Conducting QSR interviews

The first step in preparing to engage in QSR interviews is to participate in an organized training program for reviewers. It is vital that reviewers understand the whole QSR process and not attempt to "just do it". Reaching a level of knowledge and comfort with the QSR protocol and scoring system will permit the reviewer to focus more on the quality of the interviews, and less on their own anxiety.

The following list is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to remind interviewers about important aspects of the QSR interviews.

- **Prepare for interview by being oriented to basic facts.**
  Before any interviews start, try to be sure that you are oriented to the basic facts of the case. A brief review of the record, with an emphasis on key documents such as assessments, service plans, and the most recent progress notes will be helpful. When possible, having copies of key documents will be helpful both with interviews and, later, with writing your case story. The initial interview with the worker will also help you to fix important basic information about the case in your mind, so that is less likely that you will be confused about basic information such as names, relationships, and the roles of different people in the case.

- **Explain the QSR process.**
  Every interview should begin with a polite introduction and a brief explanation of the purpose of the interview and the importance of the person you are interviewing to understanding how the case is progressing. The introduction provides an opportunity to clarify that the QSR is intended to improve services to children and families, that it is not an audit or an investigation, and that (with the exception of mandatory reporting) the person interviewed may ask that information shared be held in confidence. The detail and formality of the introduction will depend on whom you are talking to.

- **Consider how to best engage children/families.**
  Often, it's possible to get assistance with some starting ideas about how to engage individuals you will interview. For example, your initial interview with the worker could provide you with the opportunity to ask about how to engage a particular parent or child. The worker might tell you that the child really hates school, so you might want to start with some opening line other than, "How are you doing in school?"

- **Be attentive to clues about family culture.**
  As with good case practice, engagement is an important starting point. Look for opportunities to put the person that you talking to at ease. Be respectful and attentive to cues about family culture. Sometimes, cues in the environment will provide an informal starting place -- is the home filled with family pictures?, is the child's room decorated in a Sponge Bob Square pants motif?, does the family have a tropical fish aquarium?, is there special collection of eagles?

- **Know what you need to learn from person interviewed.**
Remember that there is no script for the interviews. Every interview will be individualized to the particular needs and requirements of the case, and of the person to be interviewed.

- **Allow each person to tell their story**
  A key principal is to allow the person being interviewed to tell their own story in their own way. In most cases, the broadest possible opening questions allow the greatest freedom to assess the priorities and interests of the person you are talking to rather than immediately "telegraphing" your own interests and priorities. Broad, open-ended questions permit the person you are talking to "to tell their story". For example, *"Can you help me understand how your family became involved with the child welfare agency?"* is less directive than, "Tell me about how your daughter was abused." Similarly, asking a therapist, *"What do you think is the most important thing to understand about this case?"* permits the therapist to go in a lot more directions than, "What do you think about this child's diagnosis?"

As the interview progresses, you will often learn much of what you need to know through engaging in a conversation; without asking many direct questions. Often, reflection, summarization, and specific attending skills will be sufficient to move a conversation along and to gain a great deal of information. Solution focused questions often elicit ideas that help you to understand how the other person sees the issues in the case. For example, *"What would need to happen for you to feel safe at school?"* is likely to be more evocative and informative than, "Do you need anger management classes?"

Toward the end of the interview, it may be necessary to ask more direct questions to fill in important information. By this point, however, you have had the opportunity to assess what the person you are interviewing thinks is important -- the things that are foremost in their mind.

It is always helpful to preserve a few minutes at the end of the interview to ask specifically if there is anything that has been missed or overlooked that might be important to understand.

If there is information that might be expected to be emotional or anxiety producing, the end of the interview is a better place to address these issues than the beginning. There has been time to build trust and respect; and if broaching the issue causes the person to "clam up", you will have accomplished most of your interview.

- **You want to understand the perspective of everyone you interview on every important issue.**
  The QSR is not a "fill in the blank" exercise. For example, the worker may tell you that the parent really likes the services they are receiving and finds them helpful. That information does not relieve you of the responsibility of asking the parent about their services. The worker and the parent might have very different views on this issue. Similarly, because one person interviewed says that the child is not receiving special education services doesn't mean that you might not want to ask the same question to several other people you are interviewing.

- **Reviewers do not share information from one interview to the next.**
  For example, reviewers may learn in a prior interview that the permanency goal had changed from reunification to adoption. The reviewers would pay attention to the fact that this piece of
news was unknown to the Guardian ad Litem, but would not share the information during the interview with the GAL (although they would probably discuss the need to update the GAL with the case manager during the exit interview).

- **Ask each person interviewed about child safety.**
  Generally, it is good practice to ask everyone interviewed if they have any safety concerns about the case, even if no safety concerns have emerged during the rest of the interview.

- **Collaborate with your reviewing partner.**
  Use the time between interviews to consult with your review partner and to look over the list of indicators to see if you are gathering all of the information you will need to score each of the indicators.

  Use your review partner to share responsibilities like finding that you have only an hour to interview the parent and the child. You may also find that your review partner knows a great deal more about a particular subject area. It is important to have established cues about how to "switch drivers" so that you and your review partner did not disrupt one another’s train of thought.

- **Prepare for special challenges.**
  Try to be prepared for any special challenges that might develop during your interviews. For example, if you know you're going to be interviewing younger children, having useful "props" like paper and markers, small toys, etc. can make the interview a lot more productive. Similarly, if you know you will be interviewing an angry adolescent who feels ignored and disrespected; it would be helpful to think about how to highlight the importance of their opinions and perspective.

- **Stay within the role of a reviewer.**
  The QSR interviews are a different experience for many reviewers accustomed to other types of interviewing. It is important to remember that the QSR interviews are intended to gather information needed to understand all of the child and family status indicators, and all of the system performance indicators. It is not an investigative interview, supervision, or an opportunity to demonstrate the reviewer’s own expertise in case management, agency policies, or how things occur in other child welfare systems. It is not the reviewer’s role or responsibility to "fix the case". That is the work of the case manager and supervisor.

- **Remember the obligation to report child safety issues.**
  Finally, it is important to remember that reviewers have mandatory reporting responsibility if there are child safety issues that come to light during a review. Generally, the review leader will provide guidance about reporting imminent safety concerns, but it is the reviewer's responsibility to bring safety concerns to the attention of appropriate agency personnel.