E-Learning Discussion Guide – Module 1

INFORMATION DOMAINS AND INFORMATION COLLECTION

E-learning Module Discussion Guide
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Introduction to the *E-learning Module Discussion Guide* Materials

The Florida Safety Decision Making Methodology defines Florida's integrated child protection approach to working with children and families, from intake and investigations through case management. A series of four e-learning modules introduce the core concepts and foundational practices of the methodology. This *E-learning Module Discussion Guide* builds on the introduction of the four e-learning modules, so concepts and practices may be further discussed and better understood.

There are four self-contained discussion guide modules, one for each of the four e-learning modules. Each discussion guide is designed to be completed immediately following the viewing of the corresponding e-learning module.

For each module discussion guide, various resource materials are provided, along with facilitation notes or discussion questions designed to guide the supervisor and/or Safety Practice Expert (SPE) who is leading the discussion/application.

Module 1

INFORMATION DOMAINS AND INFORMATION COLLECTION

-Module 1-
Information Domains and Information Collection

Learning Objectives for Module 1:

1) Understand the progression and processes for information collection from Hotline to Case Management

2) Articulate strategies for information collection in the six domains

Prior to the Group Discussion:

Prior to the group discussion, assign each participant to review the brief articles provided in this guide as reference material:

1) The Greatest Challenge in Information Collection

2) Deliberate Information Gathering

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Information Domains and Information Collection

Discussion Questions/Process:

1) Select a recent intake received from the Hotline and make copies for everyone in the discussion group.
2) Assign or organize the discussion group members in pairs and ask them to review the Hotline intake, identifying what information is known in each of the six information domains.
3) Ask discussion group members to identify information that they believe the caller likely knew but was not identified in the report (based upon the general context of the other information provided), use the six information domains to facilitate this discussion.
4) Divide discussion group members into groups of three. Ask group members to reflect on the article that describes the Use of Self: Personal values; Personal characteristics; Personal authority; Personal motivation; Personal Consciousness and give examples of ways in which they, in their work with families, have demonstrated some of these. Share a few examples with the larger group when you reconvene.
5) Have several group members select recent cases that they have worked on and provide a brief summary of the cases. Organize into groups of at least three people and ask the person who knows the case to "role play" one of the family members. One of the other group members is to interview this family member to gather information around the six domains and demonstrate as many of the seven core techniques from the Deliberate Information Gathering article as he/she can*. The third member of the group will keep notes about which techniques are demonstrated. As time permits, alternate roles in the groups between participants. Debrief with the entire group.

   *Note: The group facilitator may choose to have participants practice just one aspect of deliberate information gathering such as "conversational looping" in order to provide a more structured approach to the activity. Asking adult learners what they are particularly interested in and would like to work on is always a good idea.

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Reference Material

Reference 1: *The Greatest Challenge in Information Collection* (adapted from article)

Reference 2: *Deliberate Information Gathering* (adapted from article)

Module 1 / Reference 1:

*Information Gathering: The Challenge in Safety Decision Making**

Introduction

Information is the foundation of safety assessment. So if information is the foundation for safety assessment, how do you establish that foundation? That may be the greatest challenge in safety intervention and safety decision making. How do you approach information gathering? How do you use yourself in a skillful, deliberate manner in order to gather sufficient, pertinent information which will support effective safety decision making?

Sufficient information gathering can be organized around six assessment questions:

- What is the extent of maltreatment?
- What circumstances surround the maltreatment?
- How does the child(ren) function?
- How do adult caregivers function generally?
- What are the parenting practices within the home?
- What are the disciplinary practices within the home?

Present and Impending danger can be revealed when individual and family functioning and home life are examined carefully and thoroughly in relation to these assessment questions.

The six assessment questions represent "what" information you should seek to collect. The challenge that remains is "how" do you go about gathering such information?

This article begins to look at how to go about collecting information associated with safety intervention generally and safety decision making specifically. We'll begin with you as the central influence on effective information gathering.

Use of Self

The most effective tool to information gathering is you! It's not some fancy method or skill or trick or art. It's you. Now, certainly, effectiveness is enhanced by skill development, the approach you use and so forth, but effectiveness truly is most associated with you as a person and how you use yourself. How you use yourself occurs as a result of who you are. Who you are is obviously quite complicated and comprised of many things. Here we consider those things most associated with child welfare work generally and information gathering specifically.

Personal Values

What you believe is more important than the truth. The values you hold are more defining than what you know or the methods you use. When you are seeking to understand someone and his situation, your values profoundly influence a) how you behave during the interaction, b) what the person reveals about himself and c) the meaning of the revelation to you. In some ways, our values form our *out picture* of a person. In other words, we see in the person what we expect to see based on our values. So, say, your beliefs are such that you mistrust people in general. Then, it is likely that your tendency is to see a caregiver who is sharing her approach to parenting as untrustworthy—likely lying or distorting. Since values always end up being expressed and therefore communicated to the caregiver, you can imagine the negative effect questionable values can have on information gathering. Alternatively, the right values can have a positive effect on information gathering.

Consider whether you hold these values dear to your heart:

- The right to be me

  Every caregiver who mistreats a child or fails to protect a child is unique from all others; each caregiver you seek to understand has absolute personhood. While having a problem with safety in a family may be something non-protective

caregivers have in common, their individual nature and circumstances are their own. This value is concerned with a strong belief in the reality of individuality.

- The right to feelings

Children who are unsafe and their caregivers own their feelings and have the need for acceptance of those feelings no matter what the emotions are. Those you seek to understand must be able to purposefully express their feelings without fear of retribution or reaction.

- People are worthy

Can you see value and worthiness in a person who does not protect her young? To truly understand a non-protective caregiver, children within a family or other family members you must recognize and accept each person's basic worth as a fellow human being separate from any behavior, habit or characteristic. The value related to whether you see people as worthy or unworthy is expressed in virtually everything done or said during interaction with family members.

- The need not to be judged

Judging actions and behaviors in a moral sense is not the work of child welfare. Assigning guilt or innocence does not enhance information gathering or understanding of caregivers and their situations. We can understand and appreciate that all behavior is purposeful, even that associated with safety threats or failure to protect. Non-judgmental information gathering helps you to understand the purpose of behavior in order to better be able to do something about it. Caregivers might say, "*If you want to know me and my family, don't judge me.*"

- The right to determine the course of our lives

Even non-protective caregivers have the right to pursue their choices and determine their life experience. In child welfare intervention, caregivers' choices about actions and also consequences should remain with them. A caregiver can decide to act or not act in accordance with what influences him, and he can be helped to make such decisions based on a full understanding of the consequences, both good and bad.

- The need for privacy and kept secrets

Family members "own" all the information which is about them. Revealing intimate details, flaws, aspirations, experiences and so forth only occurs when a sense of trust prevails whereby family members have reason to believe that what they say about themselves will be considered personal and private. This value influences you to be open about a person's rights; about what information you require, why you need it and what you will do with it; about what information you are not at liberty to keep confidential.

Personal Characteristics

Do you want to experience children, parents and family members opening up to you and sharing the important information you need to make good safety decisions? Well, who you are individually can contribute to that outcome. There are distinctive qualities that you may already possess or that you can develop that can serve to support effective information gathering.

Are you empathic? Empathy, as you likely know, is the trait of experiencing a situation and emotion of another person in similar fashion to what a person is experiencing. Related to safety intervention, it is whether you can get inside the shoes and skin of a person who is failing as a parent; it is understanding the terror a child feels; it is realizing in a deep and profound way the difficulty and challenge a family is experiencing during the CPS process.

Are you respectful? Respect is a personal, sort of internal characteristic. You feel it toward others and it compels you to behave in very clear and specific ways. You honor a caregiver's individuality, her rights and her privacy through acknowledgement. Fairness and equity guide your actions. You value a non-protective parent's history, experience and point of view. You consider a child's or caregiver's thoughts and feelings as important. Your level of attention and effort to understand a non-protective caregiver is an expression of your respect.

Are you a warm person? Warmth is expressed toward others through such things as smiling, physical contact and physical and social proximity. Let's just think about this personal characteristic from our own perspective. We are more likely to be open and sharing with someone who is friendly, kind, sincere and genial. We are less likely to get into intimate details, revelations or deep concerns with someone who is detached, aloof and disinterested. Simple. So, are you a warm person?

Are you genuine? A substance abusing, non-protective caregiver joins you in conversation about who she is as a person and what has brought about the dangerous situation in her family. She sees you as a real person, authentic in every way….not pretentious. She experiences you as open, sincere, honest and also frank. As she communicates with you, she senses congruence between what you say, what you mean and how you present yourself. These things she sees and feels helps her to gain a growing sense of trust about you. These things influence her being able to open up to give you information you need to make safety decisions.

Are you concrete? Sometimes considering a person to be concrete is considered a negative thing. Here it is not so. Let's look at the meaning of this personal characteristic. Like genuineness, concrete has to do with being real. Are you a person that acts and speaks with reality in mind? If you are concrete, in terms of our meaning here, you deal with people (behavior and communication) in specific and definite ways. You avoid abstraction in favor of what is tangible and easier to recognize and understand. Being concrete means you understand things in ways that enable you to explain them. When conversing with a

person who is threatening to his child, your concreteness is evident in your purposefulness and confidence about your interaction with the person.

Are you self-disclosing? Like being concrete, self-disclosure is closely associated with genuineness. Interrogators gather information. Probably the closest interrogators get to self-disclosure is for purposes of manipulation. So, self-disclosure among interrogators isn't very real or genuine. Interrogators have no interest in revealing themselves as real, living, breathing people whose own experience assists them in understanding the life and experience of someone else. You are not an interrogator. Your need to know about what's going on with a non-protective parent is matched with your need to understand. Sufficient information gathering depends on deep and broad knowledge and understanding. Self-disclosure as a low key expression of your self, your experience and your personal ability to understand serves as a prompt and encouragement for caregivers and children to share. Are you comfortable with sharing relevant experiences with others as a means of engaging conversation and gaining understanding?

Are you spontaneous? In interviewing and counseling, effectiveness is associated with responsiveness and dealing with things in the immediate. Spontaneity is associated with openness and flexibility which are two other pretty important personal characteristics. A non-protective parent often wishes to focus attention on a specific area of concern and a spontaneous, unfettered response on your part can have several effects. Can you identify some possible effects on the information gathering process? How about these things: relaxes the person, reduces your profile and power, supports the significance of the person's concern, and shows respect. What else? All these things and other potential effects contribute to engaging the person in information gathering. It is a good thing if you are a spontaneous person and can begin where the caregiver or child is.

Personal Authority

You have your own sense of authority personally and professionally. You also have your own adjustment to authority which probably qualifies your sense of and use of authority.

We can be simple here regarding authority and safety-related information gathering. Expressions and exertions of authority inhibit information gathering. The bossier you are the less information you'll get from children and caregivers. And…you can expect poorer quality of information if you are overly official, interfering and domineering. Don't be fooled to think you can intimidate people into opening up and giving you the critical information you need to make good safety decisions. Certainly, you possess official power and authority inherent in your position. So the challenge is to lower your profile, seek common ground, avoid power plays and side step limit setting as a means of coercing participation and information giving. Join with the non-protective caregiver to explore her life and experience, her perceptions and points of view, her fears and difficulties and her capacities and potential. In order to join with a child or a parent you must reduce the feelings and perceptions of hierarchy. Remember this. People who believe that their personal power and autonomy is threatened will not share information freely, totally or accurately.

Personal Motivation

Highly motivated people make better conversationalists and information gathers. You know, motivated people are simply more interesting than unmotivated people. How would a non-protective mom experience a highly motivated information gatherer? Well, you'd be very interested in everything she had to say. You'd be creative in how you approach learning about her. You would feel compelled to understand her and to make sure she knew that was your motivation. You'd be dynamic and energetic. You'd believe what you were doing was very important and that she was very important too. She would see that you were willing to take your time, to deliberate, to listen and inquire further, and she'd really feel the depth of your interest and concern. Of course, what you were motivated toward would make a huge difference as to whether she was willing to provide you with what you need to know. Say, for instance, that you were motivated to remove her kids and see that she is punished, and you could be very highly motivated in that direction. It's possible because occasionally you find such folks in child welfare. Okay. If she experiences that as the source of your motivation, forget getting very good information. Alternatively,

let's say your motivation is related to her best interests, the best interests of her children and the best interests of her family. Now, you can see that might have a totally different influence on the information gathering process. Yes, it would.

Personal Consciousness

If you are self-conscious, you will be a better information gatherer. That sounds controversial and not true. We don't think of self-conscious people as being very effective folks. We sometimes think of them as weak or self-absorbed. So, let's clarify. Consciousness refers to awareness, realization and perceptiveness. Consciousness applies as a concept associated with our ability to read reality accurately. Being self-conscious can be a terrific thing with respect to our self-awareness and self-management. Once again, we emphasize that if a personal characteristic of yours is self-consciousness, you will be a better information gatherer. Here's why. You will seek ways to use yourself purposefully. You will notice the effect you are having on the caregiver you are interviewing and will make adjustments accordingly. You will think about how you present yourself, what you say and how you behave. You will recognize and make use of things you do well. You will be confident about making available what is likeable and compelling about yourself. While remaining responsive, you will think carefully about ways and skills that you can deploy to encourage participation and stimulate participation and sharing. You will be alert, highly focused and tuned into the caregiver or child. These things make a huge difference in information gathering.

Closing

There is plenty more that could be written about use of self. It would be a worthy pursuit for you to look further into this critical area fundamental to good information gathering. Hopefully, you've seen what a tremendous impact and even inspiration personal values, characteristics and so forth can have on your performance in safety-related information gathering. Many people are blessed naturally or through experience with personal qualities that provide them with a personal foundation and means to be better at

their job. Others of us can take an inventory of ourselves for consideration of development and refinement. For, you know, all that has been discussed here is amenable to change in a person. In the same sense that we have a responsibility to learn interpersonal methods and skills to enhance information gathering, we should work on ourselves so that the use of ourselves contributes rather than impedes information gathering. *Remember, you are the most effective tool you have for effective safety-related information gathering.*

**Adapted from © ACTION for Child Protection, Inc. article dated August 2006.*

Module 1 / Reference 2:
Deliberate Information Gathering

Introduction

Deliberate Information Gathering (DIG) is a practical, straightforward way of thinking about and using interpersonal techniques and skills which can enhance your involvement and interaction with caregivers. And…using the DIG approach can result in more and better information for making better safety decisions.

The acronym DIG is obviously not accidental. Be deliberate in what you do. Think about it. Communicate and behave during an interview in a highly purposeful way. Forever it has been commonly accepted in social work interviewing and the counseling professions that conscious use of yourself when seeking to understand a client is crucial to success. Yes. Seek to understand the caregiver, his point of view, his story, his experience. That means dig deeper for the information you need in order to understand the person, the situation and how these help explain both threats to child safety and caregiver protective capacities. Here's a funny twist though. The DIG idea is for you to be very deliberate in gathering information and seeking to understand while you behave very naturally. In other words, how you conduct yourself during information collection should feel to the caregiver like a regular conversation. Your interest, curiosity and concern should come through and be experienced by the caregiver.

Core Techniques for Deliberate Information Gathering

[Sources: Ivey, A. (1994), Holder, W. (1997), Miller and Rollnick, (1991), Holder, T. (2000)]

DIG identifies several important interpersonal techniques which facilitate information gathering. Mastering these as part of the natural way you converse with a caregiver will radically alter your effectiveness. And, you know what else? It will greatly increase both your confidence as you approach and conduct interviews, and it will add to your personal satisfaction that can come from positive, productive interaction with caregivers.

- *Attending Behavior*

  Attending behavior refers to focusing your attention on the caregiver rather than your agenda or your line of questioning. Attending behavior involves "matching" a caregiver's nonverbal behavior by consciously manipulating and controlling your own non-verbal skills and responses. Primary attending behaviors include: eye contact, facial expressions, body language, posturing and gesturing, following, reflecting and vocal qualities—tone and pace.

- *Open Questions*

  Typically you want to attempt to begin each new line of questioning and/or transition in topic with an open-ended question. Open questions help to remove you from responsibility for "carrying" the interview by establishing a conversational quality to the interaction. Open questions are questions that cannot be answered "yes" or "no" or in just a few words. Open questions require the caregiver to elaborate with a wider range of responses. Open questions are the "what" and "how" kind of questions.

- *Closed Questions*

  Closed questions should be used to restrict or narrow the focus of a caregiver's response. Closed questions should be used purposefully when precise detail and greater clarity is needed from the caregiver. As an exception, closed questions may be used more frequently when there are time constraints or when you are interviewing a caregiver who is very concrete or is not very verbal.

- *Paraphrasing*

  The primary intent of paraphrasing, as used during a CPS investigation/assessment, is to facilitate the clarification of statements, issues and concerns. Paraphrasing may

involve you selecting and using a caregiver's own key words. This enables you to better judge whether what you heard from a caregiver was in fact accurate. Beyond your reuse of a caregiver's key words, it is important to note that paraphrasing is not simply stating back a caregiver's comments verbatim. Paraphrasing involves you formulating the essential message that the caregiver is conveying and then stating that message back to the caregiver in your own words. When using this technique, you want to make sure that you always check out the accuracy of your statement by concluding the paraphrase with a simple question such as, "Is that correct?" "Does that sound accurate?"

- *Encouraging*

This technique serves to keep people talking about a particular topic, issue or concern. Encouraging may be as simple as using a slight verbal prompt, such as "uh-huh," "I see," "go on," "then what?" Encouraging may also involve using precisely chosen key words or key phrases stated by the caregiver in order to get a caregiver to elaborate further (i.e., "Angry?" "Not the first time?" "Always happens?" "You screwed up?")

- *Conversational Looping*

Conversational looping is a skill for gathering information that first involves you identifying some key general topic or area for discussion with a caregiver (e.g., approach to parenting, problem solving, dealing with stress, etc.). Once you have identified a topic of discussion, you begin the conversation with a broad, non-threatening open question. As the conversation progresses related to an identified topic, you continue with a line of questioning (primarily open-ended) based on previous caregiver responses that progressively moves the discussion toward a more specific and intimate inquiry. A key to effective conversational looping is the ability of the interviewer to maintain a caregiver's focus on a particularly topic which will then enable the interviewer to gather more detailed information from the caregiver about

the issue, concern or topic of inquiry. This may be confusing, so let's consider a series of, say, five simple related "loops" that might be explored concerned with the topic – parenting approach:

1. "So, how would you describe yourself as a parent?"
2. "Where do you figure the way you go about parenting came from?"
3. "What brings you the most satisfaction as a parent?"
4. "I bet you experience some challenges as a parent, huh?"
5. "How does what you're saying relate to your feelings about being a single parent for Billy?"

The content areas that are explored through conversational looping (or, for that matter, any technique) are the six assessment categories identified in the previous article and introduced in the e-learning module. These include:

- The extent of maltreatment?
- Circumstances surrounding maltreatment?
- Child functioning?
- Parenting in general?
- Disciplinary practices?
- Adult functioning?

- *Reflective Listening Statements*

Reflective listening statements involves your attempts to interpret what a caregiver believes, thinks, feels, and then state your interpretation back to the caregiver. Your interpretation of what the caregiver is communicating is based on both verbal responses and non-verbal cues from the caregiver. As a technique and mental process, reflective listening statements begin with: (a) you listen (intently) to what is being communicated by the caregiver; (b) you process—think about—consider the information; (c) you speculate as to the meaning of what the caregiver is saying and

then (d) you "reflect" what you believe the meaning to be back to the caregiver in the form of a statement. A statement is used rather than a question because a statement is less likely to produce caregiver resistance, and, further, a statement triggers the caregiver to re-examine the accuracy of their perceptions and thoughts. You can accomplish this technique by keeping things simple: Interpret meaning and respond with a statement that has only a minor shift in emphasis. Here's an example:

Parent: "*I may have a couple of beers every once in a while with my friends, but I sure as hell don't have a drinking problem*."

You: "*Drinking is no big deal…it's just something you do socially with your friends*."

Rules for Deliberate Information Gathering

Rule Number 1	*Rationale*	*Technique*
Keep it conversational.	The more you bombard a person with questions, the more the interview feels like an interrogation, and the less likely you will be to get spontaneous and unsolicited information.	**Core Techniques for DIG** The use of these 7 techniques will enable you to elicit significant facts and feelings relevant to the issues and areas of concern.

Rule Number 2	*Rationale*	*Technique*
Be comprehensive in your understanding and yet thorough and focused on detail.	An effective communicator tends to think abstractly. There should not be an assumption that what is being communicated by a caregiver means the same thing to them as it does to us. It is important to move a conversation from general to specific. Check out meaning, and, if necessary, be precise in your understanding.	• **Attending Behavior** • **Open Questions**

Rule Number 3	*Rationale*	*Technique*
Listen.	The more we listen, the more we learn. Attempt to make at least 51% of your interpersonal communication listening.	• **Closed Questions** • **Paraphrasing**

Rule Number 4	*Rationale*	*Technique*
Get the caregiver invested in the interview.	A person who feels that she is actively involved in the interpersonal exchange will be more inclined to discuss personal individual and family issues.	• **Encouraging**

Rule Number 5	*Rationale*	*Technique*
Remain *neutral* and *objective*.	Avoid arguing or confronting a person regarding issues, positions, behaviors, etc. that you do not agree with. Objective evaluations of children and caregivers does not require that you get invested in taking a position positive or negative with what is being communicated.	• **Conversational Looping** • **Reflective Listening**

Rule Number 6	*Rationale*	*Technique*
Avoid identifying solutions.	Often it is easy and a pitfall in information collection to provide solutions to problems, to attempt to provide answers. Identifying solutions prematurely may close down the caregiver by putting you in the role of speaker and	**Core Techniques for DIG** The use of these 7 techniques stimulates the caregiver to keep talking. The techniques used correctly keep you as the receiver of information, keep you as the listener. Assertiveness applies only to the purposeful

	expert. This will reduce conversation and ultimately make it more difficult to gather adequate information.	expression of the techniques, not to asserting your self, your opinions, your ideas or your answers.

Summary

Those who master these techniques and rules—as simple as they seem—will see a huge difference in how caregivers respond and the quality and amount of information that caregivers disclose.

**Adapted from © ACTION for Child Protection, Inc. article dated November 2006*