

Assessment Tools and Strategies

Strategy	When and How to Use	Examples
Look for Exceptions	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"> ▶ Can you tell me about a time when you decided not to get high? ▶ When did this problem seem a little better? ▶ Has anyone offered helpful advice about caring for children? How was it helpful? ▶ Was there a time when you were able to keep your cool?
Scaling Questions	<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>Scaling questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 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? ▶ 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? ▶ 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? ▶ With a smile meaning happy and a frown meaning sad, tell me how you feel things are going at home. <p>Follow-up questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Why did you choose [5]? ▶ What would help change the rating from [2] to [3]? ▶ 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?
What Else?	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"> ▶ What else did that experience teach you? ▶ What else did you take away from that encounter with [your daughter's teacher]? ▶ What else would need to be different for you to feel like real progress has been made?



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Coping Questions	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"> ▶ Wow, with all that you have been through, how do you keep going? ▶ I am sure there are times when you feel like leaving. What stops you? ▶ 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?
Compliments	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"> ▶ Thank you for getting the information to me. This will help speed things up. ▶ I appreciate your turning off your cell phone. It's helpful to me when we can talk without interruption. ▶ I see you have a list of concerns. It's helpful when you come prepared so we can work together on these issues.
Pushing Buttons	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"> ▶ What pushes your buttons? ▶ What do you think pushes [family member's] buttons?
Tour Guide	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"> ▶ Have someone in the family serve as a "tour guide" of their home.
Family Portrait	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"> ▶ 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.
Three Houses	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"> ▶ 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."

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Self-Portrait	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"> ▶ Bones/teeth/muscles – medical/dental care, exercise ▶ Mouth/ears – listening to one another, communication and relationships among family members ▶ Hands – caring for pets or family members, affection or physical touch
Fact Check	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"> ▶ 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.
Family Circles Assessment	<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"> ▶ For descriptions of each circle, please see page 37.
Survival Stories	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"> ▶ If you were stranded on an island, what five things would you want with you? ▶ If you were lost at sea, which four people would you want on your raft to help you get back to land?
Relationship Questions	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"> ▶ What do you suppose your [children] would say they like best about your being sober? ▶ How do you think your [child] would say seeing you sober helps [him/her]? ▶ What would your [son/daughter] say about how your [drinking] has affected [his/her] relationship with you?