



CULTURALLY SENSITIVE INTERVIEW ON PARENTING

This interview outline is intended to assist health and social sector professionals working with families with children, who have moved to their current country of residence. The aim of the interview is to gain the best possible understanding of the family's situation and the parents' thoughts. The professional can ask questions in any order they wish, state questions using his or her own words, and use language that is as plain and clear as possible. Not every single question needs to be asked in every case. The professional must always personally assess which questions should be presented to the parents and in what order.

The interview has four different sections. The interview can be carried out in parts during several meetings, and a whole section or several sections can be skipped if the professional already knows about the family's situation or if the particular questions do not apply to the family. Each section contains core questions and supporting questions. The supporting questions provide additional information, for example, if parents do not provide enough information on the matter spontaneously. If the interviewer needs more detailed information on something, he or she may also ask questions of his or her own. The interview outline contains thematic titles and introductory texts, but these should not be read to the interviewees. Instructions for the interviewer are indicated in italics in the text. Italics are also used to mark words that can be changed to a term used by parents or the name of the child, or to the location in which the interview takes place.

It is important for families that sufficient background and justification is given for the questions and that the questions are presented to them in a friendly and personal manner. Likewise, it is important that professionals try to make the interview atmosphere as pleasant and safe as possible. The parents should be told that they do not have to answer all questions. The interviewer can move on to the next question if the parents do not want to answer a specific question. At the end of the interview it is a good idea to thank parents for the discussion and to give positive feedback on their openness/cooperation/courage.

Some of the questions may also be presented to the child if he or she is present at the appointment. When this is the case, the professionals can alter questions wherever necessary in order to make them more suitable for children. However, it should be noted that the idea of a child being asked directly about these matters may seem strange or unheard of to some parents and children.

This interview outline has been prepared as part of the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare-coordinated *National support system for refugee mental health work and the knowhow dissemination* project (PALOMA2 project, 2019-2021). The project is being funded by the EU's the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF).

An example of how to introduce the interview to parents

We want to get to know your family better. We hope that you can provide information on your family's situation, wishes, and needs. We want to better understand your thoughts. Parents know best about matters related to their child and family and what it is like to be a parent to their child. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. If there's anything difficult or unclear about the questions, please ask us to clarify. Answering all questions is voluntary.

You can begin the conversation by saying something like "Please tell me/us about your family". What would you like to speak with us about?"

SECTION 1: Linguistic and cultural background of the family

This section contains questions about the mother tongue or languages spoken by the parents and child as well as about their ethnic and cultural background. Ethnic or cultural background can be significant for some families, while for others it is less so. Getting to know the family and their background will support effective cooperation. Language-related matters affect practical matters and the child's development.

Language skills

Core questions

What languages do you speak in your family?

What languages do you speak to *your child(ren)*? Do you use different languages in different situations?

What kind of environment did you (the parents) grow up in when you were children?

Did you attend school?

In which language have you (the parents) studied?

Can you (the parents) read or write in any language?
PLEASE NOTE: The question concerning literacy may be an issue some illiterate adults feel ashamed of, so this should be asked in as sensitive a manner as possible.

For parents of children over the age of 5:
Has *your child* attended school? In what language has *your child* been taught?

Supporting questions

What language do you want to use when you use our services? *PLEASE NOTE: It is a good idea for the professional to check the language in which the parents wish to receive appointment information and other notifications if this is not yet known.*

What is the mother tongue of each parent?

The family's cultural background and ethnic identity

Core questions

Can you tell me something about your family's background?
For example, where were you born?

Is your ethnic or religious background important to your family or *your child*/children?

Has *your child* experienced bullying or harassment due to their ethnic background or religion?

Do you teach *your child* the customs or language of *your country of origin*? Do you eat foods from *your country of origin*?

PLEASE NOTE: The name of a specific country or territory may be used in place of "your country of origin". The family may have lived in several different countries and it is a good idea to consider on a case-by-case basis which term is best to use.

What things would you (the parents) want *your child* to learn about *your country of origin* or, for example, about your religion?

Supporting questions

Have you lived in a country other than *your country of origin* and *here*?

PLEASE NOTE: The name of the country / region where the family lived before and where they live now can be used instead of "country of origin" or "here" in the future.

Can you describe your family's ethnic and religious background?

What is the attitude towards *your child's* ethnic or religious background at school or day care?

SECTION 2: The family's life in the current country of residence and immigration background

This section contains questions that will provide background information on the family's life. Some parents may be sensitive to some of the questions. It can be explained to parents that although the questions may sometimes seem difficult to answer, the questions are asked because they inform professionals how to best help. These questions can also be asked later if the professionals are still in the process of building trust with the family.

Information concerning immigration should be collected separately for each family member. They may have entered the country at different times and via different routes. Children born outside the parents' own community or country of origin may sometimes be viewed as vulnerable or special by parents and relatives, which may affect their attitudes towards the child.

The family's life in the current country of residence

Core questions

What has your family's life been like *here*?

PLEASE NOTE: The name of the country / region where the family lives now can be used instead of "here" in the future.

Can you be the kind of parents you would like to be *here*?

Do you need information about parenthood or raising children *here*?

Have you made friends *here*? Do you have any relatives *here*?

Many people experience discrimination, prejudice, or racism after moving to a new country. Have you (the parents) experienced something like this? What about *your child*?

How have your family's everyday life and routines changed since you came *here*? How has *your child's* life changed?

PLEASE NOTE: The child may have been born in the current country of residence, in which case the question must be altered.

Is there something that you (the parents) miss about the way of life you had before you came *here*? Does *your child* miss something?

PLEASE NOTE: The child may have been born in the current country of residence, in which case the question must be altered.

Supporting questions

What has been the best for you about living *here*?

What has been the most difficult for you about living *here*?

What are your hopes and wishes for your future *here*? Is there something in the future that worries you?

For example, information about the local school or day-care system or something else? Can we help you somehow? Do you want to ask us something?

What do the family members or relatives living in *your country of origin* expect of you? Do you support them financially or send money to them?

Core questions

How has moving *here* affected your wellbeing? How has it affected *your child's* wellbeing?

How is the relationship between you (the parents) at the moment? Do you need help with your relationship?

PLEASE NOTE: This may be a sensitive question and the interviewed parties may be puzzled as to why the professional is inquiring about the parents' relationship in connection with a child's affairs.

Supporting questions

Are you concerned about your family members living in *your country of origin* or elsewhere?

Immigration background

Core questions

When did you leave *your country of origin*? Did your whole family leave at the same time?

Did you (the parents) or your family experience difficult things before coming *here*?

Some people have experienced persecution or violence. Have you (the parents) or has your family experienced such things? Can you tell me something about your experiences?

PLEASE NOTE: Consider whether you can ask about experiences of violence in the presence of children. The presence of a spouse and an interpreter may also affect a person's willingness to share their experiences.

Has *your child* experienced or seen things that it would not be good for a child to see or experience? For example, has *your child* seen violence targeted at you (the parents)? Has *your child* experienced violence?

PLEASE NOTE: Consider whether you can ask about experiences of violence in the presence of children.

People who leave their home country often experience different losses. Did you (the parents) experience any losses when you left *your country of origin*?

What losses has *your child* experienced?

How do you keep in touch with relatives in *your country of origin*? How often?

Has *your child* been forced to part from people who are important to them in *your country of origin*? What about during the trip or *here*?

Supporting questions

Do you want to say why you left *your country of origin*?

Were there people who were important/close to you who you had to leave? If so, who were these people?

SECTION 3: The child's problem from the parents' perspective and experiences of help

In this section, parents are asked about a child's illness, problem or challenge that has caused them to become clients of this service. These questions aim to obtain information on the family's experiences and the severity of the problems, as well as information on the help the parents would like to receive.

Core questions

We would like to hear your thoughts as the child's parents about why you came here today.

PLEASE NOTE: It can be emphasised to parents that there are no right or wrong answers to this and that it is important to hear their own thoughts so that the professionals and parents can understand one another.

Can you describe the *problem* due to which you are here?

PLEASE NOTE: If the parents name a specific problem or cause for their visit, use this term instead of "problem" in the future.

How does the *problem* affect your family?

How serious do you (the parents) think the *problem* is?

Can you speak to someone about the *problem*?

How is the *problem* seen at school or day care? Have teachers or nurses said anything about the *problem*?

Did *your child* have problems/challenges/difficulties in *your country of origin*?

PLEASE NOTE: The child may have been born in the current country of residence, in which case the question must be altered.

What things do you think affect *your child's problem*?

Supporting questions

How have other family members experienced this *problem*? Are they worried?

What is the cause of the *problem* in the opinion of other family members? In the opinion of friends or other loved ones?

How do other family members feel about you coming here?

How important is religion or spirituality to your family? What role does religion or spirituality play in this situation?

Do you think that *your child's* ethnic background might affect the *problem* in some way, negatively or positively?

Core questions

Is your family experiencing worries that may increase the severity of the *problem*? For example, difficulties in day-care, school, with neighbours, in the parents' relationship, at work, in studies, in financial matters or something else?

Supporting questions

Experiences of help and related wishes

Core questions

Parents seek help or support for different problems from different places, such as a doctor or a religious community. What help have you received for this *problem*?

Have you received any help that you (the parents) thought was important in your family's current situation? What has not helped you?

Do you feel like we sometimes misunderstand you? Can we do something differently so as to ensure your family and *your child* get help?

Has it been difficult for your family to get help *here*? Have things such as language or cultural differences made it difficult to get help?

Supporting questions

Have you received help for this *problem* from a family member, friends or someone else?

Sometimes families and professionals who help families have differing ideas about care and help, especially if they come from different cultures. What kind of experiences have you had?

What kind of issues can be misunderstood *here*?

SECTION 4: Family, parenting and parenthood

The structure of the family and its parenting methods are important background information. For example, grandparents or other relatives may be important in a child's life, and sometimes they may have the primary responsibility for the child. Visual aids, such as family trees or network maps, can be used when parents tell about their families.

Some of the questions in this section may be sensitive, for example those that concern the use of violence as a form of discipline. If the parents disclose activities/parenting methods that are detrimental for a child's wellbeing, follow the instructions of your local authorities. It must also always be clarified to the parents why violence as a form of discipline should not be used (for example, it is detrimental to the development of the child and intimidates the child). In addition, parents should be offered alternative positive methods for raising children and supported in implementing these. Consider on a case by case basis when it is best to discuss issues of this kind with the parents. When planning the appointment, take into consideration that questions about violence and disputes are found at the end of the interview format. Where possible, it is a good idea to end the appointment by discussing neutral or positive matters.

Family

Core questions

Who does your family include? Who lives in your home?
PLEASE NOTE: Remember to ask about other important people in the family. Parents may have children from other relationships. For example, some children may have stayed in their country of origin or died.

What other important people are involved in your life and *your child's* life?

What resources and strengths does your family have? What about *your child*? What about in your relationship?

Can you describe the relationship between you (the parents) and *your child*?
PLEASE NOTE: Ask both parents separately.

What is the relationship like between *your child* and other family members?

Supporting questions

The child is your family's (*first, second, third...*) child. Is there anything special about this?

What kind of status does *your child* have in your family and extended family?

Would *your child's* status be different if you were still living in *your country of origin*?

Does *your child's* name have a special meaning? Does another family member have the same name?

Parenting and parenthood

Core questions

Who in your family takes care of *your child* the most and spends the most time with *them*?

Are *your child's* siblings and other relatives involved in *your child's* care? How do they participate in *your child's* care?

In your family, is the relationship between mother and child(ren) different from the relationship between father and child(ren)?

What kind of things do you (the parents) and *your child* like to do together? For example, do you play, do you do chores, do you go grocery shopping, do you eat together?

PLEASE NOTE: If parents do not do anything together with their child, evaluate why. For example, if the parents do not play with the child, the reason for this may be that it is not customary in their country of origin or that the parents are experiencing problems with coping.

How do you (the parents) decide on how to raise *your child/* children? Do you agree on how to raise them?

What do you think is a good up-bringing? What do you consider to be good behaviour from children?

What kind of things do you want a child to learn from their family or relatives?

What kind of tasks and responsibilities do you think children have? Do girls and boys have different responsibilities and obligations? What responsibilities do children have in your family?

Supporting questions

Has childcare changed since you came *here*?

What is the relationship between parents and children usually like in *your country of origin*?

Do you tend to tell stories to *your child/* children? What kind of stories do you tell them and how? Do you read to *your child*?

PLEASE NOTE: When asking this question, take into account that the parents might be illiterate.

How is respect shown in your family or community?

PLEASE NOTE: If the parents do not answer the question spontaneously, they can be asked, for example, about how children should behave in the company of adults.

How do your relatives or community display closeness, affection and love?

PLEASE NOTE: If the parents do not answer the question spontaneously, they can be asked, for example, about physical touch, physical closeness or telling the child about emotions.

Core questions

What do you think a child of this age is capable of?
What do you think is most important about the development of a child of this age?

How do you encourage or reward *your child* for the desired behaviour?

In families, the parents may disagree and argue and sometimes also children and parents may disagree and argue. What kind of issues does your family disagree or argue about?

How do you set boundaries for *your child* and how do you discipline *your child*/children?

Sometimes parents may feel that they have been too hard-handed or harsh to the child. Has this happened to you or are you concerned that this could happen to you?

How were you (the parents) treated by your own parents or caregivers when you were children? For example, have you been physically punished? What do you think about this now?

What do you do if *your child* behaves in a way that is against the rules or what has been agreed?

Is there violence in your family?

Do you want our assistance or help in matters related to raising *your child*?

Supporting questions

What skills should *your child* learn? What is expected of *your child*? Have you done something to teach *your child* to be independent? For example, at what age do you think he or she can be alone at home, take care of their siblings, take part in household chores or go out and play with friends?

Do you ignore *your child* or take things away from them, such as sweets or games?
Do you hold them in place physically? Do you yell? Do you pull their hair or slap/spank them? In your opinion how does this affect *your child*?

How are children generally forbidden from doing something and scolded/told off in *your country of origin* and your own community? How are they disciplined? Does the child's age or gender affect this?

What do other family members and relatives do if *your child* does not comply with the rules?

What do you consider violence?
PLEASE NOTE: For example, violence as a form of discipline can be clarified by saying that it is a way to physically limit a child by punishing for example by slapping or hitting them or pulling at their hair.