

## Interviewing for the Family Strengths and Needs Assessment (FSNA)

1. General interviewing guidelines  
*This guideline relates to the assessment of needs and strengths, and assumes that any safety issues and/or forensic issues have already been addressed.*
  - 1.1. When you've joined with the family member, your interview will be more honest and open.
  - 1.2. Be respectful.
  - 1.3. Be culturally appropriate.
  - 1.4. Be part of a human-to-human interaction.
  - 1.5. Assume nothing.
2. Explain the FSNA and its purpose.
3. The best information is that provided by the family in their own words in response to **open-ended, non-directional** questions.
  - 3.1. How do you see your family?
  - 3.2. What are the most important things you want me to know about your family?
4. Ask about **strengths and successes** before asking about areas of struggle.
  - 4.1. What makes you proud/happy about your family?
  - 4.2. What has been going very well for you?
5. Ask the family to identify **areas of struggle** in non-blaming ways.
  - 5.1. What would you like to see different?
  - 5.2. What things make it hard for you and your family?

*Complete Steps 3–5, gathering information as you go. Proceed to Step 6 as needed.*

6. **Item-specific questions.** It is likely that one or more FSNA items could not be confidently answered based on information revealed by questions 3–5.
  - 6.1. Systematically inquire about any item where you could not score based on what you know. “Thank you for sharing your observations and beliefs about your family. As I mentioned, there are a few areas we always need to ask about because they are so important for families. To have a complete picture of your family in all of these areas, there are a few more questions I’d like to ask.”
  - 6.2. Start with items you anticipate will be LEAST sensitive, based on what you have learned so far.
  - 6.3. Begin your inquiry in each area with a non-directional question (see Table 1).
    - 6.3.1. If needed, follow up with one or more positively anchored questions (see Table 1).
    - 6.3.2. If needed, follow up with one or more negatively anchored questions (see Table 1).

6.3.3. If needed, follow up with one or more level identification questions (see Table 2).

7. **Additional points of view**

7.1. You will be interviewing more than one person (mother, father, children, other relatives, reporters, professionals, etc.) and may be gathering information from additional sources (record reviews, police reports, medical records, etc.). When all information has been gathered, if responses to any item would differ based on the source of the information, it may be necessary to return to one or more sources for additional clarifying information.

7.1.1. Ask if the person has reconsidered any information previously provided.

7.1.2. Explain that you've spoken to another or others, reviewed records, and need to reconcile some pieces of information that don't quite fit.

7.1.3. Provide the contradictory information, being careful to guard the source if you do not have permission to reveal or if revealing the source would create safety issues.

7.1.4. Do not assume that there is a right or wrong, or if there is, who is right or wrong.

7.1.5. If needed, provide your professional assessment.

8. **Complete the FSNA**

8.1. Reflect the **family's perspective** whenever possible.

8.2. If there are unresolved contradictions, proceed as follows:

8.2.1. If safety is not an issue and information is not conclusive, you may reflect the family's perspective, noting your differing point of view in the narrative.

8.2.1.1. Over time, you may be persuaded that the family is right.

8.2.1.2. Over time, you may be able to persuade the family to see themselves differently.

8.2.2. If safety is an issue, or the information is strongly pointing to a particular response, select the response that fits best, even if one or more family member disagrees. Use engagement skills to explain your choice; the narrative should reflect that there were opposing viewpoints.

# **OUTLINE FOR INTERVIEWING**

**OPEN-ENDED  
STRENGTHS  
STRUGGLES**

**NON-DIRECTIONAL FOLLOW-UP  
POSITIVE ANCHOR FOLLOW-UP  
NEGATIVE ANCHOR FOLLOW-UP**

**LEVEL CLARIFICATION  
(A vs. B, B vs. C, C vs. D)**

**INTERVIEW NOTES**

**Person interviewed:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**CAREGIVER**

<b>Substance abuse/use</b>	<b>Household relationships/domestic violence</b>
<b>Social support system</b>	<b>Parenting skills</b>
<b>Mental health/coping skills</b>	<b>Resource management/basic needs</b>
<b>Cultural identity</b>	<b>Physical health</b>

**Other/notes:**

**INTERVIEW NOTES**

**Person interviewed:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**CHILD** (Name: \_\_\_\_\_)

<b>Emotional/behavioral</b>	<b>Physical health/disability</b>	<b>Education</b>
<b>Family relationships</b>	<b>Child development</b>	<b>Substance abuse</b>
<b>Cultural identity</b>	<b>Peer/adult social relationships</b>	<b>Delinquent behavior</b>

**Other/notes:**

**Table 1**

**Sample Interview Questions Follow-up**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Non-directional</b>	<b>Positive Anchor</b>	<b>Negative Anchor</b>
<b>CAREGIVER</b>			
<b>Substance use/misuse</b>	What role do alcohol/drugs play in your household?	What do you do to help your children avoid problems with alcohol/drugs?	In what ways do alcohol/drugs affect your family?
<b>Household relationships/ domestic violence</b>	How do the adults in the house get along? How do the adults handle conflict?	What are the best things about your relationship with _____? Can you describe a time the adults were very angry with each other and resolved the issue peacefully?	What conflicts are there between you and _____? Has anyone ever been hurt by another adult in the home? Do you ever feel afraid of _____?
<b>Social support</b>	Could you tell me about your relationships with friends and family?	Who gives you the most support? How do they support you?	In what ways do you feel alone? Like people let you down?
<b>Parenting skills</b>	What's being a parent like for you? How do you help your child learn right from wrong?	What advice would you give a parent based on something you do very well?	What ways would you like to become a stronger parent?
<b>Mental health/coping skills</b>	How do you feel about life in general?	What have you found to be successful ways to cope when things get a little rough?	How often do you feel overwhelmed?
<b>Resource management/basic needs</b>	How is your family doing in terms of being able to provide?	What are some of the ways you are finding to make ends meet?	What are some important needs that are currently unmet?
<b>Cultural identity</b>	In what ways does being [whatever culture] affect you?	How does being [whatever culture] help you?	How does being [whatever culture] make things hard for you?
<b>Physical health</b>	How is your health?	What ways do you take care of yourself?	How does having [condition] make it hard for you?
<b>CHILD</b>			
<b>Emotional/behavioral</b>	Most of the time, how do you think your child feels about life in general? How would you describe your child?	What makes your child happy?	How hard is it to get your child to do what you ask?
<b>Physical health/disability</b>	How is your child's health?	What does your child like to do for physical activity?	How does having [condition] affect your child?
<b>Education</b>	How is your child doing in school?	What areas is your child doing well in?	Are there any ways your child is struggling in school?
<b>Family relationships</b>	How does your child get along with everyone else in the house?	Who is your child closest to? What is that relationship like?	Who does your child have a hard time with? What is that like?
<b>Child development</b>	Compared to other children his/her age, how would you say your child is doing?	Are there some things your child can do that are advanced for his/her years?	Are there some things most children your child's age can do that he/she can't?
<b>Substance use/misuse</b>	Could you tell me about how your child feels about drugs/alcohol?	What would your child do to avoid drugs/alcohol?	How have drugs/alcohol affected your child?

**Table 1**

**Sample Interview Questions Follow-up**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Non-directional</b>	<b>Positive Anchor</b>	<b>Negative Anchor</b>
<b>Cultural identity</b>	How aware is your child of his/her identity as [culture]? Could you tell me about what being [culture] means to your child?	What ways does being [culture] help your child?	What ways does being [culture] create struggles for your child?
<b>Peer/adult social relationships</b>	How does your child get along with other children? With adults?	Tell me about your child's friends. Are there adults your child looks up to?	Are there any children or other adults your child does not get along with very well?
<b>Delinquent behavior</b>	What is your child's sense of right and wrong? How successful is your child in doing what's right?	How does your child avoid situations where he/she could get in trouble?	Has your child ever been stopped by the police?

**Table 2**

**Level Identification Questions**

Item	A vs. B	B vs. C	C vs. D
<b>CAREGIVER</b>			
<b>Substance use/misuse</b>	<p>What do you do to teach your children about alcohol/drugs?</p> <p>How do your children feel about alcohol/drugs? How do you suppose they came to that belief?</p>	<p>Has there been a time that [caregiver's] use of alcohol or drugs was the cause of problems? Has [caregiver] continued to use since that time?</p> <p>(When discussing struggles) Do alcohol or drugs ever play a role in that?</p> <p>(For someone in recovery) What is your plan for staying straight/sober? How easy or hard is that for you?</p>	<p>How have alcohol/drugs affected:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work?</li> <li>• Finances?</li> <li>• Legal issues?</li> <li>• Relationships, etc.?</li> </ul> <p>How long are you able to remain straight/sober after being released from intensive treatment?</p>
<b>Household relationships/domestic violence</b>	<p>How do you feel about each other? How do you let one another know? Do you feel respected/appreciated by your partner?</p> <p>How do you share household responsibilities? How is that decided?</p> <p>How do you handle disagreements?</p> <p>Do your children ever physically fight or bully? If not, how do you suppose they came to choose nonviolence?</p>	<p>How often do you feel in conflict with one another? Is this more or less than in the past?</p> <p>How do the children react when they are aware of conflict?</p> <p>(As applicable) How do you and child's other parent work out visitation and other issues?</p> <p>(Ask all adults) Do you ever feel threatened or intimidated by any other adult in the household?</p> <p>Has someone in the household physically hurt you or attempted to do so? (Ask about throwing things, pushing, making a fist, etc.)</p> <p>Are there times you feel unable to do what you want because your partner won't let you? (Ask about freedom to come and go, spend money, associate, have phone calls. Sort between compromises that are appropriate vs. one-sided power.)</p>	<p>When you bring someone into the home, how do you know how safe they will be for your children?</p> <p>If a disagreement came up today, what are the chances that you and your partner could resolve it without conflict?</p> <p>Has there been an injury? How often? How severe?</p> <p>Is there a restraining order? If so, to what extent is it being followed?</p> <p>When is the last time you were able to just decide to [go out of the house, call someone to talk, spend a few dollars]?</p> <p>How fearful are you that something serious will happen?</p> <p>(If batterer has recently left...) What steps will you take to be sure your partner won't hurt you again? What steps will you take so your next</p>



**Table 2**

**Level Identification Questions**

<b>Item</b>	<b>A vs. B</b>	<b>B vs. C</b>	<b>C vs. D</b>
			partner won't be as dangerous? <b>IF ANY OF THE ABOVE IS TRUE,</b> ask both parties if they have sought or are willing to seek help.
<b>Social support</b>	How often do you get together with [identified supports]?  On balance, how much do they help you compared to how much you help them?  How many people can you name who could help with [trusted advice, financial help, child care, transportation, etc.]?	When you need [various kinds of help] can you name at least one person who you would call to help?  Can you tell about a time someone helped you?  Who in your family is helpful to you?	How long has it been since you felt there was someone in your life you could turn to?
<b>Parenting skills</b>	What do you think your child is really good at? What do you think his/her future will be?  How are you helping your child learn about and become part of his/her world?  In what ways have you helped to ensure your child has what he/she needs, for example, at school?	Ask for examples of how the parent is providing the physical, cognitive, and emotional experiences children of the child's age need.  Ask for examples of how the parent handles typical developmental tasks appropriate for the child's age (e.g., how are you managing potty training? Starting school? Driving?).  How do you help teach your child right from wrong? What do you do if your child misbehaves?	Has your child ever been injured as a result? How seriously? How often?
<b>Mental health/coping skills</b>	How do you see your future?  Can you tell me about a time you were faced with adversity? How did you manage?	Are you (sleeping, eating, concentrating) okay?  Do you feel like you have as much energy as usual?  How much do you worry about things?  (If they've mentioned any symptoms) Are you getting any help with that? What are you doing for that?	Have you missed work because of [symptoms]?  Is it harder to do everything the children need because of [symptom]?  (Be sure to ask the children and other household members.)
<b>Resource management/ basic needs</b>	How long have you lived here?  How long have you been working?	How do you provide for bathing? Toileting?  How safe is the electrical system?	Has someone gotten hurt/sick because of the living situation?  Has someone missed school or work

**Table 2**

**Level Identification Questions**

<b>Item</b>	<b>A vs. B</b>	<b>B vs. C</b>	<b>C vs. D</b>
	<p>Have you been able to start saving for a rainy day, college, a special treat, a house, etc.?</p> <p>How often do you worry about being able to provide food or shelter?</p>	<p>What does your child have to wear? To eat? What tips have you learned for how to manage on a tight budget?</p> <p>Does the food run out before your next check arrives?</p> <p>Do you ever wish you had a little more to eat?</p>	<p>because of the living situation? Has your child been sent home from school because of hygiene/clothing (not related to sensibilities)?</p> <p>How do you keep safe at night?</p> <p>Has an inspector condemned your housing?</p>
<b>Cultural identity</b>	<p>Do you feel part of a culture or community?</p> <p>How does being [culture] help you?</p>	<p>Do you ever experience conflict related to being [culture]?</p> <p>Do you ever experience conflict because you don't share a connection to [surrounding culture]?</p>	<p>How often do you experience conflict related to being/or not being [culture]?</p>
<b>Physical health</b>	<p>How are you teaching your children about staying healthy?</p>	<p>Are you getting routine health care for yourself?</p> <p>Are there any health concerns that make it hard for you to provide what your child needs?</p>	<p>How serious is [condition]?</p> <p>Who takes care of the children when you can't?</p>
<b>CHILD</b>			
<b>Emotional/behavioral</b>	<p>How has your child coped with [specific stressful event]?</p> <p>What does your child do to get help with feelings or emotions?</p>	<p>Has your child been more withdrawn, sad, angry, etc.?</p> <p>Has your child's behavior changed one way or the other?</p> <p>Compared to other children this age, is it any harder for your child to cope with [stressful situation]?</p> <p>(For infants) Can your child calm on his/her own? Compared to other infants, does he/she smile and coo as much?</p>	<p>Is your child getting in trouble because of his/her feelings?</p> <p>Has your child ever talked about/tried suicide?</p> <p>Has your child ever started fires, hurt animals, or hurt other children?</p> <p>(For infants) When your child cries, can he/she be consoled? Does he/she seem to like being held?</p>
<b>Physical health/ disability</b>	<p>What does your child say about nutrition, exercise, wellness?</p> <p>Does your child get routine preventive health care?</p>	<p>Does your child have a health condition? If so, what do you have to do to take care of it?</p>	<p>Did you have to get a lot of instruction to learn how to care for [condition]?</p> <p>Who takes care of your child's [condition]?</p>

**Table 2**

**Level Identification Questions**

<b>Item</b>	<b>A vs. B</b>	<b>B vs. C</b>	<b>C vs. D</b>
<b>Education</b>	<p>Has your child had any advanced coursework?</p> <p>Has a teacher reported that your child is doing work that is more consistent with an older child?</p>	<p>Is your child working below grade level in any subject?</p> <p>Has your child skipped school?</p>	<p>In how many subjects is your child working below grade level?</p> <p>How many days has your child been truant?</p>
<b>Family relationships</b>	<p>What positive things does your child say about his/her family?</p> <p>How loved does your child feel in his/her family?</p>	<p>How safe does your child feel in his/her family?</p> <p>How attached does your child appear with his/her family?</p>	<p>Is your child exposed to violence in his/her family?</p> <p>Does your child feel so unsafe or insecure that he/she is having trouble in school, running away, etc.?</p>
<b>Child development</b>	Review expected milestones for the child's age group. Ask questions and make observations based on expected milestones.		
<b>Substance abuse</b>	<p>What is your child's attitude toward alcohol/drugs?</p> <p>What does he/she know about the effects of alcohol/drugs?</p>	<p>Has your child ever tasted alcohol/drugs? How often? How long ago?</p> <p>Has alcohol/drug use caused any problems?</p>	<p>How long has your child used?</p> <p>How severe are the problems caused by alcohol/drug use?</p> <p>Could your child stop using without withdrawal?</p>
<b>Cultural identity</b>	<p>Does your child feel part of a culture or community?</p> <p>How does being [culture] help your child?</p>	<p>Does your child ever experience conflict related to being [culture]?</p> <p>Des your child ever experience conflict because he/she doesn't share a connection to [surrounding culture]?</p>	<p>How often does your child experience conflict related to being/not being [culture]?</p>
<b>Peer/adult social relationships</b>	<p>What does your child do outside of school?</p> <p>Does your child let others help?</p> <p>Does your child enjoy helping others?</p>	<p>Does your child have more trouble with friends than other children his/her age?</p> <p>How often does your child seem to have struggles with other children?</p> <p>How does your child resolve conflicts?</p>	<p>Does your child have any friends you feel good about?</p> <p>Do your child's friends have a positive or negative influence on your child?</p> <p>Does your child have any friends at all?</p>
<b>Delinquent behavior</b>	<p>Does your child volunteer to help in formal or informal ways?</p> <p>Does your child feel compelled to do the right thing?</p>	<p>Has your child ever behaved in a criminal way (caught or not)?</p> <p>If your child has completed probation, have at least two years gone by without re-offending?</p>	<p>Was any of your child's offending violent?</p> <p>Has your child re-offended?</p>