

# User-Experience Testing of the HELP Toolkit

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## Introduction

The *HELP Toolkit: Identifying and Responding to Family Violence for Family Law Legal Advisers* (hereafter referred to as the “HELP toolkit”) was designed to assist legal advisers in safely identifying and responding to family violence in their family law practices. The Department of Justice Canada developed the HELP toolkit collaboratively with multiple experts in the fields of family law and family violence. From March to May 2021, the Department undertook user-experience testing of the draft toolkit to fine-tune the content to ensure that it works as intended in family law practices.

## Methodology

Testers were identified through the HELP toolkit’s Advisory Group, the Canadian Bar Association’s Family Law Section, the Coordinating Committee of Senior Officials on Family Justice, the Working Group on Legal Aid, and other contacts who had previously been involved in the development of the draft toolkit. These legal advisers were asked if they would be interested in testing the draft HELP toolkit in their practice. Those who expressed interest in participating in the study were asked to complete an introductory survey that collected some demographic information on participants and their practice. Based on these results, it was possible to identify diversity gaps in the sample of testers. Where possible, efforts were made to identify additional participants who could fill these gaps. In total, 61 legal advisers provided feedback on the draft HELP toolkit.

Participating legal advisers were asked to use the draft toolkit in their practice for a period of six to eight weeks. Feedback was collected from participants through interviews, surveys and comments received by email during the first, third and final week of the testing period. Overall, 87 interviews were held, 38 survey responses were collected, and eight sets of feedback via email were received.

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<sup>1</sup>The HELP toolkit is publicly available and can be accessed here: <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/fl-df/help-aide/index.html>

## Findings

Participating legal advisers were very satisfied with the HELP toolkit. In particular, many testers appreciated the usefulness, practicality and comprehensiveness of the information provided in the draft toolkit. Testers noted that there was a real need for such a resource, and that it would reinforce other training available to legal advisers (e.g., training on family violence, trauma- and violence-informed practice).

Testers found that the draft toolkit provided them with a reminder to examine their practices and make improvements, as needed. One legal adviser shared:

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“The biggest takeaway is that it has made me a better lawyer by focusing on family violence and having a way to articulate it with clients. I think I am offering them a better service. I am better able to address their needs.”

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The biggest concern raised by testers was the length of the draft toolkit. To address this concern, the online version of the toolkit was designed to include separate PDFs for individual elements of the toolkit, along with the HTML and PDF versions of the full document, which can be downloaded and printed. This change was made to provide legal advisers with more flexibility in using the materials.

Testers also shared suggestions for how the draft toolkit could be improved, many of which were implemented. For example, based on the feedback received, information on how clients’ experiences of trauma can affect a family law case was moved to the toolkit’s introduction to emphasize why legal advisers should use the toolkit in their practice. More examples of intersectionality were also added throughout the toolkit, along with a visual summary of the HELP approach that legal advisers can access quickly.

Many testers made suggestions for additional resources that went beyond the scope of the project, such as developing similar resources for self-represented litigants and others, creating vignettes demonstrating how to use the HELP toolkit, and developing a nationwide inventory of community-based resources that legal advisers could access when making referrals. These suggestions were shared with partners and stakeholders who may have an interest in developing such resources.

The feedback varied by testers’ degree of experience and the length of practice. The most experienced testers found the content to be very similar to what they already do in their practice. While the draft HELP toolkit may have offered some new information for these testers, the content mostly served as a reminder of good practices. Testers with less experience (i.e., two to five years of practice) found some content to be familiar, but also found new information, particularly in the supplemental materials, to be very useful and relevant to them. Finally, legal advisers with relatively little experience (i.e., less than two years of practice) appreciated the practical examples and scripts provided in the draft toolkit. They shared that they learned a lot from the content and considered the information essential.

## Conclusion

The Department of Justice Canada tested the draft HELP toolkit in the family law practices of 61 legal advisers in Canada, with the goal of exploring the toolkit’s utility and ease of use, and the experiences of legal advisers in using the toolkit in practice. Overall, the feedback from participating legal advisers was positive; the tool was seen as useful, practical and comprehensive. Testers also shared suggestions for improvement, which were subsequently incorporated into the HELP toolkit.