

Improving Responses: A Toolkit for Developing an Interagency Protocol on Family Violence, 2010

TOOLKIT OVERVIEW

The Tool Kit was prepared by the Yellowknife Family Violence Protocol Development Committee to share its knowledge and experience of developing an interagency family violence protocol. The Committee hopes this Tool Kit will encourage other NWT communities to consider an interagency protocol as a way to improve responses to adult victims of family violence.

For more information, please refer to the full version of the Protocol toolkit. To get a copy of the Toolkit, or if you have questions about developing an interagency family violence protocol, please contact the Yellowknife Family Violence Protocol Development Committee through the Department of Health and Social Services Family and Child Violence Protection Consultant at (867) 920-7918.

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DEVELOPING AN INTERAGENCY FAMILY VIOLENCE PROTOCOL

Family violence is the abuse of power within intimate and dependent relationships. Family violence is sometimes a crime. It is always serious. Supporting victims of family violence is important and difficult work. No single agency has the mandate or the resources to meet all the needs of victims of family violence. That is why it's so important for agencies to work together. Agencies providing services to victims of family violence and abuse can improve their responses if they:

- √ Are clear about what their agency does and can do to help.
- √ Know what services other agencies provide and how other agencies respond to victims of family violence and abuse.
- √ Have good working relationships with other agencies so they can refer victims of family violence to other services and feel confident that victims will get what they need.

- √ Are prepared to work with other agencies and work differently to make sure that there are no cracks in the service system that victims of family violence can fall through.

WHAT IS AN INTERAGENCY FAMILY VIOLENCE PROTOCOL?

*An interagency family violence protocol is an agreement among agencies to work together on family violence and abuse issues. A protocol can involve any number of agencies or informal support systems, like community groups. Collaboration is a main ingredient in developing a protocol. Some agencies may find that it is one thing to agree to collaborate, and that it can be much more difficult to agree on *how* they will work together.*

For example, it is important for members of a protocol to make active and timely referrals. Providing clients with telephone numbers and contact names of other agencies is not an active referral. An active referral means communication with another agency about shared responses to a client's needs. It is very important that there is confidence in referrals: victims should be confident that their needs will be met, and agencies should be confident in each other when they are working together. This trust is the foundation of a shared response to family violence.

THREE MAIN TYPES OF PROTOCOLS

There are three main types of protocols. The three protocols are like building blocks because they need one another to take shape.

1. An agency protocol describes services, policies and procedures within the agency. Agency protocols govern the responses of the agency and its workers.
2. An interagency protocol is an agreement among two or more agencies on how they will work together. Sometimes an agreement between just two agencies is called an agency-to-agency protocol. *This Tool Kit focuses mainly on developing an interagency protocol.*
3. A community protocol is an agreement among agencies, individuals and other community members to work together.

EIGHT STEPS TO DEVELOPING AN INTERAGENCY PROTOCOL

Many of these steps are ongoing because the Protocol is a 'living' document that can grow and change with needs and circumstances in the community. Every community is unique, but these steps may help your community.

1. **Form a Committee to develop the Protocol:** Discuss and clarify the work of the Committee and what you expect to come out of this: a Terms of Reference should be developed for the committee and reviewed regularly. The Committee will need to decide on the target group and scope of the protocol. For example, the Yellowknife Protocol targets adult victims of family violence and abuse, and covers first response agencies only.

You might want to include other people in the target group, such as affected children, or abusers. You also might want to include more groups in your protocol, such as a community justice committee, Elders or volunteer caregivers.

2. **Look at others' experiences and best practices:** You have the option of contacting the Yellowknife Protocol Development Committee in order to discuss their experience. You could also examine coordinated community responses to family violence and abuse elsewhere in Canada and the United States.
3. **Gather information about the community agencies and other sources of help for victims of family violence:** One way to gather this information is to develop an interview guide and do interviews with the agencies and groups that will be part of your community's family violence protocol.
4. **Develop profiles of each agency or group's services, policies and procedures:** The written profiles can include:
 - √ Commitments – what the agency or group will do through the protocol to better serve the target group.
 - √ Service Delivery – the services or supports the agency or group provides.
 - √ Operations – details on the agency or group's services or support.
 - √ Procedures – the way the agency or group provides services (for example: intake, screening, risk assessment, assessment, intervention, referral, safety, sharing information, follow-up, training and complaints processes).
 - √ Linking with Other Agencies – how the agency or group works with others and how they will work with others in the future.
5. **Develop and implement a plan for how this Protocol will change the way agencies work together:** Determine how the agencies and groups can work together better to respond to family violence. Discuss what a more integrated system of services and supports to respond to family violence would look like in your community. What can be done differently? What shared commitments are agencies willing to make to make these differences a reality? This involves lots of information-sharing and informal negotiations, and may take quite a few meetings.
6. **Work together to draft the Protocol:** Prepare a family violence protocol document that captures what the community's agencies and groups are doing now, what is working well, and what you will do differently by working more closely with each other to improve the response to victims. The protocol document includes agency-specific profiles, and can include any agency-to-agency protocols.

7. **Continue to work together:** Once the Protocol is written, continue to meet and work together to promote understanding and support, and to fill gaps in services. For example, some agencies may wish to enter into agency-to-agency protocols or Memorandums of Understanding to further define the specific ways they will work together.
8. **Continue to refine the family violence protocol and engage others in it:** Protocols are living documents that require changes and updates as new situations arise and agencies change. As you continue to learn more as a group, you can continue to strengthen your protocol and deepen the relationships between agencies. Also, it is very useful to inform the larger community about the work that is being done on the protocol.

TEMPLATE FOR AN INTERAGENCY PROTOCOL ON FAMILY VIOLENCE

This is an example, or a template, for writing a Protocol on Family Violence (see step 6 above).

1. Introduction

- When and how was the protocol developed?
- What agencies and community groups were involved?

2. Purpose of the Interagency Protocol

- Why was the protocol developed?
- What do the agencies and groups want to achieve through the protocol?
- What difference will the protocol make for victims of family violence?
- Who is the protocol designed to help – adult victims of family violence? Others?

3. Definition of Family Violence

- What definitions have the agencies and groups agreed to, about what family violence is and related concepts?

4. Vision Statement

- What is the broad vision for the response to family violence which the agencies and groups want to achieve?

5. Goals and Objectives

- What are the main steps to achieving the agencies' and groups' vision?

6. Principles or Commitments

- What values will guide the interagency protocol on family violence?

- What does each agency and group commit to doing, to improve their response to victims of family violence?
- How will the agencies and groups work together better to respond to victims of family violence?

7. Services and Supports

This section would describe the services and supports that the agencies and groups have agreed together to provide to victims of family violence, and the way in which those services and supports should be provided. For example, this could include how the agencies will:

- do screening and intake
- do risk assessment
- do assessment
- make active client referrals to one another and other agencies
- do intervention
- address complaints from clients about services or supports
- ensure confidentiality.

This section could also list which agencies will provide each service or support. A chart is also a useful way to summarize this information

8. Other Interagency Collaboration

This section could describe other ways that the agencies and groups will work together to support the protocol. For example through joint training and awareness, by resolving conflict between agencies, by monitoring the protocol and evaluating it once a year, and by taking leadership in other ways to respond to family violence in the community.

9. Agency and Group Profiles

This section would include brief descriptions of each agency or group's services, policies and procedures to respond to victims of family violence.

10. Appendices

Include here any resources or tools that the protocol agencies or groups have agreed to use. Other useful information such as any agency-to-agency protocols or Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) could also be included.