Protocol Commencement: Interview with Non-Alleged Maltreating Parent

[Note: This protocol is designed for a two-parent/caregiver family; admittedly many cases involve single parent households or families that include adults whose role in the family is not well defined in relation to the children. When employing this protocol, it becomes necessary for the CPI to make adjustments to how this guidance applies to a particular case. That includes how to proceed in interviewing, inquiries, skills, and use of self. Note: If the alleged maltreating person is not the child’s biological parent, it is important at the beginning of the interview to establish the person’s relationship in the family and with the child in particular. If the person does include significant caregiving as a responsibility, it is important to determine the nature, expectations, and limits of that involvement.]

The interview with the non-alleged maltreating parent is critical for a variety of reasons:

- It is this parent who may be required to provide protection for the child(ren).
- The non-alleged maltreating parent will often be the first parent who is informed of what intervention may mean to the family.
- An assessment of this parent’s behavior/feelings must be made to determine the safety of the child(ren).
- Your interaction with the non-alleged maltreating parent will often determine your approach to the alleged maltreating parent.

Interviewing skills and techniques with the non-alleged maltreating parent will focus on extensive use of feeling and support techniques. Additionally, your comfort in using reality-orienting techniques is essential.

The key to the interview with the non-alleged maltreating parent is to involve this person in a joint effort with you. Often, asking the non-alleged maltreating parent to make a choice between the child and the alleged maltreating parent is a mistake. This approach will not work because it requires a person in crisis to decide something, which he or she cannot or will not. The preferred approach is to ask that parent to join with you in making the environment safe for the child, as well as the alleged maltreating parent.

The circumstances of the interview with the non-alleged maltreating parent will determine the process of the interview and the order of questions/responses. Usually, you will talk to the parent about the reason you are involved. You must be prepared to deal with hostility, anger, and varying levels of denial. This should not be assumed to indicate, by itself, that the parent cannot assist and protect the child.
It should be noted that in situations of neglect of children, the distinction between a non-alleged maltreating parent and an alleged maltreating parent is not as clear as it is with physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional maltreatment. You need to explore the family functioning with each parent and ensure the issues related to protection are examined.

**Here are some example questions, which you may use in this interview:**

**Child**
Tell me about your child. What is he or she good at? What do you think are your child’s strengths? What do you think are your child’s challenges? What does he or she struggle with?

How does your child behave/act in general? Tell me about your child’s behaviors that “push your buttons,” escalate you, or cause you to feel angry? (Child Functioning)

Tell me about your child's friends. (Child Functioning)

In what ways have you tried or are willing to try to keep the child and the alleged maltreating parent from being alone with each other? (Child Functioning)
Does the child have any current or past health related problems that affect him today? (Child Functioning) Describe them for me.

Does the child have any current or past developmental challenges? Educational challenges?

What are the disciplinary approaches you use? Under what circumstances?

**Parent**
Tell me about yourself—about your feelings, and about what is happening. How do you think things have been between you and your spouse (partner)? Explore with the non-alleged maltreating parent the feelings that the CPI believes are being exhibited and follow up on those. (Adult Functioning, History, Family Functioning)

What is the most special thing about parenting your child? The most difficult thing? (Parenting)

Explore with non-alleged maltreating parent how they believe their child is doing, what they are experiencing. Examine issues relating to bonding, attachment, concern, empathy, worry, anxiety, etc. (Adult Functioning, Parenting)
Tell me about the family that you grew up in. What types of things did you do? What are some of your fond memories? Your sad or hurtful memories? How were you disciplined? What did you get in trouble for growing up? What were the rules or behaviors around drinking and drugs? Hitting? Sex? How often do you/your children talk with or see your parents/siblings/relatives? (History)

What do you do with your friends? Who are your friends? What do you share with your friends? (Support)

Do you belong to any groups, organizations, religious affiliations, etc.? (Support)

What about Alcohol/Drugs (type/frequency/amount)? Describe your drinking? Are you currently prescribed any medications? Reasons, frequency, effect on behavior? Were you prescribed any medication? What is/was it? Any prior hospitalizations? For? Where? / Psychotropic medication / hospitalization?

Have you ever had a Mental Health diagnosis? For? When? Were you prescribed any medication? What is/was it? Any prior hospitalizations? For? Where? / Psychotropic medication / hospitalization?

How do you and your partner resolve conflict?

How do you / partner manage his/her daily life and how does the parent generally adapt in life? Employment? Income?

When things are going well, how do they manage? When things are not going well, how do they manage?

What is the family’s daily routine?

Family
What types of things are you responsible for in the home and with the family—chores, routine, structure, meals, etc.? (Family Functioning, Parenting)

How do the family members show they care about each other? What affection is demonstrated? (Family Functioning)

Who gives orders in the home? Who is in charge? (Family Functioning)
What happens when the orders given are not followed? (Family Functioning)

Talk about the marriage/relationship. What are the things that make it good? Things you wish you could change? Communication difficulties? Sexual relationship? (Family Functioning)

Tell me about your folks. What about extended family members? What about neighbors, are they helpful to you and you to them? (Support)

Influences regarding the demographics, extended family, and family functioning are gathered through a variety of observations during the initial interview and subsequent interviews.

**Maltreatment**
What are your thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and beliefs about the maltreatment? (Nature)

Do you have any information, which suggests the non-alleged maltreating parent has been involved in maltreatment? *If yes, explore this with the parent in a direct, yet non-adversarial manner.* (Maltreatment)

Explore with the non-alleged maltreating parent the alternatives to provide protection to the family. Can this person, with your assistance, do such? (Nature)

**Reaction to Intervention**
You should assess the non-alleged maltreating parent’s reaction to intervention at the end of the initial interview, as well as during subsequent interviews. The focus here is on the level of openness this parent has to the agency being involved with the family.

Explore with the parent the meaning of intervention. Have they had assistance before (this state or any other state)? What was the reaction and response to that assistance?

You should explore your own strengths and limitations in working with the family, including the agency’s capacity to respond and the availability and accessibility of community resources.
Protocol Commencement: Interview with the Alleged Maltreating Parent

[Note: If the alleged maltreating person is not the child’s biological parent, it is important at the beginning of the interview to establish the person’s relationship in the family and with the child in particular. If the person does include caregiving as a responsibility, it is important to determine the nature, expectations, and limits of that involvement.]

The interview with the alleged maltreating parent may cause you a variety of concerns, such as:

- What will the person’s reaction be?
- Will the level of anger, hostility, or denial make it impossible to interview the parent?
- What should the alleged maltreating parent be told?
- How should I interact with the parent?

These concerns may be influenced by assumptions about the person based upon the report, or what you have learned through previous interviews. You must avoid interviewing the alleged maltreating parent in an aggressive manner. This usually results in an adversarial relationship, which is not necessary. Do not focus on getting the alleged maltreating parent to admit what they have done.

The purposes of this interview are to:

**Explore** with the parent the family situation from a perspective of what is happening in the family, which may be threatening to the child’s safety.

**Assess** the parent’s ability to become involved with the agency, focusing on controlling for the child’s safety.

**Identify** family conditions, which may require further study (such as substance use, domestic violence, emotional disturbance).

**Share** with the parent what has occurred related to the other interviews.

In order to effectively intervene with the alleged maltreating parent, you must be aware of, and in control of, your feelings. Critical to this interaction is seeking information from the parent rather than "proving" guilt. To the extent that you can exercise a nonjudgmental attitude, the results from the initial interview and subsequent interviews with the alleged maltreating parent will provide essential information in order to make necessary decisions at Family Functioning Assessment. You should seek information from all aspects of the family. It is critical to use observational skills as well as verbal skills and techniques to properly assess all aspects of the parent's functioning, especially his behavior and feelings.
The order of the interviewing process will be determined by the actual situation. However, you can expect the parent will want to know the reason for your presence. **While you should let the parent know in general the reason for your presence, it is not recommended that all the information concerning the maltreatment and other reported concerns be presented initially. To do so would cause the interaction to slide into a series of accusations and denials.** Focusing on feelings and joining the client's resistance regarding his parenting is a more useful and effective approach with the alleged maltreating parent.

**Here are some sample questions, which may be used during this interview:**

**Child**
Tell me about your child. How does your child respond to you? Is the child easy-going? Difficult? What do you mean? (Parenting)

What type of things do you expect your child to do around the house, with siblings, for you? (Parenting)

What type of behaviors and emotions does your child show? (Child Functioning)

Does your child have friends? (Child Functioning)

Does your child have any health-related problems that affect the child today? (Child Functioning)

**Parent**
Tell me about yourself, about your feelings, and about what is happening. How do you think things have been between you and your spouse (partner)? Explore with the alleged maltreating parent the feelings that the worker believes are being exhibited and follow up on those. (Adult Functioning, History, Family Functioning)

What is the most special thing about parenting your child(ren)? The most difficult thing? (Parenting)

Explore with the alleged maltreating parent how they believe their child is doing, what the child is experiencing. Examine issues related to bonding, attachment, concern, empathy, worry, anxiety, etc. (Adult Functioning, Parenting)

Tell me about the family that you grew up in. What types of things did you do? What are some of your fond memories? Your sad or hurtful memories? (History)
What do you do with your friends? Who are your friends? What do you share with your friends? (Support)

Do you belong to any groups, organizations, religious affiliations, etc.? (Support)

What about Alcohol/Drugs (type/frequency/amount)? Describe your drinking?
  Are you currently prescribed any medications? Reasons, frequency, effect on behavior?
  Were you prescribed any medication? What is/was it?
  Any prior hospitalizations? For? Where? / Psychotropic medication / hospitalization?

Have you ever had a Mental Health diagnosis? For? When?
  Were you prescribed any medication? What is/was it?
  Any prior hospitalizations? For? Where? / Psychotropic medication / hospitalization?

How do you and your partner resolve conflict?

How do you / partner manage his/her daily life and how does the parent generally adapt in life? Employment? Income?

When things are going well, how do they manage? When things are not going well, how do they manage?

What is the family’s daily routine?

Family
How do the family members show they care about each other? What affection is demonstrated? (Family Functioning)

Who gives orders in the home? Who is in charge? (Family Functioning)

What happens when the orders given are not followed? (Family Functioning)

Talk about the marriage. What are the things that make it good? Things you wish you could change? Communication difficulties? Sexual relationship? (Family Functioning)

Tell me about your folks. What about extended family members? What about neighbors, are they helpful to you and you to them? (Support)

Describe how roles are developed, assumed, and carried out in the home. Who does what? How is it decided who will do what in the home? (Family Function)

Influences regarding demographics, extended family, and family functioning are gathered through a variety of observations during the initial interview and subsequent interviews.
Maltreatment
When you begin to talk to the parent about the maltreatment, minimal information should be given at that point in the conversation. It is critical that you not engage in a battle of wills; refocus the parent to their own feelings.

What do you want to do about this? How can we make sure nothing like this happens again? (Maltreatment)

Tell me what has been going on with you. Have you been under stress? What from? Drinking? Marital problems? Job-related problems? (Nature)

At an appropriate time, you should always share your belief about the maltreatment with the alleged maltreating parent. There is no need to "beat" this to death. This represents your belief based on what you know to the point of interviewing the alleged maltreater. It is your conclusion based on other interviews and other sources of information.

Reaction to Intervention
You should assess the alleged maltreating parent's reaction to intervention at the end of the initial interview, as well as during subsequent interviews. The focus here is the level of openness this parent has to the agency being involved with the family. You should not expect the parent to embrace the agency in making this assessment.
Explore the issue of what intervention means to the parent. Have they had assistance before? What was the reaction and response to that assistance?

Explore your strengths and limitations in working with the family, including the agency's capacity to respond and the availability and accessibility of community resources.

Closure with Parents/Family
Following the completion of the interviews, you should reconvene the parents or family as appropriate. Share with them a summary of your findings and impressions. The summary of interviews closure with the family may occur after the initial contacts, but that is unlikely. So, here, closure refers to the time when all interviews are done with the family. You might think of this as the last contact you have with the family prior to completing and documenting the Family Functioning Assessment.

Seek individual responses concerning perceptions and feelings. Take care not to reopen the whole process.
As a result of the information collecting that has occurred during all the interviews and at the point of closing, it is critical that you have a full understanding of any maltreatment and the circumstances surrounding the maltreatment.

You must be certain that your understanding of the maltreatment gained from your interviews includes: sufficient information, precise explanations, parent(s)' rationale, parent(s)' emotional response concerned with the discussion on maltreatment, and the quality of the parent(s)' response.

Reassure them that you have been seeking to understand the family, which will require time to think about the information.