

Interviewing Skill Development and Practice



Participant Guide

TABLE OF CONTENTS

REFERENCES/WORKSHEETS	Page Number
Course Description and Learning Objectives	3
Course Agenda	4
Module One - Solution Building Approach	
Stages of Problem Solving vs. Stages of Solution Building	5
Module Two - Engagement	
Worksheet: Video Presentation - Tim, Part 1	6
Question Formulation: Opening the Interview and Developing Rapport	7
Strategies for Home Visits	8
Interviewing Skills Checklist	9
Language Techniques That Promote Solution-Focused Interviewing	10
Question Lead-Ins	13
Module Three - Investigative Interviews	
Casework Practice vs. Protective Authority	14
Components of the Protective Authority Model	15
Components of the Casework Model	16
Worksheet: Video Presentation - Forrester Family, Part 1	17
Dealing with Issues Related to the Case Manager's Authority	19
Question Formulation: Assessment	21
Latino Culture - Communication Styles	23
Module Four – Defusing Anger/Assessment Interviewing	
Defusing Other People's Anger	26
Examples - Miracle Question, Exception Finding Questions, and Scaling Questions	33
Worksheet: Video Presentation - Forrester Family, Part 2	40
Question Formulation: Change Strategies	41
Question Formulation: Reassuring and Supporting	42
Module Five – Interviewing for Client Progress	
Worksheet: Video Presentation - Tim, Part 2	43
End of Session Feedback for Tim	44
Interviewing Skills Strengths and Needs	47

INTERVIEWING SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND PRACTICE

This course is designed to provide you with an opportunity for interviewing skill development and practice through the use of structured role-plays and feedback sessions. The course builds upon the content delivered in the Keys to Child Welfare Practice new worker curriculum and also provides instruction on additional interviewing techniques and the application of these techniques to casework practice. Also, this course is designed to help you develop confidence in conducting interviews and to expose you to the importance of reflective self-assessment.

Course Goals:

Upon completion of this course, you should be able to:

- Choose specific interviewing techniques to apply in various casework situations
- Effectively interview parents and/or collateral contacts in order to gather information, motivate parents toward change, and promote safety and permanency for children
- Engage in reflective self-assessment of your practice

Learning Objectives:

- Identify individual strengths and needs regarding interviewing skills
- Recognize how basic interviewing skills can be used as solution building interviewing techniques
- Given a specific case scenario, plan a purposeful casework interview
- Given a specific case scenario, identify interviewing strategies for conducting a casework interview
- Given a specific case scenario, use specific interviewing techniques, including solution building techniques, to complete a parent or collateral contact interview
- Apply DFCS social services policy and practice in interviewing situations
- Critically assess interviews conducted by peers and self and provide meaningful feedback

COURSE AGENDA

OPENING ACTIVITIES

MODULE 1 – SOLUTION BUILDING APPROACH

Section A: The Foundation - Casework Interviewing

Section B: Solution Building Approach to Casework Interviewing
Solution Building Interviewing Tools

MODULE 2 – SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND PRACTICE - ENGAGEMENT

Section A: Engagement Presentation

Section B: Abernathy Family case scenario - videotaped interviews

Section C: Video Review and Feedback

Section D: Solution Building Interviewing Tools

MODULE 3 – SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND PRACTICE – INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEWS

Section A: Investigative Interviewing Presentation

Section B: Cedeno Family case scenario - videotaped interviews

Section C: Video Review and Feedback

MODULE 4 - SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND PRACTICE – DEFUSING ANGER AND ASSESSMENT INTERVIEWING

Section A: Defusing Anger Presentation

Section B: Assessment Interviewing Presentation/Solution Building Interviewing Tools

Section C: Jones Family case scenario - videotaped interviews

Section D: Video Review and Feedback

MODULE 5 - SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND PRACTICE – INTERVIEWING FOR CLIENT PROGRESS

Section A: Interviewing for Client Progress Presentation

Section B: Kimball Family case scenario – videotaped interviews

Section C: Video Review and Feedback

CLOSING ACTIVITIES

STAGES OF PROBLEM SOLVING VS. STAGES OF SOLUTION BUILDING

STAGES OF PROBLEM SOLVING	STAGES OF SOLUTION BUILDING
<p>Description of problem(s) and data collection. The client describes his concerns. The practitioner asks follow-up questions to obtain a more detailed understanding of the client's problem so that a professional assessment can be made.</p>	<p>Describing the problem. Clients are given an opportunity to describe their problems. However, much less time and effort is spent here in solution building. Fewer details are gathered about the nature and severity of problems and the possible causes of the problems are not explored.</p>
<p>Problem assessment. The practitioner makes a determination of the nature of the client's problem and its seriousness. The practitioner draws from his profession's knowledge base to make the assessment.</p>	<p>Developing well-formed goals. Practitioners work with clients to elicit descriptions of what will be different in their lives when their problems are solved. This is done at the point where an assessment would be conducted if following the problem solving approach.</p>
<p>Intervention planning. Together with the client, the practitioner develops a list of goals and designs a set of interventions intended to solve or reduce the negative consequences of the client's problem (s). The practitioner relies on his profession's knowledge base in developing the plan.</p>	<p>Exploring for exceptions. Practitioners ask about those times in clients' lives when their problems are not happening or are less severe. Practitioners also ask about who did what to make the exceptions happen. This step substitutes for intervention planning in the problem solving approach.</p>
<p>Intervention. The problem-solving actions (i.e. interventions) intended to alleviate the problem are carried out.</p>	<p>End of session feedback. Messages given to clients at the end of each solution-building conversation. The feedback is based on information the client has revealed and always focuses on what the client needs to do more of and/or do differently in order to meet their goals. Feedback is given at the point where problem-solving practitioners would be carrying out their interventions.</p>
<p>Evaluation and follow up. As the interventions are implemented, the client and professional monitor the results. The information from the monitoring is used to decide if the actions taken have been successful. If not, adjustments are made or new actions taken. Once the problem is deemed solved by the client and practitioner, the client stops services.</p>	<p>Evaluating client progress. Regular evaluation of how clients are doing in reaching solutions. Includes working with clients to examine what still needs to be done before they feel their problems have been adequately solved and they are ready to stop services.</p>

Adapted from "Interviewing for Solutions," 2nd Ed., Peter DeJong & Insoo Kim Berg

VIDEO PRESENTATION: TIM, PART 1



Topic: Initial client engagement using a solution building approach.

Directions: Use this worksheet to jot down your observations about this interview. After the video, we will discuss your observations.

What did you observe that the interviewer did that was useful?

What else could the interviewer have done to be even more useful?

My reaction to this type of approach with clients.

QUESTION FORMULATION: OPENING THE INTERVIEW AND DEVELOPING RAPPORT

The following are sample question formulations and responses that can be used for **opening the interview and developing rapport**. These can serve as **a model** for formulating your own questions and responses to meet the unique situation in each case.

"May I talk with you for a few minutes?" (Note the use of "with" rather than "to")

"Where would you be most comfortable meeting with me?"

"I want to understand this from your point of view."

"Maybe you'd like to ask me some questions before I ask you mine?"

"Do you have any concerns about our agency? Or about me? I'd be glad to answer them"

"I'd like us to work together. You may not believe that. I understand you'll need to get to know me better before you feel confidence in me."

"I'd prefer not to do anything against your wishes. But I really would like for you to work with me; otherwise, we can't work out a solution that we can both agree on to protect Larry."

"I know this is hard for you. I'll try to make it as comfortable as I can."

"That's what we need to discuss. Where would you like to begin?"

"Please let me know if I say things you don't understand, or that bother you."

"Would you be willing to hear me out before you make a decision?"



Adapted from Child Welfare League of America, *Field Guide to Child Welfare, Volume II*

STRATEGIES FOR HOME VISITS

Below are possible strategies for home visits. You must be comfortable with the strategy to use it effectively, so personalize the strategy to fit your style. The more strategies you have at your disposal, the more flexible and successful you will be with your clients.

<p>Door-to-door salesperson (good for first contacts)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A smile on your face. ▪ Identify yourself while extending your business card. ▪ Ask to enter the home pleasantly: "May I come in?" ▪ Do not discuss the nature of your visit until entering the home. 	<p>Power of silence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Speak very softly. ▪ Use short, simple statements and questions. ▪ Allow the client plenty of time to answer. ▪ Be relaxed and non-accusatory. ▪ You must be comfortable with silence.
<p>The carrot (good for passive-resistance or to gain subsequent contacts with family)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pleasant demeanor. ▪ If you are aware of client needs, such as food, diapers, or other concrete assistance, bring it with you. ▪ Incorporate your "free sample" into request to enter or to speak with client. 	<p>Negotiation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If it is not an emergency and the client will not allow entry, ask for a convenient time to return. ▪ Do not discuss the nature of the referral. ▪ If there is a potential issue of domestic violence, be open to negotiating a different setting for meeting.
<p>The stick (good for clients who have avoided you)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Knock on door loudly and persistently. ▪ Use firm, no-nonsense voice. ▪ Be prepared with concrete information about the client's behavior: "I was here on the fifth, the tenth, and the twelfth. There was talking and noise from the apartment, but no one answered." 	<p>Good guy rub-off</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If client has a positive working relationship with another case manager or colleague, ask that person to accompany you. Have the known, trusted party introduce and endorse you.
<p>Lieutenant Colombo approach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ask client for assistance. ▪ Express confusion and request clarification. ▪ Be very low-key and non-threatening. 	<p>Implied intimidation rub-off (good for strong resistance or those with law enforcement connections)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If the client is on probation or parole, ask the officer to accompany you. ▪ If there is a history of law enforcement involvement, request an officer to accompany you.

Adapted from CalSWEC Core Curriculum, Conducting Interviews, April 2001

Interviewing Skills Checklist

Interviewer's Name _____

Directions:

For each skill, rate **each interviewer** using the scale below.

Rating Scale 1 to 4

- 1 = Didn't demonstrate this skill, although there was an opportunity to do so.
 - 2 = Demonstrated this skill, but did not seem at ease. Please keep working on it.
 - 3 = Somewhat at ease with this skill and used it fairly effectively. Please do more of this in your interviews. The more you do it, the more comfortable you will become.
 - 4 = Totally at ease with this skill and used it very effectively. Great job!
- N/A = I didn't think this skill was applicable to this interviewing situation

SKILLS	1	2	3	4	N/A
Making introductions					
Explaining role					
Communicating purpose of interview					
Addressing interviewee by name					
Noticing client's communication style and adjusting accordingly					
Putting client at ease					
Developing rapport					
Explaining confidentiality and addressing interviewee's concerns					
Balancing authority					
Acknowledging and responding to cultural differences					
Responding to anger, hostility, "attitude"					
Active listening					
Exploring client's key words (i.e. echoing)					
Summarizing at appropriate times.					
Paraphrasing					
Using silence at appropriate times					
Using open-ended questions					
Using clarifying questions					
Using scaling questions					
Using relationship questions					
Using the Miracle Question at appropriate times					
Exploring for exceptions (using exception finding questions)					
Identifying and amplifying client strengths					
Avoiding "why" questions and leading questions					
Maintaining a position of not knowing					
Formulating next question from interviewee's last question					
Giving compliments					
Keeping the interview on track or refocusing if needed					
Gathering information					
Communicating information					
Mirroring appropriate nonverbal communication behaviors					
Determining if interview goals have been accomplished					
Summarizing interview					
Reviewing agreed upon tasks/steps/goals					
Praising/complimenting interviewee					
Inviting questions from interviewee					

LANGUAGE TECHNIQUES THAT PROMOTE SOLUTION- FOCUSED INTERVIEWING

Suppose, (pause)....

This is a good way to help families begin to imagine an alternative future without implying that their preferred future will occur. It is good practice to use pauses to help families make the transition to thinking about alternatives to problems.

e.g. "Suppose you were able to find ways to have your children do what you tell them to do, (pause).....what would they notice you doing differently with them."

Instead

It is quite normal for families to not know what they want when they first meet with the case manager. Sorting this out usually begins by talking about what they do not want. Be prepared to help families define what they want by building on what they find troublesome. The word 'instead' is very useful.

e.g. "Instead of 'screaming at the kids', what would you do?"

"When," not 'if"

"When" encourages a future focus and creates more hope that a different way could happen. "If" retains the future focus, but introduces more doubt.

e.g. "When you are able to talk to your kids in a normal tone of voice, what will be different at your home?"

"How come?"

This question is less confrontational and accusatory than "why" and asks: ""What were you thinking?"

e.g. "How come you decided to respond to your children's misbehavior differently from how your mother responded to you as a child?"

Using silence and responding to “I don’t know”

Because the questions we ask families are difficult and require thought, they often fall silent or say “I don’t know.” When that happens, try

- (first) sitting back, looking expectantly, and waiting for an answer,
- saying: “I am asking some tough questions” and wait some more,
- saying: “If you were to guess, what would you say?”
- using relationship questions like “What would your husband say that he sees that tells him that you no longer have this problem?”
- reviewing how the agency became involved with the family; that is, looking at who is the “real client” in this case, that is, the person who wants something different; then proceed to relationship questions that build around the “real client.” For example, “When Social Services got involved with your family, you told me that you wanted to find a way to have your children behave that didn’t involve hitting or yelling at them. You said you wanted to raise your children differently from the way your mother raised you. What do you suppose the judge wants to see different as the result of our talking?”

Difference questions

Families make changes when they notice something is different in their lives the difference gives them ideas about what they do to bring on further changes.

Therefore expect to use the word “different” frequently in your questions.

e.g. “What will you notice different about your children that will let you know that a miracle has happened and their problems in following your instructions are solved?”

e.g. “How will you know that is really different this time”

e.g.. “What difference would that make in your relationship with your children?”

Tentative language

Tentative language is consensus building language; it invites and allows space for the listener to offer thoughts and ideas on a topic.

e.g. “I wonder what will happen when....” “Could it be that.....” “Perhaps....” “Is it possible that....”

So...

A very useful word to use in order to break in on families who are “non-stop, problem talkers” who “control” the situation with such talk. Once families have some time to express their difficulties and reactions, use “so” (not “but”, see below) followed by a paraphrase or empathic statement and then move on to solution-focused questions. The use of “so” signals to the family that a topic change is coming and gives the interviewer a device to redirect the conversation in a more useful direction.

e.g. “So, I can see that having Social Services in your life has created lots of problems for your family, (pause).....when things start to go better, what will be different?”

Words or phrases to avoid

“You want to _____, don’t you?”

Such questions reflect the worker’s or Agency’s frame of reference and minimizes the importance of what the client wants different.

“Yes, but.....”

If you are using this phrase, it is a good indication that you are about to engage in a debate with the family. We can often influence a family’s way of thinking, but we cannot win a debate or argument. If you find yourself saying “but...”, it’s a pretty good clue that you need to do something different. Get in the habit of catching yourself in time and experiment with other phrases. Start by asking: “So what has to be different as the result of our meeting today for you to say our time together was worthwhile?”

Adapted from “Interviewing for Solutions,” 2nd Ed., Peter DeJong & Insoo Kim Berg

QUESTION LEAD-INS

Sometimes the most difficult aspect of trying out a new concept is getting started. This tool lists a few of the lead-ins used in solution-focused questioning.

Make use of Who, What, When, Where, and How. Avoid the word "why" because of the negative or hostile tone it can convey.

Lead-in possibilities:

- How will things be different?
- What will you notice about. . .
- Perhaps . . .
- I am not certain, do you suppose. . .
- Suppose. . .
- It seems. . .
- Is it possible. . .
- How do you want your life to be different?
- What will you do instead?
- How did you do that?
- How did you figure out how to do that?
- What else . . .
- What did you notice. . .
- What did your colleagues, supervisors, family, boss notice. . .
- Tell me the reason (instead of why?)
- Did you notice?
- What would it take?
- What would you change?
- What small change would you make?
- So
- How will you know?
- When things are different. . .
- How would that be helpful?
- What tells you that you are better?
- What is better?
- Tell me about. . .
- How can I be helpful?
- What would be helpful?
- What have you heard?
- Anything else. . .
- How do you know?

Adapted from "Interviewing for Solutions," 2nd Ed., Peter DeJong & Insoo Kim Berg

CASEWORK PRACTICE VS. PROTECTIVE AUTHORITY

CASEWORK PRACTICE	PROTECTIVE AUTHORITY
<p><i>Focus of Intervention:</i></p> <p>The family is viewed as a unit, and is the primary focus of involvement and services.</p>	<p><i>Focus of Intervention:</i></p> <p>The child and the abusing or neglectful parent are each viewed individually as the focus of intervention.</p>
<p><i>Intervention Method:</i></p> <p>The family is involved in a mutual case assessment that includes both the causal and contributing factors to maltreatment, and inherent family strengths and resources.</p> <p>Case goals and case plans are developed with the family. The plan is a contract that outlines all parties' agreed-upon roles, responsibilities, and activities.</p>	<p><i>Intervention Method:</i></p> <p>The agency determines the scope and nature of the family's problems, often in terms of visible problem behaviors only.</p> <p>Case goals and case plans are developed for the family. The plan is a written set of agency expectations for the family.</p>
<p><i>Potential Outcomes:</i></p> <p>A family that is involved in the assessment of its own strengths and needs is more likely to perceive benefit to being involved with the case manager and the agency.</p> <p>Family members are empowered to act in productive ways on their own behalf. This reduces resistance. The goal is collaboration to promote change.</p> <p>Changes may be integrated into the family's lifestyle and sustained beyond the agency's involvement.</p> <p>Casework intervention may not be sufficient to assure protection of the child in a high risk situation, when the family is initially resistant, or is unable or unwilling to engage in activities to protect their child.</p>	<p><i>Potential Outcomes:</i></p> <p>A family that is not involved in the assessment of its own strengths and needs is not likely to perceive benefit, nor make connections between their own behavior and the agency's expectations.</p> <p>Family members are forced to act in ways that meet the requirements of the agency. This increases their resistance. The agency relies on the family's fear of retaliation to generate change.</p> <p>Changes are likely to be abandoned if external supervision and monitoring are withdrawn, since there generally was no investment by the family to begin with.</p> <p>Worker has unilateral ability to assure protection of the child in a high risk situation, even when the family is initially resistant, or is unable or unwilling to engage in activities to protect their child.</p>

COMPONENTS OF THE PROTECTIVE AUTHORITY MODEL

In a **protective authority model**, the case manager is essentially an enforcer. The **components of this approach** are as follows:

- The child welfare agency establishes standards regarding what children need for healthy development; knows what particular conditions place children at high risk of harm; and knows how parents must typically behave to meet their children's needs. Basic standards of child care are set by the community, and enforced by the agency.
- In each family situation, the case manager determines the conditions that have increased risk of harm, and determines the specific changes that must occur in the family to assure protection of the children.
- The case manager instructs family members regarding what must be done to provide safe care for their children. The case plan document is the tool that formally communicates agency expectations for family members and that directs their activities. Success is dictated by the degree to which family members comply with case plan expectations.
- The case manager links the family to relevant services, and may directly provide assistance or direction; however, the worker's most salient role is monitoring the family's achievement of expectations, and administering sanctions for noncompliance, often by developing an alternative placement plan for the children.
- The case manager's authority may be further strengthened by an action of the juvenile court.
- The strength of the protective authority model is that it allows workers to intervene immediately to protect children at high risk of harm, when other less intrusive methods cannot.

COMPONENTS OF THE CASEWORK MODEL

In the **casework model**, the role of the case manager is that of an enabler. The model integrates social work and family-centered practice values. The **underlying assumptions of this model** are as follows:

- Family members are respected as individuals with inherent dignity, worth and value, and who have the capacity to participate as equal members in a collaborative change process. Family members retain the right to make important decisions about their own lives, including decisions about the best ways to protect their children from harm.
- Family members are viewed as unique persons within family, community, and cultural contexts, with unique experiences that have shaped their lives, and with inherent strengths and capabilities that can be mobilized to achieve productive change.

The **casework method** is based upon the assumptions just outlined. Its **primary characteristics** are:

- Casework consists of a series of well-defined steps that help family members identify and make important changes to improve their life situation and the care of their children.
- Casework requires the joint involvement of the case manager and *family* members *in all* aspects of the change process. The case manager's role is that of expert facilitator or enabler, who assists the family in these activities.
- The case manager provides guidance, support, encouragement, and reinforcement for efforts toward positive change, and gives constructive feedback that guides family members in trying new strategies and solutions.
- The case manager may give advice and recommend solutions, but every effort is made to empower family members to generate their own solutions through their active participation in the development and implementation of the activities in the case plan.
- The case manager approaches each family in a manner that is consistent with the family's cultural background and values.
- The liability of casework is that its success depends upon establishment of a collaborative relationship with family members. This usually takes time, even though a skilled case manager can often engage a family sufficiently in a first contact to develop a safety plan that protects the children at home. However, casework alone is often not sufficient to protect children at high risk of harm when their parents are unable or unwilling to engage in strategies that reduce the risk to their children.

Adapted from Child Welfare League of America, Field Guide to Child Welfare, Volume II

VIDEO PRESENTATION: FORRESTER FAMILY, PART 1

Topic: Interviewing approaches with families in a CPS assessment (i.e. investigation)



Directions: Use this worksheet to take notes on each vignette. After watching the video clips, we will discuss each caseworker's approach with the family, interviewing techniques, and communication styles.

Caseworker #1 - Pamela

Primary approach

Interviewing techniques/strategies/communication style

Parent response

Caseworker #2 – Scott

Primary approach

Interviewing techniques/strategies/communication style

Parent response

Caseworker#3 – Carol

Primary approach

Interviewing techniques/strategies/communication style

Parent response

DEALING WITH ISSUES RELATED TO THE CASE MANAGER'S AUTHORITY

To set the stage to permit the utilization of casework as the principal intervention, and to resolve the conflicting roles of helper and protective authority, the issue of the worker's authority must be dealt with openly and honestly. The following strategies can help deal with this issue in a constructive manner:

- 1) The case manager must openly acknowledge and describe the nature and extent of the authority inherent in the protective service agency and in the case manager's position. The worker might explain the following:

"Yes, you're right. Our agency has the responsibility to insure that children are safe and unharmed, and that they receive proper care. So we have to look into it, any time we're led to believe there are children at risk of harm."

"Many children are seriously harmed, even killed at times, by their parents or caregivers. Our agency is expected, by law, to protect children from maltreatment. That's why we carefully assess any situation where we think a child is being harmed."

- 2) Early in the relationship, and as needed throughout case involvement, the case manager should acknowledge the family's concerns about the agency's authority to remove children and enforce change. The case manager must be honest about the possibility of removal of the children, and should explain clearly the conditions under which this would be considered. The case manager should stress, however, that removal is considered only if it is felt that the child cannot be protected from abuse or neglect in the home, and that the case manager's most important job is to work with the family to prevent placement. If placement is necessary, then rapid reunification becomes the goal.

"The court does give us the authority to remove children and place them in other families, when that is the *only* way we can assure that they will be protected from harm. But you need to understand, our first choice is always to help families care for their own children."

- 3) The case manager should explain that removal of the children is only used as a last resort, when the case manager and family cannot jointly make the necessary changes to remove the risk to the children at home. Even when a child is removed, it is expected that placement will be only as long as is necessary to assure that the child's home is safe. The worker should also explain that placement doesn't mean whisking the child away to a stranger's home, with limited access and infrequent contact with the child. Placement can be with a relative, or in a home of the parent's choosing, if that home can guarantee safety for the child.

- 4) The case manager should stress that while he does have considerable vested authority, he would prefer not to have to exercise this authority, and that there are many ways to avoid having to do so. Examples would be:

"My preference is to work with you, not against you. If you are able to collaborate with me on resolving this, I won't have to do things against your will."

"Your involvement in this is extremely important. You know your family and your needs better than I do, and the solutions will be more valid if you're involved. The first step is to talk about it and see what we can agree on."

"The choice is really yours. If you want to work together, and we can work out solutions, then I won't have to force you to do anything. I'd rather that you and I could work it out together."

Adapted from Child Welfare League of America, Field Guide to Child Welfare, Volume II

QUESTION FORMULATION: ASSESSMENT

Two types of formulations are particularly well-suited for assessment. They are **open-ended questions** and **clarifying questions**. Generally, open-ended questions provide considerable information about a wide variety of topics. Clarifying responses help the case manager and client focus on particular topics or issues to gain a more in-depth understanding.

The following are sample question formulations and responses that can be used in assessment interviews. These can serve as **a model** for formulating your own questions and responses to meet the unique situation in each case.

Open-ended formulations might include:

"Tell me what you know about that"

"What do you mean?"

"Can you tell me more about it?"

"Can you help me understand what you're saying?"

"What would you like to see happen?"

"In your mind, what might the worst possible outcome be?"

"What do you think your strengths are?"

"What's most important to you?"

"What's the hardest for you to deal with?"

"What do you do when you're hurting?"

"Has it ever happened before? Tell me about it."

Clarifying responses could include:

"I think I understand why you're angry; but would you tell me again, so I can be sure?"

"Sounds like you're saying that your mother is a real problem for you. Can you tell me more about that?"

"You've mentioned your ex-husband three times. It sounds like he may still be important to you."

"I'm not sure I understand why you won't talk with her. I can't tell if you're afraid, or just angry at her. What do you think?"

"You keep referring to his temper. Can I assume you're saying he has a bad temper?"

"You seem afraid to trust anyone, including me."

"Seems like you don't have a lot of confidence that anything can change."

"Sounds like you'd like certain things to stay just as they are."

"Sounds like caring for your children may be more than you can handle. Is that how you feel?"

"You sound like you feel really defeated."

"I'm hearing that you might want to consider releasing your children for adoption. It's always an option. Would you like to talk more about it?"

"Sometimes people are afraid to fail. I'm hearing you express lots of concerns about trying this. Are you worried you won't be able do it?"

"I understand you want to protect him, and I understand you may also be afraid of him. But from what you've told me, I'm thinking perhaps he has hurt you and the children when he's angry."



Adapted from Child Welfare League of America, Field Guide to Child Welfare, Volume II

LATINO CULTURE - COMMUNICATION STYLES

Communication styles of different cultures can be characterized as high-context and low-context.

Anglo-Europeans, Americans, Germans, Swiss and Scandinavians are classified as low-context cultures.

Low-context cultures are:

- Precise
- Direct
- Logical
- Quick and to the point
- Low focus on gestures, mood, and environmental clues

(Hecht, Anderson, & Ribeau, 1989).

High-context cultures rely less on verbal communication than on shared experiences, history and implicit messages. (Hecht et al., 1989) High-context cultures emphasize how messages are conveyed using gestures, facial expressions, and body language. These, more subtle indicators, often have more meaning than the actual words. High-context communication is often abbreviated and a look or a gesture can convey volumes (Lynch, 2004).

High-context cultures include African-American, Latino, Asian, Arab, and American Indian cultures. Latinos and other members of high-context cultures are also known as *field dependent*. Field dependent individuals are especially sensitive to the relationship and often use non-verbal communication to establish a relationship with someone and to assess someone, especially an authority figure (Zuñiga, 2004).

Clearly communication problems arise as a result of these different communication styles. For instance:

- Lots of talking, clear specific verbal instructions, giving detailed instructions can all be seen as mechanistic and insensitive to high-context cultures.
- Long pauses, silences, indirect communication (such as storytelling) may be seen as signs of resistance or a waste of time to low-context cultures (Lynch, 2004).

Add to these cultural differences the idea of communicating in a high-stress situation. It is the responsibility of the case manager to learn about and be aware of how families communicate. This may include altering one's own communication style.

When working with Latino clients, it is important to remember the cultural idea of *simpatía*. *Simpatía* emphasizes that individuals are to be pleasant and respectful. Agreeableness is valued and confrontation avoided. *Simpatía* requires small talk, courtesy and time to establish rapport. Small-talk or *la plática*, is particularly important, while “getting to the point” is not.

The Spanish language itself is full of amicability or *amabilidad*. There is a politeness and civility that Latinos are taught from childhood. It is important to be nice and complimentary to others (Lynch, 2004).

Since politeness and maintaining harmony are important and conflict avoidance is paramount, **the culture will utilize indirect and implicit communication styles**. Some traits include:

- People are to get along and not disagree, especially publicly.
- Do not make others uncomfortable.
- Use positive expressions, endearments, and compliments. (Falicov, 1998)

When working with Latino families practitioners must remember that behind all verbal and non-verbal communication is the importance of *personalismo*. Warm, responsive communication focuses on the individual. The importance lies in establishing the personal relationship and the nature of that relationship forms the background for what is said. This personal and responsive communication includes the use of *platicando* or small talk. This small talk is essential to establishing a friendly atmosphere for communicating.

Things to Remember

- Communication is often indirect. Clients may not volunteer information, particularly if it is disagreeable or conflicts with what the individual believes the worker *wants* to hear.
- Directive, blunt, “to the point” communication is not valued and may be offensive.
- Be complimentary. Compliments show respect for the culture. Can be simple, yet sincere.
- Small talk is valued. Conversation will have a slower pace.

- Emphasis is placed on the personal relationship. What you say is often less important than who you are and how your client feels about you.
- Personal space between individuals is smaller and physical contact is valued. Hugs, kiss, and displays of affection are appropriate, especially at the beginning and end of conversations.
- *Respecto* is essential. There is a respect for authority, and this respect may result in miscommunications. Clients may agree with workers and indicate an understanding of what is expected of them *rather than be disagreeable*. It is important to insure that individuals are given a way to disagree or communicate confusion and misunderstanding while maintaining mutual respect, respect for authority, and the overall sense of agreeableness.
- Remember the importance of family hierarchy and gender. Speak to the oldest male member of the family first, and obtain his permission to speak with other members. Be respectful and deferential and remember that female members of the family may seem uncooperative but are not when they indicate the need to speak with male family members prior to communicating with you (University of North Carolina, 2002).

**Excerpt from *Culturally Competent Practice with Latino Clients*
A Training Manual for Child Welfare Workers
*DFCS Professional Excellence project***

DEFUSING OTHER PEOPLE'S ANGER

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION: DEFUSING HOSTILITY THROUGH BODY LANGUAGE

- Pay extra attention to the nonverbal signals your body is giving when dealing with anger. Are you frowning or shaking your head while they talk? Are you receptive to the information being shared? Make sure your body posture is open rather than closed, inviting information rather than shutting yourself off from the speaker.
- Pay particular attention to the physical distance between you and the person speaking. This varies widely according to culture.
- Be aware of standing eye to eye with a person. Communication specialists stress that standing at an angle (sideways) rather than directly across from someone can help keep a situation calm and non-adversarial.

QUESTIONS/TECHNIQUES WHICH ESCALATE HOSTILITY

- **WHY** - Can have the impact of challenging, blaming or calling upon the other person to justify or defend his/her actions or position.
- **LEADING** - is really a disguised statement of the interviewer's opinion. This type of question leads the individual to provide a specific or particular answer desired by the case manager. For example, "Don't you think you would be better off allowing your sister to care for your son temporarily?"
- **MULTIPLE** - is when two or more questions are asked immediately following one another without adequate time for response. This is often confusing for respondents because they have trouble focusing on what is being asked. For example, "Have you been attending parenting classes, did you get a report from the instructor?"
- **CLOSE-ENDED** - invites a one or two word answer, with responses often limited to "yes" or "no." Closed questions narrow the amount of information that is given and, while sometimes useful, often have the effect of creating an adversarial atmosphere.

QUESTIONS/TECHNIQUES THAT CAN HELP TO DEFUSE HOSTILITY

OPEN-ENDED questions

- **Probing questions** ask for more information about concerns or emotions.
“What is it you want to see happen in this situation?”
“How did you react to that news?”
“What are your concerns?”
“What are some other possibilities to resolve this situation?”
- **Clarifying statements or questions** seek to understand particular aspects of the message.
“What do you mean by _____?”
“Are you saying that _____?”
“Could you help me understand how you came to _____?”
- **Consequential questions** are used to get the speaker to think about the consequences of what they are saying. It is a form of "reality testing."
“So what do you think would happen if
“So how do you think your children would be affected if....

PARAPHRASING

Paraphrasing is one way to make sure you have understood the intended message. It has a number of purposes:

- It allows you to check to make sure you understand the speaker's intent.
- It allows the speaker to correct you if you have misunderstood something, thereby preventing misunderstandings.

Angry Statement: “You case workers are all the same. You just sucker people and try to take their children.”

Paraphrase: “Sounds like you're really concerned about whether you can trust me...”

RE-FRAMING

Reframing is a way of changing directions. When faced with hostility, it is natural to push back. However, rather than opposing the other person's anger, it may be helpful to re-direct aggression into a non-threatening discussion of their underlying needs.

Includes:

- changing the emphasis from differences to common ground
- changing the emphasis from negative to positive
- changing the emphasis from the specific to the general or vice-versa

Statement: “You’re always checking up on me. I can’t stand it – I know what I need to do for my kids!

Underlying Need: Trust/respect for knowledge/experience

Reframe: “I can see that trust is very important to you, it is to me as well. You’ve done some really good things for your children in the past. I believe you know what’s important for them.”

THINGS TO AVOID WHEN SPEAKING TO/DEFUSING AN ANGRY PERSON

- **Blaming** - Blaming leads people to become defensive and hostile rather than cooperative and understanding.
- **Debating the facts** - Don’t get into debates with an angry person. In the midst of the conflict, who was right and who was wrong, or who did what to whom is not important.
- **Accusations or Counter-Accusations** - In general, be cautious about starting sentences with “You” or “You people” For example, it usually makes people defensive to begin a sentence with “You didn’t....” or “You always...”
- **Making Assumptions and Jumping to Conclusions** - Don’t assume that your perceptions are correct and others’ are false. Individuals perceive the world differently and so react differently. Change judgment to curiosity.
- **Sarcasm, nagging, and preaching.**

ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION: HOW TO COMMUNICATE YOUR INTERESTS

There will be times when you will need to assert your own or the agency's requirements, needs, or interests in order to be effective in your work. Below are some tips on how to do this:

- **Set clear, firm boundaries, and expectations for appropriate behavior.**
- **Be "hard on the issues, but soft on the person"**, implies that while it is important to communicate your viewpoint, it is important to do so in a way which refrains from personal attack on people. Say what needs to be said, but speak thoughtfully, so that your words will not provoke the person. This is critical in our role of protecting children while supporting families.
- **I/We Messages**

Starting a sentence with "I or We" often lowers the level of escalation and tension. A "YOU" message usually raises the level of pressure and tension. These messages usually blame, accuse, threaten, order, put-down or make the other person feel guilty.

An "I/We" message has three parts:

- **When** (specific behavior)
- **I or We feel/need** (specific feeling or need)
- **Because** (tangible effect or rationale)

Each part plays an important role when we attempt to communicate our concerns and/or influence another person's behavior.

1. The "WHEN" element helps separate the person from the problem. It informs the other person of the specific behavior that is problematic for you.
2. The "I FEEL" component is important because the speaker is taking responsibility for his/her feelings, indicating trust in the listener, and clarifying her/his feelings.
3. The "BECAUSE" is crucial when trying to deal with a conflict. The "because" part of the message pushes the speaker to look beneath a position to clearly define what the situation is in terms of interests. It also allows the speaker to more easily understand and communicate that interest rather than position.

Example:

You message:

You have consistently missed your scheduled visits with Maria. When you don't show up, she gets upset and disappointed. What can you do to start getting to the visits?

I/We message:

When a scheduled visit doesn't occur, **I feel** concerned **because** Maria becomes really upset and disappointed when she doesn't get to see you. I am eager to hear your thoughts on what we can do to resolve this.

When it's not possible for you to come to a visit, **I need** to know **so that** I can have the foster parent not bring Maria to the office. This will help to keep her from being disappointed. What can we do to make sure this happens?

Example:

You message:

You have missed your scheduled drug screens for the last 3 months. If you don't start completing the screens, you won't be able to get Angel back.

I/We message:

When a scheduled drug screen is missed, **I feel** concerned **because** this is a requirement that must be met before Angel can come home. What do you think needs to be done to make sure the drug screens are completed on time?

Making an Assertive Request

At times, it may be appropriate to respectfully, but assertively, request a specific change in behavior as a condition of continuing a discussion. *It is important to remember, however, that when an individual poses an immediate, high level threat, making an assertive request may not be an appropriate option. Instead you may have to take steps to disengage (see next section). If you feel it is appropriate to request a change in behavior here are some tips.*

- **PREFERENCE STATEMENTS:** Clearly communicate your preferences or desires rather than stating them as demands or forcing others to guess what they are.

My preference is....

If it were up to us...

What I would like is...

From our perspective, it would be helpful if....

- **INTEREST STATEMENTS:** Clearly state your wants, needs, fears, and concerns.
 - What concerns me is...*
 - What we really need is... because...*

- **PURPOSE STATEMENTS:** Disclosing your intentions enables others to understand what motivates you and minimizes the opportunity for misunderstanding. It also reduces the chance for others to unknowingly operate at cross-purposes.
 - What I'm trying to accomplish is...*
 - We're out here today because we were hoping to...*
 - I am in the process of trying to ...*
 - Our intention is to...*

- **DESCRIBING OBSERVATIONS:** Describe what you are currently observing between yourself and the other person in a non-positional way.
 - "I'm noticing that we seem to be at an impasse in this conversation. It seems like we're all getting a little tired and frustrated. I'm not sure how to move on. What do you think?"*

- **AGREEMENT STATEMENTS:** Acknowledge where you agree with the other party in the midst of a disagreement. This increases the amount you share in common and reduces the conflict.
 - I agree with you that...*
 - We definitely share your concern about...*
 - Your interest in..... makes a lot of sense to me.*
 - We share your hope that...*

- **"YES AND" NOT "YES BUT..."** The word **but** has been called the "verbal eraser" because agreement statements lose their effectiveness if they are followed by a disclaimer such as **but**. It is better to make your agreement statement and then raise your other concerns.
 - I share your concern about... and I am also concerned about...*
 - I agree that we should... and I also think that...*

DISENGAGING FROM AN ANGRY PERSON

The goal of disengaging is to remove yourself or the other person from the threatening situation when it appears that all your other efforts to listen, make assertive requests, or use other methods are failing. Disengaging should also occur if you have become so angry that the interaction is becoming non-productive.

Ideally, disengaging from an angry person involves an explanation for your behavior, allowing a cooling off period, and/or scheduling a time more conducive to effective communication. However, *if an individual poses an immediate threat of physical harm, you may not be able to disengage, you may simply have to leave. It is most important to keep yourself safe.*

Disengage when:

- You are too angry and you are having trouble self-managing.
- You feel too much discomfort with the situation due to the rising level of emotion and/or the destructive direction of the discussion or exchange.
- You are nervous about the situation and fear for your safety.
- You and the other person both need time to compose yourselves.
- The time or location is not conducive to effective communication.

A Sample Disengaging Script

Acknowledge: "I can see you are really upset (with me, about the situation, etc.)

Commit involvement: and we need to talk more about it.

State your needs: Right now though, I feel like things are too intense. I need to take some time to process what we have discussed.

State your intention to return: "I'll be back." or "We can work through this later."
Or "I will call you tomorrow, etc."

Then leave immediately!

Centre for Conflict Resolution Training, Justice Institute of B.C., 1991

EXAMPLES USING THE MIRACLE QUESTION, EXCEPTION FINDING QUESTIONS, AND SCALING QUESTIONS

The Miracle Question

The following should be addressed in order to maximize the effectiveness of this question.

- **suppose** [sets the stage for imagination]
- **miracle happened** [sets the tone as one of playfulness]
- **the problem is solved** [for the moment, the "how" of solution is deemphasized]
- **you don't know** (because you are sleeping) [again, emphasizes the future: a problem that is solved, rather than a problem that needs to be solved]
- **what will be different to indicate that** [focuses on details]
- **miracle happened and the problem is solved?** [future focus]

Occasionally, clients talk about winning a lottery, or other "pie in the sky" dreams. When these dreams are handled with humor, clients usually settle down and become much more realistic. They begin to describe how their lives will change in concrete, specific, small, achievable terms.

The following dialogue offers an example of the miracle question:

Client: I will have a job, a nice place to live, nice clothes, a man who cares about me, not just uses me, but really cares about me. My children will be happy, they will do well in school. Maybe I will be in school so that I can get training to get a job.

Worker: Well, that sounds like the end of a big miracle. What do you suppose is the first thing - in the morning - that will tell you that, "Hey, something is different in my life?"

Client: Well, I will get up earlier, have some time for myself, say good morning to the kids with a smile, get them up, sit down with them for breakfast, tell them to have a good day, and send them off to school.

Worker: If you were to pretend that the miracle has happened, what would be the first thing you would do? [This is a strong suggestion that the client has to *do* something to solve the problem.]

Here are more examples of follow-up questions:

- What would it take to pretend that this miracle has happened? Anything else? What else?
- If you were to do that, what will be the first change you will notice about yourself?
- Who would be the first person to notice the next day that something is different about you after the miracle?
- What would your mother (husband, friend, sister, etc.) notice different about you, if you didn't tell her that there's been a miracle? What else? Anything else?
- What would your mother (or others) do different then?
- What do you think will be different between you and your mother then?
- If you were to take these steps, what would you notice different around your house?
- If you were to do that, what would be the first thing your children will notice different around your house? [Again, a strong suggestion that the client can do something.]
- What would they do different then? What else? Anything else?

These examples use proactive words and phrases such as "do" and "take these steps" quite frequently. This is purposely designed to suggest that (a) the client has to **do** things "differently" in order to bring about changes in his life; (b) that *HE* is the one who has to do them; and (c) that he has to take an active role in shaping his life by working out his own ideas of a useful solution.

Exception Finding Questions

The following are examples of questions designed to help a client discover her own strengths and abilities to solve problems. Even when the success may be very small compared to the numerous problems the client faces, solutions start with small steps.

Worker: You are saying that you didn't drink for five days last week. How did you do it? I am amazed that you controlled your drinking for five days. How did you do it?

Client: It's only five days. I've gone longer than that when I was pregnant.

Worker: You did? How did you do that? Wasn't it hard? You mean you did it all alone without going into treatment? How long did you not drink at that time?

Client: Well, I didn't want to hurt my baby when I was pregnant. It was hard at first but I just told myself I'm not going to do it. So, when I'd go out, I used to drink soda.

Worker: That's amazing. You must be a strong person. Now, tell me how you didn't drink for five days this time.

Client: I didn't have any money. I was broke.

Worker: Come on, I know that if you really wanted to drink, you would have found ways to get that drink. How did you manage not to drink?

Later in the session the following questions can be asked:

- "Tell me, what is different for you at those times when you do not drink?"
- "How do you explain to yourself that the problem doesn't happen at those times?"
- "Where did you get the idea to do it that way?"
- "What do you suppose your mother would say you do different when you do not drink?"
- "What will have to happen for you to do it more often?"
- "What else would you say you do differently when the problem doesn't happen?"
- "What would you and your boyfriend do differently when the problem doesn't happen?"

These questions should be followed up with questions that reinforce the idea of success:

- "So, what do you have to do so that you can continue to say "No" to drinking?"
- "What do you suppose you and your boyfriend will be doing different instead of drinking (getting depressed, etc.)?"
- "If your boyfriend were here and if I were to ask him, what do you suppose he would say he notices different about you when you do not get depressed (drink, act angry, etc.)?"
- "What would he say has to happen for that to happen more often?"
- "How long would he say this has to continue for him to get an idea that your problem is solved?"
- "When the problem is solved, how do you think your relationship with your sister (mother, friend, etc.) would change? What will you be doing then that you are not doing now?"

Here the interviewer is trying very hard to give the client credit for her own success while getting her to realize that it is something she *did* rather than something she allowed to happen to her. In the process of having to explain her actions to the worker, it becomes more and more clear to the client that she did something to create an exception to the problem.

Scaling Questions

Scaling questions are very versatile. Because they are simple, even children old enough to understand number concepts (that 10 is greater than 5, for example), respond very well. Adults whose thinking style tends to be concrete, precise, and pragmatic also respond very well.

Scaling questions can be used to assess self-esteem, self-confidence, investment in change, prioritizing of problems to be solved, evaluation of progress, and so on -- things usually considered too abstract to quantify. It also helps the client to assess what his significant others think about these situations.

The following are some practical examples of how scaling questions can be put to use. Notice the careful wording that conveys hope, action, and changes in small steps.

Worker: On a scale of 1 to 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 yourself today?

Client: I would say 5, in the middle.

Worker: If I were to ask your boyfriend where he thinks you are on the same scale, what do you suppose he would say?

Client: He would probably say higher, like maybe 7 or 8, even.

Worker: What do you suppose he would say is the reason he is so much more confident about your solving this problem?

Client: He is always backing me up. He always tells me that I can do it, only if I put my mind to it. He doesn't know how hard it is to have such confidence.

Worker: On the same scale, how hopeful are you that this problem can be solved?

Client: I would say 6.

Worker: What would be different in your life when you move up just one step, from 6 to 7?

Client: I would be less upset with myself. For a change, I will actually say no to my mother. My mother runs my life and I will say to her to leave me alone and not tell me what to do all the time.

Worker: If your boyfriend was here and I were to ask him what he thinks it will take you to go up from 6 to 7, what would he say?

Client: I'm not sure but I would guess that he will say I have to stand up to my mother.

Worker: Do you agree with him on that?

Client: Yeh, he is right about that. I have to be strong with my mother. She is a powerful lady, though.

Worker: What do you suppose he would say it will take for you to stand up to your mother?

Client: He will say I have to stop drinking first.

Worker: So, how interested are you in wanting to stop drinking?

Client: I have to stop drinking. It's killing me, I know I have to do it.

Worker: So, what is the first thing you have to do to stop drinking?

Client: I just have to stop drinking when I get upset with my mother.

Worker: What do you suppose your boyfriend would say is the first step for you to stop drinking?

Here, the interviewer is using the scaling numbers to gather information not only about what will give the client more hope about herself, but also about how much support the client is getting from her environment. The next step is to help the client to talk about the steps she needs to take toward solving the problem. The more the client is encouraged to say what she has to do, and needs to do, the more she will believe it is her idea to stop drinking.

Scaling Motivation

The following are questions that encourage clients to explore motivation to change:

"On the same scale, how much would you say you are willing to work to solve this problem?"

"What do you suppose your mother (or some significant her) would say?"

"Where would you put your husband on the same scale?"
(The closer to 10 the client is, the more invested she is.)

When a client gives a low number on the same scale, it can be followed up with:

- "What do you suppose they would say you need to do to move up 1 point on the same scale?"
- "What do you suppose they would say they need to see you *do* for them to get the idea that you are at 6?"
- "What would it take you to move up from 5 to 6?" or "When you move from 5 to 6, what would you be doing that you are not doing now?"
- "When you move from 5 to 6, what would others notice different about you that they don't notice now? What do you suppose you will notice different about them then?"

- "How invested would your wife say she is, on the same scale, in helping you solve this problem?"
- "How do you explain that she is more interested in your changing than you are? What do you suppose she would say is the reason that she is so interested in your moving from 5 to 6?"

Asking these questions helps the client become more aware of his current position, where he wants to get to, what he is doing that helps, what he will need to do, and how the people around him might notice differences and respond differently as he changes, thus enabling him to make an informed decision on what step he needs to take.

Scaling Progress

Scaling questions can also be used to assess the client's perception of the progress he is making. The following examples show a number of different ways this question can be applied.

- "Let's say 10 is where you want your life to be and 1 is where we started our work together, where would say you are at today?"
- "Where do you suppose your mother would say you are?"
- "What has to be different in your life for you to say that you are 1 point higher?"
- "What would it take you to move it up 1 point?"
- "What do you suppose your mother will say you need to do to move up 1 point?"
- "When you move up 1 point, who would be the first to notice the change?"
- "When you move up 1 point, what would he notice different about you that he doesn't see now?"
- "When your mother notices these differences in you, what do you suppose she will do differently with you?"
- "When that happens, what will you do to let her know that you like what she is doing?"
- "What do you suppose she will do then?"
- "At what point do you think you will say we don't have to meet like this?"
- "When things are at 7 or 8, what will be different with you that will tell you that you can go on with your life without outside help?"

Adapted from "Family Based Services: A Solution-Focused Approach," Insoo Kim Berg

VIDEO PRESENTATION: FORRESTER FAMILY , PART 2

Topic: Defusing anger and engaging clients in the assessment process



Directions: Use this worksheet to take notes. Below is a discussion guide to help you. After the video presentation, we will discuss your observations.

What techniques/question formulations/responses did Carol use to address Ms. Forrester's anger and "attitude?"

How did Carol move the conversation from venting to assessment? (techniques, question formulations, effective responses, etc.)

What opportunities did you identify where solution building interviewing strategies could have been helpful in this interview?

QUESTION FORMULATION: INTRODUCING CHANGE STRATEGIES

The following are sample question formulations and responses that can be used to introduce change strategies with clients. These can serve as **a model** for formulating your own questions and responses to meet the unique situation in each case.

"I have an idea about that... I'd like your opinion on it."

"What would you think about...?"

"What have you done in the past that's worked? I might be able to help you do it again."

"Well, it's going to take hard work. Let's start with something we know we can accomplish. What should that be?"

"You don't have to do this all by yourself."

"The most important thing is to make sure Rita is healthy. Let's talk about how to do that."

"I know you want me to give you an answer. I can't guarantee that my suggestion is the best one for you. Let me tell you how I'd think it through. Then you can help make the decision."



Adapted from Child Welfare League of America, Field Guide to Child Welfare, Volume II

QUESTION FORMULATION: REASSURING AND SUPPORTING

There are two responses that case managers should probably never use. The first is, "It must be really hard for you." The second is, "I'm sure everything will be all right." The first is so overused that it has become a trite phrase, rather than a genuine expression of understanding and concern. The second is superficial and patronizing, and greatly minimizes the importance of the situation, particularly when we cannot say with any certainty that everything will be all right.

Support and reassurance must be specific to the situation. These statements are not meant to gloss over or make light of problems. They must be honest, related to reality, and timed properly. They should be a natural extension of the conversation. Examples are:

"You've been through quite a lot these past months. It's no wonder you're so tired!"

"I think you're doing fine, considering you just learned how to do it. You'll improve with practice. Maybe I can help you by giving you some feedback."

"I've talked with William. He still wants to come home, even with all that's happened. If we continue what we've been doing, I think we have a good chance of making it work."

"You may feel very alone at the moment, but I want you to know that we're here to help as you need us."

"You're not the only one who feels that way. I know of many people who have shared your experience. It might be helpful if you could talk to some of them directly."

"I know it feels overwhelming. Let's try it a little at a time. It'll be easier to handle that way."

"You can't scare me away just by being angry. If I understand why you're angry, I can handle it."

"In my opinion, I think it looks wonderful! It's obvious you've put a lot of work into it. Where did you find that chair?"

"How long has it been since you've had an hour to yourself?"



Adapted from Child Welfare League of America, Field Guide to Child Welfare, Volume II

VIDEO PRESENTATION: TIM, PART 2



Topic: Solution Building Interviewing Techniques

Directions: Use this worksheet to jot down notes about this interview. After viewing this video, we will discuss what you observed. Pay special attention to the way the interviewer integrates the use of the different solution building interviewing techniques.

What I observed about the interviewers use of solution building interviewing techniques with this client.

What was the client's general response to this interviewer?

My overall reaction to this approach/technique

End-of-Session Feedback for Tim

Compliments

Peter: Okay. So let me give you some of my impressions based on what we talked about so far. First off, I have to say how impressed I am that for six or seven months you basically have been taking care of those boys.

Tim: Ya.

P You have some help from your sister, but you have basically, been doing this by yourself.

T Yup, absolutely.

P Through your sheer will and determination. And I wanna shake your hands on that, shake your hand on that. I think that that's a big accomplishment. That's a big accomplishment. It's also very clear to me that you care about your boys.

T Absolutely. Ya, there's no doubt there.

P And that bottom line in this is that you want to be with your boys and that you want them to have a home with their father and not be bounced around from place to place.

T Ya, I don't want that.

P Okay, okay. And I also wanted to say that I'm very impressed that as angry and frustrated as you are with what happened last week in court.

T Ya.

P And how that came out. I'm very impressed that in spite of that, you're able to look at your situation and think about and talk about what changes, even small changes, could be made that both impress the court and at the same time make the kind of home you wanna have for your boys.

T Ya.

P So you were talking about things like you'd like to spend more time with the boys.

T Uh-huh.

P Maybe go to Connor's school. Urn, you were talking about not yelling as much. I forgot, what were you saying to do instead of yelling? What you'd like to see happen instead?

T You know, do more things with them. Take them to the park. You know, read to them maybe. I don't know. Something like that.

P That's very impressive to me. And a lot of people would be so angry with this situation that they couldn't think about those things, but you're thinking.

T Oh, I'm thinking about, ya about my boys.

Bridge

P Okay. And I agree with you. I think that following through on the expectations of the court is gonna make the biggest impression on the court.

T Okay, okay.

Task

- P** Um, that thinking on your part makes a lot of sense to me. Um, and I know that you're very interested in getting your boys back as soon as is possible. So one of the next pieces for us is to start work on this parent-agency agreement where we put down the things that you're going to do.
- T** Oh, okay, okay.
- P** Like, um, follow through on the alcohol assessment and the parenting classes and so forth. And um, then we both sign that.
- T** Okay.
- P** So I'm gonna get started based on the information that you gave me and draw up a preliminary parent-agency agreement.
- T** Okay.
- P** And then um, in about a week or ten days we'll sit down and we'll talk that through and see if that's still the way you see it.
- T** Ya, that'd be great. Finally.
- P** And we can talk about any adjustments in it that you wanna have made in it.
- T** Okay.
- P** Okay? I also heard that you're concerned about your job situation and that you have uh, some financial rent concerns right now.
- T** Ya.
- P** Um, and that even down the line you wanna be talking about day care, to get some, assuming the boys come back, that you'll have --
- T** Oh, they'll come back.
- P** -- day care, okay? And um, I think as we talk along about the parent-agency agreement, we can also talk about those things and how those things can happen, too. Okay? Um, so I think the next step is for me to get some information about when the parenting classes are, when and where about the alcohol assessment and get that scheduled. And of course, next step is to set up a visit.
- T** Ya, about time.
- P** Between you and your children.
- T** Ya, absolutely.
- P** So what I will do is when I get to the office I will call the foster parents.
- T** Okay.
- P** And I'll find out about their schedule. Um, are there any times which you couldn't meet the children?
- T** Any day. I can meet with them any day. I can adjust my schedule no problem. That's my priority, ya.
- P** Alright. So I will um, make that call and I will get back to you later today or tomorrow about that.
- T** Uh, you know, like I don't have a phone. How are you gonna?
- P** Ah, that's right. That's right. I will um, I can leave you my card.
- T** Okay.

P Which has my phone number on it.

T Alright. That'd be good.

P And um, you can give a call. If I'm not in my office you can, it's got a voice mail.

T Okay.

P You can ask to ring the secretary and I will leave the information with the secretary.

T Oh, okay. Good, so I call later today or –

P Ya, call between 4:30 and 5:00 today. I'll try to have it there.

T Okay. Try to do that, ya.

P Otherwise I'll have a message there about what happened and what to do next.

T Okay. That would be great. Ya.

P Okay? Um, is there anything else that we should talk about?

T No, that's a lot right now. You know, it's a lot of information.

P You have any questions?

T Uh, not yet. You know, I'm sure I will as we go, definitely have questions.

P Alright. Well, thanks again for meeting with me.

T Thanks.

P And um, I'll wait for your phone call.

T Okay.

References

Berg, I.K. (1994). *Family Based Services: A Solution – Focused Approach*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Berg, I.K. & DeJong, P. (2002). *Interviewing for Solutions* (2nd ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Brown, V. A. (2002). *Child Welfare Case Studies*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Rycus, J.S. & Hughes, R.C. (1998). *Field Guide to Child Welfare* (Vol I & Vol II). Washington, DC: CWLA Press.

Saleebey, D. (2005). *The Strengths Perspective in Social Work Practice* (4th ed). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.