

Child Interviewing Guide

The following provides suggestions on how to begin an interview, questions to ask, and ways to close the interview. This list is not all inclusive and should not be used exclusively when interviewing children. Questions will need to be adapted based on the individual child's age and/or development

Phase I: Introduction, Instructions and Rapport Building

☐ **Introduce yourself and identify the agency (avoid acronyms)**

Provide your first and last name, your pronouns, and the department which you represent. Do not use acronyms to avoid confusion. For example, "Hi, my name is _____. I use _____ pronouns. I work for the Oregon Department of Human Services, Child Welfare."

☐ **Verify you are speaking to the correct child**

Whether you are interviewing a child at school or at home, it's best practice to confirm you are speaking to the correct child by confirming their first and last name. This is also a good opportunity to ask the child if they prefer to go by a different name or have a nickname. It is good practice to also verify the child's pronouns after introducing your own.

☐ **Explain your role**

Remind the child that you work for Child Welfare. Consider asking the child if they have heard of Child Welfare and if so, what they know. Depending on the child's response, provide any clarification and continue on to explain the role of the caseworker, emphasizing the role in assessing safety. Examples may include:

"I have a really cool job where I get to talk to lots of kids and families. It's part of my job to talk about safety."

"My job is to talk to kids and teens and their families about safety. I ask questions about you and your family."

☐ **Ask the child for permission to interview them**

It is important to ask the child for permission following an explanation of the caseworker's role. This ensures fully informed consent. Caseworkers should also consider sharing power by asking the child where they would like the caseworker to sit and if it is an okay time for the interview.

☐ **Provide Instructions for the Interview**

Caseworkers should provide instructions in all child interviews, whether interviewing a young child or a teenager. Instructions are an important way to

share power and to let the youth know what they can expect from you and what you are asking of them.

Research indicates that providing instructions reduces children's suggestibility and enhances resistance to misleading questions.

Instructions include:

- Tell the truth – don't guess
- It's okay to say "I don't know"
- Let me know if you don't understand a question
- Correct me if I get something wrong
- Let me know if something is hard to talk about
- You can be done with the interview or take a break at any time

☐ **Notes**

An important part of the introduction is to also let children know that we will be taking notes. One way to do this is to say, "While we are talking, I am going to be taking notes, because what you have to say is very important, and I don't want to forget."

☐ **Build Rapport/Narrative Practice**

Transition to rapport building by asking the child about their interests or by asking the child what they were doing before you met with them. For example, "I'd like to get to know you better. Tell me about yourself" or "Tell me things you like to do for fun [hobbies, interests, etc.]"

Use open-ended questions, follow up prompts, requests for clarification and attentive listening to demonstrate genuine interest and to begin ***narrative practice***.

Narrative practice involves using open-ended questions/prompts to ask the child to tell about a neutral, salient event or topic. Encourage the child to tell you all about the event or topic, with great detail. Questions might include: "Tell me about your last [salient event such as birthday, vacation, etc]." "Tell me everything that happened." "Tell me what happened from the beginning to the end."

Narrative practice increases the child's comfort level and facilitates rapport building. It allows the interviewer to assess the child's developmental level, cognitive functioning, and language abilities. It also establishes the precedent that the child provides narrative responses to the interviewer's questions. Conducting a practice narrative using open-ended questions increases the amount of reliable information the child provides later in the interview.

Phase II: Information Gathering

☐ **Transition into asking questions in the 6 domains**

After spending a sufficient amount of time building rapport, begin to transition into information gathering in the 6 domains. In order to keep a conversational flow to the interview, attempt to connect something the child mentioned in rapport building to one of the domains. For example, if the child mentioned watching movies, you might ask who in their family they typically watch movies with. Other questions to transition to the six domains might include: "Who is a part of your family?" followed by asking the child to describe various people. OR "What does a normal day look like for you?"

Remember to avoid transitioning immediately to the report of concern or closely related topics as this can be anxiety provoking for the child and may prevent further narrative from developing.

- ☐ **Use open-ended questions to encourage free narrative and gather safety related information**

The transition to the "topic of concern" or "allegation-focused portion" of the interview should be accomplished in the most open-ended, non-suggestive way possible (Oregon Interviewing Guidelines, Fourth Edition, April 2021)

- ☐ **Gather information about the child's culture**
- ☐ **Utilize solution-focused question techniques when appropriate**
- ☐ **Use active listening skills**

Sample Questions for 6 Domains & Screening for Abuse/Neglect

Reminder: The following are suggestions of possible questions to ask. The questions are in no particular order. These suggestions should not be used as an all-inclusive list of questions to ask.

Screening for general safety:

Tell me about your mom/dad/siblings (If question is too general, try asking what youth likes/dislikes about individuals).

Is there anything you would change about anyone?

Are you worried or concerned about anything or anyone? What are you worried about?

Do you have any animals? Who takes care of the animals? What happens when the animals do something they are not supposed to?

Do you or your parents have friends or family who frequently visit your home or stay with you? Tell me about them.

Screening for Neglect:

What does a typical day look like for you?

Who takes care of you?

Who cooks in your family? Has there ever been a time you were without food, electricity or water?

What did you have for dinner last night? Breakfast this morning?

Has there ever been a time when you were home alone or a time when there was no adult in the home?

Do you ever get sick? What happens when you are sick?

When is the last time you went to the doctor? What was the reason you went?

When is the last time you went to a dentist? Do you have any teeth that are hurting now?

Does anyone in your house take medicine?

Tell me about your house; where do people sleep? Does anyone in your home have trouble sleeping?

Do you know what drugs and alcohol are? Can you name some? Where did you learn about it? Do you know anyone who uses (use the child's language)?

Screening for physical abuse:

What are the rules in your house?

What happens when you get in trouble, or break a rule?

Are the rules the same for everyone?

What's the worst thing that has ever happened?

When's the last time something happened? Tell me more about that.

What happens when your siblings get in trouble?

Screening for Domestic Violence:

How do your parents get along?

What happens when the grownups in your house get mad at each other?

Do you ever see adults fight? What does it look like? What does it sound like? What do people say/do when they are fighting?

(If child discloses fighting); what do you do when people are fighting?

Are there any weapons in your home? Where are they kept? Who uses them?

Screening for Sexual Abuse/Exploitation:

Has anyone ever talked to you about body safety? Has anyone asked you to keep a secret about your body?

Privacy means you can be alone when you want to be. Do you have privacy at your house? Does anyone come into the bathroom or bedroom while you are undressed?

Do you ever see pictures, books, computers, movies (etc.) where people don't have clothes on?

Phase III: Closing

☐ **Ask the child if they have questions or concerns**

Allow the child to discuss topics/issues/concerns he or she feels are important, including topics not previously addressed. This provides the child with the opportunity to communicate information that they deem as important, which could be something the interview questions did not address or information that the child did not relate to questions that were asked.

"Are there any questions that I forgot to ask you today?" "Is there anything else you think is important for me to know today?"

Give the child an opportunity to ask questions. Answer questions honestly, providing information if able. Do not make promises or guarantees as to what may or may not occur after the interview.

☐ **Share the worker's next steps**

Continue to share power by sharing information with the child about what will happen next. This includes if and when they may see you again, who else you may talk to as a part of the assessment, etc.

☐ **Transition to a neutral topic**

Make an effort to transition the child to a discussion of neutral topics prior to leaving the interview room. This may include talking with the child about their plans following the interview or other topics discussed during the rapport building stage of the interview. This process may vary in length depending upon the child's needs. Some children may be well served with a short conversation around a neutral topic. Other children may need more time to transition, and it is important to make the appropriate accommodations.

