

Exploring, Focusing, and Guiding

Engagement

Talk about what has been working for you as you meet with families. What are your needs? If you are ready to improve your skills in using exploring, focusing, and guiding, this guide can support you as you assess and plan.

Explore:

When you think about exploring, focusing, and guiding, what are your strengths? What improvements would you like to make in your use of exploring, focusing, and guiding?

Assessment

Scaling:

On a scale of 1 (need to learn) to 10 (can mentor), where would you place yourself? (Record on the functional assessment.)



Scaling Continuum:

<u>Learning</u> Learning the Skills	<u>Working</u> Using the Skills with Families	<u>Mentoring</u> Using the Skills to Mentor
1. Use verbal and non-verbal communication to gather information and convey understanding about the information.	1. Use verbal and nonverbal communication to gather information from families, verify accuracy of what was heard, and convey understanding about the information.	1. Use verbal and nonverbal communication to empower and encourage families and caseworkers to provide feedback about skills and performance.
2. Reframe information and situations to help others see the positive intent of that information or situation.	2. Reframe information and situations with families to help them see the potential, possibilities, and options for responding to situations and information.	2. Reframe information and situations with families and caseworkers to help them see the progress they are making and anticipate the growth they can still experience.

<u>Learning</u> Learning the Skills	<u>Working</u> Using the Skills with Families	<u>Mentoring</u> Using the Skills to Mentor
3. Use open-ended, close-ended, indirect, and solution-focused questions with others.	3. Uses Open-ended, Close-ended, Indirect and Solution-focused questions with families to help them tell their story and share information with the team.	3. Uses Open-ended, Close-ended, Indirect and Solution-focused questions with families and caseworkers to help them self-assess and discover strength-based solutions to meet their needs.
4. Summarize information to provide focus, understanding, answer unanswered questions, and bring closure to a discussion.	4. Summarize discussions with families to clarify understanding, ask any unanswered questions, and provide guidance for ongoing work.	4. Summarize the mentoring experience with caseworkers and families to provide feedback on strengths, determine needs, and determining direction for ongoing work.
5. Give specific and clear feedback and options for situations when asked.	5. Give specific and clear feedback to families to support them in their growth, give them direction for improvement, and motivate them towards further accomplishment.	5. Give caseworkers and families specific and clear feedback regarding their use of tools and skills to support them in improving their skill level.

Planning

1. What will it look like when you use exploring, focusing, and guiding as you would wish?
2. What steps can you take that will lead to the desired result?

Practice Opportunities

Mentor with Caseworker	Caseworker with Family	Family with Family
Use exploring techniques to gather information about a new employee as you begin the engagement process with them.	Use exploring techniques to gather information about a family as you begin the engagement process with them.	When family members are having difficulty communicating, coach them through using exploring skills to obtain additional information to come to a mutual understanding and possible resolution.

Use focusing skills with a new employee when they are having trouble staying on an important topic.	Use focusing skills with a family when they are having trouble staying focused on an important topic.	Coach families through using focusing skills with a child when they are having troubles focusing on an important topic.
Use guiding when a new caseworker is having difficulty finding their own style to help them use skills that you have observed working well for them.	Use focusing skills with team members when they are getting away from the current issues.	Coach families through using focusing skills when they are feeling scattered and like things are spinning out of control to bring focus back to the families' goals.
	Use guiding with families when they are having difficulties making new skills work within their families to help them find a way to use the skills that fit their family.	Coach families in using guiding skills to teach their children how to implement new skills, tools, or concepts.

Knowledge Base

Concept:

Using exploring, focusing, and guiding to build and maintain trusting relationships with families.

Basic Elements:

Exploring
Focusing
Guiding
Active listening
Attending behaviors
Reframing
Clarification
Open-ended questions
Closed-ended questions
Indirect questions
Solution-focused questions
Summarization
Feedback

Definitions:

Exploring:

A discovery process with a family that results in the gathering of information about the case and the family strengths and needs, builds and/or maintains a trusting relationship with the family, and develops a basis for a mutual working

relationship. Two skills that can be utilized in exploring are active listening and attending behaviors

Active listening, and the use of reflections

Listening is an active process that requires you to focus on what the family member is saying both in the content of his/her message and in the emotional process of his/her message. It is the most powerful interpersonal helping skill that promotes rapport and the building of a trusting and caring casework relationship. Active listening involves using both verbal and nonverbal messages to communicate your understanding of the family member's experience. Your verbal response can focus on what the person is describing, how the person is feeling, or both. You can reflect what the person is saying and/or reflect what the person is feeling. Active listening is used to empower families to explore and discuss topics. It conveys your understanding of their situation. It can help you gather certain information and it develops a broader and deeper understanding of the person's circumstances.

Attending behaviors:

These are behaviors that convey respect, acceptance, and trust to family members. Following are two categories of attending behavior:

- Physical attending is the intentional use of the environment and body to demonstrate respect for, acceptance of, and interest in to create a comfortable environment absent of distractions. You want to assure open communication by not placing any barriers between you and family members.
- Psychological attending involves observing and listening to the family member and responding. It involves observing the person's nonverbal behavior, hearing what the person's voice communicates, and assessing the congruence between the person's words and behaviors. Examples of verbal following and minimal encouragement are, "Oh, can you tell me more?" and, "Um-hmm," and, "Really?"

Focusing:

Focusing is using tools to center in on a particular area, strengths, needs, underlying needs, interventions, team make-up, etc. There are several tools that are valuable in helping to assist and guide families in remaining centered on the positives of a topic or situation.

Reframing:

Reframing is helping the person change his/her frame of reference in such a way that the problem can be approached in a positive way. It refers to the process of assisting the family member in identifying a different framework for understanding and responding to a problem. For example, we can view change as

painful or frightening, or we can reframe change as a manageable stage leading to a new opportunity.

Clarification:

Clarification is a process you use to help family members develop an understanding and awareness of their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. Clarifying responses facilitate the development of the family member's awareness and understanding of himself/herself.

Questions

Effective communication involves combining different types of questions. Questions should be used carefully and sparsely. Questions are a way for the child welfare worker to focus a conversation.

- *Open-ended questions* are used to encourage communication, gather information, and explore issues. Family members can answer as they choose, giving them an opportunity to explore their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Questions starting with the words *how* or *what* encourage the person to explore and allow him/her to express his/her own feelings, views, and perceptions.
- *Closed-ended questions* are used to gather specific factual information. Closed-ended questions begin with the words *who*, *when*, *will*, *is*, or *where* and usually can be answered with a one or two words.
- *Indirect questions* are statements that imply a question. Indirect questions can begin with, "Tell me..." or, "I've been wondering..." Indirect questions can be used to explore sensitive subjects and can lessen the harshness of a series of questions.
- *Solution-focused questions* are used to move from reframing to solutions. Solution-focused questions empower families to find their vision of success and their own strategies that have worked or will work for them. Solution-focused questions can be used to define the problem, determine when the problem does not exist, and encourage the family to specify what they do want.

Summarization:

Summarization helps you to synthesize a wide range of facts and feelings communicated. Effective summarizations contain no new or additional information but bring together information regarding facts or feelings previously discussed. Summarizations can be used for a variety of purposes. Following are some of the purposes:

- To keep the interview focused and on track, especially in rambling or disjointed conversations.
- To check your understanding of what the person is saying.

- To highlight contradictions or ambivalence (the phrase “I am confused” can be helpful in assuring greater clarity).
- To structure the interview, particularly in the beginning and in the end of the interview.

Guiding:

Give options, advice, directions, or suggestions to provide an opinion or suggestions to a family member that will guide the person into a specific course of action. This skill can give the family member options that they had not considered before, but is usually most effective after the family has come up with their vision of success and some steps they would like to take to begin to reach the vision.

Provide effective feedback, both positive and negative, to reinforce or maintain desired behavior and to change behavior where needed. Positive feedback, positive reinforcement, or supportive statements provide family members with tangible or intangible approval for their behavior and actions. Positive rewards are motivators and can empower family members into action.

Developmental feedback on strengths, needs, and progress is essential for family members to be aware of what is not working and the consequences of their behavior. Effective feedback messages enable a family member to be aware and consider issues he/she may have been avoiding or could not see. Feedback should be provided using the qualities and conditions for effective feedback messages.