

PRACTICE GUIDE

Communicating with the notifier

This practice guide outlines strategies and techniques that can help gather information from a notifier.

1. Clear communication

- Relate to the notifier in a professional and courteous manner.
- Reassure them that their concern for a child is important, and the information they provide could result in a better outcome for the child.
- Actively engage with a notifier and encourage and support them to provide information.
- Explain Child Safety departmental processes and the likely outcomes of their contact with the department.
- Explore the notifier's motivation for contacting the department.
- Reflect your understanding of their concerns back to them.

2. Building rapport

- **Empathy:** communicate that you understand how the notifier is feeling and actively respond to the person in a compassionate way.
- **Respect:** show an attitude of positive regard towards the notifier and a valuing of their role in the community.
- **Genuineness:** be accepting and non-judgemental towards the person.

3. Directive questioning

The following types of questioning techniques will assist the CSO to lead the notifier through the information gathering process.

- **Open ended questions:** stimulate the notifier to talk descriptively or expansively, for example, 'Describe what you saw that day?'
- **Probing questions:** seek clarification at a deeper level, for example, 'You said you saw the mother give the boy, Sam, a hiding. Tell me more about what you saw?'
- **Closed questions:** While this question type may restrict the notifier's response, they are useful for obtaining specific information. For example, 'Was Sam at home during this incident?'

4. Dealing with conflict

The following techniques can be used to manage conflict between the notifier and the CSO:

- Remain calm, speak clearly and do not respond in a hostile manner.
- Acknowledge the frustration or anger of the notifier and try to respond to any feelings they express.
- Repeat back the information to the notifier to clarify the information being provided.
- Confirm that you will record the information they have provided.

5. Refocusing a notifier on the child's experience of harm

To gather critical information about the child's experience of the harm or the risk of harm:

- balance the notifier's wish to provide information about the parent/s behaviours or environmental circumstances with the need gather information about the child's experience of harm and the impact the behaviour or harm has had on the child
- ask the notifier to consider the situation from the perspective of the child. For example, a notifier may provide information about a parent's use of illicit drugs, and the CSO can respond by asking 'When the parents are using drugs, who cares for the children?'
- reflect to the notifier the information they have provided from the child's perspective and check that the information is correct. This provides the notifier with an example of the type of information required
- ask the notifier to expand on information they have provided to gather as much information as possible from them.

Refer to the handout [Information gathering prompts](#) for a thorough breakdown of relevant aspects to be explored with the notifier regarding child protection concerns.

Further reading

- [Information gathering prompts](#)
- [Decision making at intake](#)
- [Assess harm and risk of harm](#)
- [Physical and cognitive developmental milestones](#)
- [Information sharing for domestic and family violence](#)
- [Notifiers and mandatory reporting](#)
- [Strengthening families Protecting children Framework for practice.](#)

Version history

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