Community Self-Assessment Tool:
For Agencies Addressing the Co-Occurrence of
Domestic Violence and Child Maltreatment

Introduction

This Community Self-Assessment Tool (Assessment Tool) is designed to assist child protection, domestic violence, mental health or juvenile court systems to communicate more effectively together on behalf of families that are experiencing domestic violence and child maltreatment and are involved in multiple systems. This document is intended to assist communities which have already begun some kind of collaborative process. Experience tells us that collaboration is a strategy to achieve better outcomes for families, not an end goal.

It is our hope that this Assessment Tool will help you to refine your questions and goals, specify and document the difficulties you see, maximize your assets and discover any needs for technical assistance you may have. The document is not intended to be linear, and we encourage you to examine the questions that hold the most meaning for you. Once you have reviewed this document and answered some of the questions, staff from the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and the Family Violence Prevention Fund would be happy to assist you in further exploring where your community is on addressing the issue and to identify any technical assistance activities that would help further your work on this issue. We understand that this Assessment Tool comes at one moment in an evolving process in your community, and that even as you work on the self-assessment perceptions and relationships are changing.

    I. **System Interaction**
        A. **Communication**
        Systems have different mandates, priorities, structures, languages, and cultures that can impede effective understanding when collaborating across systems. Working across disciplines requires systems to engage in dialogue. The following questions will help you assess your collaborative partnership's strengths and needs in this area.

- Are dialogues occurring across systems currently, including child protection agencies, domestic violence agencies, early intervention and education programs and the courts?
- If yes, what are the venues for these conversations? Are they formal or informal?
- Are there any other conversations happening in the community around these issues, including child mental health agencies, schools, men's organizations, culturally specific groups, etc.?
- What started the conversations? What are people talking about? Who is involved in conversations/communications at this point?
- At what levels are these people within the organizations (e.g. frontline workers or court staff, supervisors, managers, administrators, judges)?

- If formal conversations have not begun, are there specific barriers that have prevented communication between the identified systems?

B. Goals and Results

Identifying common goals among systems is fundamental to achieving new and better results for families. Remember, collaboration is a strategy, not a goal.

- In your partnership, what is the shared purpose or goals?
- Can you state the goals or vision, including the desired results for families (including specific results for women, children and men) and real changes in the ways things work? Who shares those goals? Who else do you need to share those goals?
- What are some practical goals along the way?
- Are there perceived conflicting goals among agencies? Who holds those?
- Is collaboration necessary for the purpose or goals of this effort? What other strategies on the cooperation/coordination/collaboration continuum may be effective to achieve the desired results?

C. Opportunities and Challenges

Identifying which families are being served within each system and where gaps in services/coordination/cooperation exist can push the community to improve responses and address disporportionality issues.

- Are there any current/past collaborative initiatives that address the co-occurrence of domestic violence and child maltreatment in your community? Are there opportunities to build on their successes or learn from their obstacles?
- What policies or projects are working well for families (women, children, men) affected by domestic violence and involved with CPS? From whose perspective?
- What policies or projects are not working well for families (women, children, men) affected by domestic violence and involved with CPS? From whose perspective?
- What is working well for preventing and reducing the impact of children's exposure to violence? From whose perspective?
- What is not working well for preventing and reducing the impact of children's exposure to violence? From whose perspective?
- Are there groups (ethnic, racial, economic, geographic, age, etc.) for whom there are particular difficulties? If so, what's the difficulty (engagement, resources, system bias, etc)?
- Do you have data to support these problems?
- What additional information do you need to better understand and describe the problem? How can you get the information you need?

D. Relationship Building and Collaboration

Collaboration across systems with different mandates, philosophies, histories and structures is often slow and can be difficult. Such collaboration can move forward only if participants and institutions have a clear sense of shared purpose and some level of involvement with one another.

- What types of relationships exist among staff working within domestic violence, child protection, and the courts?
- Where are there strong and trusting relationships; that is, among whom and among which interagency personnel (line, administrators, etc.)? How has this trust been built?
- Where relationships are less developed or needing more work; that is, among whom and at what levels?
- Are the relationships confined to specific individuals? If so, would relationships between systems continue if these individuals left their positions?
- In terms of collaboration across systems for the goals you have identified, whom do you see as allies or potential allies (individuals and agencies)? Who else needs to be included?
- Can each system identify, in terms of collaborating, "what is in it for us" and "the constituents I represent?"
- Is state-level participation necessary or useful? Why or why not?
- What are areas of cooperation/coordination/and collaboration among systems?
- What are the difficulties in achieving cooperation/coordination/and collaboration among systems?

II. Practice Implications
Policy and Protocol
In addition to conversation across systems, best practice is supported by cross-training and coordination of policies and protocols.

- What are the existing policies and protocols used to coordinate systems in your community to address families' needs?
- To what degree are protocols used individually or across the systems; that is, how well are they utilized?
- Does the child welfare agency have a protocol in place on how to deal with domestic violence cases? If so, describe the protocol's effectiveness.
- Does the domestic violence program have any protocol on working with children who have been exposed to domestic violence? If so, describe the protocol's effectiveness.
- Does the juvenile and family court have a protocol to address the co-occurrence of domestic violence and child maltreatment? Is so, describe the protocol's effectiveness.
- Are workers across systems trained in child protection, child mental health, and domestic violence? Describe training and any data on the training's effectiveness.

Data

Baseline and Existing Data Collection
In order to answer the questions above about how systems are working, it is critical to have data that supports working assumptions/impressions about a particular issue/system/family member. This data can be statistical or case-based

information that identifies where practices do and do not serve the interests of men, women and children (men who batter, adult victims and children who have been exposed to violence).

- In your community, what is the existing and needed data to support your project?
- Are issues of domestic violence and/or child maltreatment routinely identified and collected within child welfare, domestic violence programs or the courts? How?
- What other data is collected about families from each system?
- Do records from each system indicate involvement of a family in other systems?
- What additional data do you need to help you meaningfully interpret current practice?
- Are there any trends that are emerging within the data about which families are being served by a particular system? What are the areas of concern? For example, the overrepresentation of families of color in the child welfare system, or the disproportionate number of mothers responsible for case plans.

III. Resources
Collaborative work requires resources including: support, space, time, and sometimes money. Although most attention is focused on funding for collaboration, the community that focuses on using alternative assets is able to sustain change more effectively.

- What sources of funding do you currently have?
- Aside from money, what resources are available to support your community's efforts?
- Is there institutional support in terms of time and space? Which institutions are providing support?
- What kinds of supports are necessary to sustain these efforts? For example, organizational capacity building, workforce development, etc.
- Is there a high level or powerful support/leadership in the community to better respond to families facing the issues of domestic violence and child maltreatment?
- Is there general public support for addressing these issues?
- Given the goals you envision, what additional resources are needed?

IV. Emerging Issues
There are some issues that inevitably arise in work across these systems. These are questions you may not want to answer now, but should be considered carefully in all collaborative efforts on issues of child welfare and domestic violence.

- What implicit or explicit rules and norms govern sharing of information across and within systems? In what ways do confidentiality agreements impede communication? In what ways do confidentiality agreements facilitate communication? How does best practice inform information sharing policies?

- How is batterer accountability defined by each system? What shared understanding is there about engaging and holding accountable men who are abusive and/or are fathers?
- How do issues of culture, class and race shape or influence the problems and goals with which you are addressing?
- What are the beliefs about battered women's parenting? What are the beliefs about what children who have been exposed to domestic violence need?
- How can voices of community members and families inform and strengthen best practices?

V. Community Strengths and Challenges

Each community has unique strengths and challenges that may support or impede efforts to improve collaboration across systems. After reviewing your responses to the questions in this Assessment Tool answer the following questions to help you assess these strengths and challenges.

- What are the particular strengths of your community?
- What are the areas which need to be strengthened in your community?
- What are the top priorities in your community?

For more information and assistance in answering these questions, please visit:
www.thegreenbook.info

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