

AN ADVOCATES GUIDE TO



What is SAFeR?

SAFeR is an approach to decision making in family law matters. Using this framework, we can improve the safety and outcomes for survivors and their children. At its core, SAFeR helps courts and practitioners make more informed child-centered, custody decisions that promote safety and truly support the survivor, their children and ultimately the family as a whole. We use IPV (intimate partner violence) interchangeably with DV (domestic violence).

SAFeR consists of four steps:

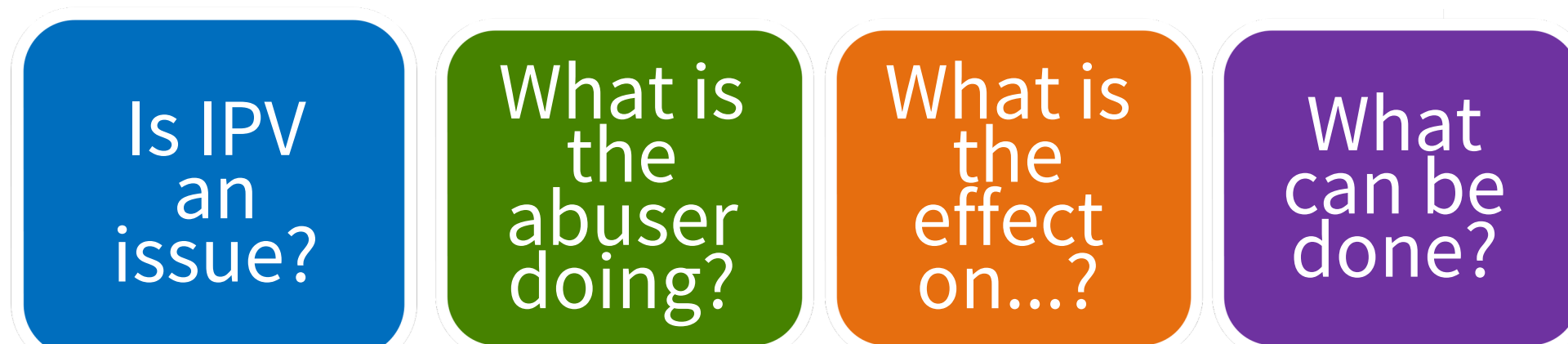
Screening for IPV - a routine process used in every case with every client that looks at whether IPV is present in a family. We listen carefully to how survivors describe their daily lives: whether they feel safe, fearful, controlled, anxious, or able to make decisions for themselves. If abuse is an issue that prompts us to move to the next step in the approach.

Assessing the Nature and Context of IPV - looks at specific behaviors to figure out what abusive behaviors are happening day to day. This means looking closely at what's happening, how long it's been going on, the severity, and how it affects parenting and family dynamics. We also consider how children experience the abuse and whether one parent's behavior interferes with co-parenting and the other parent's ability to safely care for and protect the children.

Focus on the effects of IPV - looks at what is the daily impact on each person in the family of the abuse. Understanding abusive behavior alone isn't enough, we need to know how it impacts safety, well-being, and risk.

Respond to IPV - looks at what solutions can help the family move forward as safely as possible. In this step, decisions and recommendations are grounded in what survivors and children have actually experienced.

Each step is trying to answer a question:



How can SAFeR help a survivor?

Survivors face barriers when thinking about ending/leaving an abusive relationship - including fear of losing custody. SAFeR can help a survivor tell their full story by identifying abusive behaviors, how those behaviors effect them and their children, and request solutions or interventions that address their unique needs. Best practices means that a survivor does not review the worksheets and fill them out on their own. Instead, you as an advocate can review SAFeR with a survivor to organize information in a way that can easily be translated to use in family court.

How can an advocate use SAFeR to assist a survivor?

An advocate can walk through the SAFeR worksheets to help the survivor tell their story clearly and connect how they are experiencing abuse with how it effects them. As an advocate you can use the SAFeR worksheets to help the survivor organize the history and effects of abuse. Survivors can use the information to organize their evidence (including testimony), draft petitions, prepare for a hearing, facilitate working with an attorney, and consider what safeguards they need to co-parent with the person who caused them harm. While SAFeR contains worksheets for each step, the Responding Worksheets is a great place to start.

SAFeR in Practice

SAFeR Responding to IPV worksheet:

This sheet highlights assessing the nature and context of the abuse, focusing on the effects of the abuse, and responding to the abuse. All of SAFeR’s worksheets include the same four main categories: Coercive Control, Parent Experiencing Abuse, Child’s Experience of IPV & Abuse, and Parenting by Parent Causing Harm. When using SAFeR you should fill out any information about the child separately for each child in the family because each child’s experience is different.

When working with a survivor we recommend you use the **Interview Guide** or **Screening Guide** to identify if abuse is present in the relationship and if so, what types of abuse are present. Once you determine that abuse is present the **nature and context of IPV** section will help you identify the specific abusive behaviors experienced by the survivor and their children, and the frequency and severity of the abuse. The **implications of IPV** section will help you identify the daily effects of the abuse on each member of the family, the relationship the behaviors have on the best interest of the child, and how the abuse may affect the co-parenting ability between the survivor and the parent causing harm. The **options and interventions** section provides the survivor with specific requests they can make to help them address the abuse in a way that accounts for their safety and the safety of their children.

The back of the responding worksheet provides more options and interventions to addressing coercive control, increase safety for the parent and the child experiencing abuse, and increasing accountability for the parent causing harm. The options and interventions below are not exhaustive. We recommend you familiarize yourself with the services and support available in your specific community.

What is the abuser doing?

Whats the effect on..?

What can be done?

SAFeR

RESPONDING TO IPV

Nature/Context of IPV	Implications of IPV		Options & Interventions
☐ Coercive Control	☐ Effect of Coercive Control	☐ Parents’ Wishes ☐ Wishes & Concerns of Child ☐ Parents’ Mental & Physical Health	

 Parent Experiencing Harm: ☐ Limit/prohibit access to parent experiencing abuse ☐ Support victim’s efforts to protect the child || ☐ Parent Experiencing Abuse | ☐ Effect on Parent Experiencing Abuse | ☐ Parents’ Ability to Facilitate Contact with Other Parent (absent abuse) |

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SAFeR in Practice

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RESPONDING TO IPV

SAFeR

COERCIVE CONTROL ☐ Prescribe frequency and methods of communication (email only, text only, etc.) ☐ Restrict length and/or content of communication (1-page, 10-minutes, scope, etc.) ☐ Limit access to sensitive information (addresses, account numbers, SSNs, records) ☐ Require neutral exchange locations (school, place of business, etc.) ☐ Appoint a post-visitation safety monitor to ensure visits are safe and go as planned ☐ Periodically monitor and conduct risk and danger assessments ☐ Hold parent causing harm accountable for unjustified, unexcused, intentional violations ☐ Establish schedule for parent causing harm to demonstrate compliance with plan ☐ Set automatic consequences for non-compliance with parenting plan ☐ Appoint a compliance monitor at cost of parent causing harm ☐ Designate parent experiencing abuse as the custodian of records ☐ Secure documents parent exp. abuse needs to care for and protect the child ☐ Secure immigration documents ☐ Secure health insurance for parent experiencing abuse and child ☐ Establish automatic bill-paying processes for abuser's financial obligations ☐ Other:	PARENT EXPERIENCING ABUSE ☐ Limit methods of communication (court approved parenting communication application, no in-person, telephonic or social media contact) ☐ Issue and enforce no contact orders and orders for protection ☐ Require third party exchanges (professional, friend, family member, etc.) ☐ Restrict visitation to designated location (grandparent's home, public park, church) ☐ Restrict visitation to a geographical area (25-mile radius, in town, state, or country) ☐ Condition visitation on having third party present (professional, friend, family) ☐ Restrict what can happen during visitation (no alcohol or drugs, no weapons/firearms, etc.) ☐ Establish benchmarks for unsupervised access (no abuse, no threats, no violations) ☐ Condition access on compliance with established terms (sobriety, BIP, car seat, etc.) ☐ Permit the parent experiencing abuse to relocate with the child in accordance with the law ☐ Other:
PARENT CAUSING HARM ☐ Conduct review hearings ☐ Refer parent causing harm to parenting after violence/ batterers intervention for assessment and proper services ☐ Grant sole legal custody to parent experiencing harm, with or without specified exceptions ☐ Define consequences for non-compliance with access restrictions ☐ Appoint a parenting consultant to confer with parent causing harm on all major decisions ☐ Appoint a parenting monitor to oversee and periodically assess parenting of parent causing harm ☐ Limit parent causing harm's ability to dispose of real or personal property or to dissipate assets ☐ Appoint a special master to monitor and effectuate property allocations ☐ Prohibit access to weapons/firearms ☐ Include provision parent causing harm can only claim children on taxes if current on child support ☐ Other:	CHILD ☐ Provide parent experiencing harm with information about available community-based resources ☐ Facilitate parent exp. abuse's access to available community-based resources ☐ Establish self-executing parenting plan enforcement mechanisms ☐ Allow direct and expedited access to parenting plan enforcement mechanisms ☐ Delineate reasonable house rules ☐ Limit ways parent causing harm may object to parenting decisions ☐ Make relationship findings (age, existence of marriage, parent-child relationships) ☐ Ensure that parenting plan accommodates child's interests, activities and supports ☐ Provide sufficient parenting time flexibility to adapt to child's age and social needs ☐ Structure parenting time to maintain access to child's support system ☐ Connect child and parent exp. abuse to available community-based resources ☐ Other:

When reviewing potential options a survivor can request from the court, please be sure to consider the three questions below. The goal when addressing the specific needs of the survivor is to increase safety without creating additional barriers.

Three questions to ask when seeking relief to assist a survivor and their family:*

*Questions developed by, Scott Hampton - Ending the Violence, NH.

Question 1:

Could the person causing harm use the recommended response to further abuse of the survivor? If so, how? Can you identify a safer option?

Question 2:

Are there any barriers to the survivor completing the relief requested?

Question 3:

Are these recommendations available and accessible in your community?

Responding

Local Resources: (Fill in the information for your area)

Legal Services:

Court Ombudsman:

Domestic Violence Shelter:

Food Bank:

Job Assistance:

Child Care:

Electric/Utilities:

Healthcare:

Mental Health Services: