**Appendix 6: Working with abusive partners**

**Asking questions:**

Practitioner’s responses to any disclosure, however indirect, could be significant for encouraging

responsibility and motivating a person towards change.

If the person presents with a problem such as drinking, stress or depression, for example, but does not refer to his abusive behaviour, these are useful questions to ask:

• How is this drinking / stress at work / depression affecting how you are with your family?

• When you feel like that what do you do?

• When you feel like that, how do you behave?

• Do you find yourself shouting / smashing things?

• Do you ever feel violent towards a particular person?

• It sounds like you want to make some changes for your benefit and for your partner /

children. What choices do you have? What can you do about it? What help would you like

to assist you to make these changes?

If a person responds openly to these prompting questions, more direct questions relating to heightened risk factors may be appropriate:

• It sounds like your behaviour can be frightening. What happens when you get angry with

your partner or your family? Do you ever shout at them? Have you ever frightened your

partner and your children?

• Have you ever hit them or pushed them around? What (specific) violence have you used?

When did you first lay a hand on them in anger? What’s the worst thing you’ve done in

anger? Have you ever assaulted or threatened your partner with a knife or other weapon?

What has been the most recent abuse?

• How are the children affected? Have you abused / assaulted your partner in front of the

children?

• Have the police ever been called to the house because of your behaviour?

• Do you feel unhappy about your partner seeing friends or family - do you ever try to stop

them? Did / has your behaviour changed towards your partner during pregnancy?

• What worries you most about your behaviour? Are you aware of any patterns – is the

abuse getting worse or more frequent? How do you think alcohol or drugs affect your

behaviour?

The information you gather will be the basis for your decision about how best to engage and what

kind of specialist help is required - either for the person or to manage risk.

**Responding to disclosures from abusive partners**

Practitioners can make a difference and influence a family’s situation and a child’s wellbeing, by

following good practice response guidance, such as:

• Be clear that abuse is always unacceptable;

• Be clear that abusive behaviour is a choice;

• Affirm any accountability shown by the person;

• Be respectful and empathic but do not collude;

• Be positive, people can change;

• Do not allow your feelings about the person’s behaviour to interfere with your provision of a

supportive service;

• Be straightforward; avoid jargon;

• Be clear about the judgement of risk to the children and the consequences of this,

including what actions they are expected to take;

• Whatever they say, be aware that on some level they are unhappy about their behaviour;

• Be aware, and tell the person, that children are always affected by living with domestic

abuse, whether or not they witness it directly;

• Be aware, and convey to the person, that domestic abuse is about a range of behaviours,

not just physical abuse (see definition);

• Do not back them into a corner or expect an early full and honest disclosure about the

extent of the abuse;

• Be aware of the barriers to them acknowledging their abuse and seeking help (i.e. shame,

fear of child protection process, self-justifying anger);

• Be aware of the likely costs to the person of continued abuse and assist them to see