

## WORKING MODEL OF THE CHILD INTERVIEW

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The Working Model of the Child Interview is a structured interview to access parent's internal representations or working models 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 a developmental history is optional, depending upon the setting and purposes 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. Vital to scoring is that the interviewer not make interpretive 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 purposes 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.

## WORKING MODEL OF THE CHILD INTERVIEW

### Biological Parent version *Dad adaptations italicized*

We are interested in how parents think and feel about their young 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.
  - (a) Let's start with your/(*Mom's name's*) 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.) (*If Dad responds that he was not around during the pregnancy, did he know about it? How and when did he find out? How did he feel?*) In a follow-up probe, find out how much the baby was wanted or not wanted. Had (*the two of you*) you ever been pregnant before? When did the pregnancy seem real to you? What were your impressions about the baby during the pregnancy? What did you sense the baby might be like? {The idea is to put the subject at ease and to begin to obtain a chronological history of the pregnancy.} Additional problems 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)
  - (b) Tell me about labor and delivery. Give some time to respond before proceeding. How did you feel and react at that time? (*If Dad was not present, what was that like?*) What was your first reaction when you first 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.
  - (c) Did the baby have any problems in the first few days after birth? How soon was the baby discharged from the hospital? Did (*the two*) of you decide to breast-feed or bottle-feed? Why?
  - (d) How would you describe the first few weeks at home: 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.}

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

2 (a) Describe your impression of your child's personality now. {Give the person enough time to respond to this before proceeding to specific descriptors below.}

2(b) Pick five 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, tell at least one specific incident which illustrates what you mean by each word that you chose. {You may tell the person 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 people will have a hard time coming up with five descriptors. If you feel that they cannot come up with five, then move on. The numbers are less important than the descriptions.}

3(a) At this point, whom does your child remind you of? In what ways? When did you first notice the similarity? If 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 yours? Unlike yours? Like (other parent's)? Unlike (other parent's)?

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

3(c) How did you decide on your child's name? {If needed, probe for family names.} How well does the name seem to fit?

4. What do you feel is unique, different, or special about your child compared to what you know of other children?

5. What about your child's behavior now is the most difficult for you to handle? Give a typical example.

- a) How often does this occur? What do you feel like doing when your child reacts this way? How do you feel when your child reacts this way? What do you actually do?
- b) Does he/she know you don't like it? Why do you think he/she does it?
- c) What do you imagine will happen to this behavior as your child grows older? Why do you think so?

6 (a) How would you describe your relationship to your child now? {Give time to respond.}

6 (b) Pick five words (adjectives) to describe your relationship. For each word, describe an incident or memory that illustrates what you mean.

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

7 (b) How do you feel your relationship with your child has affected your child's personality? {Give ample time to respond to this.}

7 (c) Has your relationship to your child changed at all over time? In what ways? What's your own feeling about the change?

8. 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? How do you expect it to change?

9 Does your baby 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?

(a) What about when he/she becomes emotionally upset? Can you recall a specific example? {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? What did you feel like? {If the person becomes extremely anxious and cannot recall an example, then proceed to part (b)}

(b) What about when he/she has been physically hurt a little bit? Can you give an example and describe what happened? {Be sure to find out what the person felt like and did.}

(c) Has your child been sick at all? Tell an example. Again, include what this experience was like for the parent and how they responded to the child affectively and behaviorally.

10 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 person is struggling, you may tell him/her that this doesn't have to be the favorite story, only a favorite.} What do you like about this story?

11 (a) 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.}

(b) Knowing what you know now, if you started all over again with your child, what would you do differently? {Give some time to respond.}

12. Do you ever worry about your child? What do you worry about?

13. If your child were to be one particular age, what age would you choose?

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

15. What do you expect your child to be like as an adolescent (teenager)? What makes you feel this way? What do you expect to be good about this period in your child's life? What do you expect to be not so good about this period in your child's life?

16. Think for a moment of your child as an adult. What hopes do you have about that time?  
What fears do you have about that time?

For clinical use of the interview, invite the parent to reflect on how it was for them to respond to these questions.