

# INTERVIEWING STRATEGIES FOR FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

---



## CASEWORKER FIELD TOOLS

### ADAPTED FOR KANSAS

---

OHIO DEPARTMENT OF JOB AND FAMILY SERVICES &  
OHIO CHILDREN'S TRUST FUND

DECEMBER 2014

Adapted from IHS, with permission, by the State of Kansas Department for Children and Families-January 2017

(EXCERPTED FROM: OHIO DIFFERENTIAL RESPONSE CASEWORKER SELF-ASSESSMENT  
AND FIELD TOOLS)



## Caseworker Field Tools

The following pages contain a variety of strategies, assessments and tools for caseworkers to consider integrating into their practice.

The Six Basic Interview Steps in Solution-Focused Casework Practice (p. 32), Solution-Focused Assessment Questions (p. 33) and Assessment Tools and Strategies (p. 34) can help guide your conversations with families, so they can be as strength-based and solution-focused as possible.

Finally, the Family Circles Tool (p. 37), Three Houses Tool (p. 39), and Wizards and Fairies Tool (p. 40) are creative exercises for helping families problem-solve, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and identify possible sources of support.



## Six Basic Interview Steps in Solution-Focused Casework Practice

- 1
  - Assume client wants to engage.
  - Set the tone for the partnership you want to establish. “Bring yourself to the table” and be transparent and “real.”
  - Remember the client is the expert in his or her life.
  
- 2
  - Ask for the client’s perceptions of his or her situation. This is key to demonstrating the belief that the client is the expert on his or her life.
  
- 3
  - Use the client’s perceptions to build on what the client wants to be different in his or her life.
  - Invite the client to describe what WILL be instead of what won’t.
  
- 4
  - Ask what it will take for a solution to happen. What would need to be different?
  - Keep the conversation away from problem talk. Instead, focus on what is possible.
  - Ask about exceptions to the problem or concern.
  - Ask the “miracle question.” Ask the client to imagine that a miracle happened while he or she was sleeping. This miracle has solved whatever problem or concern is occurring. Because the miracle took place while the client was asleep, he or she doesn’t know that it happened. Then ask the client to describe what one small change would indicate that something had happened to solve the problem or concern.
  
- 5
  - Ask what small steps the client can and/or is willing to take toward the solution.
  - Ask scaling questions (questions with responses ranked on a scale of 1 to 10) such as “How motivated are you to...” or “Where are you on the scale and what would it take to move one number higher?”
  
- 6
  - Summarize your impressions of the work the client has done to come up with a solution. This will help draw attention to the client’s accomplishments and competency in knowing what is right for him or her and his or her family.

## Solution-Focused Assessment Questions

### Discussing the Reported Concern

- › What is your understanding of what was reported?
- › What do you think would cause someone to call our agency about this issue?
- › Can you say a little more about what you were thinking/saying/doing when [the incident] happened?
- › It's really clear to me that you don't want us continually in your life. What do you think we need to see in order to close your case? What, if anything, would help prevent this from happening again in the future?
- › Have there been times when you were angry with your child and you did NOT spank/slap/hit him/her? What was different during those times?

### Child Functioning

- › What are you most proud of about your child(ren)?
- › What challenges you most about parenting your child(ren)?
- › If your child is having a bad day, what do you do to help him/her feel better? What is most helpful?
- › What does/did your mom/dad do to help you feel happy/safe/etc.?
- › What makes you feel sad? What do you do when you are feeling sad? What helps you feel better?

### Adult Functioning

- › Even though you are faced with all of this, how is it that you have been determined to do the best you can for your children?
- › How is your family different from the family you grew up in (in terms of the home, other family members, discipline, etc.)? How is it the same? What were your parents like?
- › As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up? What influenced you to want to be/do that?
- › What do you find most rewarding about being a parent and raising children? Most difficult?
- › How did you meet the person that you are/were in a relationship with? How would you describe him/her? What do/did you admire most about him/her? What about him/her challenges/challenged you?
- › What do you do to help yourself deal with the pressures of raising children?
- › Who supports you during difficult times in your life? How do they help you?

### Family Functioning

- › We've been talking about a lot of serious stuff. To give me a more balanced picture, can you tell me some of the things that you feel are good about your family?
- › What would your children say if I asked them how they can tell that you love them?
- › What would your parent(s) say you are good at?
- › What do you do when your family/parents/children are having a disagreement? What seems to help most in those situations?
- › What would need to change in order for you to feel more connected as a family?

## Assessment Tools and Strategies

Strategy	When and How to Use	Examples
<b>Look for Exceptions</b>	Exceptions are the times or situations when the problem does not happen. Learning about times when a problem was less severe or absent can help a family become aware of its strengths and small successes. Exceptions provide important information about what is possible, the parents' skills and current supports available to them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Can you tell me about a time when you decided not to get high?</li><li>▶ When did this problem seem a little better?</li><li>▶ Has anyone offered helpful advice about caring for children? How was it helpful?</li><li>▶ Was there a time when you were able to keep your cool?</li></ul>
<b>Scaling Questions</b>	<p>Scaling questions ask the parents or children to use a number between 1 and 10 to evaluate their situations. Because this is so simple, this tool can be used with children as young as 4. Counting and measuring are used in almost every language and culture. Scaling questions also can be helpful when trying to measure the seriousness of a problem, measure progress, determine motivation, or when encountering challenges to engagement.</p> <p>Scaling questions can be followed with questions about what it would take to improve the number. They also can be used to acknowledge progress and success.</p>	<p><b>Scaling questions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ On a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being "completely" and 1 being "not at all," how would you rate your ability to keep your child(ren) safe?</li><li>▶ On a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 representing "I would do everything I could" and 1 representing "I would do nothing," how important is finishing high school to you?</li><li>▶ Using 10 to stand for feeling like your life is going well, and 1 to stand for how terrible your life was when we first met, where would you say things are at now?</li><li>▶ With a smile meaning happy and a frown meaning sad, tell me how you feel things are going at home.</li></ul> <p><b>Follow-up questions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Why did you choose [5]?</li><li>▶ What would help change the rating from [2] to [3]?</li><li>▶ Last time we talked about school, you rated it as a [1]. Now it is up to a [2]. This is a lot of progress. What helped change the rating?</li></ul>
<b>What Else?</b>	Asking "What else?" can encourage parents or youth to consider other small things that could make a difference. After you ask this question, give the person time to think about it. He or she may consider the situation again and report successes or changes that might not have seemed important at first. This question is a good way to further discover the parents' and youth's skills and competence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ What else did that experience teach you?</li><li>▶ What else did you take away from that encounter with [your daughter's teacher]?</li><li>▶ What else would need to be different for you to feel like real progress has been made?</li></ul>

(continued on next page)

Strategy	When and How to Use	Examples
<b>Coping Questions</b>	Coping questions ask the parents or youth how they previously met challenges. Nobody's life is perfect, and most individuals have an outstanding ability to cope and resolve problems. Coping questions reveal the parents' and youth's skills and abilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Wow, with all that you have been through, how do you keep going?</li> <li>▶ I am sure there are times when you feel like leaving. What stops you?</li> <li>▶ Considering how long you have been drinking and how tough this week was, what did you find helped with the cravings? What helped you stay sober?</li> </ul>
<b>Compliments</b>	Compliments can help build and maintain relationships, but they have to be genuine to be well-received. They should be specific and include details about how the person making the compliment was affected.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Thank you for getting the information to me. This will help speed things up.</li> <li>▶ I appreciate your turning off your cell phone. It's helpful to me when we can talk without interruption.</li> <li>▶ I see you have a list of concerns. It's helpful when you come prepared so we can work together on these issues.</li> </ul>
<b>Pushing Buttons</b>	Asking family members what "pushes their buttons" can help you understand how they interact with one another and get a sense of how "in tune" they are with each another.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ What pushes your buttons?</li> <li>▶ What do you think pushes [family member's] buttons?</li> </ul>
<b>Tour Guide</b>	Having a family member act as a tour guide in his or her home demonstrates your respect for the family and your willingness to share power. It also can help "break the ice" if you're struggling to engage a family in conversation and is a great way to get kids involved.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Have someone in the family serve as a "tour guide" of their home.</li> </ul>
<b>Family Portrait</b>	Having family members draw family portraits can help you learn more about such family dynamics as how close children feel to their parents, how children feel about their parents, how children feel about their family, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Ask each family member to draw a picture of the family and share it with everyone. Ask follow-up questions about family dynamics based on what you see in each drawing.</li> </ul>
<b>Three Houses</b>	Three houses is a great technique to use when working with kids who cannot write or who have difficulty expressing themselves. It also can be used with older kids and adults, depending on the family dynamics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ On a piece of paper, draw three houses and give them different labels (such as "House of Good Things," "House of Worries" or "House of Wishes"). Have the children write or draw what they would put in each house. You may be able to gain insight from the houses' contents. For example, in the "House of Good Things," a worker would expect a child to draw things that are good in his or her life, such as "my dog Sparky," "my bedroom," "my Nintendo game," or "when daddy reads stories to me at bedtime."</li> </ul>

(continued on next page)

Strategy	When and How to Use	Examples
<b>Self-Portrait</b>	Have each member of the family draw a picture of him- or herself. Ask each family member follow-up questions related to how they take care of or use each part of their bodies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Bones/teeth/muscles – medical/dental care, exercise</li> <li>▶ Mouth/ears – listening to one another, communication and relationships among family members</li> <li>▶ Hands – caring for pets or family members, affection or physical touch</li> </ul>
<b>Fact Check</b>	As caseworkers, we ask many questions about the things we want to know about. Asking caregivers about what they want to talk about can help you learn what or who is important to them, who they turn to for help, what they value, their beliefs, etc. It also can show that you're willing to share power with them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Ask the caregivers to write down four important facts about themselves, plus one fact about their childhood relationships, their family, their friendships, their jobs, etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Family Circles Assessment</b>	<p>The Family Circles Assessment encourages the family members to create a picture or map of the people and influences that are part of their lives. It is made up of seven concentric circles. The innermost circle represents the individual. The next rings represent (respectively) the individual's partner and/or children; extended family; friends, neighbors and culture; agencies, schools and institutions; economics and community; and nature.</p> <p>If you want, you can draw the circles on a large piece of paper. Encourage the family members to be creative. They can use pictures, drawings, symbols and words to depict sources of support, stress or both.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ For descriptions of each circle, please see page 37.</li> </ul>
<b>Survival Stories</b>	Asking family members to tell their hypothetical "survival stories" can help you learn about their values, problem-solving abilities and beliefs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ If you were stranded on an island, what five things would you want with you?</li> <li>▶ If you were lost at sea, which four people would you want on your raft to help you get back to land?</li> </ul>
<b>Relationship Questions</b>	Relationship questions ask for the individuals' perceptions of what others think of them and make them consider whether they are living up to others' expectations. Relationship questions are a useful way to explore how an individual's behavior is harming other people in his or her life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ What do you suppose your [children] would say they like best about your being sober?</li> <li>▶ How do you think your [child] would say seeing you sober helps [him/her]?</li> <li>▶ What would your [son/daughter] say about how your [drinking] has affected [his/her] relationship with you?</li> </ul>

# Family Circles Tool

## Guidelines

This is a flexible tool that families can adapt for their own situations. Feel free to be creative. If you want, you can draw the circles on a larger piece of paper. You can use pictures, drawings, other symbols or words. The idea is for you, as a family, to create a picture or map of the people and influences that are a part of your world. Some are sources of support. Others are sources of stress. Some are sources of both support and stress. Below are some ideas for what might go inside the circles:

- 1) **Self** – The center of your world is your relationship with yourself and your inner belief system. Note your strengths and challenges. Note any conditions or qualities that deeply influence your life (such as athletic ability, hearing impairment or sense of humor).
- 2) **Partner/children** – List the names of your partner (if you have one), your child(ren), or whomever you live with and consider your family. Note their strengths and challenges. If you want, you can list ex-partners.
- 3) **Extended family** – List other family members in your life, including parents, siblings, aunts, uncles or cousins. Note the ways they help you and your family do well and ways they hold you back. These influences can continue for a long time, even after a family member has died.
- 4) **Friends, neighbors and culture** – List friends; neighbors; informal care providers; other members of a club, team, or cultural or religious group you're affiliated with; or others you have a relationship with by choice. These are the people outside your family who make a real difference (stressful or supportive). Note the ways they influence your family life. How does your informal network contribute to your family's well-being, or hold it back?
- 5) **Agencies, schools and institutions** – List people who are in your life because it is their job, such as school teachers, agency workers, job supervisors and coworkers. Note what you get from the relationship (for example: a paycheck, health insurance, an education, self-worth) and what you give (eight hours a day, the cost of having a car to get to work, time away from your children, etc.). How do these contribute to your family's well-being, or hold it back?
- 6) **Economics and community** – Note economic influences in your family's life (whether you're employed or unemployed, time limits on any public assistance you might receive, etc.). Describe your community and how it affects your family's well-being (whether you have a friendly or dangerous neighborhood). Note local, state, national and global trends that affect your family (such as video game violence, cuts in GED programs, affordable child care, etc.).
- 7) **Natural environment** – Note how the natural environment and its condition affect your family (for example, if your child has asthma caused by air pollution, if your family likes to relax at a park, etc.).

**Next, you may find it useful to circle sources of support and make a box around sources of stress, or use different colors for each. Some people or influences may be both!**



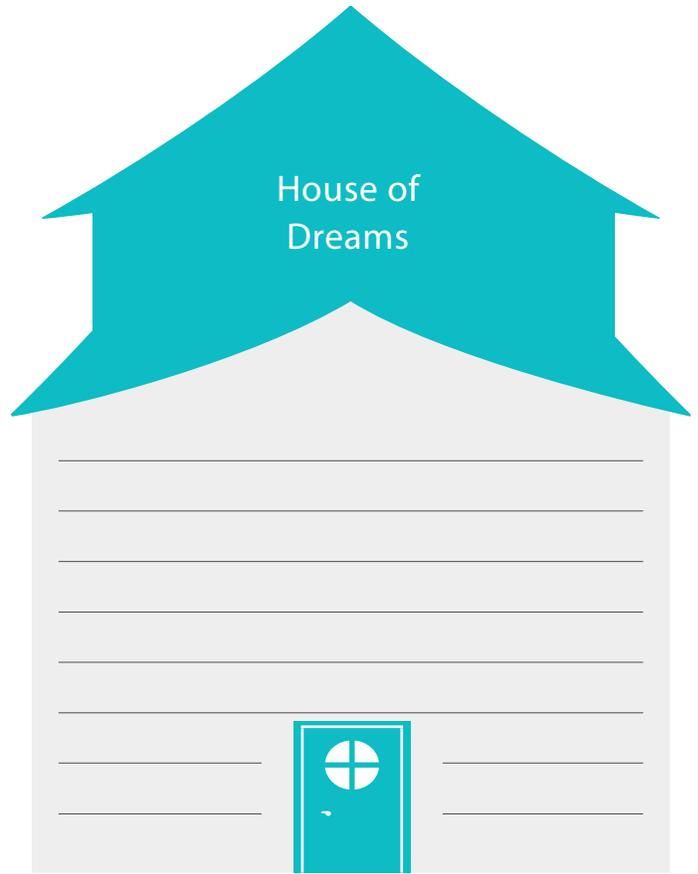
---

---

---

---

---



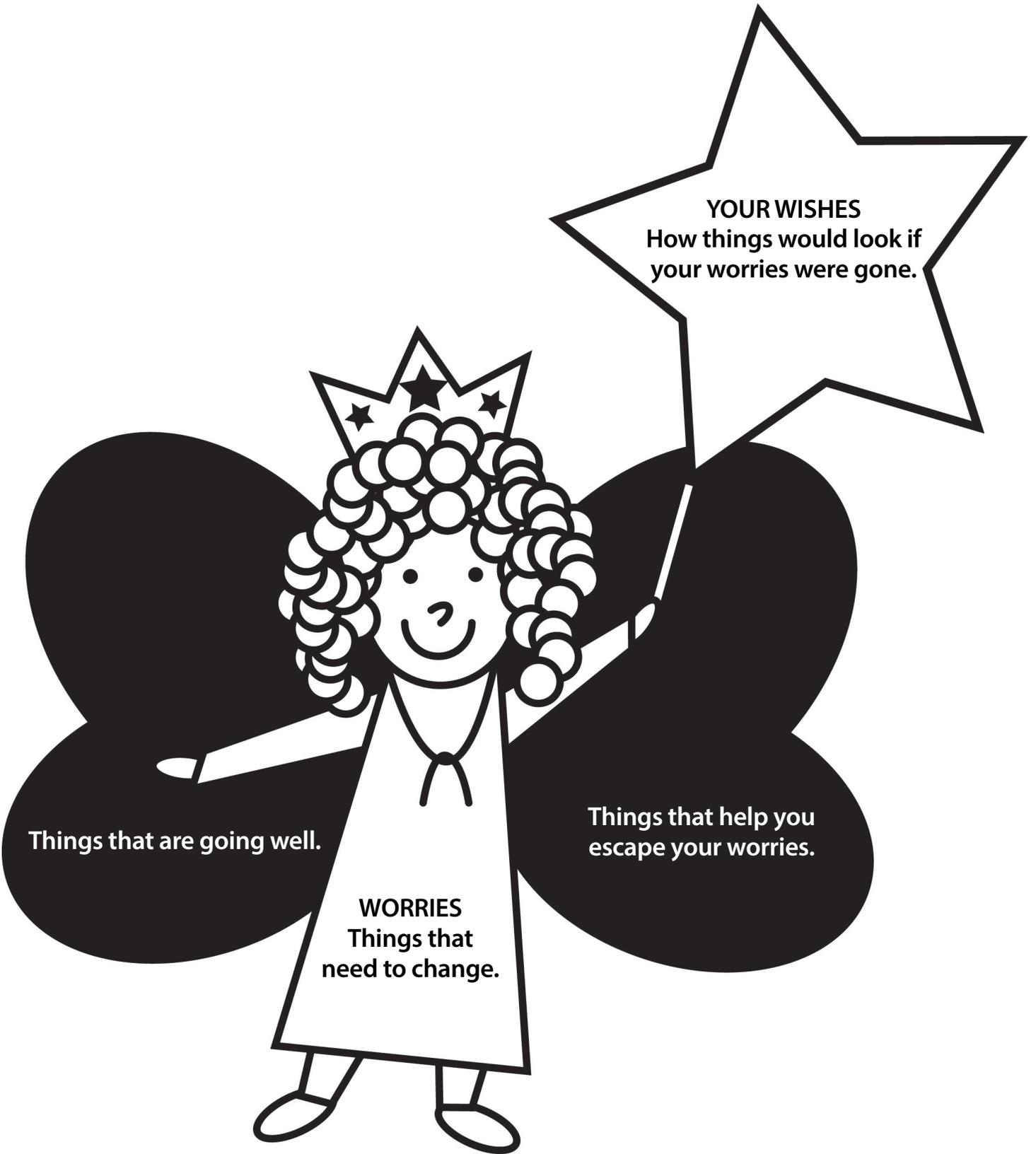


Things that are going well.

**WORRIES**  
Things that  
need to change.

Things that help you  
escape your worries.

**YOUR WISHES**  
How things would look if  
your worries were gone.



**YOUR WISHES**  
How things would look if  
your worries were gone.

Things that are going well.

Things that help you  
escape your worries.

**WORRIES**  
Things that  
need to change.

