



FAMILY INTERVIEW GUIDE

A Guide for Foster Care Workers and
Adoption Assessors



Use of the Family Interview Guide

This guide will provide sample questions to guide your interviews with prospective adoptive and foster parents. 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 be formulated based on responses from the family members. These sample 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/adoption application process.

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

The Field Guide to Child Welfare, Vol. IV. Placement and
Permanence by J. Rycus and R. Hughes
(Child Welfare League of America Press, 1998)

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I. What is a Family Assessment?

A family assessment is a process by which a mutual determination is made by the adoption or foster care worker and a prospective foster/ adoptive family of their appropriateness and readiness for adoption. It is strength-based with the intent to “screen-in” applicants. We use family assessments to “rule families out” only about five percent of the time.

The family assessment process includes:

- Adoption education and development of families
- Exploration of values, expectations, and motivations
- Family self-assessment of strengths and limitations
- Agency determination of family’s capacity to provide safety and well-being for children
- Relationship-building between the family and the agency
- Preparation of the family for placement

Agencies use a variety of assessment opportunities including individual and family interviews, pre-service training and other group sessions, written autobiographies, and collateral contacts through references, credit reports, physical and mental health evaluations, and criminal record checks.

In addition to determining a family’s readiness for fostering or adoption, the family assessment has several other goals:

- To determine the type of child(ren) who would be most successfully placed with the applicant’s family
- To assure the needs of children will be met, and children will not be harmed by disrupted placements or maltreatment
- To identify family strengths, as well as limitations, so as to facilitate an appropriate “match” between child(ren) and family
- To explore motivations of the applicant’s family
- To prepare families for foster care and adoption

II. How Does Culture Impact the Assessment Process?

Cultural competence is necessary to adequately engage applicants throughout the assessment process. Cross-cultural skills in relationship-building and communication are essential during the interview process and greatly enhance the quality of the mutual assessment.

Adoption workers strive to be culturally competent to relate to persons from diverse cultures in a sensitive, respectful, and productive way. Prospective families should be assessed within their cultural context. To reduce the chance of an inaccurate assessment, workers must consider different communication and interaction styles, non-verbal behaviors, differences in the use and meaning of specific words and phrases, family roles and relationships, and home environments.

During the interview process, the assessor should be cognizant of possible cultural differences in communication between the applicants and the assessor. There are many ways to communicate, and these are greatly determined by one's culture.

Here are some examples of communication behaviors, which may vary from culture to culture:

See opposite page ⇨

Assessors must recognize how cultural differences may affect perception, communication, and the ability to interact with people whose cultural backgrounds are different from their own. When a worker of one culture interacts with a client from another, both will bring to the interaction their culturally prescribed patterns of communication, etiquette, and problem solving. Some cultural groups rely heavily on verbal communication, and others focus on non-verbal cues such as gestures, eye contact, and facial expressions.

Communication behavior	In some cultures, may mean . . .	In other cultures, may mean . . .
Maintaining eye contact	Respect, attentiveness, and trust	Challenge, hostility, disrespect
Avoiding eye contact	Deceit, lying, and inattentiveness	Deference, respect
Handshake	Welcome, greeting, initiation of a social relationship	Strange, other forms of greeting, such as bowing or nodding, are preferred
Formality in attire, social graces, forms of address (Mr./Mrs./Ms)	Business attire and formal forms of address communicate respect and business like attitude	Casual attire, use of first names, and informal social graces communicate friendliness, acceptance

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/adoptive applicants include:

- Respect the family's culture
- Determine how the applicants prefer to be addressed
- Determine where the family feels most comfortable in holding interviews
- Ask open-ended questions that are general in nature to allow the 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 pets
- Be sure to answer the family's questions and address their concerns during each contact

IV. Interviewing Methods

The worker should utilize a variety of interviewing techniques. The adoption worker must develop culturally competent, effective, and efficient verbal, non-verbal and observational skills. There are a number of interviewing techniques employed by protective services workers that are effective when interviewing foster/adoptive applicants.

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

V. Ten Assessment Categories

1. **Motivation and expectations of adoption** - the ability to understand appropriate and inappropriate reasons for adoption with anticipated outcomes as determined by two basic questions: Why do you want to adopt? And why do you want to adopt now?
2. **Personal and emotional maturity** - the ability to put another's needs before one's own without feeling personally threatened or experiencing severe emotional stress.
3. **Stability and quality of interpersonal relationships** - the ability to develop, maintain, and sustain healthy interpersonal relationships. In a two-parent home, the relationship of the parents must be strong enough to withstand the demands of parenting.
4. **Resilience, coping skills, and history of stress management** – the ability to function productively in high stress situations. Foster/adoptive parents should have a variety of effective strategies to cope with the changes and stresses inherent in the adoption process.
5. **Openness of family system** - the 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.
6. **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 adopted from the foster care system can present additional challenges.
7. **Empathy and perspective-taking ability** – the ability to understand someone else's perspective or point of view. Likewise, empathy (the ability to relate to and understand another person's situation, feelings, and motives) is particularly important when parenting children who come from backgrounds of abuse or neglect.
8. **Entitlement** - the foster/adoptive parents' ability to believe that they have full rights and responsibilities to parent a child not born to them. Feeling entitled allows the parent to lovingly discipline, to make important decisions, to intervene on behalf of their child, and to feel they are the child's primary and permanent parents.

9. “Hands-on” parenting ability– the ability to be highly involved in the day-to-day routine of the child. Parenting children with backgrounds of abuse or neglect or institutionalization often requires close supervision, interactive instruction, modeling, redirection, and purposeful play to build attachments.

10. Lifelong commitment - the ability to see the child as a permanent family member. This category includes exploration of long term identity issues common to adoptees, issues of birth family search and reunions, “leaving the nest,” and expectations for future education, self-sufficiency, family connections, etc.

VI. Assessment Levels

Not every applicant family is capable of fostering 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 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, and at what point on the continuum they currently are. The family may be 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 of development.

VII. Large Family Assessment

The State of Ohio requires a large family assessment whenever a prospective adoptive family will have five or more children (ages 0-18) in the home upon the placement of the prospective adopted child(ren). If there will be five or more birth, kinship, foster, or adopted children in the home, a large family assessment is required. The large family assessment evaluates the ability of the family to meet the needs of the prospective adoptive child while continuing to meet the needs of children already in the home.

Issues to consider in a large family assessment include:

- Living space arrangements
- Children currently in the home (ages, personalities, special needs, attitudes of children toward the proposed adoption)
- The prospective adoptive child (special needs)
- 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)
- Resources and supports (support from extended family and community, resources available in community, financial stability of family)
- Family history and experience (length of time since last placement, placement history of prospective adoptive home, demonstrated ability to assure prospective child's safety and well-being)
- References (additional references from professionals or service providers regarding the family's ability to meet the needs of children)

VIII. No No's

“No No's” refer to harmful behaviors that should automatically preclude an applicant from becoming a foster/adoptive parent. There are very few categorical reasons for denial. These few reasons include:

- Histories of sexually abusive behaviors such as pedophilia, voyeurism or exhibitionism put children at risk of further abuse. The motivation of the applicants might very well be sexual gratification.
- Current substance abuse in either parent creates a chaotic and unpredictable home environment inappropriate and threatening to the adopted child. The home environment may also be unsafe due to drug trafficking activities or neglect when parents are “high.”
- Severe mental illness which would interfere with either parent's ability to meet the child's needs. Illnesses that are untreated or not controlled with medication such as borderline personality, bipolar disorder, chronic depression, paranoia, mood disorders or schizophrenia severely limit a person's capacity to parent. In addition, the presence of unrestrained compulsive disorders in either parent such as compulsive gambling or overspending, eating disorders, substance abuse, or intermittent explosive disorder are inappropriate placements for any special needs child due to the dangerous and disorganized parental lifestyles that result from these disorders.
- Current, ongoing domestic violence which involves physical or emotional abuse directed toward any member of the family.

IX. 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 family be assessed individually as rigid and over-generalized standards prevent assessors from understanding the wide variance in situations of applicant's families. 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 perpetration of abuse or neglect on children, violent acts, long-term patterns of social misconduct, drug use or sales, etc. (See Rehabilitation Standards on the next page to determine under what circumstances an individual with felony convictions might be considered for foster or adoptive parenting.)

Unresolved personal issues related to childhood victimization will resurface when parenting. These issues may be related to physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, abandonment or rejection. Unresolved issues may cause a repeat of abuse and neglect or render the parent incapable of healthy caregiving.

History of substance abuse, mental illness or impulse control disorders. At times, it may be necessary to require a professional opinion regarding past history of substance abuse, mental illness, a serious medical condition or impulse control disorders. It is not uncommon for an agency to request that an applicant complete a psychological or medical exam, substance abuse screening, or sign a release of information for the agency to obtain past records. Agencies require fingerprinting and may require police checks of all applicants. Workers are frequently hesitant to request that applicants produce documentation or to require a professional screening. However, in situations that require a more in-depth assessment, these activities must be conducted

to assure that children are placed in appropriate adoptive homes where their needs will be met on a permanent basis and where they will be free from emotional or physical harm.

Rigid or inflexible beliefs (e.g., about birth parents unable to parent their children, behavioral problems of children in care, cultural differences, social conditions leading up to placement of children, the need for professional support systems for the child or family) could be indicators of potential problems in the family's adjustment to normative adoptive family issues.

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 assure that discipline, nurturance, or supervision problems have been addressed and resolved.

A history of mental/emotional (including depression, personality disorders, anxiety) could be indicators of threats to the child's safety. To assure a prospective child will be safe, and the prospective parent has the capacity to meet the demands of parenting, assessors may require the applicant to provide a statement from a therapist, indicating the individual's current level of functioning, 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 candidate's ability to meet the needs of a child. Assessors may ask candidates to provide additional information or recommendations from health care providers regarding the impact of parenting on the prospective parent's physical health as well as an assessment of the candidate's 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?

X. Rehabilitation Standards

According to Ohio Administrative Code (5101:2-48-10), the following factors must be considered when an applicant for foster care or adoption has a felony conviction. To be approved, a foster/adoptive applicant must meet the following rehabilitation standards:

1. The victim of the offense cannot be under age 18 or over age 60, developmentally delayed or mentally ill at the time of the offense;
2. The applicant's age at the time of the offense is a consideration: the younger the applicant at the time of the offense, the more likely the applicant will be approved;
3. The nature and seriousness of the offense: lesser and non-violent offenses are less problematic than serious or violent offenses;
4. The circumstances under which the offense was committed including mitigating circumstances which surrounded the offense;
5. The degree to which the applicant participated in the offense: if the applicant was only passively involved (in the car at the time of a robbery, for example), the applicant is more likely to be approved;
6. The time elapsed since the applicant was fully discharged from imprisonment, probation, or parole (must be at least 10 years for a felony, 3 years for a misdemeanor);
7. The likelihood that the circumstances leading to the offense will recur;
8. Whether the applicant is a repeat offender;
9. The applicant's employment record: if the applicant has a history of stable employment, s/he can meet a higher standard of rehabilitation;
10. The applicant's efforts at rehabilitation and the results of those efforts;
11. Whether any criminal proceedings are pending against the applicant: if charges are currently unresolved, it is unlikely that the applicant can be considered for adoption at this time;
12. Any other factors the PCSA, PCPA, or PNA considers relevant.

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

XI. Description of Assessment Forms

The joint foster care/adoption home study document JFS 01673, (Assessment for Child Placement) which became available in Ohio in 1996, made it possible for an applicant to be simultaneously approved for both foster care and adoption. The JFS 01673, also known as the Homestudy, is a comprehensive tool used to determine an applicant's readiness and appropriateness for foster and/or adoptive parenting.

Through a joint decision-making process between the assessor and prospective family, this instrument gathers both factual and assessment data about the family, and explores child characteristics most compatible with the family's parenting preferences and abilities.

A completed family assessment must include the following attachments:

- Medical statements for all household members signed by a licensed physician
- Four personal reference statements (three from non-relatives)
- A fire inspection by a state certified fire safety inspector
- A safety audit
- A financial statement
- Criminal background checks (BCI and, if applicable FBI reports)
- Completed water test, if required

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

The assessment is valid for a period of six years beyond the initial approval date. Two additional updates to the original homestudy are required within the six-year time frame at two-year intervals. Updates must be completed on the JFS 01385 ("Assessment for Child Placement Update"). An amendment to the homestudy is required when the following situations occur:

- A change in the marital status of an approved adoptive applicant
- A significant change in the health status of an approved adoptive applicant
- The placement or finalization of an adopted child
- The birth of a child
- The death of a child or household member
- A criminal conviction of an approved adoptive applicant
- A change in the number of adult household members
- A family's relocation

XII. Writing the Assessment

The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 reduced geographic barriers nationwide. Adoptive families are locating children on the Internet and are having their homestudies sent across state lines. In all inter-agency adoptions, and in many intra-agency adoptions, one social worker is depending on another social worker to provide complete, clear and accurate information about a prospective adoptive family in order to make a lifelong decision for a child.

The removal of programmatic and geographic lines requires that every assessor possess superb writing skills. Too often, the written document of mutual assessment is done as quickly as possible. However, it is critical that the document is well written, descriptive, concise and clear in order 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.”

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.

DEFINITIONS, SAMPLE QUESTIONS AND INDICATORS OF FAMILY FUNCTIONING

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

1) MOTIVATION/EXPECTATIONS OF ADOPTION

DEFINITION:

1. Applicants' vision for the adoption/foster care experience
2. Applicants' reasons to adopt/foster (Why are they planning and hoping to become foster/adoptive parents?)

SAMPLE QUESTIONS:

1. Why have you decided to pursue adoption/foster care at this time? What influences have others had on this decision? (friends, family who are foster parents)?
2. Tell me about your first conversation about fostering or adopting? Who brought it up? What was your spouse's initial response? Has this changed over time?
3. (For a single applicants) With whom did you first share your decision to foster or adopt? Why that person? What was his or her response?
4. How have you and your partner handled the decision to apply for foster care/adoption?
5. What are four 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?

OTHER SOURCES OF ASSESSMENT DATA:

1. Observation of applicants' enthusiasm and interest in completing preservice training, required paperwork, scheduling assessment interviews.

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 their 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 have realistic expectations of child, themselves, and their foster care/adoption experience.
4. Applicants have experienced unmet expectations in another area of life and have grown from that experience.

MINIMAL:

1. Applicants have not fully considered the ramifications of adoption on their marriage, their children, or themselves.
2. One applicant is very interested and involved, 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/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.

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 or spouse.
5. Applicants show a pattern of quitting something that did not meet their own personal needs or expectations.

SECOND LOOK FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES:

1. Applicants are asked to talk with a foster or adoptive parent for a more realistic perspective.
2. Applicants are asked to read selections from the "Suggested Reading List" handout from the Adoption Preservice.

2) PERSONAL AND EMOTIONAL MATURITY

DEFINITION:

1. The ability to put another's needs before one's own without feeling personally threatened
2. Strong and positive self-esteem
3. The ability to care for oneself emotionally
4. The ability to cope with challenges

SAMPLE QUESTIONS:

1. Have you worked toward a goal for a long time? What was it? Did you continue or give up? Why?
2. 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? What was it? 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. Describe your dating relationship (if single).
8. How do you manage your own feelings of anger? How do you manage the angry feelings of others?

OTHER SOURCES OF ASSESSMENT DATA:

1. References
2. Employment history
3. Financial management/credit report
4. Current and former therapists or counselors

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 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, finances.
3. Applicants cannot delay gratification or work toward a goal.
4. Applicants are egocentric; do not consider others' feelings.
5. Applicants are easily frustrated and have poor emotional control as demonstrated by inappropriate statements, outbursts of temper, etc.

SECOND LOOK FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES:

1. Applicants are asked to releast confidential information from an exsisting or former therapist.
2. Applicants are asked to complete a psychological exam with a provider of the assessor's choosing.

3) 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 history. How did you meet your 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. Why did you terminate them? 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. Describe your dating relationships (if applicants are single).
8. Who do you rely on for support when you need it? How have they helped you in the past?

OTHER SOURCES OF ASSESSMENT DATA:

1. Observation of interaction with assessor; others in family
2. Content of personal and employment references
3. Discussion with preservice trainer about social interaction with other applicants during training
4. Current and former therapists or counselors

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. Applicant's relationship with a spouse or partner is moderately stable. There is limited time together in a developing relationship—still adjusting.
2. The couple has differences they cannot resolve; they are able to tolerate this dissention but lack the ability to compromise on issues.
3. A single applicant has 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. Parents do not work as a team, and roles are rigidly assigned with no flexibility.
4. Applicants find it challenging to openly express affection within their family's cultural context.
5. Extended family or friends are adamantly opposed to the applicants' plan to foster or adopt.
6. Applicants lack an external support system and will either have to develop a new support system or meet all of their own needs internally.
7. Applicants deny the need for external support.

SECOND LOOK FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES:

1. Applicants are asked to complete a psychological assessment with a provider of their assessor's choosing.

4) RESILIENCE, COPING SKILLS, AND HISTORY OF STRESS MANAGEMENT

DEFINITION:

1. Stamina and the ability to handle stress and chaos
2. A variety of coping strategies and adaptive behaviors

SAMPLE QUESTIONS:

1. In the last five years, what changes have you experienced personally or as a family? How did you navigate through them?
2. Tell me about a time in the past few years when you or your family was tested by a crisis or pressure. What was it? How was it resolved?
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. Tell me about your hardest loss? Why was it so hard? What helped? How long did it take for you to grieve? How did you know you were on the road to normalcy again?
6. How do you know when you are getting stressed out? What are the physical, emotional, social or cognitive cues for you?

OTHER SOURCES OF ASSESSMENT DATA:

1. Observation of applicants in dealing with the stress of the application, training and homestudy process
2. Review of applicants' personal and job references

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, 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.

MINIMAL:

1. Applicants have experienced few stressful situations and seemed to have managed satisfactorily; however, they have yet to be faced with a serious crisis or traumatic event.
2. Applicants have few (or no) outside supports and must depend on themselves to manage difficult situations.

CAUTION:

1. Applicants may minimize or deny experiencing a stressful or traumatic situation.
2. Applicants' descriptions of stressful situations indicate poor coping or adaptive capacity. They lack adequate ability to manage and resolve changes, losses, or trauma.
3. 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.

SECOND LOOK FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES:

1. Applicants are asked to explore resources to help support families with children with special needs.

5) OPENNESS OF FAMILY SYSTEM

DEFINITION:

1. Ability to be flexible in family boundaries
2. Adaptability to challenges from within and outside the family system
3. Receptiveness to outside help when the family is experiencing stress and chaos

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?
3. What community resources have you used to help you solve a problem? How do you feel about using outside helpers?
4. Who did your parents rely on for help when you were a child?
5. How supportive will your extended family or friends be as you foster or adopt?
6. Who in your family will best understand the needs you will have with a child who demonstrates behavioral problems, has been sexually abused, or experiences many developmental delays?
7. In your family, how have you handled differing viewpoints around personal values, religion, politics, lifestyles, etc.?
8. What experience have you had caring for, or relating to, a child who is not biologically related to you?
9. 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?
10. What challenges do you anticipate your extended family may have in integrating foster or adopted children into the family with other biological nieces, nephews, or cousins?

OTHER SOURCES OF ASSESSMENT DATA:

1. Observation of applicants with others during training
2. Observation of applicants' ability to form a relationship with the assessor and welcome the assessor into the home
3. Content of personal and employment references

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 supports 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 situation.

MINIMAL:

1. Applicants have a limited, or only recently established, support system. The family tends 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.

CAUTION:

1. Applicants believe in managing their own affairs and resist intervention from outsiders, even when it would benefit the family.
2. Roles and responsibilities are rigidly assigned and maintained. Family members are not flexible about carrying out one another's roles, even in emergent situations.

SECOND LOOK FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES:

1. Applicants are asked to explore resources to help support families with children with special needs.

6) PARENTING SKILLS AND ABILITIES

DEFINITION:

1. Ability to care for children and provide the necessary nurturing, discipline, and guidance appropriate for the age and functioning level of the child
2. Capacity to successfully parent a child with special needs
3. Ability to determine what types of children they 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? Does it interfere with anything you would rather be 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 were you disciplined? What strategies did your parents use that you would consider effective? Ineffective? Appropriate? Inappropriate?
6. Describe how you normally discipline your own children. Why did you choose those particular strategies?
7. How do you discipline other people's children? What disciplinary strategies are you most comfortable with? Which do you avoid?
8. How do you determine which methods of discipline are age-appropriate and child-specific?
9. How do you currently handle sibling issues such as jealousy, fighting, and competition? How will your children handle additional siblings?
10. What concerns do you have in integrating foster or adopted children with your biological children?

OTHER SOURCES OF ASSESSMENT DATA:

1. Observation of the applicants interacting with birth children
2. Observation of the applicants in training, response to case studies, reaction to videos, participation in group or experiential activities
3. Content of personal and employment references

INDICATORS OF FAMILY FUNCTIONING

STRENGTH:

1. Applicants gain pleasure, gratification and enjoyment from parenting activities. They view parenting as an important part of their lives and take pride in being a parent. Applicants enjoy activities involved 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.
4. Applicants have had prior experience parenting other people's children, including children who have had physical, emotional or behavioral problems.

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.
4. Applicants have never considered how foster care or adoption may affect their children but are concerned once it is brought to their attention.

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.

SUGGESTED SECOND LOOK ACTIVITIES:

1. Applicants are asked to talk with a foster or adoptive parent to gain a more realistic perspective.
2. Applicants are asked to seek additional training on child development or parenting techniques.

7) EMPATHY AND PERSPECTIVE-TAKING ABILITY

DEFINITION:

1. Ability to understand someone else's perspective or point of view
2. 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?

OTHER SOURCES OF ASSESSMENT DATA:

1. Observation of applicants with others during training
2. Observation of applicants' ability to be empathetic during the training sessions
3. Content of personal and employment references
4. Observation of applicants' reaction to a birthparent speaker during preservice training

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 biological family and can understand the situation from the child's and the biological 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.

MINIMAL:

1. Applicants rely on obvious behavioral cues or direct statements to determine others' needs or emotional states. They have limited insight into other's 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.

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.

SUGGESTED SECOND LOOK ACTIVITIES:

1. Applicants are asked to read *Dear Birthmother* and other resource material regarding birth families.

8) ENTITLEMENT

DEFINITION:

1. Ability to believe that they have full rights and responsibilities to parent a child not born to them
2. Belief that they can discipline the child as they would their biological child

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. How do you believe entitlement issues will impact foster/ adoptive parenting?

OTHER SOURCES OF ASSESSMENT DATA:

1. Observation of applicants with others during training
2. Observation of applicants' ability to feel entitled to parent during the application and home study process
3. Content of personal and employment references

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.

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.

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.

SUGGESTED SECOND LOOK ACTIVITIES:

1. Applicants are asked to talk to seasoned foster/adoptive parents for insights about parental rights and responsibilities.

9) ABILITY FOR *HANDS-ON* PARENTING

DEFINITION:

1. Ability to take an active, rather than a passive, role in the day-to-day responsibilities of parenting
2. Ability to understand challenges faced by children from neglectful and chaotic home environments

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 a friend's/neighbor's/relative's child(ren)? Describe that experience and how it might be different if you were the child's parent.
2. 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?
3. What resources have you taken advantage of to help you build your parenting skills?
4. How much direction/supervision should parents offer children? At what point do you think it is too much?

OTHER SOURCES OF ASSESSMENT DATA:

1. Observation of applicants with others during training
2. Observation of applicants during training when responding to case studies, small group process, etc.
3. Observation of applicants' interaction with birth children
4. Content of personal and employment references

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.

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.

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.

SUGGESTED FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES:

1. Applicants are asked to volunteer at church, with Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Scouts, in the school classroom, etc.
2. Applicants are asked to spend time caring for a friend's child.

10) LIFELONG (UNCONDITIONAL) COMMITMENT

DEFINITION:

1. Ability to make a lifelong commitment to a child who is biologically unrelated
2. Capacity to make an unconditional commitment to the child during the good times and the bad, throughout developmental changes

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/adoptive family that is struggling with the behavioral issues of their child? If so, what are your thoughts about it?
4. Is there anything someone could do you would consider unforgivable 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?

OTHER SOURCES OF ASSESSMENT DATA:

1. Observation of applicants' responses to case studies, group exercises, experiential exercises, etc. during training
2. Observation of applicants' ability to make a commitment to the training, application, and homestudy process
3. Content of personal and employment references

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.

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.

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 adoptive parenting.

SUGGESTED SECOND LOOK ACTIVITIES:

1. Applicants are asked to make a commitment to join a group (gym, Weight Watchers, volunteer at a hospital).
2. Applicants are asked to journal their struggles to keep their commitment.

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