Sample Questions for QSR Interviews

Listed below are some exploratory questions that can be quite useful in the review process. A number of variations are provided so the question selected can be relevant for the person being interviewed. The thoughtful use of exploratory and solution focused questions allows you to learn a lot of information without asking too many questions, implying what the answer is, or conveying judgment.

For the most part, each question you ask should be dependent upon what the person has answered in regard to your last question. This demonstrates that you are listening and will lead to a depth of information that will much enhance your review findings. This list is not exhaustive.

Interviews with Families

Note: It is always good to let families know that you have had a chance to read the case record. If they do not bring up a difficult topic, such as participating in a drug treatment program, you can ask later in the interview, “I noticed in the record a mention of your participation in a drug treatment program. Can you help me understand more about that?” or, “I noticed in reading the record that you had once been diagnosed with a Bi-Polar Disorder. Did you think that was an appropriate diagnosis for you?”

Explain process to families with children present as age appropriate. Let parents know in every family that children and parents often have different perspectives, and sometimes it is helpful to interview each person separately. Let family decide, and determine order of interviews.

To get the discussion with parents started:

“How did (your child) become known to the agency?”

“How did your family come to be involved with the child welfare system?”

“When things are working well in your family, can you tell me what it looks like?”

“Can you help me understand who are the people in your immediate family?”

“Who do you call (or talk to) when you feel good (or bad)?”

“Who are the people who care about you, and about your children?” “Who do you call if you need something?” If a person says that they cannot think of anyone who cares about them or their family you might try: “If your car broke down on the interstate, who would you call to help you?” Or “Who do you spend holidays with?” “Who would you invite to your child’s birthday party?”

Follow-up questions:
“What is your biggest worry for your children?”

Some families have a clear view of their immediate and long range goals and will be able to articulate them. The use of the miracle question is helpful when a family member appears to be having difficulty envisioning what they would like to be different in their lives. It is important to establish some rapport with the person being interviewed before a miracle is asked.

“Suppose tonight, while you are sleeping, there is a miracle and the problem that brought you to child protective services is solved. Since you are sleeping you don’t know the miracle has happened or that the problem is solved. What do you suppose you will notice that is different the next morning and tells you the problem is solved? Follow up with:

• If the miracle happened, what would be the first thing you would notice?
• If the miracle happened what will be the first change you will notice about yourself?
• What would your spouse notice is different about you?
• What would you notice is different around your house?”

“If you could have 3 wishes, what would they be?” Be careful with children that you explain that you do not have the power to grant wishes.

“What are (agencies involved) trying to help you with at this point?” (Family’s perspective as to who is on the team and what each team member’s role is.)

“What seems to be helpful to you?” “What is not helpful?”

“To what extent were you able to participate in the development of your case (service) plan?”

“You mentioned that you had some concerns with…. Can you please tell me about them?”

“And how did that affect you/the child/your family?”

“Help me understand about how the final decision for TPR was reached.” (You can plug in any decision, of course.)

What is your thinking about what your child needs to feel safe at home?

“What is your thinking about why the children do not want to return home?”

”Help me understand what the therapist is working on” might reveal if underlying needs are being addressed. It will give a general picture of how much is really known about the child/family and the degree of communication among all team members.

“To what extent does the child’s therapist involve you in the development of the treatment plan? “To what extent are you kept informed of progress?”
“On a scale of 1-10, with 10 meaning you have every confidence that this problem can be solved and 1 means no confidence at all, where would you put you put yourself today?” A follow-up question might be, “What would it take to bring your confidence up one level?” Scaling questions are an excellent way to help a family clarify their thinking about progress (or lack of progress) on key issues.

“Have you ever had the opportunity to attend a child and family team meeting?” If so, “Do you remember what was discussed there?” “Who attended?” “To what extent were you asked for input?” “In your opinion, whose meeting was that?”

**Closed-Ended Questions**

There will also be some times during an interview when the use of closed-ended questions is an appropriate follow-up to something an informant has said. Closed-ended questions begin with the words who, when, will, is or where.

“Are there people that you would like to spend more time with? If so, who are they? This is an important question for children in out-of-home care.

**Solution-Focused Questions**

“What have you tried that has worked/not worked?”

“How come things aren’t worse?” This is good to use when family member cannot identify exceptions or dream of a future without the problem.

“It’s not easy to raise three children on your own. How did/do you do it?”

“If things could be better tomorrow, what would tomorrow look like?”

“What is the one thing that would be the most helpful to you?”

“With all the transition and change taking place in your life right now, what is the one thing that will sustain you?”

“Can you tell me about the good things that have happened over the past year?” (This is also good question for older children.)

Tell me how you are involved in the lives of your children?” This question could be asked of a non-custodial father.

“As you think back over the difficult times in your life, who or what helped you through them?”

“You have told me that this child has some anger issues. Can you think of a time when he was not angry? What do you believe happened to cause the anger?” Many times a family member
can identify the point in time when things got bad….like his anger started when his father promised to visit and didn’t and he never contacted his child again.

“If we could go back to the time when your family (or this family) first became involved with the system, what do you think could have been done differently that would have been better?”

**Questions for Children**

Note: For younger children, ways to elicit conversation include asking them to draw pictures of family members; draw a happy day and a sad day; draw simple faces and ask child which ones match the way they feel with Mom, Dad, at school or day care, with current caregiver. Ask what would make them have a happy face with regard to each person.

(Older children like to know their opinions are the most important ones in the case!)

What do you like to do for fun? What are some things you used to do for fun?

What music/movies do you like? If you could do anything, what would it be?

Do you have a girlfriend/boyfriend? What do you like about her/him?

What do you want to be when you grow up?

Tell me three words that would best describe you. In addition to the three words that describe you, what other words would you like to have describe you? (For younger children, ask what animal do they think they are like, with a follow up question to learn how they feel they are similar.)

What do people like about you the most? What is something about you that others would like to change?

Describe a typical day for yourself. If you could plan a great weekend doing anything you want, what would you pick to do?

Where do you and your friends go to hang out? Are there people that you used to spend time with that you would like to spend more time with? If so, who are they?

Who do you admire most and why? What would help you to follow in the footsteps of this person?

What are the qualities of a good friend? What could improve the time you spend with family and friends?

How does your family have fun?

Every family has things they worry about? What are the worries in your family?
If you could change one thing what would it be? What would you want to be different? (A miracle question for a child is the three wishes question, being careful to explain that you can’t make them come true.)

Let children know you always ask any child you interview about how they feel about their safety. Ask, “Is there anything right now that anyone might do to make you feel safer?” Scaling questions with children who know numbers can be effective in asking where there are right now and what would move the number up by one? Young children can be offered a visual aid, such as this side of the room is when you feel totally safe, and that side is when you feel very scared…when you are with (Mom, Dad, Caregiver) where are you in this room?

Depending on child’s age, you can ask if they were the teacher giving grades, what grade would they give the people who are helping their family. No matter what the grade, ask what could that person do to get an even higher mark (such as an “A+”).

**Other Persons (Case Managers, Providers, GAL, Teacher, Attorneys)**

“What is your role in this case?”

“How long have you been involved?”

“What do you think is the most important thing to know about how (the focus child) is doing right now?”

What do think is contributing to that?

“I have read in the record that this child has some behavior issues. Can you describe for me what his behaviors are in your classroom?” “I understand he has good days and bad days. Can you think of what might be going on during the bad days?”

“Who else cares about this child/family?” (A good question to ask the case manager, foster parent and providers and then compare their answers to that from the family members.)

“Who would you put on this family’s team?” This might reveal the degree of knowledge about the formal and informal support system.

“What do you think is the most important thing to understand about this case?” (This is a great question when the informant does not have a lot of time scheduled for the interview.)

“Who are the other persons involved on the team in this case?”

“What are their respective roles?”

“What do you believe are Mrs. ___’s underlying needs?” (Help the person to keep this separate from the services.)
“What is your understanding of the goal for this child?”

“What do you think is the likelihood of this goal being achieved?”

“What else do you think could be done to help this child (or family) achieve this goal?”

“What are your worries for this child, or family?”

“What will it take for this child (or family) to live without (child welfare agency) involvement?” This will get lots of information about the long-term view and sustainability of any progress made.

“What will help the child transition back home; to foster care; etc?”

**Interview Closing Question**

If the case manager or any provider tells you that she/he is ready to close the case you might ask…”If you close this case, do you think you will see this family back in the system?”

“What is there anything else that you think it’s important for me to know?”

“DO YOU HAVE ANY CONCERNS FOR THIS CHILD’S SAFETY?”

“On a scale of 1-10, how safe do you think this child is?” One being very unsafe and 10 being the most safe she could be. If the answer is say, a 7, then you might ask what could happen to make that an 8.

“If you had to put a plan together right now, what would be needed to safely close this case?”