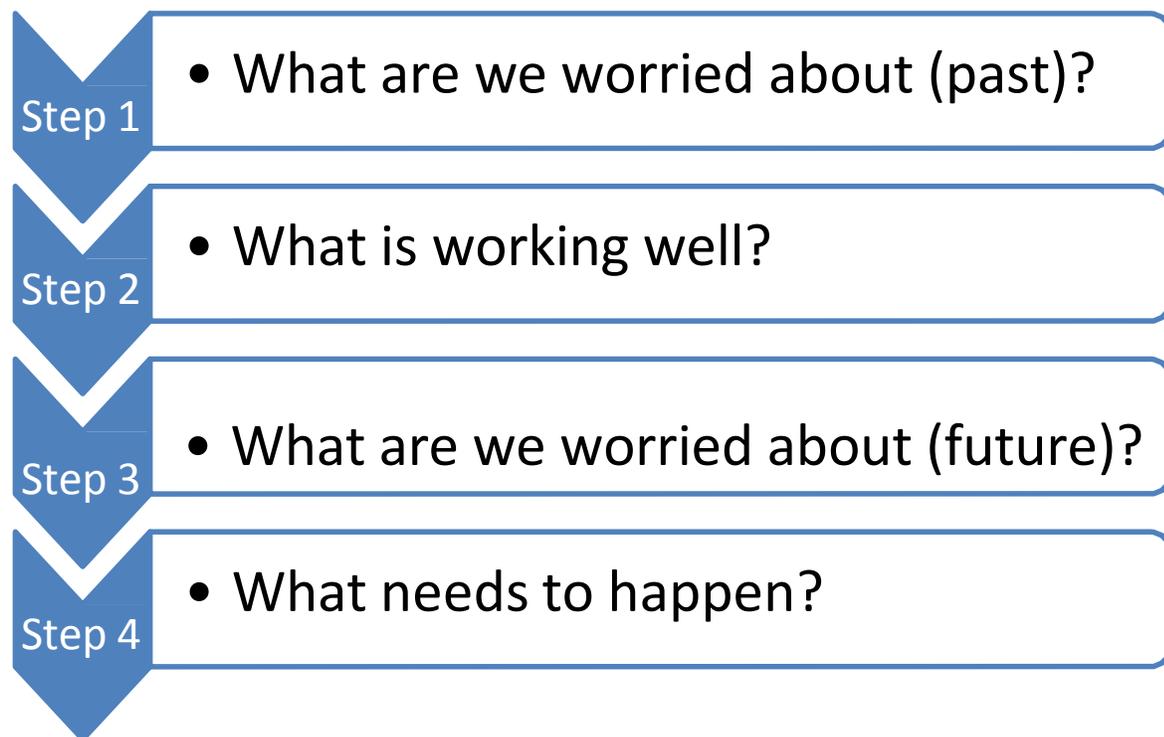


# Assessment with Families

## Questions You Can Use

*This handout is based on work by Insoo Kim Berg, Steve de Shazer, Sonja Parker, Andrew Turnell, Adriana Urken, Michael White, and members of The Massachusetts Child Welfare Institute. It was compiled by Children's Research Center (CRC) staff.*



### Step 1: What Are We Worried About?

*Exploring Past Harm*

#### Opening

- There has been a report of concern about your child that said...
- What do you think led to child protective services (CPS) getting involved with your family?
- What have you heard about why your child was removed?

## Behavioral Details

- When did [harmful event] happen?
- Can you tell me about what happened that day?
- Where was it? Where were you? Who else was around?
- How did you respond when it happened?
- How long has this been going on?
- What were the first, worst, and most recent times this happened?

## Impact on the Child

- Where were the children when this was happening?
- Do you think [harmful event] is affecting your child in any way?
- Do you ever worry about [harmful event]? When do you most worry? What is happening?
- If your child were here right now, what would they say [harmful event] does to them?
- Do you think [harmful event] might be affecting him/her at school?
- Do you think [harmful event] might be affecting how he/she makes friends?
- Does [harmful event] ever come between you and your child?
- Does [collateral] think [harmful event] is affecting your child in any way?
- Does [family member] think [harmful event] is affecting your child in any way?
- On a scale from 0 to 10, with 10 being your child was totally safe when [harmful event] happened and 0 being your child was in a lot of danger and could have been really hurt, where would you say things were when [harmful event] happened?
- What would your child say if he/she were here?

## Close

- Of all the things we have talked about that have happened in the past, what do you think is most worrisome?
- What would your child say is most worrisome?
- What do you think my supervisor or I might think is most worrisome?
- We have a way of summing up these kinds of things which is called a harm statement. Can I share it with you and see what you think?
- On a scale from 0 to 10, where 10 is the harm statement really describes something that concerns you too, and 0 is you think I am really off base, where would you say things are?

## **Follow Up: Impact of Exceptions on Children**

- Where were the children when [exception] was happening?
- When you did [exception] did it make a difference to your child in any way? How?
- What do you think your children would say they like best about the fact that you took this step?
- Do any [family members/friends] know you took this step? What kind of difference would they say it made to the children?
- Do any [collaterals] know you took this step? What kind of difference would they say it made to the children?
- On a scale from 0 to 10, with 10 being your child was totally safe when [exception] happened and 0 being your child was in a lot of danger and could have been really hurt, where would you say things were when [exception] happened?
  - What is helping you keep that number as high as you have?

## **Identifying Potential Network Members**

- Who or what else may have helped you do that?
- Who else knows you were able to take this step?
- Who from your life would be least surprised at your ability to take these steps?
- What would your best friend say about how you are doing this?

## **Coping**

- What you have been going through is not so easy. How do you think you have survived as long as you have? What is keeping you going?
- Given everything we have talked about, how do you think you have managed to keep things from getting worse?

## **Close**

- Of all the things you are doing to care for the children, what do you think you are doing that is most protecting the kids?
- What would your child say he/she is most pleased that you are doing?
- What do you think my supervisor or I will be pleased to see?

## **Step 2: What is Working Well?**

### *Searching for Safety and Strengths*

#### **Opening**

- What do you think is working well in your family?
- What are you most proud of in your family?
- What do you see in your child that you are most proud of?
- What is your family like at its best?
- If your child were here right now, what would he/she say is going well in your family?
- What would they say they are most proud of in you? In themselves?
- Who else knows you/your family really well? What would they say is going really well?
- What do you think I see working well?
- Can I tell you what I see working well?

#### **Searching for Exceptions/Past Examples of Safety**

- Has there ever been a time when [the problem] could have happened, almost did happen, but somehow you were able to do something different?
- Can you tell me about a time you were able to manage [the problem] in a way that you felt good about?
- What are you already doing to help keep your children safe and respond to the concerns?

#### **Specific Examples of Exceptions**

- Tell me about a time you were able to look after your child even though you were dealing with other difficult things?
- Can you tell me about a time when you were really angry with your child, but rather than hitting him/her, you were able to find a way to calm yourself down?
- Can you tell me about a time you were both really pissed off with each other, but rather than yelling or hitting each other in front of your child, you were able to keep it away from him/her or to sort it out so it did not blow up?
- Can you think of a time you were going to use drugs but either made sure your child was looked after first or made another decision about using altogether?

## **Follow-Up: Gathering Behavioral Details of Exceptions**

- When did that [exception] happen?
- How did you do that? [Specific details of exception.]
- Can you tell me what happened that day?
- When was it? Where were you? Who else was around?
- Suppose I were a fly on the wall when this was happening. What would I have seen you do?
- What were the first, worst, and most recent times this happened?

## **Step 3: What Are We Worried About?**

### *Exploring Future Danger*

#### **Opening**

- Of all the things we have talked about today, which are you most worried about happening in the future?
- Of all thing things we have talked about today, which do you think your child is most worried about happening in the future?
- Of all thing things we have talked about today, which do you think I am most worried about for the future?
- What do you think the initial reporter might be most worried about happening in the future?
- On a scale of 0 to 10, with 10 being your child is totally safe now and 0 being your child is in a lot of danger, where do you think things are now?
- What do you think is getting in the way of the number being even higher?

#### **Potential Future Impact on the Children**

- What do you think will happen in your family if nothing else changes?
- What do you think might happen to your child?

#### **Identifying Potential Network Members**

- Does anyone else in your family worry about what might happen to your family or to your child in the future if nothing changes?
- Do any of your friends worry about this?
- Do any of the collaterals worry about this?
- What do you think they worry will happen to your child if more of [harmful event] occurs?

## Close

- Can I take a minute and tell you how we at CPS are trying to think these days?
- Now that I have shared these definitions with you, which of the things we have talked about do you think are real dangers to your child in the future? Which are complicating factors?
- We have a way of summing up these kinds of things called a danger statement. Can I share it with you and see what you think?
- On a scale from 0 to 10, with 10 being the danger statement really describes something that worries you also and 0 being you think it is really off base, where would you place the danger statement?

## Step 4: What Needs to Happen?

### *Developing Goals*

#### Family Goals

- Ten years from now, what would you like your child's story about this time to be? What do you think needs to happen for him/her to be able to tell that story?
- It is clear from what you have said that you are not happy with how things are going. How would you like things to be instead?
- Given all we have talked about, what is your biggest hope for what could be different in your life?
- What is the least that could happen that would still leave you feeling like you had accomplished something important?

#### Agency Goals

- Given all we have talked about, what are the next steps you think we need to take to make sure your child is safe?
- Which of the danger statements do you think is most important for us to deal with first?
- You have said you want CPS out of your life. Given everything we have talked about, what do you imagine I am going to say needs to happen for us to get out of your life?
- Our agency has a format for talking about goals that we feel is important. It is called a safety goal and is also going to move us to discuss who else needs to be a part of our work together. Can I show you what this goal format looks like, and

can we think about who else needs to be involved?

- What do you think you will need to see in yourself in order to take these steps?
- What will you need from others?
- Who would be good to talk to about this?
- When you first start making these changes, who will see them? First? Second?

## **Identifying Potential Network Members**

Moving toward these kinds of goals is hard work and often requires help. Do you know the phrase, “it takes a village to raise a child”? Who from your community would be important for us to invite to these meeting to help you move in the directions we have been talking about?

## **Services**

- Do you think going to [service] might do anything to address the danger statement? What do you think it might do?
- If I were to suggest you to go to [service], what do you think I might be hoping would be different as a result?
- By going to [service] what are you hoping will change about safety for your child?

## **Small Steps**

Suppose we meet for coffee a few years from now and all the problems we have talked about, specifically the danger statement, have all been taken care of.

- What do you think you will have done to achieve this?
- Who or what will have helped you make that possible?
- How will I have contributed?

## **First Steps**

- What will have been your first step?
- What difference will it have made in your life?
- If you take that step, how will it affect your child?
  
- Will that be enough to keep your child safe/address the danger statement?
- Will your child think it is enough?
- Will I think that it is enough?

- Now that you have made up your mind to stop doing [harmful event], how long do you think it will be before you take action on it?
- On a scale of 0 to 10, with 10 being “my child is totally safe now” and 0 being “my child is in a lot of danger,” where do you think things are now?
- If we keep working at this and a month from now the danger/safety scale number has improved by one number, what do you think will be concretely different in your family?
- If I were a fly on the wall and saw you taking that step, what would I see?
- What will you or others be doing differently?
- What services will be in place? What will you be doing differently as a result?

### **Willingness, Confidence, and Capacity**

- On a scale from 0 to 10, with 10 being you are very willing to take these first steps and 0 being you are not willing at all, where would you place yourself?
- On a scale from 0 to 10, with 10 being you are very confident you can complete these first steps and 0 being you are not sure at all if you can do it, where would you place yourself?
- On a scale from 0 to 10, with 10 being you have everything you need and all the help you need to take these first steps and 0 being you do not have what you need, where would you place yourself?
- For all questions: What would need to happen to increase that number by one?

### **Confirming Direction/Monitoring**

- What will tell you that you are on the right track?
- How will you know that you have reached this goal and your child is safe?
- What will tell me that you are on the right track?
- How will I or my supervisor know you have reached this goal and your child is safe?
- Who will be the first people to notice a change?
- What will they see?
- What will you see?
- What will your kids notice?
- What will I notice?