

Ensuring Safety, Permanency and Well-Being: Suggestions for conducting contacts with Birth Parents

Adapted by Rose Wentz and Joan Morse

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Pre-School: (3-6 years old)

Developmental Milestones:

Physical

- Is able to dress and undress self
- Has refined coordination and is learning many new skills
- Is very active and likes to do things like climb, hop, skip and do stunts

Emotional/Social

- Develops capacity to share and take turns
- Plays cooperatively with peers
- Is developing some independence and self-reliance
- Is developing ethnic and gender identities
- Learning to distinguish between reality and fantasy
- Learning to make connections and distinctions between feelings, thoughts and actions

Intellectual/Cognitive

- With pre-schoolers, their ability to understand language usually develops ahead of their speech
- By age 6, their vocabulary will have increased to between 8,000 and 14,000 words but it is important to remember that children in this age group often repeat words without fully understanding their meaning

- They have learned the use of most prepositions (up/down, ahead/behind, beside) and some basic possessive pronouns (mine, his, ours), and have started to master adjectives
- Pre-school children continue to be egocentric and concrete in their thinking. They are still unable to see things from another's perspective, and they reason based on specifics that they can visualize and that have importance to them (i.e. "Mom and Dad" instead of "family").
- When questioned, they can generally express who, what, where, and sometimes how, but not when or how many. They are also able to provide a fair amount of detail about a situation.
- It is important to keep in mind that children in this age range continue to have trouble with the concepts of sequence and time. As a result, they may seem inconsistent when telling a story simply because they hardly ever follow a beginning-middle-end approach

Suggested Well-Being and Permanency Questions for Birth Parents:

What was/is it like for you to care for your child at home? What has been the effect on your family of having this child placed? What did you expect it to be like? Help me understand what it has been like for you dealing with your child/children's placement in foster care?

What do you need to do so that you'll feel good about yourself and in control of your life again?

Scaling Question: Thinking about the problems that led to your child's placement, on a scale of 1 -10 with 10 meaning you have every confidence that these problems can be solved and 1 means no confidence at all, where would you put yourself today? What would be different in your life when you make a change?

On a scale of 1 – 10 how much would you say you are willing to work to solve these problems?

Miracle Question: Suppose that one night, while you were asleep, there was a miracle and all the problems that lead to the placement of your child were solved. How would you know they were solved? What would be different?

Could you tell me something you like about parenting your child? What things are not so good about parenting him/her? What might happen if you don't change? How would changing your behavior affect your child and family?

What is the permanency goal for your child? What do you think/feel about this? What makes it okay; not okay? How have you been included in the family conferences/treatment team meetings? What are your responsibilities (things you do such as visits, treatment, getting your house ready for your child to return, etc.) in the case plan? Where you involved in helping to choose the alternative permanent plan (adoption or guardianship) and which family would care for your child?

In order to have your child returned to you, what will be the first sign that things are moving in the right direction?

What services do you need in order to care for your child? What do you think/feel about those?

Is this child is receiving any educational, medical and/or psychological services? Which ones? How often? Do you think that these services are meeting this child's needs? Are there any other services that you think that this child needs?

How have your visits been with your child/children? What types of things do you do together during the visits? What could be done by you or others to improve visits?

What services do you think your child/children will need in order to return home? To whom do you go to when things are going well? To whom do you go to if things aren't going too well?

What is your greatest fear about your child returning home? What is your greatest fear if your child does not return home?

What things do you need to support your continued care of this child?

Describe who your child is. What about your child is easiest and most pleasurable? What was the most difficult aspect of dealing with your child at home? What are the things about this child that will help him/her in the future? What will be harder for him/her?

What were some of the adjustments you experienced in parenting this child?

When your child was at home, what types of things did he/she like to do?

When your child was at home, did she/he seek you out and accept your help when needed?

When your child was at home, did he/she show warmth and affection across a range of interactions and with different people?

When your child was at home, who did they seek comfort from when hurt, frightened, or ill?

What was your child's sleeping pattern at home? What was your child's eating pattern?

Have you seen any weight changes since your child entered care?

Does your child show preference for a particular adult?

How easy is it to sooth your child when s/he is upset?

Reviewing Safety Concerns with Birth Parents:

Basic Safety

- ✓ Did this child have any serious injuries, either before or since coming into your care?
- ✓ Does your child have any chronic health conditions? Do you have all the necessary medication and supplies?
- ✓ Do you have a First Aid Kit in your home? I

Check For:

- ✓ TVs and other pieces of standing furniture secured so that they cannot be pulled over?
- ✓ Exposed wires or appliance cords in reach of children?

Preventing Falls

- ✓ Are there child safety window guards on all windows above the first floor?
- ✓ Are safety gates installed at the top and bottom of all staircases?

Sleep Time Safety

- ✓ Please show me where the child will sleep? What will you do if the child has trouble falling asleep? Does your child experience nightmares?
- ✓ What type of bedding do you use for the child? (avoid soft bedding or pillows)
- ✓ Do you use pillows or heavy comforters in the bed?
- ✓ Does your child ever sleep in bed with you or with other children?

- ✓ Are there any window blinds or curtain cords near your child bed or other furniture?
- ✓ Do you ever cover mattresses with plastic or a plastic bag? (No plastics that could interfere with breathing)

Bath Safety

- ✓ What do you do if the telephone or doorbell rings while you are giving your child a bath?
- ✓ What type of bathtub seat do you use? (check for suction cups)
- ✓ Do you check the water temperature to make sure that the bath is not too hot or too cold?

Child care safety

- ✓ Who takes care of your child when you are not home? How do you know this person? How old is this person? Is there a way for your child to reach you when you are away from home?
- ✓ Is there a list of phone numbers for your doctor, local hospital, police, fire department, poison control center and a friend or neighbor near the phone?
- ✓ Does this child go to daycare or pre-school? If so, how many hours per week? How does your child get there? Who is responsible for drop-off and pick-up?

Safety in the Streets

- ✓ Who watches your child when they play out-of doors?
- ✓ Does your child know what to do if a stranger talks to him or her on the street?

Well-Being Questions for Pre-Schoolers Living with Their Family :

Living Arrangements:

What is it like living with your family?

What is the best thing about living with your family? What are some things that you don't like?

Who else lives here with you? What do you think about these other people who live here? What is it like living with them?

What are some of the rules your family has? What happens if you break a rule?

Daily Routine:

Do you wake up by yourself in the morning or does someone else wake you up? If it's someone else, ask: Who?

What do you do in the morning to get ready for school? Does anybody help you? If so, what do they do? What do you do by yourself to get ready in the morning?

Does anyone make breakfast for you? Who? What are some things that you eat for breakfast?

(If child goes to school): Do you bring your lunch with you to school or do you get lunch at school? What are some things that you eat for lunch?

(If child goes to school): Where do you go after school? How do you get there? What do you do after school? Do you like what you do after school?

Who makes you dinner? What are some things that you eat for dinner? What is your favorite thing to eat? What are some things that you do after you eat dinner?

What time do you go to bed? Does anyone help you to get ready for bed? If so, what do they do to help you?

Where do you sleep? Do you share a room with anyone? Who? If so, ask: Do you like sharing a room with this person? How come? Do you share a bed with anyone else? If yes, ask: who?

What do you do on Saturday and Sunday? Who do you do this with?

Special Interests:

What kinds of things do you like to do for fun (sports, music, art, video games, etc.)? How often do you get to do these things?

Are there any things that you'd really like to be doing that you aren't doing now?

Education:

What do you do at school? Who do you do this with?

What are some of the things that you like the most about school? What are some of the things that you don't like so much about school?

Family and Friends:

What are some things you do with your family?

What are some things you do with your brothers and sisters?

Do you get to visit with any of your relatives? Who do you see?
Who are some of your friends? What do you do with them? Where do you play together?

Social/Emotional:

If you are sad, mad or scared about something that happens at your house, do you tell anyone? Who?

Do you ever get scared at night? If so, ask: What do you do when you feel scared at night?

Does anyone in your family ever get mad at you? What happens if they get mad at you? Do your parents ever get mad at anyone else who lives with you?

Is there anyone at home make you feel scared? Can you tell me who they are.

Is there anyone at school who makes you feel scared? What are their names?

Do you ever get scared when you are playing outside? If yes, ask: How come? Do you tell anyone when you feel scared? Who?

Are there any grown ups or kids who do things that make you feel happy?
Are there any grown ups or kids who do things that make you feel sad?
Are there any grown ups or kids who do things that make you feel mad?

If something is really worrying or bothering you, who can you talk to? If you want to talk to me, do you know how you can do that?

Health:

Have you been to see a doctor since you've been living with _____?
What did you see this doctor for? Have you been to any other doctors? If so, how come?

Have you seen a dentist since you've been living with _____?

Reviewing Safety Concerns with Pre-Schoolers Living with Their Family:

- ✓ Do you know the name of the street that your house is on? Do you know the address your house is on? Do you know telephone number at home? Can you tell me what it is?

- ✓ Do you ever stay by yourself at home without any grown ups around?
- ✓ Who takes care of you if your parent is not at home? Do you feel happy or sad when they are not at home? Do you feel happy or sad when some else comes to stay with you? How come?
- ✓ Do you know what to do if something really bad or scary happens, like if there is a fire? What would you do?
- ✓ Do you ever sleep over at somebody else's house? Tell me their name. Do you like to sleep over? Do you do this a little or a lot?
- ✓ Do you go to school? Who takes you to school? Who picks you up from school?
- ✓ Do any grown ups watch you when you play outside? Who?
- ✓ Do you know what to do if a stranger talks to you on the street or asks you to go somewhere with him/her?

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