



FAMILY INTERVIEW GUIDE

Second Edition

A Guide for Foster Care and Adoption Assessors

Use of the Family Interview Guide

This guide will provide sample questions to help you conduct your interviews with prospective adoptive parents and foster caregivers. It is also appropriate to use in assessing kinship care families in becoming licensed foster caregivers. These sample questions are only offered as suggested guidelines. Of course, interview questions will need to be tailored to the families being interviewed, and follow-up questions will need to be formulated based on responses from the family members. These questions will give Assessors a starting point as they gather assessment data and guide the family through a process of self-assessment in the foster care and adoption application process.

Developed by the Institute for Human Services
for the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program

2015

Material in this guide has been adapted
from the following sources:

The Field Guide to Child Welfare,
Vol II, *Case Planning and Family-Centered Casework*, and
Vol. IV, *Placement and Permanence*
by J. Rycus and R. Hughes
(Child Welfare League of America Press, 1998)

Family and Child Assessment, Tier I Assessor
Curriculum, Ohio Child Welfare Training Program, revised 2015

Foster Care, Kinship Care, and Adoption Preservice Training,
Ohio Child Welfare Training Program, revised 2015

“Promoting Normalcy for Children and Youth in Foster Care”
Juvenile Law Center 2015

I. WHAT IS A FAMILY ASSESSMENT?

The purpose of the family assessment, also known as the Homestudy, is for the Assessor and the applicant to mutually determine the appropriateness and readiness of the family for foster care or adoption.

The goals of the family assessment are to:

- 1) Educate the family about the differences between foster care and adoption
- 2) Help the family explore their values, expectations, and motivations
- 3) Help the family identify and highlight their strengths and limitations
- 4) Provide the Assessor with the opportunity to determine if the applicants have experienced trauma in their life and what is the potential impact of that trauma on their ability to be foster caregivers or adoptive parents
- 5) Provide the family with the agency's philosophy and values regarding foster care and adoption
- 6) Prepare the family for the challenges of adoption or caregiving
- 7) Initiate the self-selection process for the applicant
- 8) Develop a working relationship between the family and the Assessor as well as between the family and the agency

Agencies use a variety of assessment opportunities including:

- 1) Individual and family interviews
- 2) Observation of the applicant at Preservice training and other group sessions
- 3) Criminal record checks and personal and employment references which may include credit reports and physical and mental health evaluations
- 4) The Assessor's own experience with the family
- 5) Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) database searches

II. HOW DOES DIVERSITY IMPACT THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS?

Diversity refers to all the characteristics that distinguish one person from another.

Diversity competence is:

- 1) The capacity to relate to persons with diverse characteristics in a sensitive, respectful, and productive way.

2) An ongoing developmental process that includes:

- An acquired understanding of the patterns and potential dynamics of diverse groups and cultures, including our own
- The understanding of how culture (the values, beliefs, attitudes, and traditions acquired from affiliate groups), and other circumstances influence our own and other people's thinking and behaviors
- The ability to manage and adapt to the dynamics of difference, and work effectively with all people

Diversity competence impacts:

- 1) The quality of assessment and supportive services provided to foster and kinship caregivers and adoptive families, and
- 2) Decisions made by Assessors placing children in foster or adoptive homes.

Sound foster care and adoption practice begins with a commitment from the Assessor to provide diversity-competent services. To succeed, Assessors need:

- 1) An awareness and acceptance of diversity and differences
- 2) An awareness of their own values
- 3) An understanding of the "dynamics of difference" in the helping process
- 4) A basic knowledge about the applicants' diversity
- 5) Knowledge of the applicants' environment
- 6) The ability to adapt practice skills to fit the applicants' context

Assessors will serve clients from vastly different backgrounds than their own. While it may be easy to dismiss another's diversity as "wrong" or "inappropriate," the Assessor must provide non-discriminatory and competent services to each family and child on his or her caseload.

Skills in relationship-building and communication are essential during the interview process and greatly enhance the quality of the mutual assessment. Prospective families and caregivers should be assessed within the context of their own diversity. To reduce the chance of an inaccurate assessment, Assessors must consider different communication and interaction styles, nonverbal behaviors, differences in the use and meaning of specific words and phrases, family roles and relationships, and home environments.

III. ENGAGING THE FAMILY IN ASSESSMENT

A critical first step in family assessment is engagement, a process of putting the family at ease, drawing its members more comfortably into the process, and building trust and rapport. Successful engagement increases the likelihood of a more effective assessment outcome. Some strategies to successfully engage foster and adoptive applicants include:

- Respect the family's diversity
- Establish a clear purpose for each interview
- Determine where the family feels most comfortable in holding interviews
- Determine how the applicants prefer to be addressed
- Ask open-ended questions that are general in nature to allow applicants an opportunity to express themselves
- Display a non-judgmental attitude
- Vary the intensity of the interview so that there is a balance between more probing, personal questions and more superficial ones
- Seek opportunities to compliment the family about their children, home, activities, etc.
- Acknowledge the family pet(s)
- Be sure to answer the family's questions and address their concerns during each contact

IV. INTERVIEWING METHODS

An Assessor should make an effort to ask behavioral rather than theoretical questions. Theoretical questions typically elicit responses the applicant feels the Assessor wants to hear, and these questions provide relatively limited insight into the applicant's strengths or challenges. Behavioral questions, on the other hand, focus on actual events in the applicant's history. They are founded on the understanding that an excellent predictor of future behavior is past behavior. Asking applicants how they have handled similar situations in the past will give the Assessor (and the applicants) a much clearer picture of their readiness for adoption or foster care.

The Assessor must develop diverse, effective, and efficient verbal, non-verbal and observational skills and should utilize a variety of interviewing techniques.

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Interviewing Method	Description	Examples
Closed-ended, probing or yes/no questions	Allows Assessor to gather specific information from applicants	<p>“What is your birth date?”</p> <p>“How long have you been married? Divorced?”</p> <p>“How old are your children?”</p>
Open-ended questions	Assists Assessor in gathering a broad range of information including insight into applicants’ feelings and perceptions	<p>“Tell me about your childhood?”</p> <p>“Describe your spouse to me.”</p> <p>“Why are you interested in this type of child?”</p>
Supportive responses - Active listening	Builds trust between Assessor and applicants; Encourages applicants to be honest in the interview	<p>“It must be difficult to accept that you cannot have children biologically.”</p> <p>“Sounds like you have thought about adopting or caregiving for a very long time.”</p>
Clarification	Helps Assessor accurately interpret applicants’ responses; Assist applicants in gaining insight into their own feelings and perceptions	<p>“You believe that you have a good marriage; What does that mean?”</p> <p>“Sounds like you are feeling very ambivalent about a school-age child. Can you tell me more about that?”</p>
Summarization-Redirection	Helps to maintain focus and organization during interview; Assists Assessor in moving interview along and using limited time efficiently	<p>“Now that you’ve talked about your childhood, let’s hear about your life as a married person.” (redirection)</p> <p>“You’ve told me three things that you consider strengths: your parenting experience, high energy level, and positive relationship with the school system.” (summarization)</p>
Giving options, advice or suggestions	Allows Assessor to serve in a supportive role to applicants	<p>“I can see that your heart’s set on adopting a newborn. Our agency only places older children with special needs. Let me give you the names and numbers of agencies who can help you.”</p>
Confrontation	Necessary when Assessor feels applicants have been resistant or have not been completely honest in responses	<p>“I don’t believe that you are giving me all the details about the extent of the abuse you suffered as a child.”</p>

V. TWELVE ASSESSMENT CATEGORIES

- 1) **Attitudes and beliefs regarding foster care and adoption issues** – the applicants’ ability to view themselves as resource families for children who enter their home, and as team members rather than consumers of services. They are strong child advocates and support the child welfare goals of safety, permanency, and well-being for children.
- 2) **Motivation to foster or adopt** - the applicants’ ability to understand appropriate and inappropriate reasons for adoption and foster caregiving with anticipated outcomes as determined by two basic questions: Why do you want to adopt or foster? And why do you want to adopt or foster now?
- 3) **Personal and emotional maturity** - the applicants’ ability to put another’s needs before their own without feeling personally threatened or experiencing severe emotional stress.
- 4) **Stability and quality of interpersonal relationships** -the applicants’ ability to develop, maintain, and sustain healthy interpersonal relationships. In a two-parent home, the relationship of the applicants must be strong enough to withstand the demands of parenting.
- 5) **Coping skills and history of stress management** – the applicants’ ability to function productively in high stress situations. Foster caregivers and adoptive parents should have a variety of effective strategies to cope with the changes and stresses inherent in the adoption or foster care process. They should also possess the ability to acknowledge the impact trauma has on their life, recognize when they have been triggered and use coping skills to effectively manage the resulting emotions.
- 6) **Level of openness in family relationships** - the applicants’ ability to be flexible in boundaries and respond to challenges from within and outside the family system. Openness is also indicated by the family’s receptiveness to community and professional services, if needed.
- 7) **Parenting skills and abilities** - the applicants’ ability to care for children and provide the necessary nurturing, discipline, and guidance appropriate for the age and functioning of the child. Although applicants with children have experience in parenting and, in general, are better prepared, caring for a child from the child welfare system can present additional challenges.
- 8) **Ability to empathize with others** – the applicants’ ability to relate to and understand another person’s situation, feelings, and motives. This is particularly important when parenting children who come from backgrounds of abuse or neglect.
- 9) **Understanding of entitlement issues** - the adoptive parents’ ability to accept they have the full rights and responsibilities to parent a child not born to them. Feeling entitled allows adoptive parents to lovingly

discipline, to make important decisions, and to intervene on behalf of their child(ren).

Entitlement also refers to the foster caregivers' ability to believe they have the right and responsibility to facilitate age and developmentally-appropriate experiences for children and youth in care. They acknowledge their duty to make reasonable and prudent decisions that enhance development and support normalcy.

- 10) Ability and willingness to take a hands-on parenting approach** – the applicants' ability to model (vs. verbally instruct) appropriate behaviors for the child and to use concrete behavior management techniques of a more cognitive nature. Parenting children with a history of trauma often requires close supervision, interactive instruction, modeling, redirection, and purposeful play to build attachments.
- 11) Ability to make and honor commitments** - the applicants' ability to see the child as a family member. This category includes exploration of long term identity issues common to adoptees and children in foster care, issues of birth family search and reunions, "leaving the nest," and expectations for future education, self-sufficiency, family connections, etc.
- 12) Religious affiliation and/or spiritual beliefs** – The applicants' ability to acknowledge and respect the magnitude of spiritual and religious diversity that exists, and their willingness to accommodate the practices and needs of children and their families.

VI. CONTINUUM OF FUNCTIONING

Not every applicant family is capable of caregiving or adopting. The mutual assessment process is designed to provide the Assessor with insight into the applicants' level of functioning and suitability for foster care or adoption. At the same time, the process stimulates the applicants to engage in a self-assessment and discovery mode. By conducting the Homestudy as a mutual assessment, it is likely that both the Assessor and applicants will reach the same conclusion at the end of the process.

When exploring the assessment categories, Assessors will determine at what level the family is functioning. The family may be at one of the following levels of functioning:

- **Strength level:**
The family is well prepared and knowledgeable. They have had direct and successful parenting experiences in the assessment category.
- **Minimal level:**

The family has a beginning awareness or has had limited, or only recent, positive experiences. However, the family is motivated and is capable of developing in the assessment category.

- **Caution level:**

The family has had no positive experiences and is functioning at a deficit. While the family needs considerable development, they are unwilling or deny the necessity for further development.

VII. LARGE FAMILY ASSESSMENT

Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) rules require a large family assessment be completed at the time of the adoption Homestudy when there will be a total of five or more permanent, kinship, foster, or adopted children (ages 0-18) in the home, based on the number of children the family is being approved for (Example: A family currently has two children in the home. They are going to be approved for three additional children. A large family assessment is needed because there would be a total of five children in the home).

The large family assessment evaluates the ability of the family to meet the needs of additional children while continuing to meet the needs of children already in the home. While this is required for adoption, it is a good practice to conduct the large family assessment for foster and kinship applicants as well. These considerations apply to all potential families, regardless of family size but take on special significance in large families.

Issues to consider in a large family assessment include:

- 1) Living space arrangements
- 2) Children currently in the home (ages, personalities, special needs, attitudes of children toward the proposed adoption)
- 3) The prospective adoptive child (special needs)
- 4) Parents' capacities and motivation for wanting a large family (availability to supervise children, family lifestyle, organization of the household, plans in place should parents die or otherwise become unable to parent)
- 5) Resources and supports (support from extended family and community, resources available in community, financial stability of family)
- 6) Family history and experience (length of time since last placement, placement history of prospective adoptive home, demonstrated ability to ensure prospective child's safety and well-being)
- 7) References (additional references from professionals or service providers regarding the family's ability to meet the needs of children)

VIII. NON-REHABILITATION OFFENCES

According to Ohio Administrative Codes (OAC) 5101:2-5-09.1 and 5101:2-7-02 - (K), if any of the following have a felony conviction for spousal abuse, rape, sexual assault, or homicide, the foster home shall not be certified and no rehabilitation standards exist for:

- 1) An adult resident in the household of a foster caregiver or applicant
- 2) A [licensed] foster caregiver
- 3) A foster care applicant

A parallel rule, OAC 5101:2-48-10, also applies for an adoptive applicant.

IX. "NO NOS"

In addition, there are certain behaviors not specifically included among those in the OAC as non-rehabilitative, but, as best practice, should be categorized as behaviors that put children at risk, and therefore, should automatically preclude an applicant from becoming a foster caregiver or an adoptive parent. These behaviors are commonly referred to as "No Nos." Examples include:

- Histories of sexually abusive behaviors such as pedophilia, voyeurism or exhibitionism put children at risk of further abuse. The motivation of the applicants may very well be sexual gratification.
- An applicant's current substance abuse creates a chaotic and unpredictable home environment inappropriate and threatening to children. The home environment may also be unsafe due to drug trafficking activities or neglect when the applicant is "high."
- Severe mental illness which would interfere with either parent or caregiver's ability to meet the child's needs. Illnesses that are untreated or not controlled with medication severely limit a person's capacity to parent.
- Current, ongoing domestic violence which involves physical or emotional abuse directed toward any member of the family.

X. SECOND LOOK ISSUES

There are many other situations which warrant a more in-depth assessment or a second look by the Assessor. It is critical, however, that each applicant be assessed individually, as rigid and over-generalized standards prevent Assessors from understanding the wide variance of family situations. In-depth assessments are necessary when the following situations occur:

- *History of being a perpetrator of physical abuse, sexual abuse or neglect.* This may be substantiated or strongly indicated. This information is generally uncovered as past agency history, police reports and poor references. This needs to be reviewed thoroughly to assess the circumstances of the abuse or neglect and the potential for further abuse or neglect.
- *History of domestic violence* should be further assessed to determine the scope, coping styles, duration, and long-term patterns which have emerged as a result of violence within the family.
- *Recurrent arrests and convictions* should be explored further with the applicants to determine whether the arrests involve a disqualifying offense – a felony conviction for spousal or partner abuse, sexual assault, rape, or homicide. Other convictions may be permissible if the applicant has completed rehabilitation standards.
- *Unresolved personal issues related to childhood victimization.* These issues may be related to physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, abandonment or rejection and will resurface when parenting.. Unresolved issues may cause a repeat of abuse and neglect or render the applicant incapable of healthy parenting.
- *Rigid or inflexible beliefs.* For example, applicants may believe that birth parents are unable to parent their children, or that “punishment” is always the best strategy for misbehavior.
- *Marital difficulties,* including a history of repeated separations or divorces, or indications of ongoing conflict between adult partners, may create an environment potentially threatening to a child’s well-being, permanence, or even safety. Applicants who demonstrate a pattern of leaving relationships when obstacles appear may be demonstrating their inability to make a life-long commitment to a child. Further, it may indicate that adults who have unresolved or unhealthy conflict in their intimate relationships may have experienced trauma and lack the emotional energy or support to appropriately meet a child’s needs.
- *Child-rearing problems* in parenting children currently in the home or a history of parenting problems with minor or adult children should be thoroughly explored to ensure that discipline, nurturance, or supervision problems have been addressed and resolved.
- *A history of mental/emotional problems* (including depression, personality disorders, anxiety, etc.) could be indicators of threats to the child’s safety. To ensure that a prospective child will be safe, and the prospective parents or caregivers have the capacity to meet the demands of parenting, Assessors may require the

applicant(s) to provide a statement from a therapist, indicating the current level of functioning of the applicant(s), steps taken to address the mental health issue, and potential triggers for a recurrence.

- *Physical health problems* (chronic illnesses or conditions, physical challenges) may also impair a prospective applicant's ability to meet the needs of a child. Assessors may ask applicants to provide additional information or recommendations from health care providers regarding the impact of parenting on the prospective applicants' physical health as well as an assessment of the applicants' capacity for providing care for children.
- In order to help the Assessor explore any of these areas of concern more fully and accurately, it is recommended that the following questions be addressed by the Assessor and applicants:
 - What happened?
 - Why did it happen?
 - How did you feel about it at the time it happened?
 - What progress have you made in working on this issue since it happened?
 - How do you feel about it now?
 - How do you solve similar problems now as a result of your experience?

XI. PROOF OF REHABILITATION

According to the Ohio Administrative Codes (OAC) 5101:2-7-02 and 5101:2-48-10, certain rehabilitative standards must be met when an applicant for foster care or adoption, or a member of their household, has a conviction for certain crimes. Those crimes are listed in Appendix A to rules 5101:2-7-02 and 5101:2-48-10 of the OAC. These standards also apply to records of convictions that have been sealed or expunged.

The burden of verifying that these rehabilitation factors have been met falls to the applicant.

XII. DESCRIPTION OF ASSESSMENT FORMS

The joint foster care and adoption Homestudy document *Assessment for Child Placement* ([IFS 01673](#)), which became available in Ohio in 1996, made it possible for an applicant to be simultaneously approved for both foster care and adoption. The Homestudy is a comprehensive tool used to determine the applicants' readiness and appropriateness for foster caregiving and/or adoptive parenting.

A completed family assessment must include the following attachments:

- 1) Medical statements for all household members ([JFS 01653](#))
- 2) Three personal reference statements (all from non-relatives who do not live with the applicants)
- 3) A Fire Inspection Report for Homes or Residential Facilities Certified/Approved by ODJFS ([JFS01200](#))
- 4) Safety Audit of a Foster Home ([JFS 01348](#))
- 5) Applicant Financial Statement ([JFS 01681](#))
- 6) BCI and FBI reports as outlined in the [OAC 5101:2-48-10](#)
- 7) Completed water test, if the family has well water
- 8) The Large Family Assessment ([JFS 01530](#)), if applicable
- 9) Agency forms
- 10) *The Child Characteristics Checklist ([JFS 01673-A](#))

*The *Child Characteristics Checklist* is completed by applicants, not the Assessor, and is attached to the JFS 01673 form. Applicants must specifically indicate whether they will or will not consider a child who has certain characteristics identified on the JFS 01673-A.

Assessors should check with their agency regarding any additional agency or county requirements.

XIII. DOCUMENTING THE ASSESSMENT

It is critical that the Homestudy document is well written, descriptive, concise, and clear in order to ensure that children and families receive appropriate placement services. The following are a few tips to assist in writing the family assessment:

Use words that give an exact meaning

Too often assessors use statements like:

- *“They have a stable marriage.” “They have a good relationship” “It is a nice house.”*
What do “stable, good, and nice” really mean? It would be more accurate to say:
- *“Like any other couple, Fred and Mary have had their ups and downs. They both agree that there have been few major disagreements and they have been able to negotiate or compromise each time. Neither can stay mad very long.”*
- *“While small in size, the Collins home is cozy, neat and comfortable. It is well-lit and has a fresh coat of paint inside and out!”*

Get rid of extra words

Some writers are verbose and wordy. The reader must wallow through unnecessary words to get important information. For example:

- *“Robert attended North High School and graduated in 1983. He played football, baseball and basketball. Linda attended North High School and graduated in 1983. She was a cheerleader and was in the choir.”*

With editing, unnecessary words and phrases are eliminated:

- *“Both Robert and Linda attended North High School, graduating in 1983. Robert lettered in three sports, while Linda was active in cheerleading and choir.”*

Do not use slang, “lingo,” or local jargon

This is not professional, and others reading the assessment may not understand these terms. Phrases such as “He’s a smooth talker” may not be accurately interpreted. Use “He’s an articulate and colorful speaker” instead.

Give complete information

Some writers try to cut corners and leave out valuable information. Frequently, information regarding the foster/adoptive family’s neighborhood, culture, personal interests and infertility issues is scanty and insufficient. A four-word sentence does not adequately relate information about important topics.

XIV. DEFINITIONS, SAMPLE QUESTIONS AND INDICATORS OF FAMILY FUNCTIONING

NOTE: An applicant refers to a person of any gender or marital status

1 Attitudes and beliefs Regarding Foster Care and Adoption Issues

Definition:

- 1) The ability to understand the difference between foster care and adoption
- 2) The ability to understand the importance of permanency planning for children
- 3) The ability to adhere to state licensing and adoption rules that govern standards of best practice in child welfare
- 4) The ability to promote reunification efforts in accordance with case planning, and, support the child and the child’s family during the reunification process
- 5) The ability to help children feel emotionally safe and connected with important people from their past

- 6) The ability to understand and manage a child's emotions resulting from long-term separation

Sample Questions:

- 1) Describe your role and responsibilities in achieving the goals of child welfare. Can you explain the difference between foster care, kinship care, and adoption?
- 2) Please identify the members of the child protection team and their role in serving children. What do you consider to be some advantages and disadvantages of teaming?
- 3) How do you define permanency? Why do you think permanency is defined as one of the goals of child welfare? How do you intend to address the permanency needs of children who enter your home?
- 4) What efforts have you made to gain knowledge about the issues and needs of children in out-of-home placement?
- 5) What have you done to prepare your home, extended family, and community for the placement of children? What measures have you taken to ensure the child's cultural continuity and well-being?
- 6) Who in your family will best understand the needs you will have with a child who has experienced trauma, demonstrates behavioral problems, or experiences many developmental delays?
- 7) Do you know any foster or adopted child who is struggling behaviorally or emotionally? Describe the situation. How might separation from his or her primary family be related to these struggles?
- 8) Who in your family will best understand the needs you will have with a child who has experienced trauma, demonstrates behavioral problems, or experiences many developmental delays?
- 9) Describe opportunities you have had in working directly with primary families and their extended relatives. What engagement strategies have you found most helpful? Least helpful?
- 10) Tell me about a time when you were obliged to return something you valued. How did you feel? What coping strategies did you use to manage your feelings?
- 11) What do you see as your role in actively promoting the reunification between children and their primary families?

Activities Recommended to Strengthen Family Functioning

- 1) Establish networks with other foster caregivers, adoptive families or support groups.
- 2) Attend the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program (OCWTP) *Fostering* and *Post-Adoption* workshops for advanced training.

- 3) Contact their Regional Training Center or visit www.fosterparentcollege.com to enroll in other Post-Preservice online Training.
- 4) Read resource literature (e.g. *Foster Parent Handbook*; *OCWTP Caregiver Corner*, ODFJS Foster Care and Adoption Fact Sheets; state licensing rules, etc.).
- 5) View digital stories of foster youth (<http://youth.gov/feature-article/digital-stories-voices-foster-care-youth>).

INDICATORS OF FAMILY FUNCTIONING

Strength:

- 1) Applicants know the goals of child welfare and the difference in placement options for children.
- 2) Applicants express positive views about the child welfare system and see themselves as important team members and child advocates. They are able to explain the life of a child welfare case from allegation to permanency.
- 3) Applicants are active participants in permanency planning for children in their home.
- 4) Applicants grasp the significance of their role in helping children who enter their home, and have taken appropriate measures to prepare themselves for the inherent responsibilities.
- 5) Applicants can explain how respect for the diversity of the child and family impacts placement success and child welfare goals. They are able to demonstrate measures to help a child feel welcomed in their home.
- 6) Applicants have a history of positive working relationships with schools and service providers in meeting the needs of their children or themselves.
- 7) Applicants can describe how attachment can be impacted by complex trauma, and recognize behaviors that indicate a child is experiencing toxic stress.
- 8) Applicants can recognize indicators that a child has been sexually abused or exposed. They are able to list ways to modify their home environment and rules to ensure the child's safety and well-being.

Minimal:

- 1) Applicants have a baseline understanding of their role and responsibilities in child welfare teaming.
- 2) Applicants are somewhat familiar with how a child welfare case develops from beginning to end, but need further education.

- 3) Applicants feel overwhelmed by the wealth of information presented during Preservice training, and struggle to recall critical facts.
- 4) Applicants have a narrow definition of permanency, and believe adoption, rather than reunification, is usually the best plan for a child.
- 5) Applicants have concerns about their ability to respond to all of the responsibilities that their role requires (e.g. counseling sessions, court hearings, reunification visits with primary family members; openness with birth parents and the birth parents' extended relatives, etc.).
- 6) Applicants express a willingness to make their home culturally diverse, but need additional guidance from their Assessor with this task.

Caution:

- 1) Applicants do not view themselves as members of the child welfare team, nor do they see the benefits of teaming. They are not invested in working towards the goal of reunification, and are difficult to engage during the homestudy or certification process.
- 2) Applicants regard the child welfare system primarily as a means to an end to become parents. They harbor inaccurate or preconceived notions about the nature of child welfare, and state they did not find Preservice training useful.
- 3) Applicants do not understand the concept of permanency, and cannot articulate why it is a relevant goal of child welfare.
- 4) Applicants have given only minimum consideration to the diverse issues and needs of children, and, culturally speaking, have demonstrated little or no effort to welcome a child into their home and community.
- 5) Applicants have a history of poor working relationships at their employment, and in their neighborhoods and communities.
- 6) Applicants may minimize the impact of trauma that children experience, believing any present or residual effects can be overcome by love, TLC, or "faith."
- 7) Applicants believe children should live in the present and forget about their past relationships, experiences, or circumstances.

2 Motivation to Foster or Adopt

Definition:

- 1) The ability to create a vision of what the experience of an adoptive parent or foster caregiver might be like
- 2) The ability to give a reason for wanting to become a foster caregiver or adoptive parent

Sample Questions:

- 1) Why have you decided to pursue adoption or foster care at this time? Why now? What influences have others had on this decision (e.g. friends, family members who are foster caregivers)?
- 2) With whom did you first share your decision to foster or adopt? Why that person? What was his or her response?
- 3) What discussions have you and your spouse or partner had about applying to become foster or kinship caregivers or adoptive parents? Who brought it up? What was the initial response? Has this changed over time?
- 4) What level of support do you expect to receive from your extended family or friends in your decision to foster or adopt a child? Explain.
- 5) What are things that “worry” you about parenting a child not born to you?
- 6) When you dream about doing this, describe the child you hope to parent.
- 7) Tell me about a time that you entered into something when your expectations were not met. What was it? What was your response? What was the outcome?
- 8) What is the best case outcome for you and your family in this foster or adoption process? What would be the worst-case outcome?
- 9) How have you dealt with issues of infertility?

Activities Recommended to Strengthen Family Functioning

- 1) Talk with a foster caregiver or adoptive parent for a more realistic perspective.
- 2) Think about how their daily life will look following the placement of an adopted or foster child in terms of childcare, transportation, homework, doctor appointments, trips, etc.
- 3) Read literature (articles or books) or watch videos that address challenges of foster care or adoption.
- 4) Explore national, state, or local foster care or adoption associations.

INDICATORS OF FAMILY FUNCTIONING

Strength:

- 1) Applicants express child-focused reasons for their interest in foster care or adoption. They are motivated by factors that support a child's best interests rather than factors related to selfish gain.
- 2) Applicants enjoy children and find parenting to be pleasurable and fulfilling.
- 3) Applicants can explain the process of self-assessment and determine if caregiving or adoption is the right choice for their family.
- 4) Applicants have realistic expectations of children, themselves, and their foster care or adoption experience.
- 5) Applicants have experienced unmet expectations in another area of life and have grown from that experience.
- 6) Applicants have dealt with and resolved their infertility issues and are ready to welcome a child into their home.

Minimal:

- 1) Applicants have not fully considered the ramifications of adoption or caregiving on their marriage, their children, or themselves.
- 2) One applicant is very interested and involved in the process, and the other will go along with the plan without being actively engaged.
- 3) Applicants have limited experience with children in need of foster care or adoption and therefore, have unrealistic expectations, but are motivated to learn more.
- 4) Applicants have not had a lot of experience working through their disappointment of unmet expectations, either as a family or as individuals.
- 5) Applicants express excitement about becoming foster caregivers or adoptive parents, yet continue to struggle to manage their feelings of loss of a birth child experience.

Caution:

- 1) Applicants want a playmate for a birth child.
- 2) Applicants believe a child will save their marriage.
- 3) Applicants want to rescue a child.
- 4) Applicants feel pressured by extended family, spouse, or partner.
- 5) Applicants show a pattern of quitting something that did not meet their own personal needs and expectations.
- 6) Applicants have unresolved infertility issues and believe the myth that if they adopt or foster a child, they may become pregnant.

3 Personal and Emotional Security

Definition:

- 1) The ability to put another's needs before one's own without feeling personally threatened
- 2) The ability to demonstrate strong and positive self-esteem
- 3) The ability to care for oneself emotionally
- 4) The ability to cope with challenges
- 5) The ability to delay gratification

Sample Questions:

- 1) Have you worked toward a goal for a long time? What was it? Did you continue or give up? Why?
- 2) How do you manage obstacles? What has been the hardest situation you've ever faced? How did you overcome this situation? What was the outcome?
- 3) Have you ever felt unappreciated at home or on the job? Under what circumstances? How did you handle it?
- 4) Tell me about a time when you have felt personally rejected? Explain. How did you respond? What was the outcome?
- 5) Describe a frustrating or disappointing experience you have encountered. How did you respond? What was the outcome?
- 6) Tell me how conflict is managed in your family. Please give me a recent example.
- 7) How do you manage your own feelings of anger? How do you manage the angry feelings of others?

Activities Recommended to Strengthen Family Functioning

- 1) Release confidential information from an existing or former therapist, if needed.
- 2) Complete a psychological exam with a provider of the Assessor's choosing, if needed.
- 3) Journal positive and negative experiences and do a "Thinking Report" to identify the applicants' thoughts and emotions prior to, during and after an event.

INDICATORS OF FAMILY FUNCTIONING

Strength:

- 1) Applicants can delay gratification and find satisfaction in small gains.
- 2) Applicants can nurture a child who does not return affection.

- 3) Applicants can critically and realistically assess their own strengths and weaknesses.
- 4) Applicants have insight into their own sensitivities and vulnerabilities.
- 5) Applicants can act responsibly and fulfill obligations.
- 6) Applicants can maintain good emotional control.

Minimal:

- 1) Applicants have recently begun to develop positive self-esteem.
- 2) Applicants have limited insight into their own strengths and limitations.
- 3) Applicants can delay gratification but experience extreme disappointment.
- 4) Applicants can make a commitment but are likely to give up when the situation becomes difficult.
- 5) Applicants have inconsistent emotional control.

Caution:

- 1) Applicants blame others to maintain their own self esteem.
- 2) Applicants behave irresponsibly in day-to-day obligations such as work or finances.
- 3) Applicants cannot delay gratification or work toward a goal.
- 4) Applicants are egocentric and do not consider others' feelings.
- 5) Applicants are easily frustrated and have poor emotional regulation as demonstrated by inappropriate statements, outbursts of temper, etc.
- 6) Applicants may make a statement like, "I never get angry, so I don't even know how to answer that."

4 Stability and Quality of Interpersonal Relationships

Definition:

- 1) The ability to develop, maintain, and sustain healthy interpersonal relationships
- 2) The ability to build a strong support group of individuals who can support the family in times of need
- 3) The ability to reach out to new sources for assistance, should this become necessary

Sample Questions:

- 1) Tell me about your relational history. How did you meet your spouse or partner? How long have you been together? What drew you to each other? What has life together been like?
- 2) Are there areas in which you strongly disagree? How do you manage or resolve disputes?
- 3) What challenges or problems have you encountered in your relationship? Can you describe them? How did you handle them?
- 4) Describe past relationships you terminated? When and how did you decide to end the relationship?
- 5) How do you demonstrate affection in your family? How do you know that other family members care for you? How do they show it?
- 6) Thinking about extended family members and close friends, with whom are you closest? With whom do you have serious conflict and why? How often do you see that individual?
- 7) Who do you rely on for support when you need it? How have they helped you in the past?
- 8) Describe how you have defended or protected others in the past from negative or unfair comments. What plan have you considered to protect a foster or adopted child from such potential harm when you cannot avoid those individuals or circumstances (e.g. grocery store, church, park, family reunions, holidays, birthdays, etc.).

Activities Recommended to Strengthen Family Functioning

- 1) Complete a personality inventory to gain insights about their personality type and attachment patterns.
- 2) Participate in a therapeutic program designed to strengthen marriage, and/or improve communication and relationships.
- 3) Meet with experienced foster caregivers or adoptive parents and discuss how relationships are impacted by foster caregiving or adoptive parenting; then develop a plan to support their relationships.
- 4) Attend additional training regarding the impact of being a foster caregiver or adoptive parent.

INDICATORS OF FAMILY FUNCTIONING

Strength:

- 1) Applicants have a family history reflecting stability in relationships.
- 2) Applicants are able to disagree and negotiate in healthy ways.
- 3) Applicants have a strong, well-developed support system.

- 4) Applicants with a history of divorce can identify how they have grown from their experiences, and can identify how their current relationship is different.
- 5) Family members are capable of expressing affection within their family's cultural context.

Minimal:

- 1) Applicants' relationship with a spouse or partner is moderately stable. There is limited time together in a developing relationship—still adjusting.
- 2) Applicants have differences they cannot resolve; they are able to tolerate this dissension but lack the ability to compromise on issues.
- 3) Applicants have limited support systems.

Caution:

- 1) Applicants lack a history of marital or relationship stability. Their current relationship is unstable or new.
- 2) Applicants are constantly in a state of disagreement with others and are incapable of negotiating their differences. They become angry, hostile, or aggressive when conflicts occur.
- 3) Applicants have a pattern of interpersonal conflict or distancing, rather than problem-solving behaviors when conflicts occur.
- 4) Applicants do not work as a team regarding parenting issues, and roles are rigidly assigned with no flexibility.
- 5) Applicants find it challenging to openly express affection within their family's cultural context.
- 6) Extended family or friends are adamantly opposed to the applicants' plan to foster or adopt.
- 7) Applicants lack an external support system and will either have to develop a new support system or meet all of their own needs internally.
- 8) Applicants deny the need for external support.

5 Coping Skills and History of Stress Management

Definition:

- 1) The ability to demonstrate stamina, and handle stress and chaos
- 2) The ability to demonstrate a variety of coping strategies and adaptive behaviors

- 3) The ability to manage trauma reactions

Sample Questions:

- 1) In the last five years, what changes have you experienced personally or as a family? How did you navigate through them? What strategies were most helpful to use in general for self-care?
- 2) Tell me about a time in your past when you experienced a traumatic event. Describe the event. What impact has it had on you then and now? How have you managed the aftermath over the years? What challenges has it posed for you?
- 3) Please tell me about the most challenging thing you've ever had to deal with as a young person or adult. As a couple. What was it? What did you do? How did it affect you? Your family?
- 4) When you're having a rough time, what resources do you call on to cope?
- 5) How do you know when you are getting stressed out? What are the physical, emotional, social or cognitive cues for you? What are situations that are likely to generate stress for you or trigger a crisis?
- 6) What challenges have you experienced or learned about from other caregivers that cause anxiety for you? What strategies for self-care are effective or ineffective for you?
- 7) What encounters have you had in caring for children who have experienced trauma?

Activities Recommended to Strengthen Family Functioning

- 1) Identify their various "triggers" and develop a self-care survival plan for implementation for after they become foster caregivers or adoptive parents.
- 2) Identify three resource individuals (e.g. extended family, friends, neighbors, etc.) in their life that would understand the challenges of parenting a child with special needs, or who would be available during a family crisis.
- 3) Explore new stress management techniques and start to incorporate them in their daily life (i.e. breathing exercises, journaling, walking, medication, prayer, singing, etc.).
- 4) Meet with a mental health professional, if indicated, to assist with discovering stressors and management strategies.

INDICATORS OF FAMILY FUNCTIONING

Strength:

- 1) Applicants can describe difficult or traumatic situations; how it affected them; and how they coped. Applicants' self-perceptions are accurate and appropriate; reveal insight into their coping style.
- 2) Applicants have experienced changes in family composition. They are able to articulate the impact of those changes and their efforts to adjust in a healthy and functional way.
- 3) Applicants demonstrate their capacity to be flexible and accommodate changes easily. They have the ability to develop and implement contingency plans. They are not upset or threatened when faced with last-minute changes.
- 4) Applicants can identify childhood traumas, and how these traumas have impacted them.

Minimal:

- 1) Applicants can identify only a few stressful situations and report they have yet to be faced with a serious crisis or traumatic event.
- 2) Applicants have few outside supports and must largely depend on themselves to manage difficult situations.

Caution:

- 1) Applicants have no outside support system.
- 2) Applicants may minimize or deny experiencing a stressful or traumatic situation.
- 3) Applicants' descriptions of stressful situations indicate poor coping or adaptive capacity. They lack adequate ability to manage and resolve changes, losses, or trauma.
- 4) Applicants blame others for personal problems or try to manage by ignoring the situation. They are comfortable allowing others to handle their problems and lack insight into their own ineptitude.

6

Level of Openness in Family Relationships

Definition:

- 1) The ability to be flexible in family boundaries
- 2) The ability to be adaptable to challenges from within and outside the family system

- 3) The ability to establish ties with a child's primary family members, including birthparents, siblings, extended relatives, and significant others
- 4) The ability to be receptive to outside help when the family is experiencing stress and chaos
- 5) The ability to recognize the importance and benefits of permanent connections for children

Sample Questions:

- 1) Who do you include in your family? (Note: An ecomap can be effectively used to assist families in identifying their members and helpers).
- 2) During stressful situations, who helps you? Can you give me an example? Tell me about a time when you sought outside help. What were the circumstances? What was the outcome? What community resources have you used to help you solve a problem?
- 3) What experience have you had caring for, or relating to, a child who is not biologically related to you?
- 4) What experience has your extended family had in relating to children who are not biologically related to the family? Can you give me some examples? What challenges do you anticipate they may have in integrating foster or adopted children into the family with other biological nieces, nephews, or cousins?
- 5) In your family, how have you handled differing viewpoints around personal values, religion, politics, lifestyles, etc.?
- 6) What value do you see, if any, in facilitating and supporting lifelong connections between children and important people in their past? Explain. Why do you think lifelong connections are crucial considerations for children? How do you intend to address the need for lifelong connections of children who enter your home?

Activities Recommended to Strengthen Family Functioning

- 1) Locate an agency that supports and provides services to all members of the adoption community (child, birth parents, adoptive parents) and participates in their activities
- 2) Network with other resource families who engage in openness practices with birth families and discuss the positives and challenges they have had over the years.
- 3) Participate in visitation with birth parents or birth relatives, if applicable.
- 4) Locate a birth parent support group and request to talk to birth family members.
- 5) Develop a network of resources and supports to assist with the special needs of children who enter the home.

INDICATORS OF FAMILY FUNCTIONING

Strength:

- 1) Applicants have a strong, well-developed support system comprised of culturally acceptable helpers such as extended family, friends, neighbors, spiritual community, or other community groups.
- 2) Applicants' support system values and affirms the applicants' decision to foster or adopt.
- 3) Applicants demonstrate an ability to be flexible in their boundaries and welcome whatever assistance is offered from outside. Applicants readily seek outside help.
- 4) Within the family unit, members are able to be flexible in roles and responsibilities to accommodate changing family composition and situations.
- 5) Applicants value involvement with the child's primary family system as a way to promote reunification, continuity of care and connection and to minimize trauma, and the child's sense of loss and separation from his family of origin.
- 6) Applicants can explain how helping a child maintain connections with important people from his or her past minimizes the trauma of placement.
- 7) Applicants display comfort with diversity.

Minimal:

- 1) Applicants have a limited or only recently established support system. They tend to deal with problems internally and will ask for help as a last resort.
- 2) Applicants' family members have clearly delegated roles and responsibilities and feel confused or disrupted should the patterns temporarily change.
- 3) Applicants have some reservations about encounters with the primary family and do not fully understand how these contacts contribute to a child's cognitive and emotional well-being.
- 4) Applicants may recall the information given during Preservice training about the benefits of lifelong connections for children, but may not fully grasp the importance or feel fully committed to the concept.
- 5) Applicants have limited exposure to diversity and are not motivated to explore other cultures and perspectives.
- 6) Applicants have a preliminary understanding of childhood and adolescent development, including brain development.

Caution:

- 1) Applicants believe in managing their own affairs and resist intervention from outsiders, even when it would benefit the family. They may be open to sharing information about their foster child, but may be reluctant about sharing information concerning their biological child or themselves.
- 2) Roles and responsibilities are rigidly assigned and maintained. Family members are not flexible about carrying out one another's roles, even in emergency situations.
- 3) Applicants resist visitation or openness arrangements with the child's birth family members.

7 Parenting Skills and Abilities

Definition:

- 1) The ability to understand the parenting role and responsibilities for providing proper nurturing, care, and guidance to foster and adoptive children
- 2) The ability to provide activities for children and youth that are appropriate for age and level of functioning in an environment of normalcy
- 3) The ability to understand the complex and diverse issues, needs and behaviors of children who enter substitute care or adoptive placement
- 4) The ability and capacity to successfully parent children with special needs
- 5) The ability to determine what types of children applicants are best able to parent

Sample Questions:

- 1) What do you most enjoy about parenting? What do you dislike?
- 2) How does parenting fit into your day-to-day life? How might it interfere with other activities you also enjoy doing?
- 3) Tell me about your children. How are they alike? How are they different? Do you parent them differently? How? Why?
- 4) Have you ever had full-time responsibility for a child who had emotional or behavioral problems? Describe that experience to me. What did you like most about caring for the child? Least? What did you learn from this experience? What did you learn about yourself?

- 5) How do you currently handle sibling issues such as jealousy, fighting, and competition? What conversations have you had with your children about additional siblings?
- 6) What concerns do you have in integrating foster or adopted children with your biological children?
- 7) How do you define normalcy?
- 8) How have you helped children reach their developmental milestones? What preparations have you made or do you need to make to create a home environment of normalcy for foster and adopted children?
- 9) What is your understanding about brain development in children and adolescents?

Activities Recommended to Strengthen Family Functioning

- 1) Talk with a foster caregiver or adoptive parent to gain a more realistic perspective.
- 2) Seek additional training on child development, parenting techniques, or specialized topics (Example: sexual abuse, trauma and attachment).
- 3) Seek volunteer opportunities with children and teens (Example: tutoring, mentoring, coaching recreational sports, serving in the church nursery or with youth groups, etc.).
- 4) Consider becoming a respite care provider for their agency.

INDICATORS OF FAMILY FUNCTIONING

Strength:

- 1) Applicants gain pleasure, gratification and enjoyment from parenting. They view parenting as an important part of their lives and take pride in being a parent.
- 2) Applicants can accurately assess their strengths and limitations as a parent. Applicants can individualize children and their needs and respond to each child accordingly.
- 3) Applicants have had prior experience caring for and interacting with other people's children, including children who have had physical, emotional, or behavioral problems.
- 4) Applicants are familiar with the developmental tasks of young children. They can identify factors that enhance early child development and promote well-being. They understand the importance of normalcy in adolescent development, and have incorporated federal and state requirements on the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard for normalcy into their decision-making. They are able to explain the concept of brain plasticity.

- 5) Applicants can describe the kind of information from a child's history that can help determine appropriate parenting strategies.
- 6) Applicants can recognize the need to parent differently based upon the child's trauma history.

Minimal:

- 1) Applicants see parenting as labor-intensive, but also acknowledge the benefits. They experience a combination of frustration and joy. While they may enjoy parenting, they are often challenged to find a healthy balance between managing parenting time and obtaining adult time together with their spouse or partner.
- 2) Applicants can describe differences in their children but haven't been able to adjust parenting strategies to accommodate these differences.
- 3) Applicants have had limited experience parenting children and do not have a depth of knowledge about child development. However, they recognize the stress of caring for children with special needs, including sexual abuse, attachment challenges and a trauma history.
- 4) Applicants have never considered how foster care or adoption may affect their children but become concerned once it is brought to their attention.
- 5) Applicants realize they need to give more thought about how they intend to create an environment of normalcy for their foster or adopted child. They believe they will have ample time to do so at the onset of placement.
- 6) Applicants know that experiences shape the brain, but do not know how to apply the knowledge in their role as caregiver.

Caution:

- 1) Applicants provide basic care to children but are not enthusiastic and view parenting as work. They may have many outside interests and commitments and resent the time spent on parenting tasks.
- 2) Applicants lack insight into their strengths and limitations as parents.
- 3) Applicants are rigid in their expectations for children and are unable to see differences between children.
- 4) Applicants have no experience with children other than their own and no contact with children who have special needs.
- 5) Applicants advocate the use of corporal punishment or cruel discipline and deny the negative impact it would have on a child who has been abused, neglected, or sexually victimized.

- 6) Applicants deny that fostering or adopting will have any impact on their biological children and have not included them in any planning.
- 7) Applicants believe their home is “just fine” the way it is, and they are resistant to having to do anything additional to create an atmosphere of normalcy for children or youth.
- 8) Applicants do not believe that understanding brain plasticity relates to a child’s developmental well-being.
- 9) Applicants view any discussion about a child’s developmental tasks and brain plasticity as interesting, but irrelevant to their parenting needs.

8 Ability to Empathize with Others

Definition:

- 1) The ability to understand someone else’s perspective or point of view
- 2) The ability to relate to and understand another person’s situation, feelings, and motives

Sample Questions:

- 1) How can you tell when people in your family are upset? Mad? Sad? Happy?
- 2) Why do you think parents maltreat their children? How do you think they feel?
- 3) How do you think children feel about their abusive parents?
- 4) How would you explain the birth parents’ behavior to the child?
- 5) Tell me about a time that your opinion of someone changed after you met them and heard their story? In what way did it change? What was the contact or relationship like after that?
- 6) Tell me about a time when someone understood how you were feeling. Have you ever been able to provide that kind of support to someone else? When? How did you help?

Activities Recommended to Strengthen Family Functioning

- 1) Read *Dear Birthmother* and other resource material regarding birth families (http://www.amazon.com/Dear-Birthmother-Kathleen-Silber/dp/0931722209/ref=sr_1_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1439571196&sr=1-2).
- 2) Participate in a visitation with the child and his or her primary family.

INDICATORS OF FAMILY FUNCTIONING

Strength:

- 1) Applicants can recognize and properly interpret others' verbal, nonverbal and behavioral cues and can verbally articulate what another person is feeling. They can tell when other family members are distressed or need assistance.
- 2) Applicants can articulate empathy for a child's birth family and can understand the situation from the child's and the birth family's perspective.
- 3) Applicants are able to understand why the child would have strong and positive feelings towards parents who harmed or abandoned him.
- 4) Applicants understand the child's behavior is an expression of feelings and needs and is motivated to work hard to use cues to meet the child's needs.

Minimal:

- 1) Applicants rely on obvious behavioral cues or direct statements to determine others' needs or emotional states. They have limited insight into others' feelings and perceptions.
- 2) Applicants have a beginning or limited understanding and empathy for the child's family. They still may be critical or hostile at times.
- 3) Applicants can understand the child's perspective on a limited or beginning basis. They may be able to understand how a child could have an attachment to the birth family but lack insight into the positive or idealized feelings the child may have.
- 4) Applicants express limited understanding about indicators associated with a child who has experienced abuse, trauma, or loss; consequently, their responses to the child may be unintentionally harmful rather than helpful.

Caution:

- 1) Applicants are unable to identify others' feelings or perceptions and deny the importance of doing so.
- 2) Applicants resist knowing information about the child's birth family and background. They fear the child's family and wish to protect the child from them.
- 3) Applicants are openly critical and hostile towards the birth family.
- 4) Applicants resent the child's loyalty towards the birth family and will not let the child talk about his past.
- 5) Applicants seek attention, sympathy or applause from others for "putting up with" "ungrateful" children and a "demanding" child welfare system.

- 6) Applicants see misbehavior as an indication that the child needs punishment; the applicants see no connection between the child's behavior and underlying needs.

9 Understanding of Entitlement Issues

Definition:

- 1) The ability of adoptive parents to believe they have full rights and responsibilities to parent a child not born to them in the same manner as they would their birth child
- 2) The ability of adoptive parents to believe they can discipline their adopted child as they would their biological child
- 3) The ability of foster caregivers to make decisions for foster children and youth related to normal activities, using the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard

Sample Questions:

- 1) Have you ever cared for someone else's child? Were you able to parent the child as you would your own? Why or why not?
- 2) How do you plan to claim this child as part of your family?
- 3) What issues of entitlement do you believe will impact your ability as a foster or adoptive parent?
- 4) Describe a situation that required you to make a reasonable and prudent parent decision. What were the circumstances? What was the outcome?
- 5) Tell me about a time when you needed to make a decision that potentially might have had a favorable or an unfavorable outcome. What process did you use in your decision-making? Was it an independent decision, or did you rely on outside assistance? Who? What pressures were you up against? What was the outcome?

Activities Recommended to Strengthen Family Functioning

- 1) Talk to seasoned foster caregiver and adoptive parents for insights about parental rights and responsibilities.
- 2) Consult with their Assessor or other appropriate agency staff for questions regarding the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard.
- 3) Attend a foster caregivers or adoptive parent support group meeting to learn how experienced caregivers and parents have managed entitlement issues.
- 4) Review the [ODJFS Foster Care Youth Handbook](#) and resource articles on the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard.

INDICATORS OF FAMILY FUNCTIONING

Strength:

- 1) Applicants have experience in caring for someone else's child.
- 2) Applicants understand the emotional and legal differences between adoption and foster care.
- 3) Applicants understand that adoptive parents are primary parents. They also understand the primary parents of foster children are the birth parents.
- 4) Applicants understand the child's loyalty to, and connections with birth family members are not a threat to the child's attachment to the adoptive family.
- 5) Applicants understand their role and responsibilities to ensure that children and youth engage in developmentally-appropriate activities. They can make reasonable and sensible decisions concerning social, recreational, and enrichment activities for their foster children and youth.

Minimal:

- 1) Applicants have had limited experience in caring for someone else's child and have found some difficulty in feeling fully entitled to parent.
- 2) Applicants have a preliminary understanding of the emotional and legal differences between adoption and foster care, but may have difficulty making those distinctions in their parenting role.
- 3) Applicants have mixed feelings about the birth family's involvement in the permanency process, and may not value their importance in the child's life.
- 4) Applicants feel threatened by the child's loyalty to the birth family. The applicants express some trepidation regarding openness with birth family members but are open to considering ongoing connections.
- 5) Applicants want foster children and youth to have opportunities for normal growing-up experiences, but harbor fears of liability regarding federal and state requirements for normalcy; they prefer an agency-directed rather than a parent-directed approach to implementing the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard.

Caution:

- 1) Applicants have had no experience in caring for someone else's child.
- 2) Applicants deny the difficulty in assuming full parental rights and responsibilities and believe it will be "love at first sight."

- 3) Applicants see no emotional or legal differences between adoption and foster care.
- 4) Applicants believe that their parenting role and responsibility to the child is more important than the birth family's. They may make intentional efforts to disconnect the child from any contact with the past.
- 5) Applicants do not understand normalcy to be crucial to healthy child and adolescent development, nor do they recognize the consequences to the child and youth when this responsibility is neglected.

10 Ability and Willingness to take a Hands-On Parenting Approach

Definition:

- 1) The ability to take an active, rather than a passive, role in the day-to-day responsibilities of parenting
- 2) The ability to understand challenges faced by children from neglectful and chaotic home environments
- 3) The ability to identify a child's behavior as their primary communication tool

Sample Questions:

- 1) Describe your parenting style. What works for you? In what way have you made changes over time? Have you had to extensively care for the child of a friend or neighbor or relative? Describe that experience and how it might be different if you were the child's parent.
- 2) How were you disciplined? What strategies did your parents use that you would consider effective? Ineffective? Appropriate? Inappropriate?
- 3) Tell me about a time you have had to give a consequence to a child. What was it? What was the outcome? How did you feel about it?
- 4) How do you determine which methods of discipline are age-appropriate and child-specific?
- 5) How do you discipline other people's children? What disciplinary strategies are you most comfortable with? Which do you avoid?
- 6) What resources have you taken advantage of to help you build your parenting skills?
- 7) How much direction or supervision should parents offer children? At what point do you think it is too much?

Activities Recommended to Strengthen Family Functioning

- 1) Volunteer at church, with Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Scouts, in the school classroom, etc.
- 2) Spend time caring for a friend's child.
- 3) Take an online or classroom course on parenting strategies for adopted or foster children.

INDICATORS OF FAMILY FUNCTIONING:

Strength:

- 1) Applicants provide an appropriate amount of direction and supervision to their children and are able to adjust the level based on the needs of the child.
- 2) Applicants are comfortable being intrusive and controlling when necessary and view involvement as an integral component of parenting.
- 3) Applicants use appropriate interventions that promote positive development (attachment, self-regulation, and initiative).
- 4) Applicants are able to tailor parenting strategies to the developmental level of the child.
- 5) Applicants understand they must parent foster and adopted children differently than they may have parented their birth children.

Minimal:

- 1) Applicants provide a standard amount of direction and supervision to their children, but are unable to adjust the level based on the needs of the child.
- 2) Applicants recognize that they may need to be intrusive and controlling when parenting children with special needs but feel uncomfortable doing so.
- 3) Applicants will refrain from using physical punishment on children in care, but they do not fully understand why it is not allowed as a strategy for controlling a child's misbehavior.
- 4) Applicants are unsure about how to individualize parenting strategies to meet the needs of children, but they are motivated to learn more.

Caution:

- 1) Applicants provide very little direction and supervision to their children and believe children should be able to manage their own behavior or respond to verbal direction.
- 2) Applicants deny the need to be intrusive and controlling when parenting children with special needs.

- 3) Applicant's adhere to the philosophy of "spare the rod, spoil the child", and will resort to physical discipline when they think they can get away with it.
- 4) Applicants resort to rigid and indiscriminate parenting techniques to behaviorally manage children in their home; they do not establish clear expectations and are unable to model appropriate behaviors.

11 Ability to Make and Honor Commitments

Definition:

- 1) The capacity to make an unconditional commitment to the child during the good times and the bad; throughout developmental stages
- 2) The ability to make a lifelong commitment to a waiting child who is biologically unrelated (adoptive families)
- 3) The ability to see a child as a permanent family member (adoptive families)
- 4) The ability to identify long-term issues impacting parents who adopt children and those who foster children

Sample Questions:

- 1) Tell me about a time when you wanted to quit something that became very hard for you. What did you do? What was the outcome?
- 2) Tell me about a time when a commitment to you was broken and how you dealt with those feelings.
- 3) Do you know any foster or adoptive family that is struggling with the behavioral issues of their child? Did you observe any long-term effects? Explain.
- 4) Is there anything someone could do you would consider unforgivable, a behavior that would end the relationship?
- 5) Describe something to which you've made a lifelong commitment. What made it hard? Did you ever want to give up? What made you persevere?

Activities Recommended to Strengthen Family Functioning

- 1) Journal their struggles to keep their commitment.
- 2) Talk to foster care youth or alumni.

INDICATORS OF FAMILY FUNCTIONING

Strength:

- 1) Applicants have an extensive history of honoring commitments and have several long-term unbroken commitments despite obstacles or challenges.
- 2) Applicants are able to articulate a realistic breaking point in terminating a commitment.
- 3) Applicants can explain the importance of, and can recognize their role in placement stability and permanency needs of children.
- 4) Applicants can articulate why parental commitment is vitally important to children and youth.

Minimal:

- 1) Applicants have a limited or only recent history of honoring commitments and have one or two long-term unbroken commitments despite obstacles or challenges.
- 2) Applicants are able to articulate a breaking point in terminating a commitment, but it may be unrealistic or unreasonable to do so.
- 3) Applicants are young and have not had opportunity for a long-term commitment.

Caution:

- 1) Applicants lack any history of honoring commitments and have no long-term unbroken commitments.
- 2) Applicants cannot articulate a realistic breaking point in terminating a commitment and deny that this is important to foster caregiving or adoptive parenting.
- 3) Applicants have a history of multiple employment changes or terminated relationships with friends or family members.
- 4) Applicants display a pattern of avoiding conflict by ending, rather than repairing, relationships.

12 **Religious Affiliation and/or Spiritual Beliefs**

Definition:

- 1) The ability to respect belief systems different from one's own
- 2) The ability to support a child's right to practice religious traditions of their choice
- 3) The capacity to understand the need for private or corporate expressions of one's spiritual beliefs

Sample Questions:

- 1) Tell me about your religious or spiritual beliefs, viewpoints, or practices. Are you currently affiliated with any particular religious or spiritual group? If so, please identify the group. How often do you congregate?
- 2) Who do you turn to for guidance with religious or spiritual matters? What coping strategies do you find most beneficial?
- 3) What rules or values regarding religion did your family of origin have for children?
- 4) What areas of life do you suspect religion might affect? Give examples.
- 5) What has been your level of exposure to religious or spiritual diversity?
- 6) How have you responded to religious or spiritual viewpoints that do not reflect your value system?
- 7) What religious expectations or requirements do you have for children in your home? Describe any religious practices or beliefs you embrace that might influence your ability to care for children who come into care.
- 8) How have you managed differences with others concerning standards of morality, ethics, beliefs?

Activities Recommended to Strengthen Family Functioning

- 1) Review the State licensing rules about the requirements and expectations governing religion (OAC 5101:2-5-16).
- 2) Talk with individuals from the child's faith community for clarity about any religious or spiritual standards, practices, or restrictions.
- 3) Consider attending services different from their own to experience what worship is like for other faiths.
- 4) Talk to other foster caregivers or adoptive parents about managing religious differences.

INDICATORS OF FAMILY FUNCTIONING

Strength:

- 1) Applicants have had significant exposure to individuals from different religious backgrounds and are comfortable interacting with religiously diverse groups of people.
- 2) Applicants are able to honor and respect religious and spiritual diversity.
- 3) Applicants are open to becoming lifelong learners about the spiritual beliefs and practices of others.

- 4) Applicants welcome children into their home whose religious or spiritual backgrounds are different from their own. They are willing to meet the on-going needs of children who may require special accommodations (Example: daily obligatory prayers; meditation; alternate day of worship observance; dietary restrictions from certain foods, etc.)

Minimal:

- 1) Applicants have had limited contact with individuals or groups from diverse religious and spiritual backgrounds but are willing to learn more about the religious cultures of children placed in their home.
- 2) Applicants may complain about the “strange” religious or spiritual beliefs and practices of children placed in their home and express frustration if special considerations are required.
- 3) Applicants claim to be “flexible” in their religious views, but expect children to conform to the values, beliefs and practices of the home.

Caution:

- 1) Applicants have low or no tolerance for diverse beliefs and practices beyond their own.
- 2) Applicants make minimal effort to understand or value spiritual or religious diversity.
- 3) Applicants express tolerance for religious diversity, but may also set limits if those differences exceed their standards of “normal”.
- 4) Applicants may try to proselytize children into accepting their religious beliefs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*The following persons contributed to the development of the
Family Interview Guide:*

Denise Goodman

Kelley Gruber

Gayle Hahn

Betsy Smalley

Charlotte Osterman

Johanna Pearce

Judith Rycus

Arlene Samuel

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Learn Well.
 **Do Well.**



**Ohio Child Welfare
Training Program**