

# Collateral Desk Guide

Interviewing collaterals during the Family  
Functioning Assessment

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## Introduction

The Family is the best source for information, potential solutions, and must be engaged and involved in the casework process. With that said, collaterals can provide extremely important and relevant information concerning child safety. As the state agency responsible for protecting children, we must be able to identify collaterals that have relevant information and interview those individuals in a systematic, purposeful manner. Collateral identification and interviewing is not a haphazard, insignificant part of the casework process. Information provided by collaterals can be paramount in determining child safety.

The information in this guide is meant to provide only general direction. In order to gather sufficient information you must explore the subject matter with the collateral in a more profound manner. It is never appropriate to use the example questions as a check list. Interviews are dynamic and you must use your interview skills to determine what information collaterals may have and in turn gather the necessary, relevant information.

## Purpose of the Guide

The collateral resource guide is to be used, when necessary, to assist the CPS Social Worker in gathering relevant information necessary to complete the Family Functioning Assessment. This guide should be read and understood prior to interviewing but can be a resource to assist during an interview if necessary. The tips and questions contained in this guide are not all inclusive. Families are different and unique and the information collaterals may be able to provide cannot be reduced to a single form. This guide must be used by the CPS Supervisor and CPS Social Worker in conjunction with CPS Policy, training materials and the CPS Supervisor Consultation Guide.

## Definition

CPS Policy Section 4.6 Information Collection defines collaterals as:

- Any third party (e.g., friends, neighbors, relatives or professionals) with information about the alleged abuse/neglect and risk of serious harm to the children.
- Collaterals are contacted to corroborate information provided by individuals previously interviewed; to obtain additional information about the family; and to assess as protective resources.
- The CPS Social Worker must interview as many collaterals as needed to reach conclusions regarding the alleged abuse/neglect and threat of serious harm. All individuals known to have first-hand knowledge of the allegations must be contacted. Interviews must be conducted individually and privately, by telephone

or in person. Collaterals can be interviewed at any point during the Family Functioning Assessment. When interviewing collaterals, stress the confidential nature of the Family Functioning Assessment.

## Collateral Identification

Collateral identification is an important aspect of the Family Functioning Assessment. You must fully understand the Family Functioning Assessment process in order to appropriately identify collaterals. The purpose of collateral interviews is to provide relevant information to make the Family Functioning Assessment Decisions including information concerning the 6 areas of Family Functioning which informs the safety decision. Collaterals are not “references”. Collaterals can provide life altering information concerning a family; collateral identification and interviews must be viewed as serious.

When attempting to identify collaterals consider the following:

- Did the reporter identify someone who may have additional information? If so, who?
- Was there a witness to the alleged maltreatment? If so, that individual must be interviewed.
- Based on what is known about the family, what individual(s) would a reasonable person suspect may have information concerning the child’s functioning, typical parenting practices of the caregivers including their views on disciplinary techniques, and general adult functioning?
- Are there missing gaps of Family Functioning Assessment information? If so, who may be able to provide the information to make the necessary decisions in the Family Functioning Assessment?
- Are there collaterals that may be able to provide the information necessary to determine if a child is in impending danger? If so, who?

## Rapport Building

Collaterals may be alarmed, concerned, confused, etc. when being approached by Child Protective Services. You may be required to use your interpersonal skills to gain a rapport with collaterals just as you do with caregivers and children. The following tips may be helpful when collaterals are reluctant to be interviewed by Child Protective Services:

- Introduce yourself and explain the purpose of the interview.
- Answer the collateral’s questions about Child Protective Services honestly in so far as not revealing information about the family that may violate confidentiality.
- Acknowledge any concerns the Collateral may voice about discussing the matter with Child Protective Services.

- Emphasize the importance of information the individual may have in assisting both Child Protective Services and the parents in assuring that the child is protected if necessary.

## Information Collection-Collateral Interviews

You must have a thorough understanding of the Family Functioning Assessment processes and decisions in order to effectively interview collaterals. Every family and collateral interview is unique. For instance, when completing an FFA one neighbor may have a significant amount of information concerning all 6 areas of Family Functioning; however another neighbor may have no relevant information. You must be able to use professional judgment on how far to probe when interviewing collaterals. All questions listed are not appropriate for all interviews. If a neighbor informs you that they know very little about a family you should not “interrogate” the neighbor concerning the family’s finances, employment, marital relationships, etc. Be professional and be able to justify your interview.

## Information Concerning Maltreatment/Nature and Example Questions

The Maltreatment Family Assessment Area is straightforward and concerned with facts to support a conclusion whether or not child abuse or neglect occurred. As it relates to interviewing collaterals, individuals who witnessed the alleged maltreatment must be interviewed. This may include both individuals who were identified during the Intake Assessment or individuals who are later identified during the Family Functioning Assessment.

The Nature, or surrounding circumstances, Family Assessment Area is concerned with placing the maltreatment in context. What led up to the Maltreatment? What conditions existed while maltreatment was occurring? This area of Family Functioning should be explored with collaterals when appropriate.

Examples of questions concerning the alleged maltreatment and nature are:

- It was alleged (or I have discovered through the investigation/assessment process) that you may have witnessed the parent/caregiver(s) engaging in abusive/neglectful behavior (be case specific, non-technical if necessary). Is this true? If so, what can you tell me about what you observed?
- Did anyone else observe the incident? If so, whom?
- What did the parent(s) or caregiver(s) say prior to, during and after the incident?
- If applicable, what was the non-maltreatment caregiver’s response to the incident?
- Have you witnessed other concerning behaviors by the parent(s) or caregiver(s) other than the alleged maltreatment? If so, what were they?
- Did the parent use an instrument during the incident?

*(The questions above must not be viewed as mandatory nor should they be viewed as the only questions that must be asked. The questions can be viewed as merely a starting point to information collection. You must use open ended, individualized, probing questions in order to gather sufficient information.)*

## **Information Concerning Child functioning and Example Questions**

The Child Functioning Family Assessment Area is concerned with the child(rens) functioning compared to “normal functioning” children of similar ages. It can be the child’s independence, verbal skills, motor skills, physical capabilities, etc. (refer to CPS Policy, training materials and the Family Functioning Assessment Supervisor guide for more information concerning child functioning).

Use professional judgment to determine what a reasonable person might expect the collateral to know concerning child functioning and engage the collateral to gather the relevant information. For instance, a school teacher may have a significant amount of information concerning child functioning, as would a relative, neighbor, physician therapist, etc. A Police Officer who responded to a complaint at the residence may have limited knowledge concerning child functioning.

Examples of questions to collection information concerning child functioning are:

- What was the child’s reaction to the alleged maltreatment? Explain
- Does the child have any learning difficulties?
- Does the child appear shy/aggressive? Can you explain further?
- Describe the child’s peer relationships.
- Does the child appear to be more/less mature for their age? Explain
- Does the child have any physical or cognitive disabilities? If so, what leads you to this conclusion?
- Does the child need medical attention? If so, why?
- Does the child have any medical, speech, visual, hearing, issues? If so, does the parent know about the issues and what is the parent’s response in addressing the issues?
- Has the child ever threatened suicide? Homicide? What was the caregiver’s reaction(relates to parenting assessment area)
- Does the child appear fearful? Explain
- Does the child appear to blame themselves for things that are out of the ordinary? Example, parent not having a job, abuse to a sibling? Etc.
- Does the child appear to have mood changes? If so, is there a particular situation that triggers the changes?
- Is the child constantly fixated with perfection? If so, describe.
- Does the child feel a part of the family? Can you explain thoroughly what leads you to this viewpoint?

- Does the child appear to have a normal, appropriate relationship with their caregiver(s)? Peers? Explain

*(The questions above must not be viewed as mandatory nor should they be viewed as the only questions that must be asked. The questions can be viewed as merely a starting point to information collection. You must use open ended, individualized, probing questions in order to gather sufficient information.)*

## Information Concerning Adult Functioning and Example Questions

The importance of this Family Functioning Assessment Area is often not understood and sufficient information is not often times not collected concerning adult function. Relevant information concerning adult functioning is paramount in determining if a child is unsafe and in need of protection; 1/3 of the impending dangers are directly related to adult functioning.

Adult functioning is essentially an examination of how the adults (caregivers) function in their everyday lives. Adult Functioning is concerned with the caregiver's mental health, substance abuse, self-control, impulsivity, out of control sexual issues, stress management, stability, problem solving ability, domestic violence, general violence, communication, criminal behavior/history, etc. Review CPS Policy, training materials and the Family Functioning Assessment Supervisor Consultation Guide for more information.

Example questions for collaterals related to Adult Functioning are:

- Does the caregiver appear to be passive and allow others to persuade them to engage in unhealthy, unproductive activities? Explain
- Is the caregiver able to make healthy decisions about their life without outside influence? Explain
- Does the caregiver appear depressed? Hopeless? Sense of worthlessness? Explain
- Is the caregiver's mood consistent with the circumstances?
- Does the caregiver have any serious medical issues that may impair their ability to care for their child? If so, explain
- Does the caregiver have any cognitive delays that may impair their ability to care for their child? If so, explain
- Does the caregiver act or react impulsively and without regard to consequences? Explain
- To your knowledge is the caregiver engaging in illegal activity? If so, does this activity threaten the child's safety? Why do you feel it does/does not threaten the child?
- To your knowledge does the caregiver have a substance abuse problem? (illegal or prescription drugs, alcohol) Explain in detail

- Is the caregiver violent with individuals in the home? Is the caregiver violent to others who may not reside in the home?
- Does the caregiver have any uncontrolled/unrestrained behaviors? (substance use, gambling, pornography, sexual impulses, violent tendencies, impulsive spending, etc.) How does this threaten child safety?
- Does the caregiver engage in behaviors outside of the home that may endanger those who live in the home?(ex. Gang activities, selling drugs, allowing dangerous individuals in the residence)
- Is the caregiver employed? If so where and how long?
- Is the caregiver isolated from others? If so, what leads you to this conclusion?
- How does the caregiver react to stressful situations? Explain
- If applicable, how is the caregiver's relationship with other adults in the home including but not limited to Dependency? Supportive? Chaotic? Controlling? Powerless?

*(The questions above must not be viewed as mandatory nor should they be viewed as the only questions that must be asked. The questions can be viewed as merely a starting point to information collection. You must use open ended, individualized, probing questions in order to gather sufficient information.)*

## **Information Concerning General Parenting and Example Questions**

The General Parenting Assessment Area is concerned with the typical, pervasive parenting practices used by the caregiver(s)/parent(s). Please review CPS Policy, Training Materials and Family Functioning Assessment Supervisor Consultation Guide for more information concerning General Parenting.

Example questions for collaterals related to general parenting are:

- Do you feel that the caregiver views himself/herself as responsible for assuring the child is protected?
- What kind of things does the caregiver expect their children to do? (chores, appropriate childhood activities, etc.)
- Does the caregiver seem empathetic, compassionate, understanding towards their children? explain
- Does the caregiver seem satisfied in their role as parent? Does the caregiver seem happy to be a caregiver? explain
- Does the caregiver place regular, typical parenting responsibilities on others including children?
- What activities do the caregiver and child engage in together?
- Does the caregiver understand their child's strengths? Limitations?
- Have you seen the caregiver become frustrated with the child? If so, what made the caregiver frustrated and what was the outcome?



- Have you observed the parent playing with the child? Describe
- Does the caregiver feel as if the child is punishing them? if so, explain in detail
- Does the caregiver place responsibilities and/or expectations upon the child that are impossible to meet or out of the ordinary? Do these expectations threaten the child's safety? Explain in detail
- Does the caregiver feel like the child is "holding them back"?
- Is the child ever left to "fend for themselves"?
- Is the child allowed by the parent to abuse alcohol or other drugs?
- Has one of the caregivers ever expressed a concern about the other caregiver's parenting practices? If so, explain
- Does the caregiver place their needs ahead of their child's needs?
- Do you think the caregiver loves the child? What leads you to that opinion?
- Does the parent understand and follow through with basic parenting duties such as supplying the child with appropriate food, shelter, supervision?

*(The questions above must not be viewed as mandatory nor should they be viewed as the only questions that must be asked. The questions can be viewed as merely a starting point to information collection. You must use open ended, individualized, probing questions in order to gather sufficient information.)*

## **Information Concerning Parenting Discipline and Example Questions**

The Parenting Discipline Assessment Area is concerned with the disciplinary approaches used by the caregiver(s). This includes but is not limited to discipline methods, purposes for discipline, caregiver's attitude concerning discipline, and meaning of discipline. Often times we are focused on the type of discipline (time out, spanking, grounding, etc.), however discipline must be understood and explored more in depth. Please review CPS Policy, Training Materials and Family Functioning Assessment Supervisor Consultation Guide for more information concerning this Family Functioning Assessment Area.

Example questions for collaterals concerning discipline are:

- Do you feel the caregiver uses discipline to punish the child or to teach/protect the child? Why do you feel this way?
- Does the caregiver use different discipline techniques? Explain
- Does the caregiver appear in control of their emotions when disciplining?
- Does the caregiver use degrading, threatening, or intimidating language as a standard practice when disciplining?
- In general, do you feel as if the discipline the caregiver uses is appropriate based upon the circumstances? Explain

- Have you ever felt as if the caregivers discipline was not appropriate? If so, explain
- Have you ever felt that the caregiver's primary reason for discipline was to physically or emotionally hurt the child? If so, explain

*(The questions above must not be viewed as mandatory nor should they be viewed as the only questions that must be asked. The questions can be viewed as merely a starting point to information collection. You must use open ended, individualized, probing questions in order to gather sufficient information.)*

## Frequently Asked Questions concerning Collaterals

### 1. Does policy require two collateral interviews prior to completing the Family Functioning Assessment?

No. Policy does not require or specify a certain number of collateral interviews to be conducted before completing the Family Functioning Assessment. Presupposing a certain number of collateral interviews poses a potentially dangerous view of the Family Functioning Assessment information collection process. Having a specific number of interviews that must occur changes the focus and purpose of information collection from a quality and sufficiency standard to a numbers/compliance standard. The number of collaterals interviewed never determines whether or not sufficient information was gathered.

Essentially CPS is collecting information concerning the 6 areas of family functioning. The information is used to determine if a child is in present or impending danger, if a child is abused or neglected, and to assist in protection and/or safety planning when necessary. Occasionally you may be able to collect sufficient information with one collateral interview; other times you may have to interview multiple collaterals.

*Information collection sufficiency is outlined extensively in the Family Functioning Assessment Supervisors Consultation Guide.*

### 2. Do CPS Social Workers need parental permission or a signed consent to interview collaterals?

No, a signed consent or parental permission is not required to interview collaterals. That does not mean that you haphazardly interview everyone who knows the family. You should be able to explain why the interview was conducted or will be conducted to the caregivers. Always keep the caregiver informed of the casework process unless it will jeopardize child safety. Be mindful of the Philosophical Principles in CPS Policy Section 1.2 and always treat the parents/caregivers with the respect they deserve.

3. Due to HIPAA laws we are not allowed to interview collaterals (health care providers) without parental permission. Is this correct?

No, this is not correct. HIPAA permits or allows health care providers to provide information to CPS so long as state law permits or mandates health care providers to provide CPS with information concerning suspected child abuse or neglect. HIPAA Section 160.203(c) states HIPAA does not apply where the “provision of State law, including State procedures established under such law, as applicable, provides for the reporting of disease or injury, child abuse, birth, or death, or for the conduct of public health surveillance investigation, or intervention.” Under West Virginia law, health care providers are mandated reporters and therefore are required to report suspected child abuse and neglect to CPS and provide information, including photographs and x-rays, if any, regarding the abuse or neglect. WV Statute 49-2-811 further abrogates the privileged quality of communications between any professional person and his patient or client (excluding the attorney/client privilege or course) with regard to situations involving suspected or known child abuse or neglect.

4. If you contact the reporter during the Family Functioning Assessment is their identity still confidential?

49-5-101 does not allow CPS to reveal the identity of the referent. We must never enter documentation that leads parents or others to the identity of the referent. If we happen to interview the referent and their role has changed from referent to collateral, then we identify them in the record as collateral.

For instance, a school counselor may call in a referral alleging a child has belt marks due to inappropriate discipline. If later CPS interviews the School Counselor to get child functioning information, information concerning the caregiver’s interaction with the school, etc... the School Counselor’s role in the interview is that of collateral. We should identify the school counselor as collateral just as we would other collaterals. With that said, nothing in the contact can identify or even hint that the counselor is also the referent. If you had no idea of the identity of the reporter you would likely call the counselor to get the necessary information to complete the Family Functioning Assessment.

5. We tell collaterals that they can remain anonymous and we do not identify the collateral in the record because this makes them feel more at ease and protects their confidentiality. Is this appropriate?

No it is not appropriate. Although CPS records are confidential to the general public, they are nevertheless subject to disclosure to certain individuals and entities under

certain conditions. In this regard, it would be inappropriate to give collaterals assurances about their anonymity in the CPS record. We must identify those individuals who provided information to make decisions about a family in their record so long as it does not reveal the identity of the referent. Collaterals listed as Anonymous or Collateral Number 1, Collateral Number 2, etc. is not an indication of who supplied CPS with information concerning the family. If collaterals are reluctant to be interviewed, you may be required to use your interpersonal skills to gain a rapport with collaterals just as you do with caregivers and children.

6. If the parent poses a serious threat to the collateral, would it ever be appropriate to redact or “black out” the collaterals identifying information prior to releasing the record?

There may be instances when the parent poses a **legitimate, serious threat** to the collateral or their family if the collateral’s identity is known by the parent. In those situations, it may be appropriate to redact or black out the collaterals identifying information prior to releasing the record. This must not be done in a haphazard manner; you must be able to justify why the collaterals identifying information was redacted. It would be appropriate to get legal advice in these situations. The parent can take the DHHR to court and we would have to defend the decision the decision to redact the collaterals identity.

7. Where should we document the information provided by collaterals?

The interviews should focus on the areas of Family Functioning that drives the decision making process. The information should be documented in the appropriate Family Functioning Area that determines child safety. The contact screen in FACTS should contain the person interviewed, time, date, and purpose of the interview.