

Trainer Handout 2-1 C

Suggested Open-Ended Questions

Helping Families Tell their Story:

Sample Questions:

- It would help me to know more about your family to hear you tell me a little bit about how things have gone. Could you walk me through important events, starting when things were going really well for you?
- What has your life been like in the past year? Have there been any big events or changes? If so, how have you and your child(ren) been dealing with these changes?
- I've shared the reasons for our involvement in your lives: I know this process is very intrusive. What are some of the things you would like me to know as we move forward?
- How would you describe what is happening in your family as a result of this issue?
- How do you make sense of what is happening in your family right now?
- When you think about your family going through tough times, what are some of the experiences you have had? What helped you get through those times? Is any of that still in place or available to you now (personal strengths, family supports, etc).
- If you have been involved in services before, what worked best for you? What didn't work? How can that inform the way we work together from here?
- How would your child(ren) describe the best parts of your family? What do you think s/he would like to change?
- What do you want to see for yourself and your family six months from now? A year from now?
- What do you think would be the best way to move forward and make things better for your family?
- How can I help you make sure that our involvement in your family helps you get to some of your own goals?

Exception Finding Questions:

- You have said that things are not always like this: can you tell me more about the other times?
- When was the last time this issue came up? How have you managed to avoid or address this issue since then? What have you tried?
- Sounds like you have been through some tough times before: what did you do in the past that seemed to work for you and your family?
- Seems like you have gone a long time without being involved with the child welfare system: what was going well then that we could build on now?

Things to Look for:

- Identify the strengths and past successes of the family.
- Identify if this is a lapse or if the reasons for involvement relate to a progression of issues for the family.
- Notice the quality of connection between parent and child.
- Notice whether the parent has empathy for how the child is experiencing the current situation.

Success factors on which you can build:

- Bonding and connection between parents.
- Stories about positive interactions.
- Stories about changes that the family has already tried or made
- Parental willingness to set aside defensiveness and think about the needs of the child.
- Parental ability to make the connection between the parents' actions and the child(ren)'s response and functioning.

Concerns:

- Blaming the child for events or involvement.
- Unrealistic expectations of the child, particularly related to developmental age and special conditions.

Safety:**Sample Questions:**

- Okay, we both see the need to make your child safe. What I'm really interested in are the ideas you have for doing this.
- How can we help you makes things better and make your child safer?
- What do you suppose you, your partner, the child, and other family members can do to increase safety?
- Let's suppose we could do anything to make your child safer: what would that be?
- In your opinion, what would it take to make your child safer?
- When we ask your son what would make him feel safer, what do you think he will say?
- At times that your child has felt most safe, from your standpoint, what was going on?

When Parent does not agree on safety concerns:

- What are your goals for your family: how could you go about meeting those goals without crossing into what the agency would consider unsafe? How can I help you?
- On a scale of 1-10: where 10 means you are willing to do anything to keep your child safer and 1 means you are unwilling to do or consider anything, where would you put yourself? What would it take to move up?

Things to notice:

- Parent's assessment of safety once trust is established.
- Parent's measure of what would need to be in place for parent and for child.
- Parent ability to have empathy for child.
Strengths to build on:
 - Parents' ability to see safety as a concern.
 - Parents' willingness to identify how to establish and maintain safety.
 - Previous efforts to keep child safe, even if ineffective or sporadic, provide a basis for growth.

Parenting:**Sample Questions:**

- When you think about important decisions you have made as a parent, what comes to mind?
- What do you think you have done that has been the most important for your children? How can you tell?
- Most of us, growing up, think of things we definitely WILL do that our parents did, and things we definitely WONT do. What are some of those things, from your standpoint, that you bring forward from your own childhood.
- Parenting is not something you wake up and know how to do... sometimes our instincts kick in and other times, we may struggle to figure things out. What are some of the things that come naturally? What are some of the areas where you have reached out for advice or help?
- What is the time of day when you and your children seem to have the best connection? For example, after school, dinner, bedtime?
- What if any time or part of the daily routine seems tough in your family?
- Scaling question—On a scale of 1-10, 1 being not at all and 10 being completely, how would you rate yourself in terms of where you are in comparison with where you want to be in parenting?
 - Any times when it was lower? What helped you raise it?
 - What would it take to move up to 9 or 10?
- Can you walk me through a day in your family/household?
- If one of your kids is being really difficult, what is one creative way you have used to deal with the behavior?

- What can your kids do to really push your buttons? What makes that so for you?
- Describe a great memory you have of your family?
- How would you describe each of your children?
- When is a time when your child was very successful: what part did you play in that success?
- What are ways that you show love to your children?
- Who taught you to be a parent?
- Who is your biggest influence as a parent?
- What do you like about being a parent? What have you learned from the experience?
- If you were describing yourself to others, what sorts of things would you say you are good at?
- How do you usually solve family problems? Who does what?
- What do you do to help yourself deal with the pressures of raising children?

Things to look for:

- Individualization of parenting based on children's needs
- Positive view of children

Strengths you can build on:

- Humor about children's behaviors, finding the tenderness and humor in parenting moments.
- Understanding of the parenting issues that brought them into the system.
- Willingness to modify parenting or try new ideas
- Parent is willing and able to parent
- Can identify and find family members who can be of help and provide relief and advice.

Concerns:

- Adamant or rigid about parenting style
- Child has taken on the parenting role in the family.
- Parent has unrealistic expectations for the child.
- Lack of consistent parenting or supervision
- Responds negatively, harshly, tone of voice is generally angry or harsh.
- Excludes the child
- Negative to normal developmental behaviors.

Sample Questions:

- What family members are you close to?
- Who can you rely on?
- Who helps you when you are stressed out?
- Who do you trust?
- Do you visit your relatives? What do you consider home?
- Who do you consider family?

- For a Native American Family, Are you connected to any tribe or family?
- Are you involved with any church or community group?
- In times when you have needed help in the past, who was there for you?
- Are there people who are special to your children?
- Do your children have friends or supports through school or activities? Is this someone you can turn to?

Things to look for:

- Supports and connections.
- Parent involvement outside of the home.

Strengths to build on:

- Family ability to ask for help.
- Extended family or community who may be of help during the change process.
- Extended family or community, even if out of the area, who could be of help from a distance.

Concerns:

- Recent death or loss of a family member that served as a support system.
- Does not seem to trust anyone to get close
- Lives in geographically isolated area
- If exploring care resource, can and will this person meet the safety and well being needs of the child?

Understanding Child Needs:

Sample Questions:

- Based on the child's experiences, what do they need?
- What do you think that your child needs?
- With whom is it important to this child to stay connected.

For the child:

- What do you think you need?
- If you had three wishes, what would they be?
- Are there times that you feel scared... what is happening then? Who is around?
- What is the best time at home?
- What is the worst time at home?
- What are you good at?
- What do you love to do?
- What do you like about school—what is your favorite subject in school?
- Is it easy to make friends? Do you have a close friend? What do you do together?
- What would you like to see change about your family?

Things to look for:

- Sources of safety for the child.
- Individualization of parenting and community/school supports for child
- Toys and activities that are age appropriate
- Child knows rules about safety, ie. Need for supervision, not to talk to strangers, etc.

Strengths to build on:

- Child identifies safety in the home, with a parent or a sibling.
- Child can identify good times at home
- Child has connections and a sense of what s/he needs.

Considerations and areas to explore:

- Special physical or developmental needs and considerations.
- Level of care required to meet child's needs compared with parents' functioning.

Medical and Dental Needs:**Sample Questions:**

- Does your family have a medical provider? When were you last able to see him/her?
- Do you or any family member have any health conditions we should know about?
- Has anyone in your family been sick lately?
- Has your health ever held you back from getting a job or taking care of your children?
- Are there any medications that you/your family members are taking?
- Have you and/or your children been to the dentist? Last visit?
- Do you have any worries about your own health?
- Do you have any worries about your children's health?

Things to watch for:

- Possible untreated medical conditions that can interfere with functioning.
- Changes in health or functioning that have impacted family functioning
- Medical conditions that limit parental ability to care for child
- Financial or medical needs that keep family from managing condition.
- Child's medical needs place stress on the family, physically, emotionally, and/or financially.

Strengths to build on:

- Regular medical care.
- Parental knowledge of own or child's condition

- Involvement with providers and/or peer groups that support addressing the medical condition.
- Neighbors or friends who can be of help in an emergency.
- Ability to advocate for child or for self.

References:

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