

Child and Family Services Reviews Case-Related Interview Guides and Instructions

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Introduction: CFSR Case-Related Interviews

Through the Child and Family Services Reviews, we want to have a full understanding of what occurred that affected child and family outcomes in a particular case. It is critical to obtain information from a variety of sources before making initial determinations about outcomes. Case-related interviews with key individuals involved in the case serve as an opportunity to determine what has occurred in the case, confirm case record documentation, collect information that might be missing from the record, and obtain input about case participants' experiences. The interview information is weighed equally with information obtained from the case file documentation.

When interviewing persons important to the case, reviewers are responsible for asking questions relevant to the items in the Onsite Review Instrument and Instructions (OSRI). Sometimes, information obtained during an interview may conflict with the documentation in the case record or obtained from another interview. In these cases, reviewers have a responsibility to pursue the issue across multiple interviews until they can determine the most accurate response to the relevant item questions.

Required Interviews With Key Case Participants

When scheduling interviews with key case participants, states should keep in mind that there are often multiple parents and/or caregivers who should be included in the review process. Ensuring that all of the relevant participants in the case are available for interviews is critical for a successful review process. If a required case-related interview cannot or does not occur, reviewers should refer to the Children's Bureau's guidance related to case elimination due to a lack of required case-related interviews.

The following individuals related to a case will be interviewed unless they are unavailable or unwilling to participate:

- The child (school age)
- The child's parent(s)
- The child's foster parent(s), pre-adoptive parent(s), or other caregiver(s), such as a relative caregiver, if the child is in foster care
- The child and/or family's caseworker(s) or a caseworker's supervisor, if the caseworker is unavailable (when the caseworker has left the agency or is no longer available for interview, it may be necessary to schedule interviews with the supervisor who was responsible for supervising the caseworker assigned to the family)

As needed, on a case-by-case basis, other individuals who have relevant information about the case also may be interviewed, such as the child's guardian ad litem or advocate, a parent's significant other, or other family members.

Preparing for Interviews and Using the Interview Guides

Case-related interviews should be scheduled to take place after reviewers have had an opportunity to thoroughly review case record documentation. This allows reviewers to explore

relevant issues and confirm or verify information found in the case record with each person interviewed.

These interview guides have been developed for key case-related interviews (Child/Youth, Parent/Caregiver, Foster Parent, and Caseworker). The guides include suggested language for introducing the interview process to the interviewee as well as specific questions that cover the key areas in the OSRI that should be informed by case participant information. The questions in the guides can be modified to fit the specific needs of participants as well as the circumstances of the case. The Children's Bureau strongly recommends that the guides be used for interviews to ensure that adequate and consistent information is gathered through the interviews across the sample of cases being reviewed. Reviewers are encouraged to review the guides before interviewing case participants so they can highlight questions that they plan to ask and develop additional questions that may be needed based on case specifics.

Conducting Interviews

When the interview begins:

- 1. Introduce yourself and the interview process.** Let interviewees know the approximate amount of time the interview might take. You may find that you normally spend about 30 to 45 minutes in your interviews, although the interview with the caseworker will likely take longer. Let the participant know in advance that you will need to take notes while he or she is talking. You should not record any interviews.
- 2. Provide an overview of the review process.** Provide individuals with a brief overview of the purpose of the review process and the interview. Explain that the federal and state governments are looking at how well the state is helping children and families achieve positive outcomes. Let parents or foster parents know that you are interested in learning about their experiences because that will help to determine how the state can better support children and families.
- 3. Reassure participants of confidentiality.** Emphasize that particular individuals will not be identified by name in any report. Reinforce participants' confidence in confidentiality by not revealing the comments of other persons interviewed, particularly those involved with the family. Stressing confidentiality is particularly important when interviewing children, parents, or foster parents. Note, however, that if concerns arise regarding the safety of the child, such concerns become subject to mandatory reporting laws. In addition, situations that you believe put the child at risk, such as individuals of whom the agency was not aware living in the home with the child or caregivers allowing a child in foster care to have visits with a non-custodial parent without the knowledge of the state, must be reported to the agency.
- 4. Explain your neutrality.** Another important concept for your interviewees to understand is that you are a neutral reviewer with no ability to affect the case that you are reviewing. This is especially important when you are interviewing birth parents, who may see you as someone who can intervene on their behalf in a case plan or a case's goals. You will need to be very clear that your role is not to specifically help or advocate for them, but to help the state know how to better meet the needs of families in the future. While you should acknowledge complaints raised by interviewees, you should not commit to checking on their situation or to getting back in touch with them.

5. Be flexible in your interview style and approach. Also, as you know, your interviewees may cross the spectrum from child to grandparent to therapist. You'll need to be very flexible in your interview styles to accommodate the particular parties that you're interviewing. At the same time, remain focused on what you need from each interview so that you obtain critical information while still using your limited time as efficiently as possible.

6. Get caseworker contact information. We advise you to ask the caseworker for a phone number during the interview, and to ask if you may call him or her if further information is needed. Many reviewers find that they need to contact the caseworker again after the initial interview to ask for clarification or obtain further information, particularly if the caseworker is one of their earlier interviewees.

Post-Interview Activities

Once the interviews have concluded:

1. Immediately report child safety concerns. If you hear information in an interview or observe something while interviewing that raises concerns about risk or the safety of a child, immediately report that concern to the lead person in charge of the case review (unless it is an emergency that requires you to immediately call 911).

Always strive to ensure that children are not upset by these interviews; normally, they aren't. If a child appears upset after an interview, be sure to immediately tell the review leader so that the state can respond to the situation by providing support to the child.

2. Schedule additional interviews as needed. You may discover that additional interviews beyond those scheduled are needed to complete a thorough case record review. If this happens, immediately consult with the case review leader about the possibility of scheduling a new interview. Depending on where you are in the review process and with your case load, this may or may not be possible.

3. Review and compare interview and case record documentation. Once you complete all of the interviews, consider all the information gathered and begin to consider your assessment of each item in partnership with your assigned quality assurance team member(s).

The Interviews

Child/Youth Interview

Because the Child and Family Services Reviews are focused on outcomes for children and families, hearing first-hand from children about their experiences is a crucial part of the review process. Questions to be used in interviews with children will vary depending on age, development, and the circumstances of the case. Reviewers should use their professional judgment when determining which topics to cover and how to phrase questions, but every effort should be made to obtain as much information as possible from children and youth about their experiences. Reviewers should be prepared to ask additional questions not included in this guide to clarify or verify information that was found in case documentation or obtained through other interviews.

When beginning the interview, start by explaining the purpose of the interview and asking about the child's understanding of his or her involvement with the agency. The following example can be modified based on the age of the child/youth:

Thank you for talking with me today. We are here to make sure that children who are involved with the child welfare agency get the best services they can, so I'm here to ask you about the kinds of services you received during [provide dates of the period under review or, depending on the child's age, just say, "the past year"] and what your experiences were like as you worked with your caseworker. I'm not going to share what you tell me with your caseworker. I want to encourage you to be open and honest with me as I ask you questions because this information will be used to give the agency feedback about how they can improve their services. I understand that some of these questions or topics may be difficult to talk about, so please feel free to respond in whatever way you are most comfortable, and if you prefer not to answer a question, just let me know. Do you have any questions about this process? I have some specific questions to ask you, but before I start, can you tell me why the agency is/was involved with your family?

Use the item focus (in bold below) as a way of explaining to the child what the questions will be about as you move from item to item. Again, depending on the child's age, you should explain that he or she should respond to the questions based on experiences within the dates of the period under review or just within the last year.

Item 3—Ask about the child's experience during the period under review, whether he or she felt safe, and whether the agency was checking in about safety.

- For in-home services cases: Did/do you feel safe in your family home? If not, what was/is going on to make you feel unsafe? [If necessary, ask about specific risk and safety concerns present during the period under review.]
- For foster care cases: Did/do you feel safe in your foster home? During visits with your family? If not, what was/is going on to make you feel unsafe? [If necessary, ask about specific risk and safety concerns present during the period under review.]
- Did you share any concerns about how you were feeling with the caseworker? How did he or she respond?
- When the social worker visited, did he or she meet with you privately during part of each visit? Did he or she ask if you felt safe in your home (or foster home) or during visits with your family?

Item 4—Ask about the child's placement history during the period under review, reasons for any changes, and stability of the current or most recent placement.

- Do you know why you had to move from [describe placement/foster home name] to [describe next placement/foster home name]? How did you feel about moving?
- How do you feel about where you are living now (or where you were placed last)?

Item 5—Ask about the appropriateness of the child’s permanency goals during the period under review.

- Explain the current or most recent permanency goal to the child and ask how the child feels about the goal: is it what he or she wanted; why or why not?
- Has anyone discussed [indicate the permanency goal] with you? If yes, what did you talk about?

Item 6—Ask about the efforts made to achieve permanency for the child during the period under review.

- Do you know what the agency or the court did to try to make sure you could be (reunified/adopted/placed in guardianship, etc.)?
- [If permanency was not achieved timely, older youth may provide input as to reasons for delays.] What do you think happened that made it hard for [specify goal] to happen sooner?

Item 7—Ask about efforts made to place siblings in foster care together.

- Ask the child about his or her siblings, and their relationship.
- If placed separately, ask about when that happened (initial placement or later); ask the child why he or she believes they are currently separated and what contact they now have.

Item 8—Ask about the visitation arrangements for children with siblings and parents/caregivers.

- How often do/did you visit with your parents? What about visits with siblings?
- Where did visits take place?
- How long were the visits? Did you feel they were long enough?
- Were visits supervised? If yes, do you know why they were supervised?
- Did you enjoy the visits? Is there anything that would have made visits better or more enjoyable for you and your parents and siblings?

Item 9—Ask about the child’s connections and how they were preserved during the period under review.

- How did your caseworker help ensure that you stayed connected with friends and family after you were placed in foster care?
- What about other connections like church and school?
- Do you have cultural connections, including any Tribal affiliations?

Item 10—If not placed with relatives, **ask about efforts to identify, locate, inform, and evaluate both paternal and maternal relatives as placement resources.**

- Did your caseworker ask you about relatives (maternal and paternal) with whom you could possibly live?

Item 11—**Ask about efforts to promote, support, and maintain the child’s relationship with parents/caregivers during the period under review.**

- Aside from visitation, did you have any other contact with your parents? For example, did they come to school activities or attend doctor’s appointments with you?

Items 12, 16, 17, and 18—**Ask about how the child(ren)’s needs were assessed (comprehensive, education, physical, dental, mental health), what needs were identified, and how services were provided to meet needs. (In-home services cases should focus on all children in the home; foster care cases should focus on just the target child.)**

- Ask about any specific needs known to you (from Items 12, 16, 17, and 18) and ask if the child was getting services to help. If the child is an adolescent, ask about assessment and services for independent living skills.
- If no known needs, ask generally: Did you participate in any activities or services—for example, afterschool programs, counseling or therapy, mentoring, sports, tutoring, special education services?
- Was there anything you wish your caseworker had helped you with?
- How are you doing in school?
- Did you have any health or dental problems that the caseworker did not attend to?

Optional questions for older child/youth, depending on case circumstances: Ask about how the parents’ needs were assessed, what needs were identified, and how services were provided to meet needs.

- Do you think your parents received the services and help that they needed to take care of you and keep you safe?
- Is there anything you think they needed help with that they didn’t get?

Optional questions for older child/youth: Ask about how the foster parents’ needs were assessed, what needs were identified, and how services were provided to meet needs.

- Do you think your foster parents had what they needed to take good care of you?
- Is there anything you think they needed help with that they didn’t get?

Item 13—**Ask about how the child was involved in case planning.**

- Did the caseworker talk to you regularly about what was happening in your life, asking you questions about how you were doing and what you may have needed?

- Were you involved in any meetings where your case plan was discussed?

Item 14—Ask about the frequency and quality of the caseworker’s visits with the child.

- How often did your caseworker visit you?
- Where did you usually visit?
- What did you talk about?
- About how long were the visits?
- Were the visits helpful for you?
- If you ever needed to talk to your caseworker, were you able to contact him or her?

Complete the interview by thanking the child/youth for his or her time and asking if there is anything else he or she would like to share with you.

Parent/Caregiver Interview

Because the Child and Family Services Reviews are focused on outcomes for children and families, hearing first-hand from parents/caregivers about the outcomes they have experienced is a crucial part of the review process. Questions to be used in interviews with parents/caregivers may vary depending on the circumstances of the case. Every effort should be made to obtain as much information as possible from parents and/or caregivers about their experiences. Reviewers should be prepared to ask additional questions not included in this guide, to clarify or verify information that was found in case documentation or obtained through other interviews.

When beginning the interview, start by explaining the purpose of the interview and asking about the parent/caregiver’s understanding of his or her involvement with the agency. The following is an example:

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. We are conducting a review of the services provided to children and families by [agency name]. The goal of the review is to provide feedback to [agency name] about how they can make improvements in their system so that children and families have the best outcomes. I’m here to ask you about the kinds of services you received during [provide dates of the period under review] and what your experiences were like as you worked with the agency. The information you share with me is confidential and will not be shared with your caseworker, so it will not have any impact on your case. I want to encourage you to be open and honest with me as I ask you questions because your feedback is a very important part of this review process. I understand that some of these questions or topics may be difficult to talk about, so please feel free to respond in whatever way you are most comfortable, and if you prefer not to answer a question, just let me know. Before we begin, do you have any questions about the interview or the review process? I have some specific questions to ask you, but before I start, can you tell me why the agency is/was involved with your family?

Use the item focus (in bold below) as a way of explaining to the parent/caregiver what the questions will be about as you move from item to item.

Items 2 and 3 [Ask these questions to assist in determining whether Item 2 is applicable for assessment]—**Ask about how the agency assessed risk and safety during the period under review and what concerns were present in the case during that time.**

- What is/was your understanding of the risk and safety concerns that existed during the period under review?
- What kinds of things did the caseworker look for or ask about to determine whether those concerns were being resolved?
- Did you have a safety plan developed for your family? If so, can you talk about the plan? How was it monitored?
- [This question should be asked for all in-home services cases, and should be asked for foster care cases in which the child entered foster care during the period under review or was reunified during the period under review.] Were services offered to your family to keep your children safe in your home?
 - If not, do you know why not?
- [For foster care cases] Did you have any concerns about the safety of your child while he or she was in foster care?
- [If the case was closed during the period under review]—Can you describe what happened when your case was closed? For example, did the caseworker come to your home and have a final conversation with you?

Item 5—**Ask about the appropriateness of the child’s permanency goals during the period under review.**

- What was/were the permanency goal(s) for your child when he or she was first removed from your home? What is the current permanency goal for your child? [Parents may not be familiar with the term “permanency goal,” so provide examples and explain goals like reunification/return home, adoption, etc.]
- Did the caseworker discuss the permanency goal(s) with you? If so, can you tell me what those conversations were like?
- [If permanency goals changed during the period under review and/or there were concurrent goals in place]—Do you think the goals in place during the period under review were appropriate for your child based on what was happening with the case and the child’s needs?

Item 6—**Ask about the efforts made to achieve permanency for the child during the period under review.**

- What did the agency or the court do to try to ensure that your child achieved the goal of [indicate the child’s permanency goal]?

- [If permanency was not achieved timely]—What were the barriers that you experienced in achieving [indicate permanency goal] in a timely manner?
- [If the child had concurrent goals]—What was your understanding of the concurrent plan of [name concurrent goal]? How did the caseworker explain that to you?

Item 7—Ask about efforts made to place siblings in foster care together.

- Were any of your children placed in separate foster homes? If so, do you know why?
- Do you know what efforts the agency made to place them together?

Item 8—Ask about the visitation arrangements for children with siblings and parents/caregivers.

- Was a visitation plan developed for you and your children? If so, were you involved in developing it?
- What was the frequency of visitation and how was frequency determined?
- Where did visits take place? How was the location of visits determined?
- How long were the visits? Did you feel they were long enough?
- Were visits supervised? If so, how and why?
- [If children were placed in separate foster homes]—Did your children have visits with their siblings in addition to visits with you?
- Is there anything that would have made visits better for you and your child?

Item 9—Ask about the child’s connections and how they were preserved during the period under review.

- Were any efforts made to ensure that your child stayed connected with friends and family after they were placed in foster care?
- What about other connections like church and school?
- Does your child have Native American heritage?
 - If yes, is the child a member of, or eligible for membership in, an Indian Tribe?
 - If yes, did the agency make any efforts to maintain your child’s cultural connections, including any Tribal affiliation?

Item 10—Ask about efforts to identify, locate, inform, and evaluate both paternal and maternal relatives as placement resources.

- Did the worker ask you about relatives (maternal and paternal) with whom your child could possibly be placed?

- What other efforts did the agency make to find and/or place your child with relatives?

Item 11—Ask about efforts to promote, support, and maintain the child’s relationship with parents/caregivers during the period under review.

- What efforts, aside from visitation, were made to support and strengthen your relationship with your child while he or she was in foster care? For example, were you encouraged to participate in school activities and case conferences, attend doctor’s appointments, or engage in the child’s extracurricular activities?
- What kinds of interactions (if any) did you have with your child’s foster parents?
- Were you offered or provided with transportation or transportation funds to participate in events and appointments with your child?

Item 12—Ask about how the child(ren)’s needs were assessed, what needs were identified, and how services were provided to meet needs. (In-home services cases should focus on all children in the home; foster care cases should focus on just the target child.)

- Do you believe the agency accurately assessed your child(ren)’s needs during the period under review?
- What kinds of services did your child(ren) receive? Were the services helpful?
- Was there anything your child(ren) needed that the agency did not provide for?

Ask about how the parent’s needs were assessed, what needs were identified, and how services were provided to meet needs.

- Do you believe the agency accurately assessed your needs during the period under review?
- How did they assess your needs? What kinds of questions were you asked?
- What kinds of services did you receive?
- Were the services helpful to you? How were they helpful?
- Were services easily accessible? Culturally appropriate?
- Was there anything you needed that the agency did not provide for?

(Optional, if the parent/caregiver has a relationship with the foster parents)—Ask about how the foster parents’ needs were assessed, what needs were identified, and how services were provided to meet needs.

- How were the foster parents’ needs assessed during the period under review?
- Did the foster parents have any needs related to their ability to care for the child in their home?

- Were any services provided to the foster parents?
- Were there any barriers to accessing services?
- Was there anything the foster parents needed that they were not provided with?

Item 13—Ask about how the child, mother, and father were engaged in case planning.

- Were you able to provide input in developing your case plan?
- What types of conversations did you have with the caseworker about your case plan? How frequently did the caseworker discuss the case plan with you?
- Did you understand the purpose and content of your case plan? Did you have a copy of your plan?
- How was your child involved in case planning activities?

Item 14—Ask about the frequency and quality of the caseworker’s visits with the child.

- How frequently did the caseworker visit the child(ren) during the period under review?
- Where did visits typically occur?
- If you were present during the visit, what was discussed?
- Did the worker visit with the child(ren) alone?
- Typically, how long were the visits?
- Did the child(ren) have regularly scheduled visits or were visits prompted by other things?

Item 15—Ask about the frequency and quality of the caseworker’s visits with the parents/caregivers.

- How frequently did the caseworker visit you? Did you feel they were frequent enough?
- Where did visits occur?
- What was discussed during visits?
- Typically, how long were the visits? Did you feel they were long enough?
- Did you have regularly scheduled visits or were visits prompted by other things?
- Did you feel like your caseworker was accessible to you?
- Were you able to talk about things during your visit that you felt were important regarding your child(ren) and your case?

Item 16—Ask about how the child’s educational needs were assessed and met.

- Did you have any concerns about your child(ren)’s education during the period under review?
- Did your child(ren) need or receive any special services?

Item 17—Ask about how the child’s physical and dental health needs were assessed and met.

- Did you have any concerns about your child(ren)’s physical health during the period under review?
- Did they need or receive any services?

Item 18—Ask about how the child’s mental health needs were assessed and met.

- Did you have any concerns about your child(ren)’s mental or behavioral health during the period under review?
- Did they need or receive any services?

Complete the interview by thanking the parent/caregiver for their time and asking them if there is anything else they would like to share with you regarding their experience.

Foster Parent Interview

Because the Child and Family Services Reviews are focused on outcomes for children and families, hearing first-hand from foster parents about the outcomes they have experienced is a crucial part of the review process. Questions to be used in interviews with foster parents may vary depending on the circumstances of the case and how long they had the child in their care. Every effort should be made to obtain as much information as possible from foster parents about their experiences and the experiences of the child in their care. Reviewers should be prepared to ask additional questions not included in this guide to clarify or verify information that was found in case documentation or obtained through other interviews.

When beginning the interview, start by explaining the purpose of the interview. The following is an example:

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. We are conducting a review of the services provided to children and families by [agency name]. The goal of the review is to provide feedback to [agency name] about how they can make improvements in their system so that children and families have the best outcomes. I’m here to ask you about the kinds of services you and your foster child received during [provide dates of the period under review] and what your experiences were like as you worked with the agency. The information you share with me is confidential and will not be shared with your caseworker, so it will not have any impact on the case. I want to encourage you to be open and honest with me as I ask you questions because your feedback is a very important part of this review process. Before we begin, do you have any questions about the interview or the review process?

Use the item focus (in bold below) as a way of explaining to the foster parent what the questions will be about as you move from item to item. Explain to the foster parent that he or she should respond to the questions based on experiences during the period under review, and mention the dates of that period.

Item 3—Ask about any specific risk and safety concerns present in the case during the period under review.

- Did you have any concerns about the child’s safety during visitation with parents and/or other family members?

Item 4—Ask about the child’s placement history during the period under review.

- [If the child is no longer in your home]—What was the reason for the child leaving your home? Is there anything that could have been done to prevent the child from moving from your home?
- [If the child is still placed with the foster parent]—Do you plan to continue to provide a home for the child as long as a placement is needed? Do you have any concerns with the child’s current placement in your home or your ability to care for him or her?

Item 5—Ask about the appropriateness of the child’s permanency goals during the period under review.

- Did the caseworker discuss the child’s permanency goal of [indicate specific goal(s)] with you?
- Do you believe the goal of [indicate permanency goal] is/was appropriate based on the child’s needs and the circumstances of the case? Why or why not?

Item 6—Ask about the efforts made to achieve permanency for the child during the period under review.

- What did the agency or the court do to try to ensure that the child achieved the goal of [indicate permanency goal] in a timely manner?
- [If permanency was not achieved timely]—Do you know what the barriers were in achieving the goal of [indicate permanency goal] in a timely manner?

Item 7—Ask about efforts made to place siblings in foster care together.

- Were any of the child’s siblings placed in separate foster homes? If so, do you know why?
- Do you know what efforts the agency made to place them together?

Item 8—Ask about the visitation arrangements for children with siblings and parents/caregivers.

- Was a visitation plan developed for the family? If so, were you involved in developing it?

- What was the frequency of visitation and how was frequency determined?
- Where did visits take place? How was the location of visits determined?
- How long were the visits? Did you feel they were long enough?
- Were visits supervised? If so, how and why?
- [If children were placed in separate foster homes]—Did the child have visits with siblings in addition to visits with parents?
- Did you have any concerns regarding visitation for the child? Is there anything that would have made visits better for the child?

Item 9—Ask about the child’s connections and how they were preserved during the period under review.

- Were any efforts made to ensure that the child stayed connected with friends and family after placement in foster care?
- What about other connections like church and school?

Item 11—Ask about efforts to promote, support, and maintain the child’s relationship with parents/caregivers during the period under review.

- What efforts, aside from visitation, were made to support and strengthen the relationship between the child and parents/caregivers while he or she was in foster care? For example, were parents/caregivers encouraged to participate in school activities and case conferences, attend doctor’s appointments, or engage in the child’s extracurricular activities?
- What kinds of interactions (if any) did you have with your child’s parents/caregivers?
- Were there any concerns with transportation for parents/caregivers to have additional contact with the child?

Item 12—Ask about how the child(ren)’s needs were assessed, what needs were identified, and how services were provided to meet needs.

- Do you believe the agency accurately assessed the child’s needs during the period under review?
- What kinds of services did the child receive? Were the services helpful?
- Was there anything the child needed that the agency did not provide for?

Ask about how the foster parents’ needs were assessed, what needs were identified, and how services were provided to meet needs.

- How often did the caseworker visit with you? What types of things were discussed during visits/contact with the caseworker?

- Did you have any needs relating to your ability to care for the child?
- Were you provided with any services? Were they helpful?
- Were there any barriers to accessing services?
- Did you have the training you needed to meet any specific needs of the child?
- Was there anything you needed that you were not provided with?

Item 13—Ask about how the child was engaged in case planning.

- Do you know if the child able to provide input in developing the case plan? How was the child involved in case planning activities?
- Do you know what types of conversations the caseworker had with the child about the case plan? How frequently did the caseworker discuss the case plan with the child?
- Do you know if the child understood the purpose and content of the case plan?

Item 14—Ask about the frequency and quality of the caseworker’s visits with the child.

- How frequently did the caseworker visit the child during the period under review?
- Where did visits typically occur?
- If you were present during the visit, what was discussed?
- Did the worker visit with the child alone?
- Typically, how long were the visits?
- Did the child have regularly scheduled visits, or were visits prompted by other things?

Item 16—Ask about how the child’s educational needs were assessed and met.

- Did you have any concerns about the child’s education during the period under review?
- Were any educational needs appropriately assessed?
- Were you provided with needed access to the child’s school records?
- Did the child need or receive any special services?

Item 17—Ask about how the child’s physical and dental health needs were assessed and met.

- Did you have any concerns about the child’s physical or dental health during the period under review?

- Is the child up to date with any needed immunizations, annual check-ups, or periodic dental screenings?
- Were you provided with, or did you have access to, the child's health records?
- Did the child need or receive any services? If so, were they helpful and adequate to meet the child's needs?
- Was the child on any medications? If so, how were they monitored?

Item 18—Ask about how the child's mental health needs were assessed and met.

- Did you have any concerns about the child's mental or behavioral health during the period under review?
- Did the child need or receive any services? If so, were they helpful and adequate to meet the child's needs?
- Was the child on any medications? If so, how were they monitored?

Complete the interview by thanking the foster parents for their time and asking them if there is anything else they would like to share with you regarding their experience.

Caseworker Interview

Because the Child and Family Services Reviews are focused on outcomes for children and families, hearing first-hand from caseworkers about the work the agency has done with families is a crucial part of the review process. Every effort should be made to obtain as much information as possible from the caseworker and, in most cases, reviewers should include all of the questions in this guide during their interviews. Reviewers should be prepared to ask additional questions not included in this guide, to clarify or verify information that was found in case documentation or obtained through other interviews.

When beginning the interview, start by explaining the purpose of the interview. The following is an example:

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today about the [case name] case. As you know, we are conducting a review of the services provided to children and families by [agency name]. The goal of the review is to provide feedback to [agency name] about how they can make improvements in their system so that children and families have the best outcomes. As a caseworker, your work with children and families is extremely important and we want to be able to capture your experience in working with the family. In addition, we also want to understand how your agency works in collaboration with other state systems, like education, health, and the courts, in working to meet the needs of families. In addition to reviewing the case record, we will be conducting interviews with children, parents, and foster parents as well, so I may ask you some clarifying questions based on information that we have gathered about the case. The information you share with me is confidential, and I want to encourage you to be open and honest with me as I ask you questions because your feedback is a very important part of this review process. Our review is focused on a specific period of time [indicate the period under review], so when you provide your responses, please consider things that happened during that

time period. Before we begin, do you have any questions for me about the interview or the review process? I have some specific questions to ask you, but before I start, can you provide me with a quick summary of why the agency is/was involved with this family?

Use the item focus (in bold below) as a way of explaining to the caseworker what the questions will be about as you move from item to item. Remind the caseworker that he or she should respond to the questions based on experiences during the period under review. If another social worker was responsible for a portion of the period under review and is not available to be interviewed, encourage the worker you are interviewing to respond as best as he or she can for the entire period.

General information to obtain: Confirm who the key case participants are who are being assessed as Mother, Father, and Foster Parents in the review. If the case involves birth parents who could not be located during the period under review, ask about the concerted efforts that were made to locate them.

Item 1—Ask about the reasons for any delays in initiating investigations and/or completing face-to-face visits with children who are the subject of the report(s).

- Based on documentation in the case record, verify with the social worker any noted delays in the investigation process.
- What were the reasons for delays?

Items 2 and 3 [Ask these questions to assist in determining if Item 2 is applicable for assessment.] Ask about general practice for assessing risk and safety during the period under review.

- What did the safety/risk assessment process involve?
- Were specific assessment tools used?
- Was your supervisor involved in reviewing assessments?
- How often were assessments conducted?
- Were assessments updated? If so, when/under what circumstances?
- How were assessments documented (formal and informal)?
- [If the case was closed during the period under review]—Did you do an assessment of risk/safety before case closure? If so, can you describe that process?

Ask about the specific risk and safety concerns present in the case during the period under review.

- Can you describe any risk and safety concerns that existed during the period under review?

- If safety concerns existed during the period under review, was a safety plan developed? Who was involved in its development, and how was it monitored? Was it updated as case circumstances changed?
- Were services offered to the family and/or any alternative caregivers to address risk and safety concerns and prevent foster care placement or re-entry after reunification?
 - If not, why not?
 - If yes, what types of services were offered? How did the services address the specific risk and safety concerns?
- For foster care cases: Did any safety concerns exist for the child in care during visitation or in the foster care placement?
 - If yes, what were the concerns? What did you do to ensure the safety of the child?

Item 4—Ask about the child’s placement history during the period under review.

- Please verify the child’s placement history during the period under review based on the case record documentation. [Confirm each placement.]
- For each placement during the period under review, how was this placement identified for the child? What was the reason for the change in placement?
- How stable is the child’s current placement?

Item 5—Ask about the appropriateness of the child’s permanency goals during the period under review.

- [If a goal is not documented in the case record]—What is/are the child’s current permanency goal(s)?
- [Describe the goals in place during the period under review and ask, for each goal:] Was this the most appropriate goal for the child? Why?
- What were the reasons for any goal changes? Discuss any concerns about the timeliness of establishing goals and/or changing goals.
- [If the child had concurrent goals]—How was concurrent planning implemented in the case?
- [Obtain any clarification needed regarding filing for termination of parental rights, if applicable.]

Item 6—Ask about the efforts made to achieve permanency for the child during the period under review.

- Has the child achieved, or will the child achieve, permanency within an appropriate timeframe (e.g., 12 months for reunification, 18 months for guardianship, 24 months for adoption)?
- What efforts have been made by the court and the agency to achieve permanency in a timely manner?
- [For a child with the goal of "another planned permanent living arrangement"]—What formal steps have been taken to make the living arrangement permanent?
- [If the child will not achieve permanency timely]—What were/are the barriers in achieving the permanency goal(s) timely?
- Is there a justifiable reason for any delay in achieving permanency for the child [see examples in the OSRI]?

Item 7—Ask about efforts made to place siblings in foster care together.

- Was the child placed separately from siblings? Why?
- [If a valid reason for separation existed at one point during the period under review]—Were the circumstances for separate placement re-evaluated to consider if the siblings could be reunited?

Item 8—Ask about the visitation arrangements for children with siblings and parents/caregivers.

- Was a visitation plan developed for the family? Who was involved in developing the plan?
- What was the frequency of visitation and how was frequency determined?
- Where did visits take place? How was the location of visits determined?
- How long were the visits?
- Were visits supervised? If so, how and why?
- Did children have separate sibling visitation, or was it only in the context of parent visitation?
- What efforts did the agency make to support and encourage visitation?

Item 9—Ask about the child's connections and how they were preserved during the period under review.

- What were the child's important connections?

- What efforts were made to preserve these connections?
- Has the child been maintained in the same school? If not, why not?
- Does the child have Native American heritage?
 - If yes, is the child a member of, or eligible for membership in, an Indian Tribe?
 - If yes, what efforts did the agency make to maintain the child’s cultural connections, including any Tribal affiliation?

Item 10—If the child is not placed with relatives, **ask about efforts to identify, locate, inform, and evaluate both paternal and maternal relatives as placement resources throughout the period under review.**

- What efforts were made to identify, locate, inform, and evaluate maternal relatives as placement resources?
- What efforts were made to identify, locate, inform, and evaluate paternal relatives as placement resources?
- In addition to when the child first came into care, what efforts were made to identify, locate, inform, and evaluate relatives throughout the period under review?

Item 11—**Ask about efforts to promote, support, and maintain the child’s relationship with parents/caregivers during the period under review.**

- What efforts, aside from visitation, were made to support and strengthen the child’s relationship with parents/caregivers? For example, were parents encouraged to participate in school activities and case conferences, attend doctor’s appointments, or engage in the child’s extracurricular activities?
- Were efforts made to support a relationship between the foster parents and the child’s parents/caregivers so that they could serve as a support system and as mentors?
- Were efforts made to provide transportation or transportation funds for the parents/caregivers to participate in events/appointments with the child?

Item 12—**Ask about how the child(ren)’s needs were assessed, what needs were identified, and how services were provided to meet needs. (In-home services cases should focus on all children in the home; foster care cases should focus on just the target child.)**

- [If the case was opened during the period under review]—Was an initial comprehensive assessment of the child(ren) conducted?
 - How was the assessment done?
 - What needs were identified?

- Were ongoing comprehensive assessments conducted during the period under review to assess needs and inform case planning?
 - How were assessments conducted?
 - What types of needs were identified, and/or did the child’s needs change during the period under review?
- What services were provided for the child during the period under review?
 - Did these services meet the child’s identified needs?
- Were there any barriers to accessing services? If yes, what were they and how did the agency attempt to address them?

Ask about how the parents’/caregivers’ needs were assessed, what needs were identified, and how services were provided to meet needs.

- [If the case was opened during the period under review]—Was an initial comprehensive assessment of the mother/female caregiver and father/male caregiver conducted?
 - How was the assessment done?
 - What needs were identified?
- Were periodic comprehensive assessments conducted during the period under review to assess needs of the mother/female caregiver and father/male caregiver?
 - How were assessments conducted?
 - What types of needs were identified and/or did their needs change during the period under review?
- What services were provided for the mother and father during the period under review?
 - Did these services meet identified needs?
- Were there any barriers to accessing services? If yes, what were they and how did the agency attempt to address them?

Ask about how the foster parents’ needs were assessed, what needs were identified, and how services were provided to meet needs. (Cover all foster parents providing care to the child during the period under review.)

- How were the foster parents’ needs assessed during the period under review?
- Did the foster parents have any needs related to their ability to care for the child in their home?
- Were any services provided to the foster parents?

- Were there any barriers to accessing services? If yes, what were they, and how did the agency attempt to address them?

Item 13—Ask about how the child and parents/caregivers were engaged in case planning. (Ask specifically for child(ren), mother, and father.)

- Describe the process you used to engage the parents/caregivers in case planning. How did you describe the purpose of the case plan to parents/caregivers?
- How frequently did you engage parents/caregivers in case planning discussions?
- What input did the parents/caregivers provide into the case plan?
- Describe the process you used to engage the child(ren) in case planning. How did you describe the purpose of the case plan to the child(ren)?
- What input did the child(ren) provide into the case plan?

Item 14—Ask about the frequency and quality of the caseworker’s visits with the child.

- How frequently did you visit the child during the period under review [refer to any available documentation of visits from the case record]?
- Where did visits occur?
- What was discussed during visits?
- Did you visit with the child alone for part of each visit, or did visits take place in the presence of parents, foster parents, or others?
- Typically, how long were the visits?
- Did you have regularly scheduled visits, or were visits prompted by other things?

Item 15—Ask about the frequency and quality of the caseworker’s visits with the mother and father. (Ask questions for each parent/caregiver.)

- How frequently did you visit the mother/father during the period under review [refer to any available documentation of visits from the case record]?
- Where did visits occur?
- What was discussed during visits?
- Typically, how long were the visits?
- Did you have regularly scheduled visits, or were visits prompted by other things?

Item 16—Ask about how the child’s educational needs were assessed and met.

- What is the child’s current status in school (grade level, reading level)?

- Were educational assessments conducted during the period under review? If so, how were they conducted?
- What needs were identified?
- What services (if any) is the child receiving, and are they meeting identified needs?
- Are there any barriers to accessing needed services? What efforts has the agency made to access the services?

Item 17—Ask about how the child’s physical and dental health needs were assessed and met.

- [If the child entered foster care during the period under review]—Was an **Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment** test or other medical examination conducted upon the child’s entry into care?
- When was the child’s last physical and dental exam?
- What physical and dental health needs does the child have?
- What services (if any) have been provided to the child, and are they meeting the identified needs?
- Is the child on any medication related to physical health? If so, how is that being monitored?

Item 18—Ask about how the child’s mental health needs were assessed and met.

- During the period under review, did the child have or develop any mental or behavioral health needs?
- How were they assessed?
- What services were provided to meet the identified needs, and are they meeting those needs?
- Is the child on any prescription medications for mental health issues? If so, how is that being monitored?
- [If the child was exposed to domestic violence]—Was the child’s exposure to domestic violence in the home assessed to determine if he or she needed further mental health assessment or services?

Complete the interview by thanking the caseworker for his or her time and asking if there is anything else the caseworker would like to share with you.