

# Asking About Intimate Partner Violence & Children's Exposure to IPV

## Should you ask?

There is no consensus about whether to routinely screen or ask all clients a series of standardized questions. There is consensus on the need to be alert and to assess clients who present a wide range of physical, psychological, or behavioural signs or symptoms of intimate partner violence (IPV) or exposure to IPV. In other words, it is reasonable to ask questions if you are concerned.

When approaching the conversation about intimate partner violence, the **SEE IT - NAME IT - CHECK IT** framework can be a helpful reminder to be alert to the warning signs, not to ignore the signs and not to jump to conclusions.

### SEE IT

👁️ Recognize the signs of abuse

### NAME IT

💬 Name it to yourself and to the client you are concerned about

### CHECK IT

✓ Check the situation, don't judge, and use your resources and community experts

Source: SNCit Conversation Framework, Western Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women and Children: <https://www.makeitourbusiness.ca/guidelines/sncit.html>

## How should you ask about IPV & children's exposure to IPV?

1. To create a safer space, ask questions in private and when the client is alone (not in front of family members, partner, children, or informal translators). Be cautious if family or community members interpret; consider professional interpretation services when possible.
2. Begin with more general questions, showing concern based on indicators.
3. If appropriate, follow up with targeted screening using probing questions.
4. Be specific when describing violence; avoid ambiguous words like abuse or assault.
5. Consider that some communities have historically faced over surveillance and are under-supported due to systemic discrimination and implicit bias. Check your [implicit bias](#) before asking any questions.
6. During home visits, are there other children in the home? Based on indicators or signs of children's exposure to IPV, consider targeted screening using probing questions.

## Sample Questions

Here is a list of suggested sample questions using various resources and commonly used screening tools, including the SAFE Tool, ALPHA Tool, and Partner Violence Screen (PVS).

Feel free to adapt them to your client and context.

### EXAMPLES OF GENERAL QUESTIONS:

- “How are things going at home?”
- “Can I ask you some questions about your relationship with your partner?”
- “Because violence is common in many birthing people’s lives and there is help available, I now ask every client about family violence.”
- “Are you in a relationship with a person who threatens or physically hurts you?”
- “Is there a partner from a previous relationship that is making you feel unsafe?”
- “How do you and your partner usually settle disagreements or arguments?”



### EXAMPLES OF PROBING QUESTIONS:

- “Has your partner/ex-partner punched, kicked, or hit you in the abdomen?”
- “Does your partner yell at you or call you names?”
- “Does your partner humiliate you or psychologically or emotionally abuse you?”
- “Do you feel frightened about what your partner says or does to you, your children, or your pets?”
- “Does your partner force you, manipulate you or make you afraid to say no to having sexual intercourse?”
- “Does your partner control your finances?”
- “Do you ever feel frightened by what your partner says or does? If so, does that make you respond the way your partner would want you to, especially when it comes to decision- making?”

### EXAMPLES OF CHILDREN-SPECIFIC PROBING QUESTIONS:

- “Are there any other children at home?”
- “Do you worry about your child/children being affected by your partner’s behaviour?”
- “Is/Are your child/children ever present when your partner is being aggressive or violent?”
- “Does/do your child/children hear you arguing with your partner?”
- “Do you have any concerns about your child/children’s behaviour or safety?”
- “Have you ever had to interact with Child Protection Services? Was that experience helpful?”

## SUPPORTING RESOURCES:

Visit [canadianmidwives.org/family-violence/resources/](https://canadianmidwives.org/family-violence/resources/) for our companion resources on recognizing and responding to family violence:

- Recognizing & Responding to Family Violence
- Assessing the Immediate Risk of Violence
- Child Maltreatment & the Duty to Report

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