

Questions to Ask Yourself: Pre-interview Preparation for Child with Disabilities

Be sure to know the answers to the following questions before proceeding with an interview involving an individual with a disability.

1. What is this person's **primary** disability? An individual may be described in multiple ways, e.g. having mental retardation, learning problems, hyperactivity, hearing loss. Determine which **ONE** is perhaps listed on an **IEP** in school, or used on a more formal testing report.
2. Does the individual have any **accompanying** disabilities? e.g. cerebral palsy, epilepsy, hearing or visual impairments
3. In what **specific way** does the disability impact upon their current functioning? E.g. cognitive, language, memory, social-emotional?
4. Is this person **highly distractible**? If "yes", care needs to be taken related to the location and types of materials used in the interview environment.
5. Is there any information that **communication** might be a challenge? If so, determine the **most effective method** of communication given these possibilities: sign language, language board, computer assisting devices, facilitative communication.
6. Is there a marked **difference in receptive vs. expressive** communication?
7. Does the interviewee have **behavioral challenges** that you know about? E.g. verbal perseverations, compulsive behaviors, self-abusive behaviors, person assaultive behaviors, object assaultive behaviors, withdrawal.
8. Are any of the **above behaviors** being considered as possible indicators of abuse? If "**yes**", answer the following questions: What is the **history** of that behavior? Is there a behavioral "baseline" available? If baseline is there, has there been a **clear behavioral change** that has taken place during the timeframe in question? Remember, when looking at a **change in behavior** consider: Intensity of behavior, duration of behavioral episodes, and change in behavioral repertoire.
9. Will any of the behaviors require **support for management** during the interview? If so, what are your plans for management during the interview?

10. Are there **Vulnerabilities** to consider

1. Historical compliance
2. Limited education in self-protection and/or sexuality
3. Interpersonal dependency
4. Family Stress Issues and/or lack of family resources
5. Apparent individual isolation

Establishing Rapport

Be sure and establish a solid, positive rapport....no different than with any other child. Just remember, that their exposure to these kinds of interviewing situations will usually be very limited; and sometimes, because of the nature of their disability, unfamiliar people, wording, lighting, and/or places can really "throw them off"....so they have to become comfortable to not only YOU, but their SURROUNDINGS. TAKE THE TIME needed to allow both you and the individual to reach a "comfort level".

Provide a series of questions that are "neutral" in content that can help establish whether the child really understands you, or whether additional adaptations are needed. **IT IS IMPORTANT TO DO THIS WITH ALL INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE DISABILITIES**, not just for those who have more communication challenges.

Skilled interviewers use a variety of questions, so keep the above issues in mind.

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