

SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

Intimate partner violence screening for separating or divorcing parents: An introduction to the mediator's assessment of safety issues and concerns-short (MASIC-S)

Fernanda S. Rossi¹  | Amy G. Applegate² | Claire Tomlinson³ | Amy Holtzworth-Munroe³

¹Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Stanford University School of Medicine, Stanford, California, USA

²Maurer School of Law, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, USA

³Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, USA

Correspondence

Fernanda S. Rossi, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Stanford University School of Medicine, Stanford, CA, USA.
Email: fsrossi@stanford.edu

Abstract

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a leading cause of separation and/or divorce. IPV may not stop after separation, as parents who use IPV can continue intruding in the lives of parents who experience IPV due to unsafe parenting arrangements that allow continued frequent contact and thus risk further abuse. Therefore, it is critical that separating/divorcing parents be assessed for IPV and ongoing safety concerns. Parenting arrangements (e.g., physical and legal custody, parenting time) may not include the appropriate protections if IPV has not been uncovered and/or considered. Unfortunately, many existing IPV screens for family court processes have limitations. The Mediator's Assessment of Safety Issues and Concerns-Short (MASIC-S) was designed to address these limitations. Results from the MASIC-S may be used to inform and create parenting arrangements in the best interest of the child. We provide recommendations on how MASIC-S results can guide family court practitioners in parenting arrangement disputes. These recommendations are based on the existing literature and guidelines regarding the relationship between parenting arrangements and child-wellbeing following separation/divorce in the context of IPV. We also discuss areas in which additional research is needed to help determine

parenting arrangements most suitable for separating/divorcing parents with a history of IPV.

KEYWORDS

child custody, intimate partner violence, parenting arrangements, screening, separation and divorce

Key points for the family court community

- The use of an IPV screen in family law is necessary for effectively considering how to increase the safety and improve the outcomes of parents and children during and after the separation or divorce process.
- We offer recommendations, based on existing research, to help family law practitioners effectively screen for IPV among separating and/or divorcing parents.
- We introduce two versions of the Mediator's Assessment of Safety Issues and Concerns-Short (MASIC-S), an IPV screening tool we developed for family law practitioners and discuss how MASIC-S screening results can assist practitioners in disputes over parenting arrangements.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES



Fernanda S. Rossi is a Clinical Assistant Professor at the Center for Dissemination and Implementation in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the Stanford University School of Medicine. She received her PhD in Clinical Science from Indiana University and completed a postdoctoral fellowship in Medical Informatics and Health Services Research at the Department of Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System and Stanford University. A large part of her work has been dedicated to testing intimate partner violence (IPV) assessment tools within the divorce mediation context and examining the implications of mediation for families reporting IPV.



Amy G. Applegate, Clinical Professor of Law and Ralph F. Fuchs Faculty Fellow, and Director of the Viola J. Taliaferro Family and Children Mediation Clinic, joined the faculty at the Indiana University Maurer School of Law in 2001. Applegate teaches mediation theory and practice in the clinical law program that she developed at the Law School; she is also teaching and directing a civil protection order clinic at the law school for survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV). Through this program, law students provide mediation services to indigent and low-income litigants in disputed custody, parenting-time, and other family law cases. Applegate has received teaching, research, and service awards for her work. She has

been a leader in clinical legal education on the national level, and actively and significantly involved in state and local bar activities, with a special emphasis in the areas of delivery of pro bono services, training mediators, and mediation ethics. Applegate and colleagues have conducted research on family law issues, focusing on families experiencing parental divorce or separation. She and her colleagues have developed and tested the best methods of screening for a history of IPV in cases seeking family mediation, so that mediators are aware of IPV and consider the possible impact of IPV on the mediation process. They also conduct randomized controlled trials testing the effectiveness of family law interventions, including different mediation approaches (for both families with and without histories of IPV) and online parent education programs. Applegate has co-authored many publications in her research areas. Additionally, she has presented individually, as well as with her collaborators, in presentations at state, national, and international conferences about her research and practice areas.



Claire Tomlinson is a doctoral candidate in Clinical Science at Indiana University. At Indiana University, Claire investigates the evaluation and implementation of evidence-based practice in the family law field, with a focus on divorcing and separating parents. She is interested in family law programs, often based in courts, that are designed to minimize the negative impact of parental separation on the children in the family.



Amy Holtzworth-Munroe is a Professor in Indiana University's Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences. She has conducted research on intimate partner violence (IPV) since the mid-1980s. For over the past 15 years, in collaboration with others, she has conducted research on family law issues, focusing on families experiencing parental divorce or separation. The research team developed and tested IPV screening measures for family mediation. They also conduct randomized controlled trials testing the effectiveness of interventions, including online parent education programs, mediation approaches to help parents focus on their children's needs, and mediation approaches designed to be safer for parties reporting IPV. She is a recipient of the Stanley Cohen Distinguished Research Award from the AFCC.

How to cite this article: Rossi, F. S., Applegate, A. G., Tomlinson, C., & Holtzworth-Munroe, A. (2023). Intimate partner violence screening for separating or divorcing parents: An introduction to the mediator's assessment of safety issues and concerns-short (MASIC-S). *Family Court Review*, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fcre.12762>