

# PRACTICE GUIDE

## Communicating with the notifier

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The following strategies and techniques 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 departmental processes and the likely outcomes of their contact with the department.
- Try to determine 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, 'Can you describe what you saw that day?'
- Probing questions: seek clarification at a deeper level, for example, 'So you are saying you saw the mother give the child a hiding, what did the mother use to hit the child with?'
- Close ended questions: restricts the notifier's response and may be useful when specific information is needed, for example, 'What colour was the bruise?'

### 4. Dealing with conflict

The following techniques can be used to manage any conflict that occurs 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 back 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; and
- ask the notifier to expand on information already provided or ask questions about how the situation may be impacting on the child.