

## WORKING MODEL OF THE CHILD INTERVIEW

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1986, rev. 1993

### Introduction

This is a structured interview to assess parents' internal representations or working model of their relationship to a particular child. The setting of the interview should be comfortable enough to allow for attention to the questions posed and a relaxed atmosphere that permits the opportunity for reflection.

The introductory section on developmental history is optional, depending upon the setting and purpose for which the interview is used. Otherwise, the interviewer should follow the outline. The interview allows for some follow-up probes, particularly those that encourage the individual to elaborate on responses. ...the interviewer [should] not make interpretative comments, since we are interested in the degree to which individuals make these links on their own. Requests for clarification about contradictions may be made but only for the purpose of ascertaining whether the individual maintains contradictory views of the infant and only after allowing the individual an opportunity to recognize, acknowledge, and resolve the contradictions on his/her own. Essentially, the purpose of the interview is to have individuals reveal as much as possible in a narrative account of their perceptions, feelings, motives, and interpretations of a particular child and their relationship to that child.

### Reference

Zeanah, C.H., & Benoit, D. (1995). Clinical applications of a parent perception interview in infant mental health. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 4, 539-554.

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### Interview

We are interested in how parents think and feel about their children. This interview is a way for us to ask you about *child's name* and your relationship to *him/her*. The interview will take us about an hour to complete.

(1) I'd like you to begin by telling me about your child's development.

(1a) Let's start with your pregnancy. I'm interested in things like whether it was planned or unplanned, how you felt physically and emotionally, and what you were doing during the pregnancy (working, etc.). *In a follow-up probe, find out how much the baby was wanted or not wanted.* Had you ever been pregnant before? Why did you want to get pregnant at this time in your life? When did the pregnancy seem real to you? What were your impressions about the baby during pregnancy? What did you sense the baby might be like (including gender, temperament/personality)?

*The idea is to put the subject at ease and to begin to obtain a chronological history of the pregnancy. Additional probes may be necessary to make sure that the individual is given a reasonable opportunity to convey the history of his/her reactions to and feelings about the pregnancy and the baby (which may or may not be the same).*

(1b) Tell me about labor and delivery. *Give some time to respond before proceeding.* How did you feel and react at the time? What was your first reaction when you saw the baby? What was your reaction to having a boy/girl? How did your family react? *Be sure to include husband/partner, other siblings.*

(1c) Did the baby have any problems in the first few days after birth? How soon was the baby discharged from the hospital? Did you decide to breastfeed or bottlefeed? Why? What was the experience of breast-/bottle feeding like for you?

(1d) How would you describe the first few weeks at home in terms of feeding, sleeping, crying, etc. *This is often a very important time because it may set the "emotional tone" of the baby's entrance into the family, particularly if the delivery and perinatal period were routine.*

(1e) Tell me about your baby's developmental milestones such as sitting up, crawling, walking, smiling, and talking. *Be sure to get a sense of the ways in which the baby was thought to be different, ahead or behind in motor, social, and language development.* Did you have any sense of your baby's intelligence early on? What did you think?

(1f) Did your baby seem to have a regular routine? What happened if you didn't stay in the routine?

(1g) How has the baby reacted to separations from you? *Try to get a sense of the baby's reactions at various ages.* Were there any separations of more than a day in the first or second year? How did the baby react? How was it for you? How did you feel? What did you do?

(1h) How and when did you choose your baby's name? Find out about family names, etc. How well does your baby's name fit him/her?

(2) Does your baby/child get upset often? *Give some time to respond before proceeding to specific queries.* What do you do at these times? What do you feel like doing when this happens? What do you feel like at these times?

(2a) What about when he/she becomes emotionally upset? Can you recall a specific example (or tell about a time when your child was emotionally upset [e.g., sad, frightened]). *Make sure that subject describes incident(s) about the child being sad, frightened and not only angry. Also, indicate that you want an example by providing a reasonably long time to think of one.* What did you do when that happened? What did you feel like doing? How did you feel or what was that like for you to see him/her upset like that? *If the subject becomes extremely anxious and cannot recall an example, then proceed to part (2b).*

(2b) Tell me about a time when he/she was physically hurt a little bit (e.g.,

*a bump on head, scraping knees, cuts, bleeding)* – in terms of what happened, what you did and what you felt. *Be sure to find out what the subject felt like and did.*

(2c) Tell me about a time when your baby/child was ill (e.g., *ear infection, measles, flu/cold, etc*), in terms of what happened, what you did and what you felt like. *Again, include what this experience was like for the parent and how they responded to the child affectively and behaviorally.*

(3) Describe your impression of your child's personality now. *Give the subject enough time to respond to this before proceeding to specific descriptors below.*

(3a) Pick 5 words (adjectives) to describe your child's personality. After you have told me what they are, I will ask you about each one. *For each one.* What is it about him/her that makes you say that? *Then again for each one,* tell at least one specific incident which illustrates what you mean by each word that you chose. *You may tell the subject that it is fine to use any of the descriptors they used in response to the general probe above, but do not remind them what they said before you have given them time to recall themselves. Some subjects will have a hard time coming up with 5 descriptors. If you feel that they cannot come up with 5, then move on. The numbers are less important than the descriptions.*

(4) At this point, whom does your child remind you of? In what ways? When did you first notice the similarity? *If only one parent is mentioned ask.* In what ways does the child remind you of (the other parent)? *The following questions should be asked whether or not the parents have been mentioned.* Which of his/her parents is your child most like now? In what ways is your child's personality like and unlike each of his/her parents'?

(4a) Are there any family characteristics on your side you see in your child's personality? What about (other parent)'s side?

(4b) How did you decide on your child's name? How well does the name seem to fit?

(5) What do you feel is unique or different about your child compared to (what you know of) other children?

(6) What about your child's behavior now is the most difficult to handle? Give a typical example.

(6a) How often does this occur? What do you feel like doing when your child reacts that way? How do you feel when your child reacts that way? What do you actually do?

(6b) Does he/she know you don't like it? Why do you think he/she does it?

(6c) What does the child do after you respond to the difficult behavior in the way you described? How do you imagine the child feels when you respond this way?

(6d) What do you imagine will happen to this behavior as your child grows older? Why do you think so/what makes you feel that way?

(7) How would you describe your relationship to your child now? *Give time to respond.*

(7a) Pick 5 words (adjectives) to describe your relationship. For each word, describe an incident or memory that illustrates what you mean.

(8) What pleases you most about your relationship with your baby? What do you wish you could change about it?

(9) How do you feel your relationship with your child has affected your child's personality? *Give ample time to respond.*

(10) Has your relationship to your child changed at all over time (*since birth*)? In what ways? What's your own feeling about that change?

(11) Which parent is your child closest to now? How can you tell? Has it always been that way? Do you expect that to change (as the child gets older, for instance)? How do you expect it to change?

(12) Tell a favorite story about your child – perhaps one you've told to family or friends. I'll give you a minute to think about this one. *If the subject is struggling, you may tell them that this doesn't have to be the favorite story, only a favorite.* What do you like about this story?

(13) As you know, the first (age of child) months/years can be difficult at times – what is your worst memory of (child's name)'s first (age of child) months/years of life?

(14) Are there any experiences which your child has had which you feel may have been a setback for him/her? Why do you think so? *Indirectly, we're trying to determine whether the parent feels responsible in any way for the setbacks. Therefore, be sure to give time to respond before moving on to the more direct questions which follow.*

(14a) Do you have any regrets about the way you've raised your child so far?

(14b) If you could start all over again, knowing what you know now, what would you do differently?

(15) Do you ever worry about your child? What do you worry about? How worried do you get about (*list each worry*)?

(16) If your child could be the same age forever, let's say you can freeze him/her in time – any age at all – what would you prefer that age to be? Why (what do you like about that age?).

(17) As you look ahead, what do you think will be the most difficult time in your child's development? Why do you think so?

- (18) What do you expect your child to be like as an adolescent? What makes you feel that way? What do you expect to be good and not so good about this period in your child's life?
- (19) Think for a moment of your child as an adult. What hopes and fears do you have about that time?

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