



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE-INFORMED FAMILY LAW ATTORNEY INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

This screening tool is grounded in the empirical, evidence-based research and nationally recognized best practices presented in *Advancing Justice in Family Law: Best Practices for Protecting Victims of Domestic Violence and Their Children*. It is intended to assist survivors in identifying attorneys who possess the specialized knowledge, training, and child-safety focus necessary to effectively represent victims of domestic violence and their children in family court.

Attorney Name: _____

Law Firm: _____

Phone: _____

Date Interviewed: _____

Scoring Guide

For each question, rate the attorney:

Score	Meaning
5	Excellent understanding
4	Strong understanding
3	Moderate understanding
2	Limited understanding
1	Significant concerns
0	Major red flag

1. Domestic Violence vs. High Conflict

Question:

"How do you distinguish between a true high-conflict custody case and a case involving coercive control, domestic violence, or post-separation abuse?"

Looking For:

- ☐ Understands coercive control
- ☐ Understands post-separation abuse
- ☐ Does not automatically label cases "high conflict"
- ☐ Recognizes one party may be driving the conflict

Score: _____ out of 5

Notes:

2. Strategy for Presenting Abuse Evidence

Question:

"How would you present my abuse history to the court?"

Looking For:

- ☐ Focuses on patterns, not isolated incidents
- ☐ Understands coercive control
- ☐ Values documentation
- ☐ Understands trauma responses

Score: _____ out of 5

Notes:

3. Parental Alienation Allegations

Question:

"What is your view of parental alienation allegations when domestic violence or child abuse concerns exist?"

Looking For:

- ☐ Understands misuse of parental alienation claims
- ☐ Familiar with CAMS (Child and Mother Sabotage, Dr. Joan Meier's 2020 Study)
- ☐ Understands trauma-based child resistance
- ☐ Does not immediately blame the protective parent

Score: _____ **out of 5**

Notes:

4. Trauma and Courtroom Presentation

Question:

"How do you help judges understand that survivors often appear emotional while abusers appear calm and credible?"

Looking For:

- ☐ Understands trauma-informed lawyering
- ☐ Understands DARVO (Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim & Offender)
- ☐ Understands manipulation tactics
- ☐ Can explain trauma to the court

Score: _____ out of 5

* A trauma-informed lawyer understands that trauma can affect how a survivor thinks, remembers, communicates, reacts to stress, and participates in a legal case. Instead of viewing those behaviors as signs that the client is dishonest, unstable, difficult, or uncooperative, the attorney recognizes them as possible effects of trauma and adjusts their approach accordingly.

Notes:

5. Custody Evaluators & Experts

Question:

"How do you evaluate custody evaluators, therapists, reunification therapists, and other experts involved in a case?"

Looking For:

- ☐ Screens experts carefully
- ☐ Requests CVs
- ☐ Understands bias concerns
- ☐ Familiar with domestic violence training standards

*Question: "Approximately how many hours of formal domestic violence-specific training have you completed during your legal career, and what were the primary subjects covered?"

Score: _____ **out of 5**

Notes:

6. Reunification Therapy & Parent Coordinators

Question:

"What is your position regarding reunification therapy, reunification camps, parent coordinators, and similar interventions in abuse cases?"

Looking For:

- ☐ Understands concerns about forced reunification
- ☐ Familiar with Piqui's Law and Kayden's Law
- ☐ Prioritizes child safety
- ☐ Understands trauma-informed alternatives

Score: _____ out of 5

Notes:

7. Criminal Evidence & Statute of Limitations Issues

Question:

"Would you investigate historical criminal records, sealed records, and other evidence that may support my disclosures?"

Looking For:

- ☐ Will pursue relevant evidence
- ☐ Understands family court limitations
- ☐ Understands statute-of-limitations issues
- ☐ Appreciates the importance of credibility evidence

Score: _____ out of 5

Notes:

8. Evidence That Matters Most

Question:

"What evidence do you find most persuasive in domestic violence custody cases?"

Looking For:

- ☐ Values documentation
- ☐ Values witness testimony
- ☐ Understands pattern evidence
- ☐ Understands digital evidence
- ☐ Understands stalking and coercive control evidence

Score: _____ out of 5

Notes:

9. Children's Disclosures

Question:

"How do you determine whether a child's fear or resistance toward a parent is a trauma response versus alleged parental alienation?"

Looking For:

- ☐ Understands child trauma
- ☐ Understands forensic interviewing
- ☐ Takes children's disclosures seriously
- ☐ Understands coercive control impacts on children

Score: _____ out of 5

Notes:

10. Domestic Violence Training & Education

Question:

"What domestic violence-specific training, experts, books, organizations, or continuing education have influenced your practice?"

Looking For:

- ☐ Ongoing education
- ☐ Familiarity with coercive control
- ☐ Familiarity with trauma
- ☐ Familiarity with nationally recognized experts

Score: _____ out of 5

Notes:

BONUS QUESTION

Question:

"Tell me about a domestic violence custody case where the abusive parent appeared credible. What did you do to protect your client and the children?"

Looking For:

- ☐ Real-world experience
- ☐ Specific examples
- ☐ Strategic thinking
- ☐ Child safety focus

Score: _____ out of 5

Notes:

FINAL ASSESSMENT

A Strong Attorney Should Leave You Feeling:

- ☐ This attorney understands coercive control.
- ☐ This attorney recognizes post-separation abuse.
- ☐ This attorney understands trauma and how it affects survivors.
- ☐ This attorney understands how abusers manipulate family court.
- ☐ This attorney knows the difference between domestic violence and "high conflict."
- ☐ This attorney takes children's disclosures seriously.
- ☐ This attorney prioritizes child safety over parental rights when abuse is present.
- ☐ This attorney is willing to challenge biased experts and flawed evaluations.
- ☐ This attorney understands that domestic violence is a safety issue—not merely a relationship issue.
- ☐ This attorney is willing to read and apply the information contained in *Advancing Justice in Family Law: Best Practices for Protecting Victims of Domestic Violence and Their Children* and incorporate its trauma-informed, evidence-based principles into the representation of my case.

Total Score

10 Questions: _____ out of 50

Bonus Question: _____ out of 5

Total: _____ out of 55

Interpretation

50–55: Outstanding fit. Demonstrates strong domestic violence and custody expertise.

40–49: Good fit. Appears knowledgeable but explore any weaker areas.

30–39: Proceed cautiously. Additional education or consultation may be needed.

Below 30: Significant concerns. Consider interviewing additional attorneys before retaining counsel.

Most Important Question:

"Do I believe this attorney will advocate for my child's safety with the same diligence and urgency they would if it were their own child?"