

Safe Access in Action:

National Insights and On-the-Ground Lessons from the SAVES Project

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Safe Access for Victims' Economic Security (SAVES) Center

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SAVES
CENTER

Safe Access for Victims'
Economic Security Center

What is the SAVES Center?



National Resource Center funded by the federal Office of Child Support Services (OCSS)



Works to increase safe access to child support, parenting time, and establishment parentage of services for survivors of domestic violence



Works with 13 SAVES Demonstration sites (12 state and one Tribal child support programs)

Who is the SAVES Center?



COLORADO
Child Support Services
Department of Human Services

What does the SAVES Center do?



Technical Assistance

Providing technical assistance to 13 SAVES demonstration sites and the national child support program to support the development, implementation, and evaluation of safe access initiatives.



Training

Enhancing, creating, and delivering trainings on practices that promote safe access to child support, parenting time, and establishment of parentage.



Research

Conducting research to
1) Better understand the needs and safety of survivors in and out of the child support system;
2) Learn how new and existing policies/practices support or hinder survivors' interest in and ability to safely access child support services.



Evaluation

Developing, curating, and disseminating resources and research on child support, parenting time, and domestic violence.

Demonstration Site Highlights

Screening

SAVES demonstration sites are at different stages of developing and implementing screening tools to identify safety concerns in child support cases.



Triage Teams

Establishment of specialized domestic violence triage teams to respond to safety concerns.



Advisory Boards

SAVES demonstration sites have built advisory boards to collaborate with dv coalitions, public assistance agencies, judges, legal aid providers and survivors.



Parenting Time Resources

Some sites are developing parenting time resources that offer clear, trauma-informed information of key terms, the process, and safety focused parenting time options.



SAVES Learning Collaborative

SAVES demonstration sites are sharing their knowledge and tools with other child support agencies to help build their program's capacity to safely enforce child support for survivors.



Resources Available



**Child Support 101:
Building a
Framework for
Advocates**



**Caseworker
Guide for DV
Survivor -
Centered
Communication**



**Assessing Risk,
Enhancing Safety: Role
of Child Support
Agencies Supporting
Survivors of Domestic
Violence**



**The SAVES Learning
Community and
Website**

How can you make child support safer today?

Communication

Assess current communication practices with survivors involved in the child support system. Do your communications clearly explain the process and proactively address survivor safety concerns?



Trainings

Support staff's knowledge and ability to practically apply appropriate skills and competencies to the everyday work they do with survivors.

Resources

Use available resources that support both the workforce and survivors in navigating the child support system safely.



Collaboration

Collaboration with your county-level child support administrators, domestic violence service providers and other systems or organizations that may come into contact with survivors.

Contact Us

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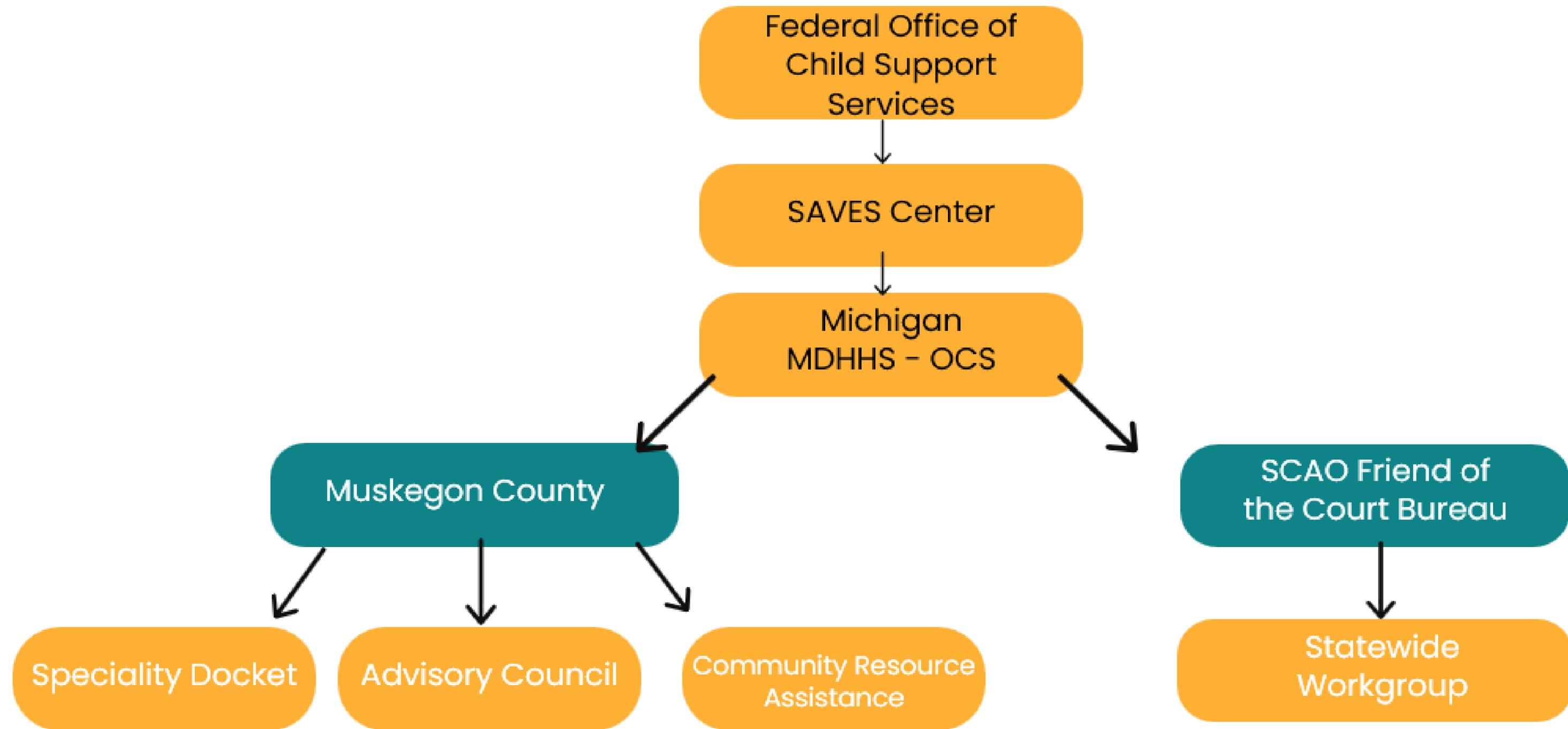
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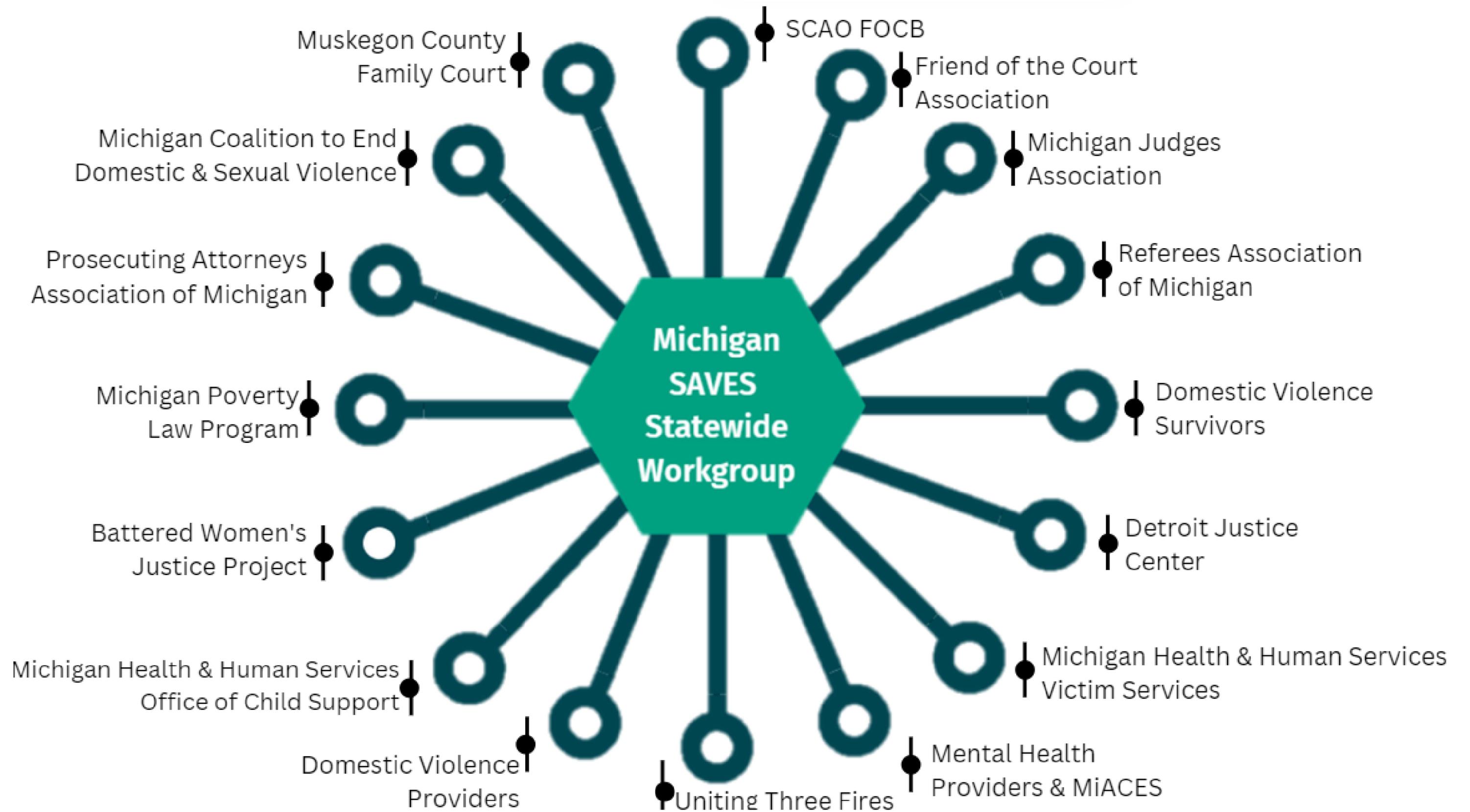
SAVES Grant **Michigan**

Liz West – SCAO FOCB



Michigan's Grant Project





Survivor Involvement



Grant Requirement

Meaningful, respectful engagement of individuals with lived experience to inform and guide all aspects of demonstration implementation



Advertise for Participants

Submission in multiple formats

Expectation setting

Compensation

Interviews as needed



Selection Criteria

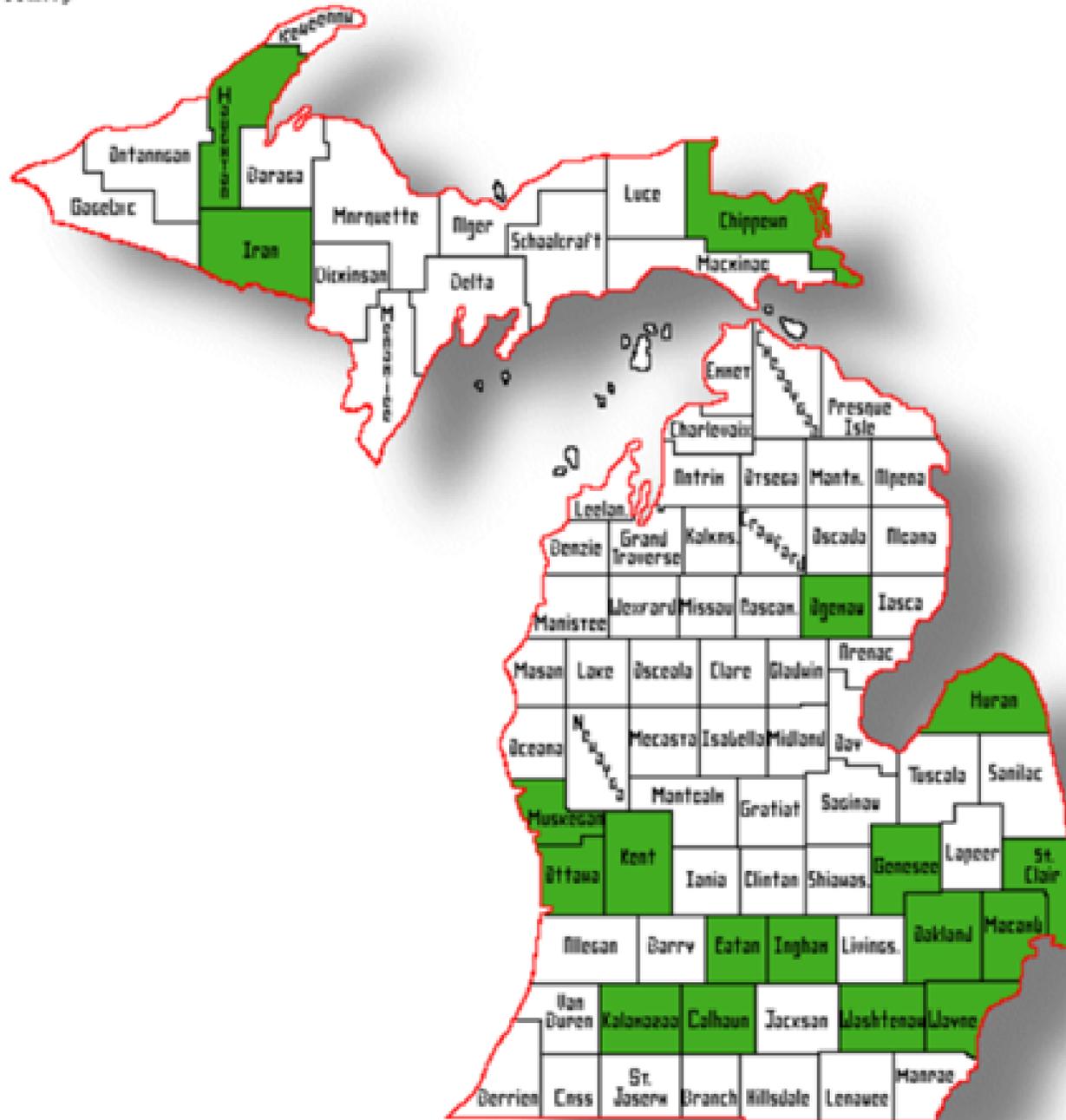
Partnered with MDHHS Victim Services and Uniting 3 Fires

Diversity in age, race, education, economic background, case status, and location

Survivor Involvement

SAVES Statewide Workgroup Representation

● - Member County



57 applicants

31 met established base criteria

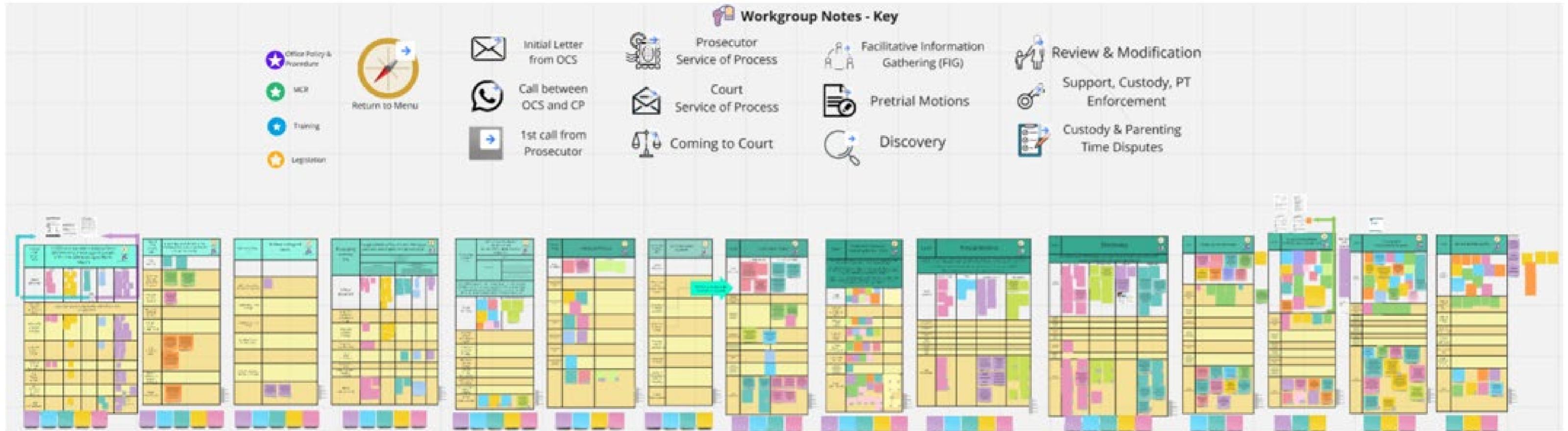
4 active child support cases

1 inactive but continued abuse

All White females...?

Conscious effort to partner with DV organizations that serve underrepresented communities

State Workgroup



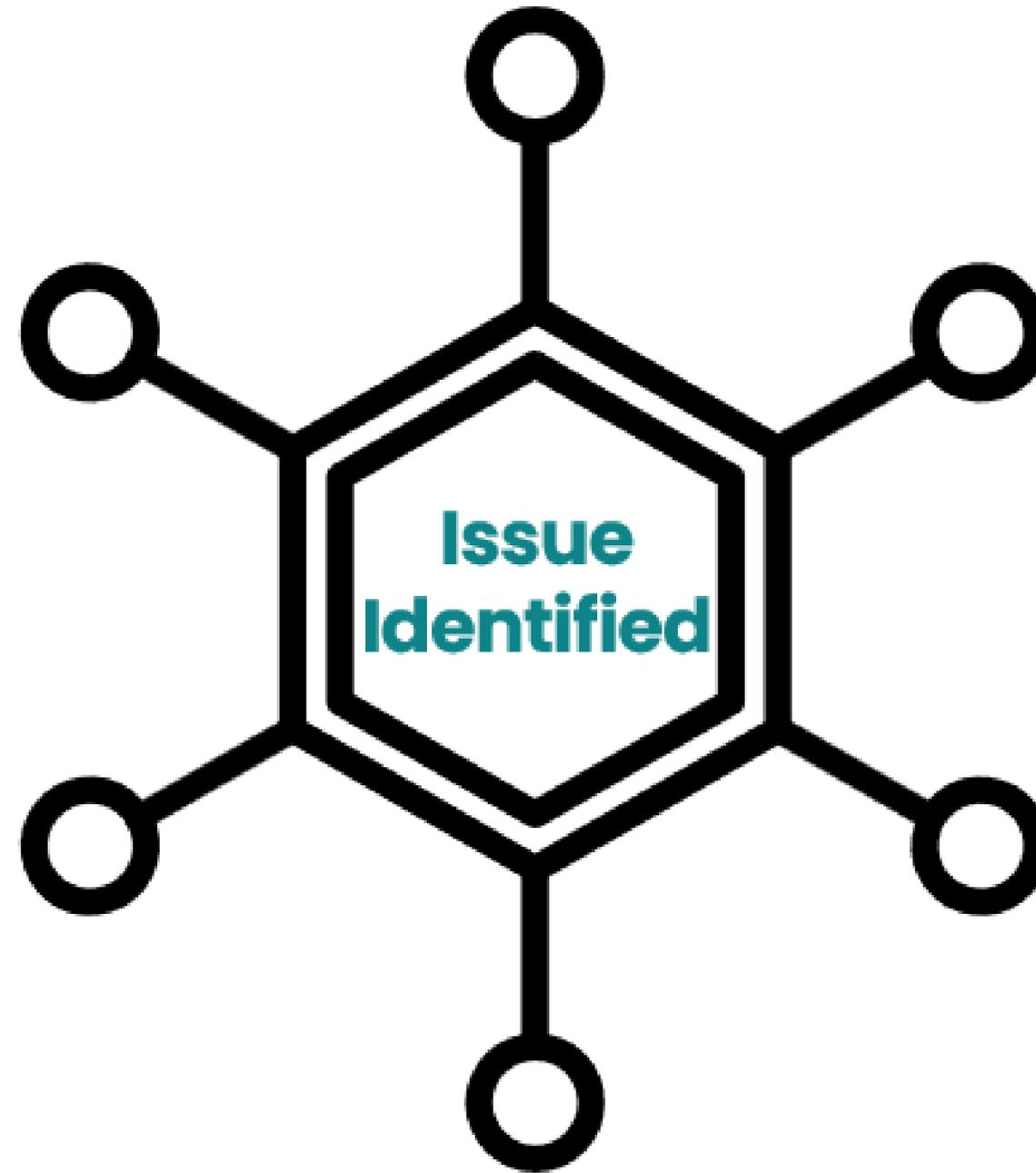
What is the survivor supposed to be **doing**?

Ability to Participate in Action or Proceeding

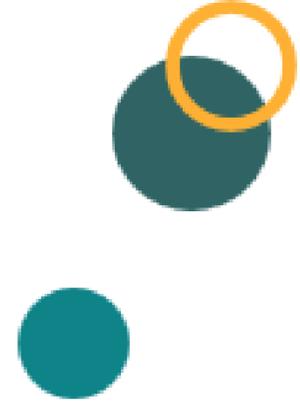
What is the survivor **thinking**?

Past Trauma on Phase

What is the survivor **feeling**?



Domestic Violence Considerations



Domestic abuse screening is inconsistent

Trauma responses affect every step of the case

Domestic abuse & trauma training are lacking

Survivors don't feel safe or supported in court

Confusion about confidentiality (Address & info)

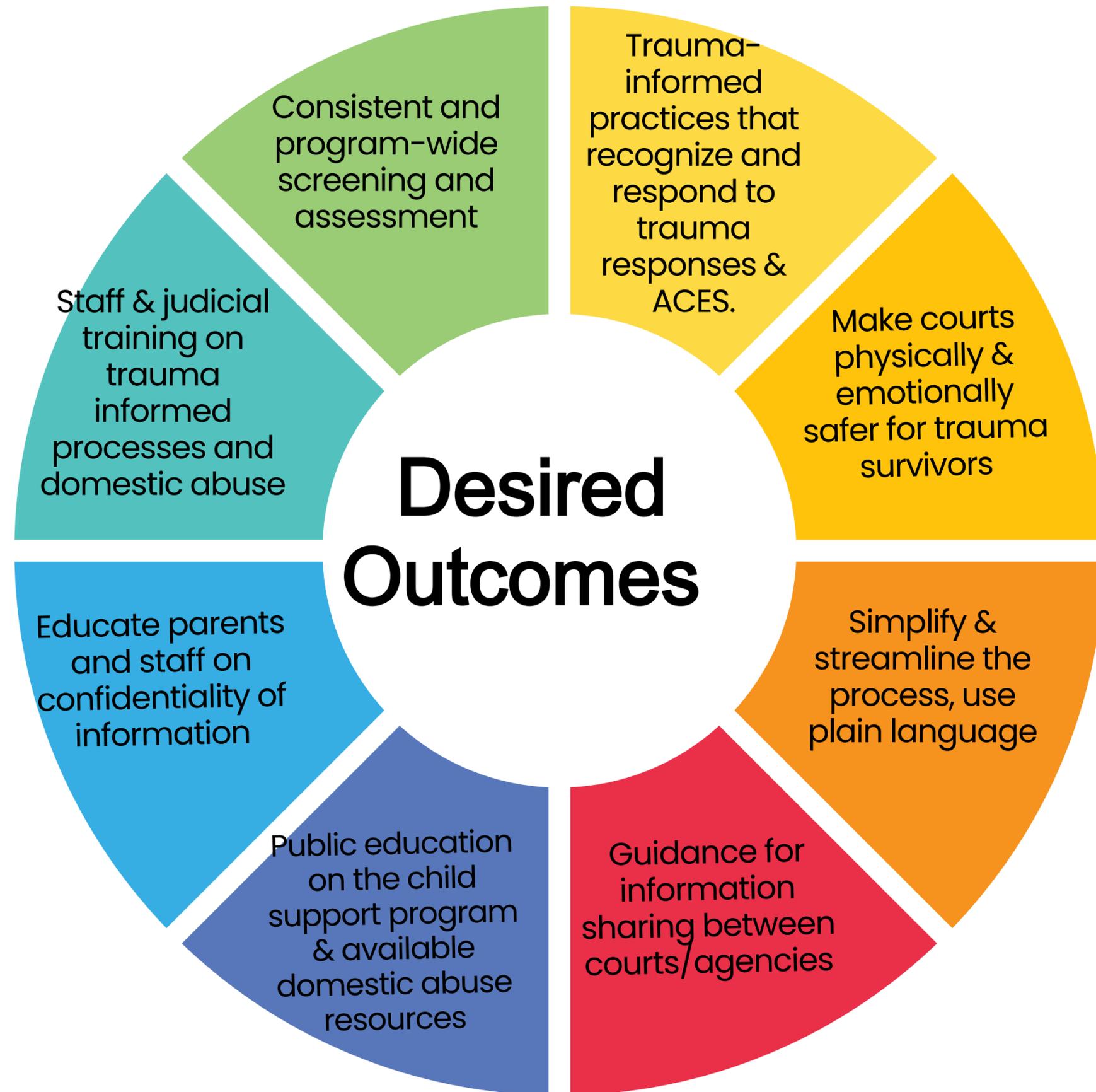
Court process is too difficult

Too much confusion about child support process

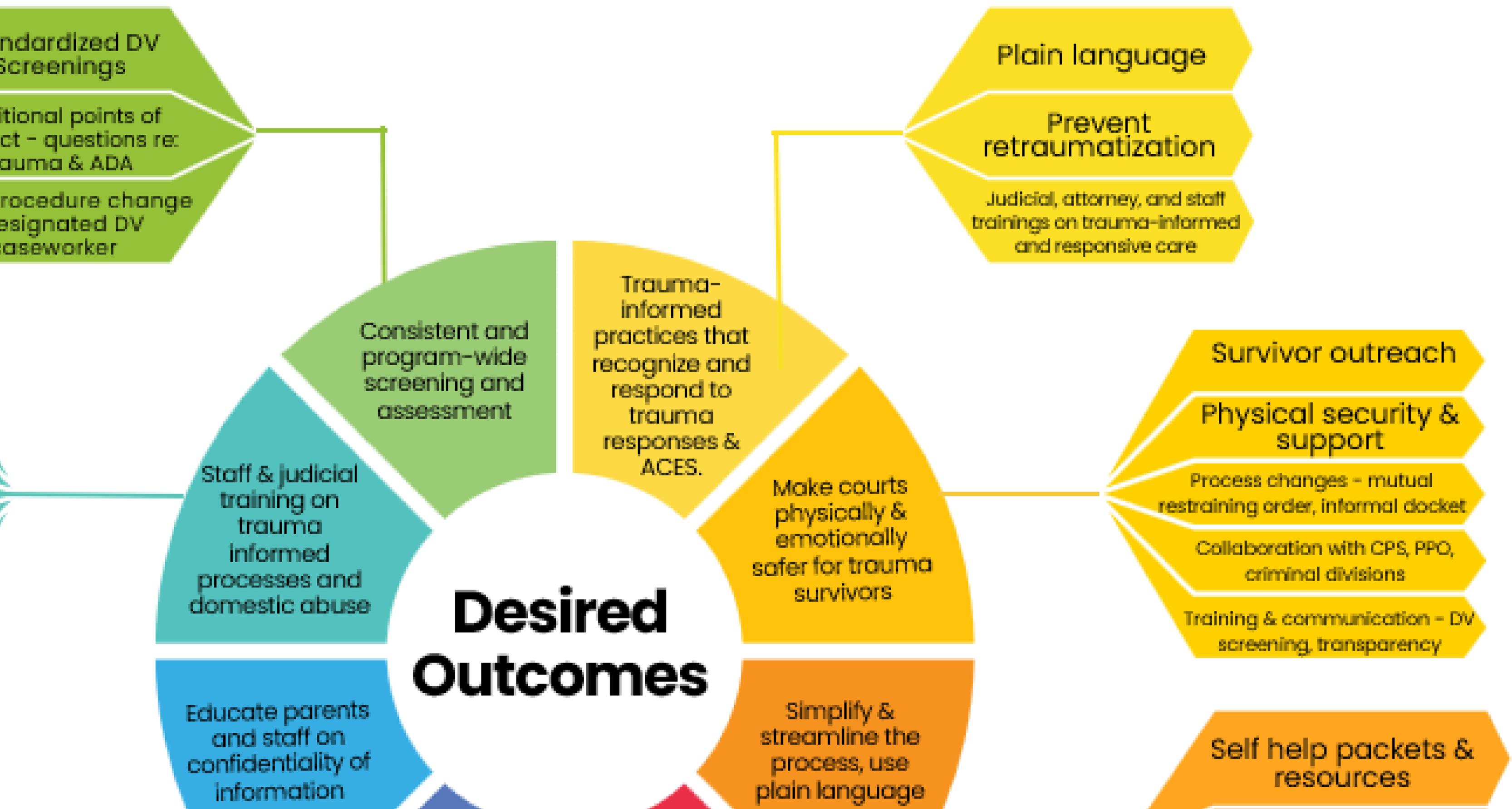
Lack of information sharing between agencies

Desired Outcomes







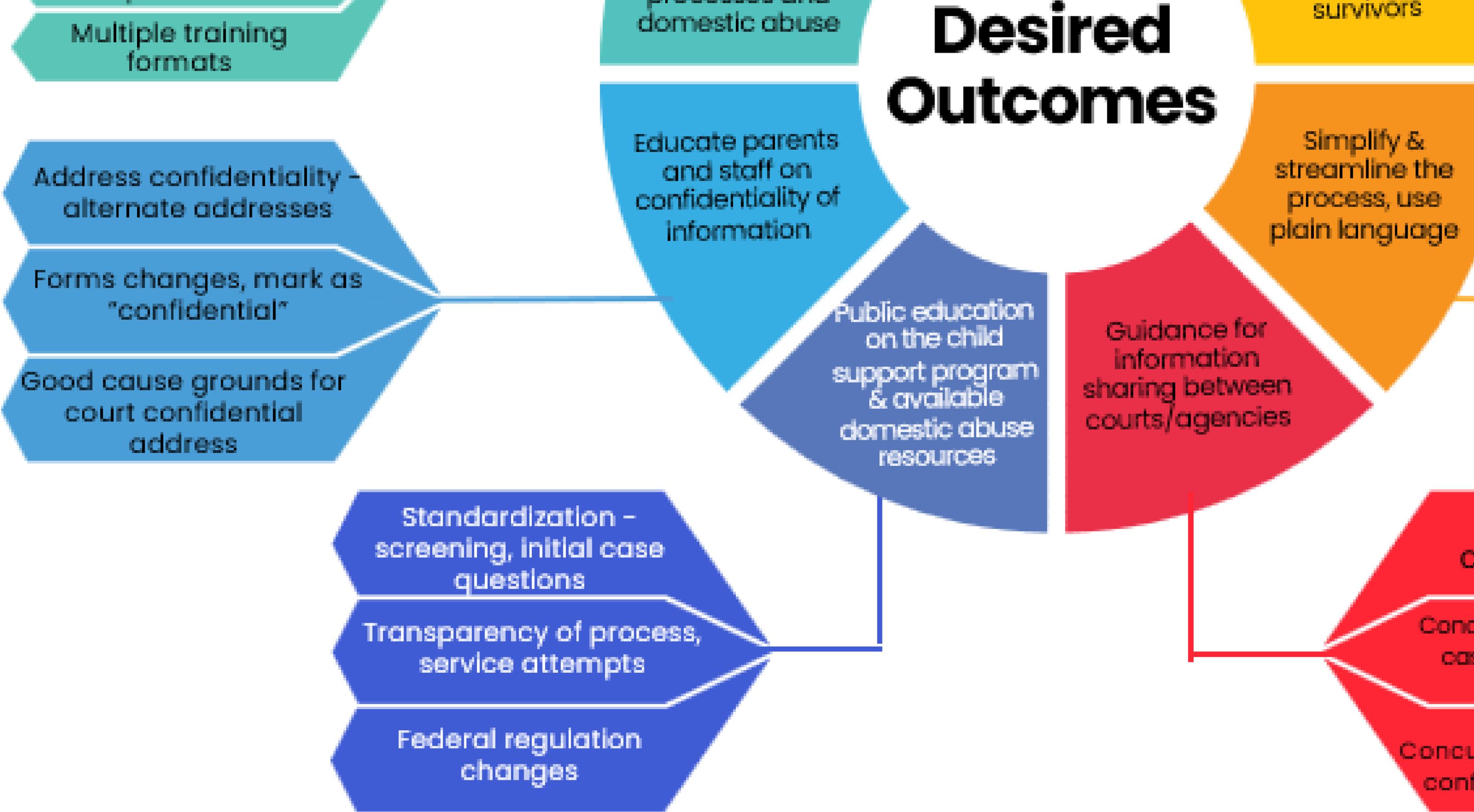


Desired Outcomes





Desired Outcomes



Multiple training formats

Address confidentiality - alternate addresses

Forms changes, mark as "confidential"

Good cause grounds for court confidential address

Standardization - screening, initial case questions

Transparency of process, service attempts

Federal regulation changes

Educate parents and staff on confidentiality of information

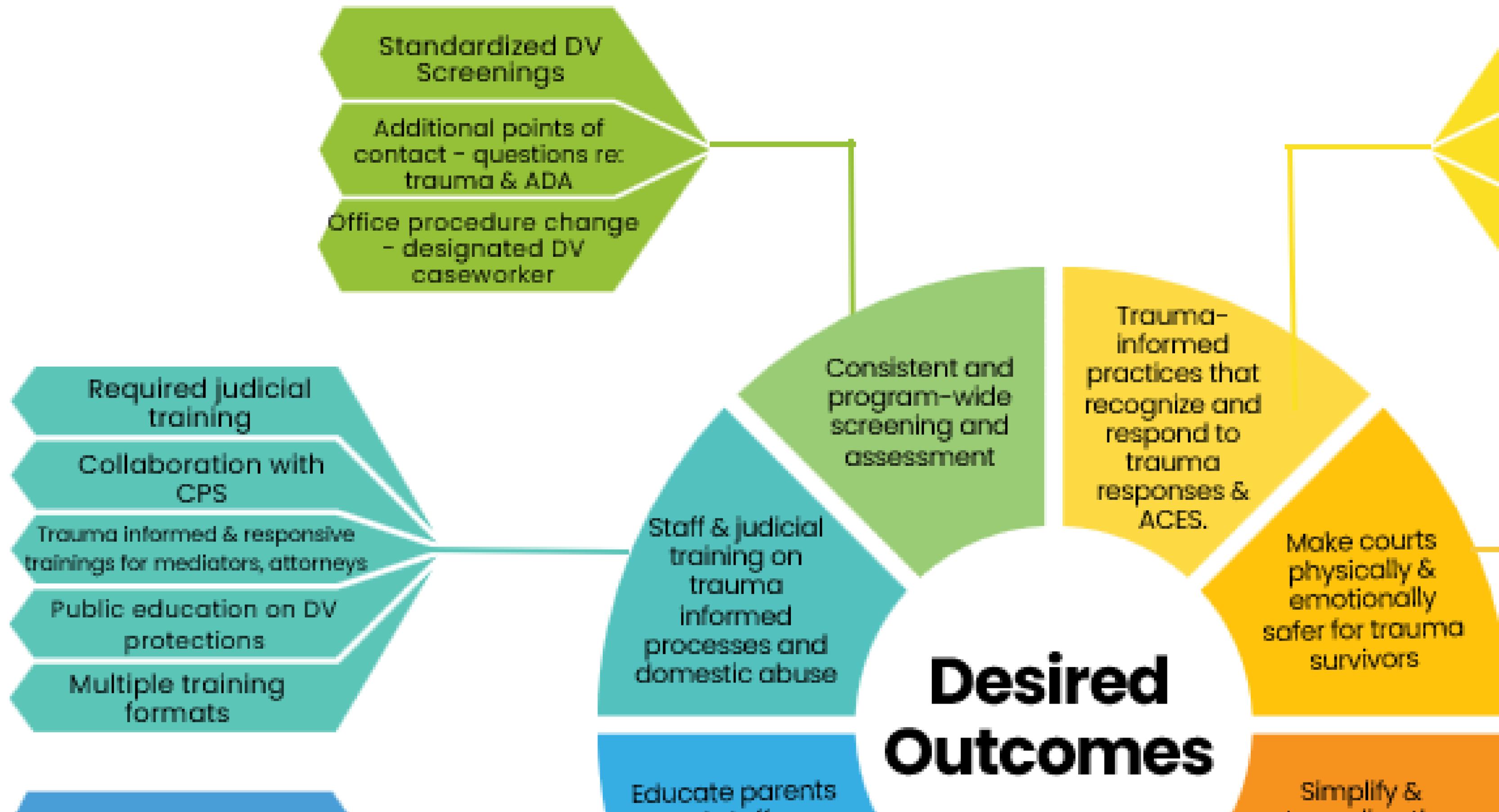
Public education on the child support program & available domestic abuse resources

Guidance for information sharing between courts/agencies

Simplify & streamline the process, use plain language

Survivors

Confidentiality of information
Confidentiality of information
Confidentiality of information



What's Next?

Taken together, the findings of the Workgroup support and build on previous findings that **abused parents make difficult choices between financial support and their safety**. Community domestic violence experts describe the child support and domestic relations processes as being “**like poking the bear**”, raising concerns such as “**how is [the abusive parent] going to react? Will this trigger more aggression?**” and feeling “**afraid of retribution.**”

Community domestic violence experts also cited a lack of public education and insufficient and inconsistent screening for DA throughout the process. One community domestic violence expert explained, “**Survivors are often given education while on the run - often too late.**”

These findings point to a critical need to evaluate and improve screening tools and processes and to expand and improve information sharing between and within courts.

- SAVES Workgroup Report, 2025

Ombudsman Rule (New rule)

Allows courts to apply protections to a party when there's a PPO, Extreme Risk Personal Protection Order (ERPO), or if the court finds after a hearing that a party engaged in domestic abuse. **Provides new definition!**

Allows **change in venue** for domestic relations action to the circuit court where an existing PPO or ERPO has been issued.

Allows for court to issue **protective measures for hearings, trials, or conferences:**

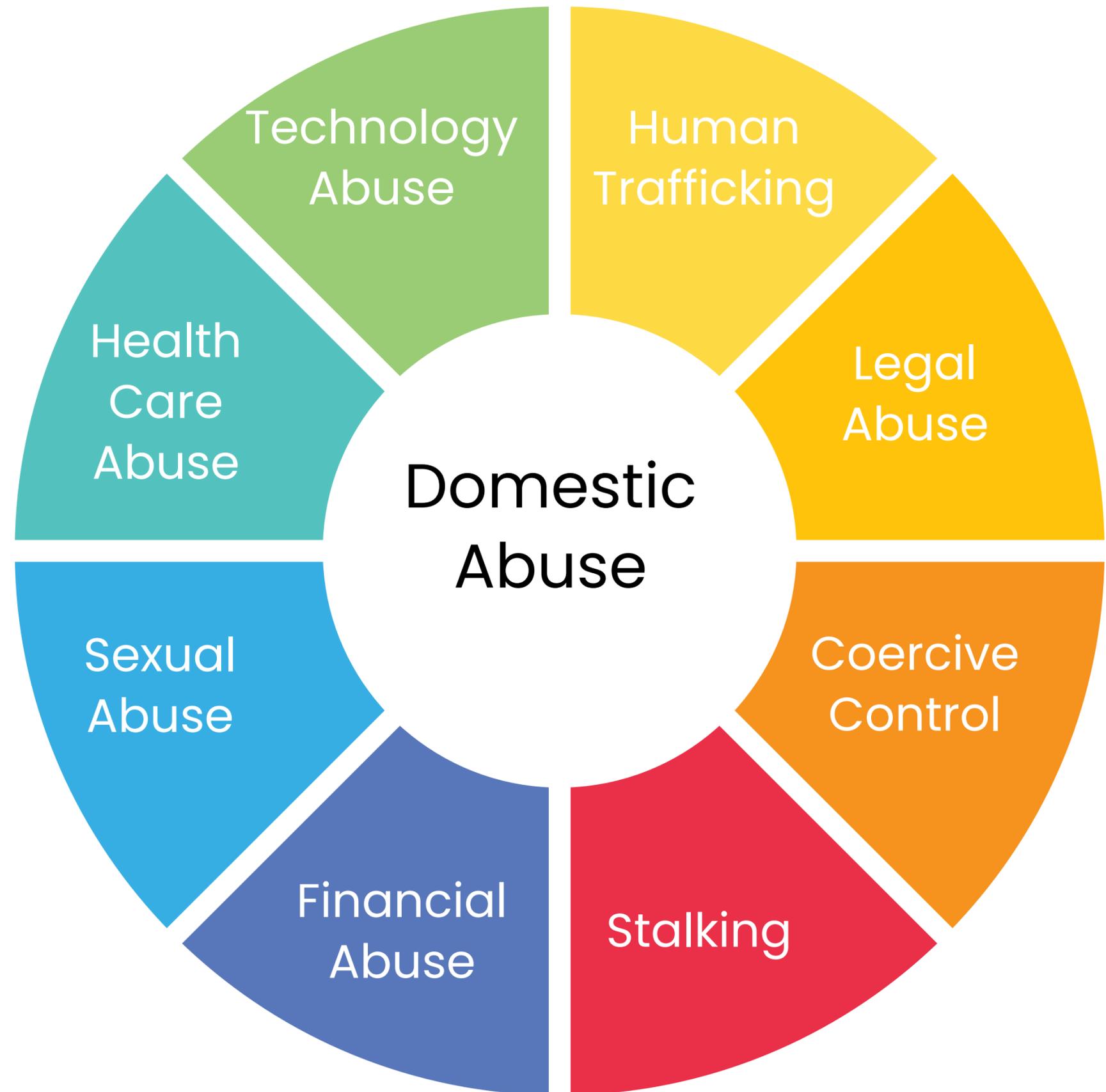
- Exclude abusive party's relatives, friends, and colleagues from attending in-person hearings
- Remote hearings except when the physical liberty of a person is at stake
- Limit abusive party's ability to directly cross-examine the abused party (court to do cross examination)

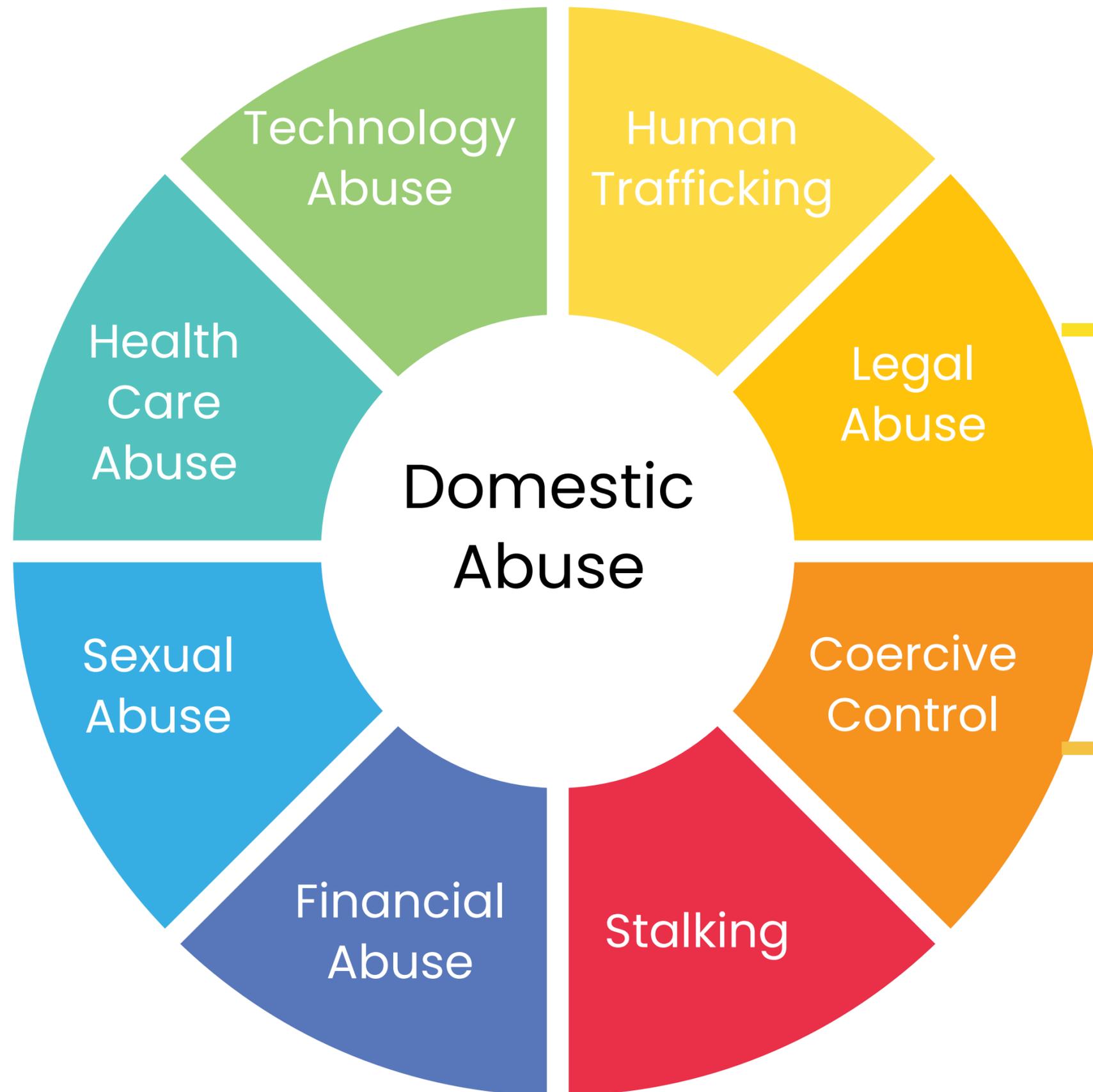
Allows for **protective measures for amendments, discovery, or information provided to the court/FOC.**

- Limit pleadings if court is convinced party is engaging in conduct intended to delay the proceedings, or to control/harass the other party
- Limit discovery to the Verified Financial Information Form and documents that can be acquired from 3rd parties.
- Limit disclosure to an abusive party, including place of employment. Violation of the order subjects person to contempt of court and sanctions.

Court can order parties to a "Court User Safety Planning Conference"

Proposed Definition of “Domestic Abuse”





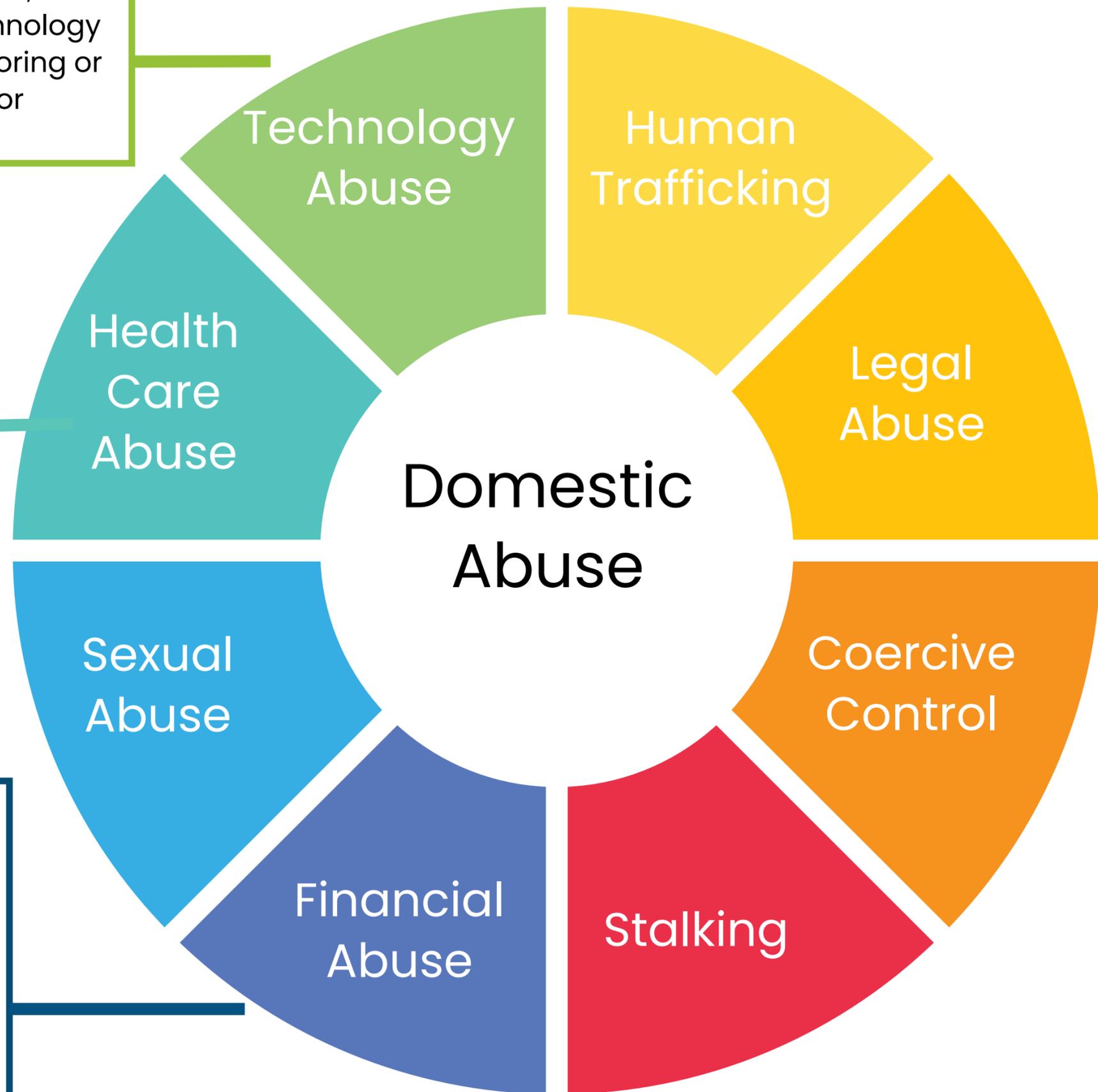
- Using repeated court actions not warranted by good/existing law
- Filing repeated court actions on same/similar issues already addressed
- Filing multiple different court actions at different times
- Excessive discovery
- Use of surrogates to engage in behavior that would be considered legal abuse if done by the party

- Monitoring & surveilling of daily activities
- Intensely managing another's day-to-day
- Intimidation
- Manipulating mental health status
- Isolation
- Humiliation
- Threaten to harm/abduct children
- Committing/Threatening to commit harm to pets
- Gaslighting
- Using a firearm in an intimidating or threatening manner
- Threatening deportation

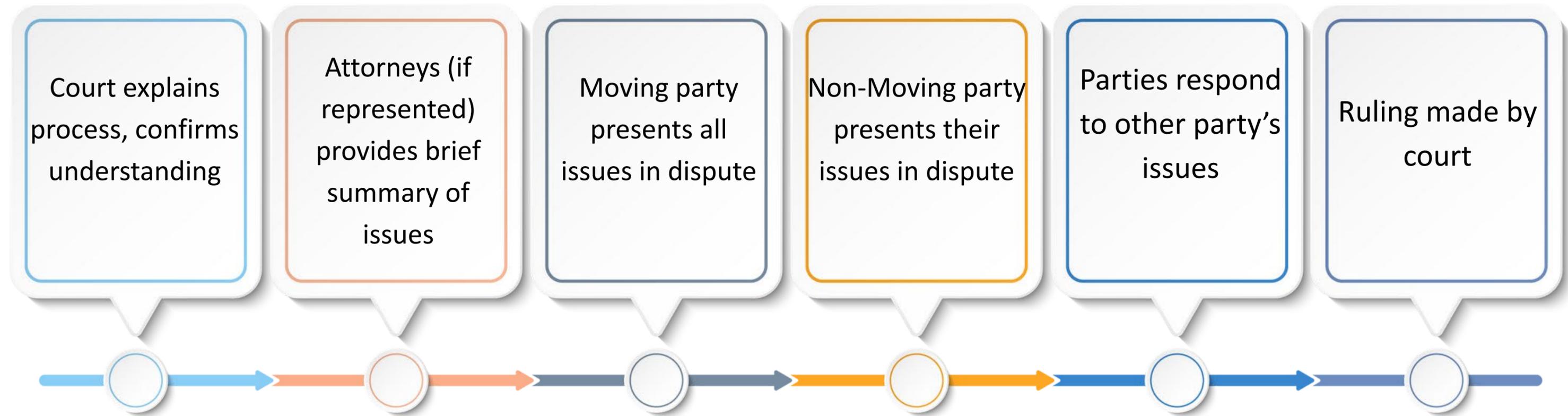
Act or pattern intended to harm, threaten, intimidate, stalk, impersonate, exploit, or extort, by use of any form of technology such as cyberstalking or other forms of electronic monitoring or surveillance, nonconsensual intimate image disclosure, or impersonation.

- Interferes with or obstructs access to necessary health insurance, medical care, medicine, medical devices, or other health-related services for the other parent or child
- Prevents or controls other parent's or child's access to mental health services or medications
- Controls reproductive autonomy, deliberately interferes with contraception use or access to reproductive health information, or uses coercive tactics to control or attempt to control pregnancy outcomes.

- Accessing or using credit or property without authorization
- Tax or state/federal assistance fraud
- Withholding or interfering with access to money, debit cards, government benefits, or other resources
- Sabotaging efforts to gain financial independence by interfering with employment or education, immigration status, employment authorization, or damaging the reputation of the abused parent
- Damaging credit ratings
- Acquiring debt that is imposed on the other parent



Informal Docket



Questioned by court or counsel

No cross examination; parties can ask the court to question

Witnesses

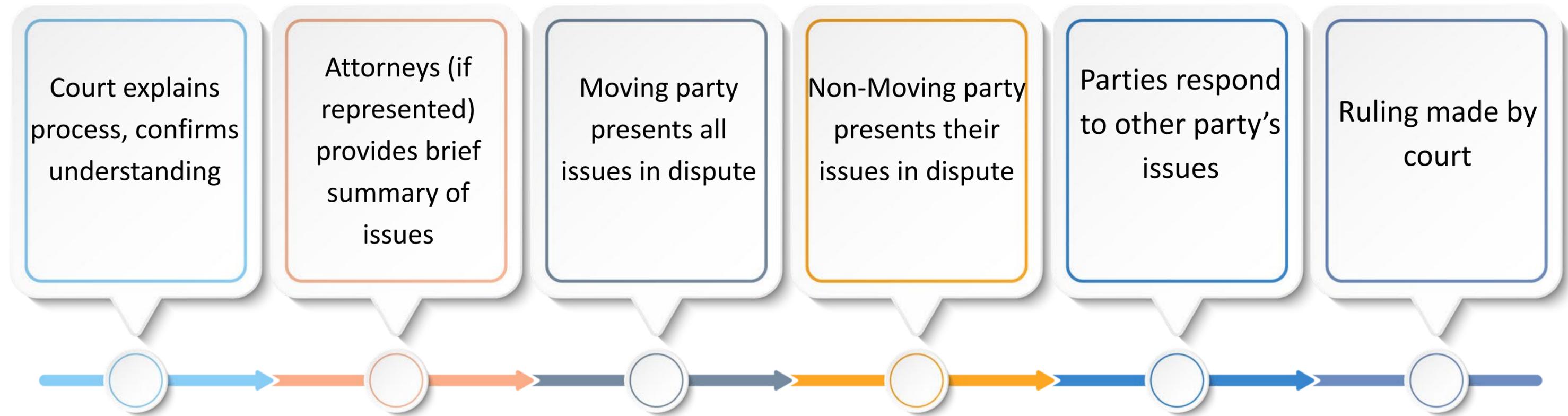
Evidence

Discovery

Temporary Proceedings

Assistance Provided

Informal Docket



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No cross examination; parties can ask the court to question

Witnesses

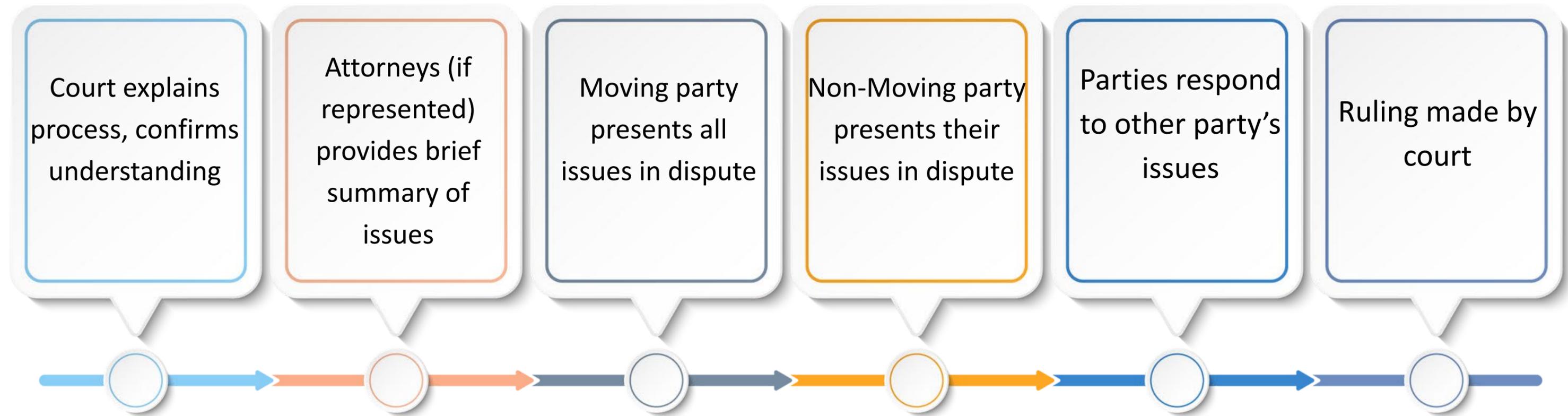
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Informal Docket



Questioned by court or counsel

No cross examination; parties can ask the court to question

Witnesses

Evidence

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Temporary Proceedings

Assistance Provided

Formal rules don't apply - "any evidence that the court believes is likely to prove a fact in dispute"

Expert reports as exhibits, author sworn in and questioned by court/counsel if requested

Other Proposed Court Rule Changes

MCR 3.205 – Prior and Subsequent Orders and Judgments Affecting Minors

Issue: CPS files an abuse/neglect action against a parent in the same circuit court where there's already an existing custody/support action. Abuse/neglect court would issue orders contrary to the domestic relations court without notice, and, at times, would lead to a "legal stand off" between courts.

Proposed amendment: ___ When there's a domestic relations action and a court in the same circuit later takes jurisdiction over a parent or a child due to abuse and neglect, the new court can conduct hearings, modify orders, receive evidence, etc. as required by the law governing the domestic relations action.

MCR 3.706 – Personal Protection Orders: Existing Custody and Parenting Time Orders

Issue: The court rules allow for parties to petition for a PPO in any county in Michigan regardless of residency [MCR 3.703(E)(1)]. At times, that means a court that is not overseeing the domestic relations matter (custody, parenting time, support) is not the same court hearing the PPO. Generally, the court issuing the PPO must contact the court having jurisdiction over the domestic relations case and consider the impact on custody and parenting time rights. This consideration can include, but does not require, consultation with the court hearing the domestic relations matter.

Proposed amendment: ___ Amendmend the rule to require coordination between the courts before issuing a PPO.

Legislative Action



Simplify Grounds for Divorce

Current language: “there has been a breakdown of the marriage relationship to the extent that the objects of matrimony have been destroyed and there remains no reasonable likelihood that the marriage can be repaired”

Proposed New Language:
“The marriage is broken beyond repair.”



Waiver of 60 Day “Cooling Off” Period

If there is an active PPO or Extreme Risk Personal Protection Order, a party can motion to waive the 60-day waiting period before the order of divorce is entered.



Modify Divorce Jurisdiction With Existing Action

Allow a court that has entered a currently effective PPO to exercise jurisdiction over divorce if a party lived in the county of the circuit for at least 10 days and allow venue in any county that would have jurisdiction.



Automatic Financial Injunction in Divorce Proceedings

Impose an automatic injunction upon the filing of a complaint for divorce preventing both parties from dissipating assets, canceling insurance, moving the children, or engaging in abusive behavior.

SAFeR Screening and Assessment Initial Screening



Michigan Domestic Violence Screening for Child Support

Part 1: Complete this screening at the intake process when opening or reviewing a child support case. 

Prior to asking the questions below, ensure the party has informed consent by stating: “Your answers to the following questions can only be viewed by judges, referees, and friend of the court staff. It cannot be viewed by the other parent or his or her attorney, and it cannot be used in any court proceedings. Information will not be shared with anyone unless a child is being harmed or is in danger. If you are concerned about Child Protective Services (CPS) involvement, please speak to your worker.”

Screening
<p>Do you have any concerns about the child support process? If yes, what?</p>
<p>Have you ever felt unsafe around the other parent? If yes, why? Has there ever been any physical violence, or threat of physical violence, between you and the other parent? Have you ever felt ashamed, humiliated, embarrassed, or fearful by something you or the other parent said or did? Have you or the other parent ever forced the other to do sexual things the other didn't want to do or insisted on having sex when the other didn't want to? Is there currently, or has there ever been, a personal protection order or no contact order issued between you and the other parent?</p>
<p>Do you have concerns about the other parent knowing your address, where you are employed, or how to contact you? If yes, are you interested in keeping your address confidential from the other parent?</p>

Michigan Domestic Violence Assessment for Child Support

Part 2: Friends of the Court Staff and Establishment Team, including prosecutors, to complete this assessment if parent has safety concerns about a child support case.

Prior to asking the questions below, ensure the party has informed consent by stating: “Your answers to the following questions can only be viewed by judges, referees, and friend of the court staff. It cannot be viewed by the other parent or his or her attorney, and it cannot be used in any court proceedings. Information will not be shared with anyone unless a child is being harmed or is in danger. If you are concerned about Child Protective Services (CPS) involvement, please speak to your worker.”

Forms of Abuse Against Parent Experiencing Harm	Lethality Factors
<p>Indicate all forms of domestic violence that have been detected against the adult victim:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical abuse  Sexual coercion Emotional abuse Economic abuse Spiritual/ethical abuse Health-related abuse Technological abuse Post-separation abuse Coercive control 	<p>Identify and discuss lethality indicators and express heightened concern for victim and child safety. Indicators for adult victims are also indicators for substantial risk of harm to children.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Escalating Violence Threats to Kill Strangulation Abuse During Pregnancy Sexual Assault Stalking Access to Firearms Animal Abuse Child Abuse Controlling Behaviors Excessive Jealousy/Obsession Abuser's Mental Status Avoidance of Consequences

How We Keep Survivors Involved

Ask!

We asked at the end of the Workgroup, and all wanted to continue to be involved.

Reviewing “Best Practices”

Request feedback on particular sections/pages

Legislative Initiatives

Workgroup consensus required to move forward; virtual meetings with survivors to explain logistics/answer questions.

Constant Communication

Continue to do periodic check-ins with Workgroup members

Partner for Trainings

MCEDSV, local DV service providers

Continued Collaboration

Keep looking for new groups to partner with and hear from survivors (Women’s Commission)



Thank You

A hand is shown holding a white rectangular sign with the words "THANK YOU" printed in a bold, dark blue, sans-serif font. The sign is positioned in the lower right quadrant of the image. The background is a dark blue gradient with a white silhouette of a group of seven people standing in a line. To the left of the sign, there are several decorative elements: a large teal and yellow curved shape, a smaller teal circle, and a yellow circle with a teal outline. The overall design is modern and professional.

**THANK
YOU**