

Chapter 18

INTERVIEWING COLLATERAL CONTACTS

18-1. Purpose. Based upon the information in the intake, the review of the family's history and initial interviews with all family members, the investigator must determine which collateral sources are likely to have relevant information related to the current investigation. Collateral contacts will also provide the investigator with essential information to validate, corroborate and reconcile what has been learned from the family. Identifying the relevant collateral contacts and conducting purposeful interviews based on information already gathered is key to the investigator's ability to complete the FFA-Investigation and make final safety determinations.

18-2. Procedures.

a. In most instances, the reporter should be the first individual contacted prior to commencing the investigation. This contact is required and is necessary to corroborate information obtained by the Hotline counselor and to explore what other information the reporter might have on the extent of the maltreatment, circumstances surrounding the maltreatment, child functioning, adult functioning, general parenting, and disciplinary and behavior management practices. The reporter may also be an excellent source for obtaining the names and contact information for other reliable collateral contacts that know the family well.

b. The investigator must:

(1) Identify collateral contacts likely to have relevant and reliable information on the family.

(2) Provide his or her name and contact information to "professionally mandated" reporters within 24 hours of being assigned to the investigation.

(3) Advise "professionally mandated" reporters he or she may submit a written summary of the information made to the Hotline to become part of the child's file.

(4) Protect the identity of the collateral contacts to the extent possible when discussing information shared about the family with the family.

c. A consideration in identifying collateral contacts is the degree the source is likely to provide reliable and unbiased information about the family.

(1) Professional sources are typically less biased than neighbors, friends and family members, but correspondingly, are also less likely to have as much detailed information on the family.

(2) Informal sources, on the other hand, typically are aware of family conditions and dynamics to a much greater extent than professional sources, but are more often biased regarding the information shared and may intentionally skew information provided to present the family in either a more favorable or negative light.

(3) Information from one source that can be corroborated by additional sources helps the investigator determine the reliability of the information.

(4) Unless compromised by adult instruction, children are typically the most unbiased source for information within a family and are also the least guarded in disclosing sensitive information.

(5) Similarly, extended family members who have emotionally or physically distanced themselves from the parents/caregivers or children in the recent past are often good collateral sources for information. Asking a child if there is a favorite aunt, uncle or family member he or she misses is a good way to identify these individuals because the adults in the home will rarely disclose this information because of concerns about the information the individual might share about the family's situation.

d. In addition to individuals who have direct knowledge about circumstances surrounding the maltreatment, collateral contacts or sources may include:

(1) Individuals who have regular contact with the child and are likely to be able to describe the child's day-to-day functioning.

(2) Doctors or other professionals who have evaluated or maintain records on the child.

(3) Individuals with established personal or professional relationships with the parent who can likely describe the parent's day-to-day functioning.

(4) Individuals likely to have witnessed the child-parent interactions and can describe general parenting and disciplinary and behavior management practices.

e. The investigator should also determine the order in which collateral sources are interviewed to facilitate information collection. In determining the order of interviews related to collateral sources, a critical aspect to consider in scheduling or aligning the interviews is to start with the individuals most likely to openly provide relevant and valid information, and then proceed to the individuals most likely to be resistant or guarded. This will allow the investigator to develop a line of questioning for future interviews that builds on the information collected and indicates to "closed" or uncooperative individuals that the investigator has obtained substantial information to analyze their responses to the investigator's questions.

18-3. Supervisor. When initiated, the Supervisor Consultation should affirm:

a. To the degree possible, the investigator's interview of collateral contacts provided information within the context and extent of how the individual knows or typically interacts with the family (e.g., teachers can provide information on the child's educational status but are unaware of how the child is disciplined at home, or an eyewitness can provide information related to the maltreatment incident but does not know the family personally, etc.).

b. The investigator has made reasonable effort to locate and interview any collateral contact that is a likely source of relevant information on the family or the alleged maltreatment incident.

18-4. Documentation.

a. The investigator will document all contacts and information obtained through interviews in case notes within two business days.

b. The supervisor will document the consultation using the supervisor consultation page hyperlink in the investigation module within two business days.