

Ep. 2 How to Complete Exceptional Child & Family Assessments Frequently Asked Questions

What is the best way to involve the child in the reintegration process since they may not really have a mature level of understanding?

It is not uncommon for people to think that children are too young to make big decisions about their life. However, this is exactly when they need to have a voice. It is critical that they have the opportunity to discuss their hopes, dreams, fears, and concerns throughout the reintegration process.

Be sure to reach out to the child where they are, regardless of their age. Some children are verbal and will talk about their feelings, but others need a different approach. Be creative - use art, storytelling, whatever will help the child share their wishes. Let them know the importance of their thoughts and feelings -- after all, they are at the heart of the reintegration.

For more information, view our ["LifeBook Work" unit](#) and ["Expressing Emotions through Art" unit](#)

How do I help the family feel comfortable in sharing their very personal experiences with me?

The key to helping the family feel comfortable is taking the time needed to build a relationship with them. Be warm, friendly, caring, and positive, and show your sincere care for them.

Let them know that you recognize how hard this is for them.

Ensure that they understand that you are on their side -- you are there to help them get the support they need

Always respond to the family members in a non-judgmental manner - respect is key.

It may take several visits/calls for the family to open up, but your investment of time is paramount to successfully supporting the family.

What does it mean to listen beyond the words?

People will often respond in the way they think you want to hear, or they will share half-truths because they are ashamed or embarrassed about the reality, or worried that you will separate the family or punish them in some way.

But people are not often good at hiding non-verbal communication. Watch for lack of eye contact, fumbling with their hands, hesitation in their speech.

Listen also for a tone of voice that doesn't match what the person is saying. They may be telling you everything is ok, but their voice doesn't sound convincing.

Observe how family members interact with each other or with those outside the family. You can learn so much just by paying attention to their relationships and communication.

When you notice that the person doesn't seem to be telling you the full story, never become confrontative. Rather, state that what they're saying doesn't seem to match how they're feeling and ask them to clarify. Listen supportively and chances are they will reveal their true concerns.

How do we know what is in the best interest of every unique child?

In order to attend to the best interests of the child, we must first gain an in-depth understanding of each child's very personal circumstances, hopes, and needs. Reintegration is not a one size fits all process, and we must truly get to know the child and their family in order to serve their unique priorities.

- Listen to the child
- Gather input from family members, teachers, healthcare workers, mental health professionals, and any other important people in the child's life to gain a holistic view of the child's strengths and needs.
- Utilize tested assessment and planning tools such as Miracle Foundation's Home Thrive Scale™ to guide your decision making
- Trust your professional judgment - you are in this important field because you have people skills and intuition ... that coupled with your solid foundation of psycho-social knowledge and case management processes is your key to making sound child-centered decisions.

Ensure that the child's immediate need and long term goals are met, and their development is being considered holistically.

Who do I need on my team and what training do I need to provide to start reintegrating children safely?

Investment in a high quality social workforce is critical to effective case management, with the primary responsibilities requiring a skilled social worker/case manager who is familiar with the local community. This role is the hub of the case management process, coordinating the Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) and overseeing all aspects of case management, including supervising outreach workers who carry out the frequent follow up visits to family homes. Trained paraprofessionals can effectively be utilized to support the process in the event there is a lack of credentialed outreach workers in the community.



Training of these vital roles should include knowledge and skill building on the following topics:

- Child development, child rights, importance of attachment, impact of trauma
- Communication skills focusing on the child, family, community, and multi-disciplinary team
- Preparing children and families for reintegration
- Positive parenting, positive discipline
- Effective utilization of assessment and planning tools
- Knowledge of community resources
- Using a strength based approach to set realistic goals with the families

The importance of ongoing and on-the-job training and mentoring cannot be over-emphasized. Case workers/outreach workers must have the opportunity to discuss ways to apply what they have learned to the children and families they are supporting through frequent case conferences.

For more information on training and curriculum, contact safelyhome@miraclefoundation.org

What if I can't travel to visit the families in person due to extenuating circumstances such as COVID?

While we always encourage face to face interaction with the children and families, and our Home Thrive Scale™ is designed with this in mind, we understand that in unusual circumstances it is not possible to visit in person. Remote connections via phone can be very effective in assessing family needs and planning for intervention strategies if you keep the following in mind:

- In general, people find it more difficult to focus for long periods of time on the phone – keep your calls to a maximum of one hour at a time. Recognize that it may take you several calls to complete the entire assessment tool.
- Be sure to speak with the child as well as relevant family members. You want to get feedback from all significant individuals. Ensure that the child has a private place to talk, especially if there are concerns about potential abuse.
- Approach the family with a tone of voice that is warm, friendly, and caring. Use positive language, and convey the message that you are approachable and there to help them..
- Visual cues will be limited, even when utilizing video. Since you lack non-verbal cues, be sure to listen carefully, and listen beyond the words that are spoken. Clarify any mixed messages you receive where the words stated don't match the way they were expressed.
- Listen for tone of voice, attitude, hesitation in response, uncomfortable laughter.
- If you are having difficulty reaching families, engage the government officials charged with serving these families. You may also involve community volunteers, neighbors, and extended family to gather neutral, accurate information, and to ask them to support the family in the form of group monitoring.

Utilize the Home Thrive Scale™ in the same way remotely as you would in person to assess family needs and plan for interventions strategies.

For more information, view our [Expedited Case Management Guidelines](#)