Competencies

Relevant Child Welfare Outcomes

**Safety 1:** Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect

**Safety 2:** Children are safely maintained in their home whenever possible and appropriate

**Permanency 1:** Children have permanency and stability in their living situations without increasing reentry to foster care

**Permanency 2:** The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children

**Well-being 1:** Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs

Core Competencies

The trainees will understand the principals of effective interviewing techniques considering age, developmental level, and mental health status of the interviewee.

The trainee will demonstrate the ability to establish rapport and obtain accurate and comprehensive information for initial or on-going assessments.

The trainee will value employing strength-based engagement strategies during the interview process to promote fairness and equity in assessments and case management.

Learning Objectives

Knowledge

**K1** The trainee will be able to explain both *question content type* and *question content style* and their importance in developing questions which encourage narrative responses from interviewees.

**K2** The trainee will be able to describe the phrases of an interview (preparation, rapport building, information gathering, and closure).
The trainee will be able to discuss effective strength-based interviewing strategies for defusing conflict, engaging family members who are reluctant to deal with critical issues and assisting family members to openly discuss their opinions and feelings.

The trainee will be able to summarize how a child’s or adult’s ability to comprehend and respond to questions is reflected by his or her level of cognitive, emotional, and linguistic development.

The trainee will be able to describe when cooperation with law enforcement is advisable before conducting an interview.

The trainee will be able to list five possible ways trauma can influence an interview.

Skills

Given a case example, the trainee will be able to write 3 opening interview questions intended establish rapport and begin information gathering.

Given a case example, the trainee will be able to formulate 3 interview questions to learn more about the family’s values, beliefs, or practices that relate to child rearing and parenting.

Given a scenario or role play of a family situation, the trainee will be able to:

a. Select and modify interview strategies in response to family members’ behaviors;

b. Describe possible strategies to defuse or de-escalate conflict;

c. Identify strategies to engage family members to participate in interviews.

Given a written transcript of an interview between a child and interviewer, the trainee will be able to correctly identify the question content type and question content style of each question asked by the interviewer.

Given a poorly worded transcript of an interview, the trainee will be able to identify the weaknesses of the questions and then design questions whose structure is more soundly designed, age appropriate, open-ended and legally defensible.
Values

V1 The trainee will value the importance of a well-conducted interview for establishing new relationships, and as a primary source of information for assessments, interventions and on-going case management.

V2 The trainee will value a respectful, empathic, and strength-based approach to listening and responding to events and life experiences described by interviewees.

V3 The trainee will value the importance of worker culturally congruent conversational skills to enhance understanding of interviewee responses and developing rapport.

V4 The trainee will value learning about the interviewee’s values, beliefs, and behaviors and eliciting family strengths and resources.

V5 The trainee will value the skillful use of power and authority in the interview process.

V6 The trainee will value awareness of his/her responses to interviewees, with particular attention to biases that may arise.

V7 The trainee will value building trust and rapport by providing clear explanations to families about child welfare responsibilities, procedures, and services that relate to interview questions and responses.

V8 The trainee will value the importance of considering personal safety in planning for all interviews.

WORKING OUTLINE

1. Introduction
   a. Introduction of trainer/trainees
   b. Learning Objectives
   c. Agenda

2. Communication as a Primary Social Work Function
   a. NASW Code of Ethics as the overarching guidelines for all client interactions
      i. Ethics as the overarching guidelines for all client interactions
   d. What is communication?
i. Verbal and non-verbal
ii. Communication loop
iii. Meaning: intent versus impact
iv. SW factors that influence the results of an interview
   1. Strengths-based philosophy
   2. Personal and professional styles
      a. Self-awareness
      b. Cultural identification
      c. Gender
      d. Knowledge/experience/skill
      e. Comfort with interviewing topics
   3. Use of authority
   e. Purpose of the social work interview
      i. Create or enhance client-SW connection, lay foundation for client empowerment, trust; building and supporting relationships
         1. Explain SW job and purpose of interview with clarity
         2. Defuse or reduce the risk of conflict
         3. Assist family members in openly sharing their opinions and feelings
         4. Establish appropriate boundaries
      ii. Gather accurate and complete information to aid in decision-making for assessments, interventions, and on-going case management
         1. Safety and risk (danger and harm in Safety Organized Practice)
         2. Assess/identify family and personal strengths and needs
         3. Personal and family history, including individual trauma histories
         4. Perceptions of the events/situations which prompted this interview
      iii. Share information/educate
         iv. Inspire behavioral change to enhance the safety and well-being of the child or children in the household
   f. Types of interviews
      i. Clinical
      ii. Forensic
      iii. Child Welfare
   g. Various models or strategies of interviewing
      i. Ethnographic
      ii. Solution focused
iii. Motivational
iv. Cognitive
v. others

2. Critical Nature of Language
   a. Power of words
   b. Congruence in meaning and understanding
   c. Empowerment versus dependency

3. Perceptions of “Interview”
   a. What is the SW’s framework?
      i. Inquisitorial
      ii. Appreciative inquiry
      iii. Confrontational
      iv. Who controls/directs?
      v. What is the goal?
   b. What is the interviewee’s framework?
      i. Understands concept and format
      ii. Cultural congruency
         Discuss ways in which culturally-based differences can be reflected, and importance of not misinterpreting them:
         1. Behaviors in the interview (eye contact, lack of response, use of silence, etc.)
         2. Personal space comfort zone
         3. Presence of others in the interview
         4. Level of privacy needed
         5. Assumption about what is important to the family/interviewee (values) and/or assumptions about what behaviors mean
         6. Comfort level with disclosing family matter/seeking outside assistance
         7. Deference to authority
   iii. Concern or fear of interview outcome

4. Question Style and Content
   a. How does the question asked influence the answer given?
   b. Explanation of question content
   c. Explanation of question style
   d. Recognition of style and content in interview scenario
e. Practice composing appropriate questions to learn more about the person’s values, beliefs or practices that relate to childrearing or parenting, using provided scenario

5. Possible Effects of Trauma on Interviewing

a. Emotional

i. Traumatic stress overwhelms a person’s sense of safety

ii. Trauma can elicit such intense fear, anger, shame, and helplessness that the person feels overwhelmed.

iii. Emotions experienced prior to language development maybe be very real for the child but difficult to express or communicate verbally.

iv. Distorted connections between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors can disrupt encoding and processing of memory.

v. Difficulties in communicating about the event may undermine a person’s confidence and social support.

vi. Separation from an attachment figure, particularly under traumatic and uncertain circumstances, is highly stressful for children

vii. Relatives serving as resource families may themselves be dealing with trauma related to the crisis that precipitated the investigation and placement and influence the child’s perception of the event, their physical and/or psychological safety concerning disclosure.

b. Cognition

i. Problems focusing on and completing tasks

ii. Difficulty planning and anticipating

iii. Problems understanding own contribution to what happens to them

iv. Learning difficulties

v. Problems with language development

c. Systemic
i. Multiple professionals conducting repeated interviews for the same information can cause traumatized children to believe their statements are not believed, can create doubt that their memory of events is accurate, and further impair their sense of trust.

ii. Interviewer personal characteristics or style may hinder building trust and engagement as well as enhance the risk of misinterpretation of both questions and responses.

iii. Unfamiliar people and locations may make it more difficult for the interviewee to feel psychologically safe.

iv. Interviewers may empathize with victims and “leak” feelings of helplessness, anger, and fear for which a child may take responsibility.

6. Trauma Informed Practice Strategies for Caseworkers
   a. Plan investigations, assessments, possible removals ahead; reduce the element of surprise.
   b. Try to keep things calm during the investigation; engage parents in helping the child.
   c. Provide sensory comfort, familiarity, help with settling in at the interview location.
   d. Empathize, connect & try to understand the adult and child’s perspective.
   e. Provide information about who you are, why you are there, why it is necessary to ask the questions you will be asking, and what to expect next.
   f. Support child’s relationships & family connections should a removal occur.
   g. Utilize services of child advocacy center as an interviewing site for children.
   h. Provide services aimed at healing & well-being.
   i. Help your colleagues to adjust their practice & deal with their emotions.
   j. Educate and work with law enforcement, parents, & foster parents around trauma reduction.

   i. Source: “Reducing the Trauma of Investigation, Removal, & Initial Out-of-Home Placement in Child Abuse Cases”

7. The Other Half of Interviewing: Listening
   a. The process of active listening
      i. Receiving
      ii. Attending
      iii. Interpreting
      iv. Responding
b. Recognizing and overcoming listening obstacles
   i. Environmental distractions
   ii. Source distractions
   iii. Inadequate preparation anxiety
   iv. Safety distractions/anxiety
   v. Factual diversion
   vi. Semantic diversion
   vii. Content listening
   viii. Selective listening
      1. Confirmation bias
   ix. Wandering thoughts
   x. Message complexity
   xi. Past experience with the source

c. Critical listening
   i. Evaluation of plausibility
      1. Reasonable alternative hypotheses
      2. Critical thinking
      3. Application of logic
   ii. Evaluation of source
      1. Source monitoring
         a. Credibility
         b. Competency
   iii. Evaluation of competency
   iv. Evaluation of evidence

8. Phases of the interview
   a. Planning and Preparing for the Interview
   i. Case Related Tasks:
      1. Review information, case history and priors, DOJ, SW department protocol for investigating the particular form of child maltreatment alleged in referral (investigative interview)

      2. Consider consultation option (supervisor/prior worker; expert in: family’s ethnic group/mental health/DV, etc.)

      3. Contact with reporting party and other collaterals

      4. Develop a “plan of action” as it related to interviews (order, location, time, duration of interview; in partnership with LE/coworker/PO/translator/other professional, etc.)
5. Discuss information that can only be obtained in the interview, what can wait or be elicited from another source

ii. Personal Preparation
   1. Self-disclosure do’s and don’ts

   2. Presentation of self-professional demeanor

   3. Self-awareness re: personal feelings/beliefs about abuse, how one deals with these feelings to avoid bias in interviewing activities and counter transference

4. Finding “common ground”

5. Discuss SW concerns or fears about interviewing and understanding their origins

6. Explore SW comfort with use of authority/control and how these can affect the interview

iii. Planning for potential interview barriers
   1. Questioning plan

b. Interview process
   i. Creating an “empathic” space

   ii. Choosing interview strategy (e.g., motivational interviewing, ethnographic interviewing, solution focused interviewing, cognitive interviewing, etc.)

   iii. Strategies for eliciting information (e.g., active listening, reflecting back, supporting, projective identification, etc.)

iv. Introduction of self and role

   1. Build connection, safety & trust
   2. Assessing client’s capabilities/competencies/linguistic level
   3. Ground rules for client (avoid miscommunication)
      a. OK not to know
      b. OK not to remember
      c. OK to ask for clarification
      d. OK to correct interviewer
      e. OK to ask questions or ask for a question to be repeated
      f. Be honest
4. Body language
   v. Engagement and rapport building
   vi. Strategies for reaching common understanding (e.g., recapitulation, paraphrasing, clarifying, etc.)
   vii. Strategies for handling denial/minimization (“broken record,” provide options/ facts, move on)
   viii. Task introduction

1. Explanation of methods/documentation
2. Explanation of purpose
   a. prove or disprove referral information/allegations
   b. find missing information from case data
   c. discover needs of client for case management/planning
   d. discover resources the family has or needs
   e. understand client’s perception of strengths, needs, issues, resources, motivations
3. Information gathering
   a. Who, what, when, where, how, context
   b. Question design (e.g., open-ended, focused, clarification, etc.)
4. Assessment
   a. Verbal, non-verbal
   b. Script vs. question refinement
   c. Client’s reactions/interaction
5. Provide information
   a. Educate as to system, resources, child safety/protection issues
   b. Inform as to what to expect/next steps
6. Closure
   a. Get any releases signed
   b. Leave door open for further contact
ix. Truth evaluation
   1. Verbal and non-verbal
      a. Language of responsibility
   2. Script versus question responsiveness
   3. Interviewee reactions/interaction
x. Provide information
   1. Safety issues or safety plan
   2. Services or service plan
   3. Options
   4. Education/ Information
c. Interviewing children
   i. Discuss how it differs from interviewing adults
   ii. Tasks of the interviewer
      1. Build connection, safety & trust
      2. Assessing client's capabilities/competencies/linguistic level
      3. Ground rules for client (avoid miscommunication)
         a. OK not to know
         b. OK not to remember
         c. OK to ask for clarification
         d. OK to correct interviewer
         e. OK to ask questions or ask for a question to be repeated
      4. Truth – Lie Check
         a. Research with children, including children who have been
            maltreated, has demonstrated that a promise to tell the
            truth increases children's honesty, even if they have been
            coached to cover up a transgression or to make a false
            report.
            The wording of the promise is important. Young children
            are likely to know the meaning of the word "will" even if
            they do not know the meaning of the word "promise";
            hence, asking the child "do you promise that you will"
            should have some meaning for even quite young children.
            Asking for both a "yes" response (to "do you promise")
            and a "no" response ("are you going to tell me any lies")
            reduces the likelihood that a child mindlessly replies "yes"
            to the questions. Furthermore, asking "do you promise
            that you won't tell any lies" is not recommended; many
            children will respond "no," probably intending to assert
            that "no, I won't tell any lies."
      5. f. Be honest
   iii. 4. Body language
         e. Interviewing Adolescents

12. Closure and Evaluations