TALK WITH THE SURVIVOR

- Has the survivor shared information that shows the father is ready to start a conversation?
- Ask the survivor about the father's ability to explore his relationship and parenting.
- Ask the survivor if this is the right time to engage with the father.
- What kind of follow up will the survivor need?
- What might the father need?

IS THE FATHER READY?

- Is the father self-reflective about his behavior and the impact it has on the child/ren?
- Is this a father who is willing to have a conversation that explores his relationship, tolerates differences, and examines his approach to fatherhood?



**DO NOT ENGAGE A FATHER WHO
BLAMES AND/OR THREATENS ANYONE.**

DURING



TIMING



PARENTING
QUESTIONS



RELATIONSHIP
QUESTIONS



RESPECT
BOUNDARIES

TIMING

IS EVERYTHING

THESE CONVERSATIONS DON'T HAPPEN ON THE FIRST VISIT

- Follow the survivor's lead and make sure you receive an invitation before you begin a conversation.
- Stay observant during the conversation and notice any shifts or changes.
- It's OK to take a break, pause, and come back during another visit.
- Check back in with the survivor; things can change.
- Share local resources.

PARENTING QUESTIONS

START SMALL AND ALWAYS CENTER THEIR PARENTING

- What kind of parent do you want to be?
- What kind of memories do you want to leave for your children?
- What memories do you have of your parents?
- Is there anything you want to do differently from your parents?
- Would you like to make new/different memories?
- Do you feel close to your baby? How do you spend time with your baby?
- How do you have fun with your children?
- How do you talk about respect with your children? What does that look like or feel like?
- Are your children respectful of you?
- Who do you respect in the family? In the community?
- How do you think your children are affected by what you do?

RELATIONSHIP QUESTIONS

START SMALL AND LISTEN FOR WHAT'S WORKING

- What do you like about your relationship with your partner or co-parent?
- What do you like about their parenting?
- What goes well? What do you wish was different?
- What do you hope for your relationship?
- Is there anything that you need for your relationship?
- What do you like about your partner as a person?
- What do you do for fun?
- How do you handle conflicts with your partner? Does that work for both of you?
- During difficult times, who do you turn to for support?

RESPECT BOUNDARIES

- Express appreciation for their willingness to share.
- Check in with the survivor and return to the conversation when you are invited.
- Be open and listen for opportunities to revisit the conversation.
- If you get a sense that the conversation is winding down, you can come back when the father is ready.
- Don't push for a conversation. Observe what the father is saying and how he is reacting.
- It's OK to take a break, pause, and come back another time.
- You will have many opportunities to build relationships and have conversations about their hopes and dreams for their family.



**REMEMBER THAT SMALL CHANGES
CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE.**

AFTER



REFLECT &
PRACTICE



SELF-CARE



FOLLOW UP

REFLECT & PRACTICE

TAKE TIME TO RESET

THESE ARE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

- Follow up with the survivor and ask if they want the conversation to continue.
- Invite the father to continue to join in home visits.
- Consider checking in with the father about prior parenting conversations.
- After every interaction, debrief with an experienced supervisor or peer.

SELF-CARE

IS ESSENTIAL

GET SUPPORT


- Reach out to trusted peers or supervisors for support after difficult conversations.
- Setting boundaries is an important way to take care of yourself.
- Take care of yourself by journaling, taking a walk, doing breathing exercises, or doing whatever else centers you and brings you back to the present.

FOLLOW UP

Creating the space for survivor-led conversations means you are listening in a different way and building trust between the home visitor and the family. Being invited into the conversation matters. Be clear about your role as a home visitor. Remember that the survivor is the expert in their relationship and family. Think about what will stay with the family after you are gone, and think about what you are leaving behind. Small changes matter.

- For WA state domestic violence (DV) programs or a confidential hotline, contact Get Help Now, <https://wscadv.org/get-help-now/>
- For confidential, 24/7 DV advocate support, and a connection to local resources, go to <https://www.thehotline.org/>
 - Call 1.800.799.SAFE for support in 140+ languages
 - Text "START" to 88788 for support via text
 - Go to <https://www.thehotline.org/#> to chat live
- For confidential, ASL-accessible, 24/7 DV advocate support, and a connection to local resources, go to [thedeafhotline.org](https://www.thedeafhotline.org)
 - Contact 1.855.812.1001 (videophone) or 1.800.787.3224 (TTY)
 - To begin an email conversation, contact us at <https://www.thedeafhotline.org/contact-us/>
 - To chat live with a hotline advocate, click on the "Chat With Us" flag at <https://www.thedeafhotline.org/>
- For more information, go to <https://wscadv.org/>





Thanks for your
work to support
survivors and
engage fathers!

Many thanks to the wise
home visitors, advocates, and
survivors who contributed to
the creation of this tool.

THE CONVERSATION CONTINUES
wscadv.org

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