

Attorneys For Children Guide to Interviewing Clients:

Integrating Trauma Informed Care and Solution Focused Strategies

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Karen A. Reitman
Supervising Editors: Honorable Judith S. Claire, Chautauqua County Family Court Judge
Aimee L. Neri, LMSW New York State Child Welfare Court Improvement Project

Introduction:

This guide focuses on the importance of taking trauma into account when interviewing children who have been traumatized. Representing and advocating for a child who has been abused or neglected involves communicating with someone already distrustful due to significant trauma. In order to work for child-clients it is critically important that the attorney for the child considers the impact of trauma on the child's mentality and how the resultant shift in functioning affects the child's ability to communicate. In 2001, Harris and Falot published an innovative guide that examined the necessary elements of integrating trauma informed work into service systems to increase efficacy of the support being provided to persons who are survivors of trauma.¹ Since its publication, the support by systems for integrating trauma informed care has spread widely, including the penetration of its concepts into child welfare cases. The integration of trauma informed care into mental health and service systems sparked a creative design for communicating with clients. Applying the strategies used in Brief Solution-Focused Therapy can provide a language for practitioners to use in partnership with their client to create solutions to a problem and honor the client as being expert to their own story and situation.²

Family court attorneys who represent parties engaged in litigated civil disputes often find themselves at an impasse where the parties (particularly the children) have experienced high rates of exposure to traumatic events ranging from witnessing domestic disputes to being the victim of direct physical harm. The attorneys who represent children, despite their highest level of professionalism and expertise are often challenged with limitations for time and access to develop a working relationship with their client. Further, the ability to effectively engage with their client and wholly interview and counsel their client can be hindered by the impacts that traumatic exposure has had on the child's developmental and emotional communication and thought processes. Integrating the theories of trauma informed care and solution focused strategies into the family court process can provide an opportunity for dialogue and connection within the attorney-client relationship.³ This guide defines a framework from which an attorney for the child can utilize the theories of trauma informed care and solution focused strategies to develop a meaningful and trusting relationship their client. Further, this guide provides a means for attorneys to formulate a comfortable, successful approach to interviewing children. Section I describes the Solution Focused model and its applicability to interviewing child clients. Section II provides the background information and research on the concepts advocated as best practices for interviewing children both independent of and within the context of abuse and/or neglect. Section III includes tools for courts/attorneys and describes their uses. These tools were developed using the research detailed in Section II: concepts from the Solution Focused Thinking methods created by Insoo Kim and Steve de Shazer.

Section I:

The concepts and language put forth by this guide are based on the Solution Focused Thinking model of communication. Brief Solution-Focused Therapy was developed by Insoo Kim as a way to shift the system of therapy from problem-solving to the creation of solutions.⁴ This model can be applied in cases of children affected by trauma. The goal is to transfer the

paradigm of the conversation from a reactive to a proactive methodology. The language presented in this guide is informed by this model. In working with children who have been traumatized, moving away from the problems they are facing towards possible solutions not only creates more opportunity for positive outcomes, it also makes children more open to talking about any issues they are encountering. By using this language, attorneys can more successfully understand their clients' needs and therefore more ably advocate for them. Language that is solution focused in nature is based in the concept that by letting an individual take control of their plan for improving their situation, they will be more open and ultimately more successful.⁵

An aspect of being an effective attorney for the child is having an understanding of the client. Augmenting the difficulty in communication between the attorney and child-client is the change in the thinking patterns of a child who has been traumatized.⁶ Currently, the attorney for the child is responsible for attaining the child's opinion on difficult, often traumatic circumstances and has little to no information on how to attain such information without running the risk of further traumatizing the child. This unfortunate arrangement of distrustful children with incredibly valuable information and interviewers who do not necessarily have guidance on how to deal with such youths leads to less impactful child representation. Whether an attorney is advocating for the child's best interest or representing the child's desires, it is imperative that attorneys have open, fruitful interviews with their clients. The basis of trust and comfort that is needed for a successful attorney-client relationship is attainable only if the attorney has a way to successfully communicate with the child.

Integrating information on child development and the thinking patterns of children affected by trauma will make the interview process less anxiety producing for the child and more effective for the attorney. Introducing techniques for interacting with children in a manner that allows them the most expression despite their underlying trauma will enable more successful legal advocacy for the child.

Section II:

In addition to using the basic skills of interviewing the child while applying the most successful methods, the child's history of abuse and/or neglect must be considered as well. The concepts on interviewing children who have not been abused apply; they are simply tempered with consideration of the impact that trauma has on the child's mindset and functioning. The core concepts of interviewing children – creating a comfortable environment, taking language development into account, and maintaining cultural awareness– remain important when speaking with a child in the family court system. Recognizing a child affected by trauma's vulnerability, increased susceptibility to shame, and specific language needs augment the skills already used when interviewing children. These added concepts facilitate an easier interview process for both the child and the attorney.

The child's comfort is paramount in an interview setting. Not only does the attorney want to avoid creating anxiety in the child, a comfortable environment will help facilitate dialogue between the child and the attorney.⁷ Children do not respond well to direct questioning. Sitting face to face with an adult (inherently an authority in the child's mind) creates unease and will dissuade the child from divulging information.⁸ Using other activities (driving, eating, playing) to soften the import of the conversation will put less pressure on the child and encourage honesty.⁹ The use of an activity to access a child's thoughts is less intrusive and allows for more freedom of expression on the part of the child. Making a child comfortable and building a relationship between the interviewer and the child facilitates a productive interview that supports

the child. Nonverbal cues from the attorney will, likewise, make the child more comfortable. Sitting next to the child as opposed to across from them, appearing engaged and interested, and matching the child's body language give the message that the attorney is a safe, non-threatening figure.¹⁰

When interviewing children, a basic consideration is their developmental linguistic ability to communicate.¹¹ The child's ability to communicate verbally may not align with the standard for their chronological age, so developmental patterns are especially important. The language uses of different aged children require specific communication methods on the part of the interviewer. The young child's tendency towards concrete thinking juxtaposed with the adolescent's hypersensitivity to perceived condescension illustrates the extent to which communication between an attorney and his child-client must be personalized by linguistic developmental age.¹² Techniques that are ubiquitous for all age groups – using open ended questions, avoiding verbosity, and active listening - are the basis to approach interviewing any child.¹³ Open ended questions provide a platform from which a child can give his thoughts on a subject without being limited by the scope of the question.¹⁴ Children are trained into believing that agreeing with an adult pleases the adult and that disagreeing may have negative consequences.¹⁵ A child will often say “yes” simply to garner approval. Thus, open ended questions prevent the child from agreeing out of habit or fear. For instance, asking “Where did you go?” instead of “Were you at the park?” allows the child to tell his version of events. This method also reduces the possibility of the child agreeing with the interviewer's supposition because he believes it is what the attorney wants to hear. By eliminating the use of direct questions, the interviewer opens the lines of communication. Asking wordy, drawn out questions obstructs the child's ability to respond. Especially with developmentally younger children, the full meaning of a long question is lost as the ability to process the information peters out.¹⁶ By keeping questions simple and concise, the interviewer increases likelihood that the child will be able to understand the question and respond truthfully. Children also often fear being ignored or declared untruthful.¹⁷ Actively listening will increase the attorney's understanding of the child, it will also encourage the child to engage in the conversation. By validating what the child says, confirming that the interviewer understands correctly, and asking for the child to elaborate, the interviewer indicates that he is interested in what the child has to say.

Guarding against unintentional introduction of judgment into an interview requires cultural awareness of both ethnicity and social stigmas. The need to avoid assumptions is especially important in regard to different cultures, as recognized actions and belief sets of one culture may not be the accepted mode of conduct or perception in another culture.¹⁸ Minorities' communities are built around a sense of kinship, so the bonds between children and their family/community is a major deterrent from speaking out about their issues.¹⁹ Emotionally, children are less able to go against social norms in order to advocate for themselves.²⁰ Children who are concerned about being judged will not voice an issue as a method of escaping possible censure. In issues such as sexuality, interpersonal relationships, and wrongdoing children will only offer information if they trust that they will not be criticized for it. The introduction of judgment on cultural or social differences is often unintentional. If the interviewer is working from a societal premise that is different from the child's, the judgment can be inherent in the form of the questions. It is therefore important that the interviewer recognize and remove his own bias from questions in order to prevent seeming culturally inappropriate or critical.

When interviewing a child who has experienced trauma, there are some additional concerns. As previously mentioned, children who have been traumatized think in a different way

from other children.²¹ These children experience an increase in emotion, agitation, and have difficulty trusting others.²² Children who have been the subject of abuse or neglect carry a feeling of hopelessness, have low confidence, and have difficulty imagining a future for themselves.²³ The feelings of helplessness, powerlessness, anxiety, and distress lead to social isolation and difficulty communicating. Specific language and techniques can be used to improve the interview process for a child affected by trauma. Focusing on empowering the child, avoiding judgment, and using language adapted for distressed children is fundamental. Additionally, it is vital that the interviewer address any personal traumas or emotional concerns surrounding the child's circumstances so as to be able to provide a healthy interview setting for himself and for the child.

A child who is involved with the Family Court system is incredibly vulnerable. In a position of powerlessness in almost every aspect of their lives, such children do not get the opportunity to impact their life in a meaningful way. When interviewing a child who has been traumatized, it is therefore important to recognize and build upon the child's strengths. When trying to ascertain what the child's position is on issues, it is important to allow the child to choose the solution he prefers. Furthermore, allowing the child to formulate positive next steps, and work with the attorney to create the child's preferred outcome engages the child in the process.

Avoiding judgment is a way to make the child feel more comfortable disclosing information. For children who have been traumatized, the feeling of embarrassment often immediately translates into a feeling of shame.²⁴ This shame is almost paralyzing for children, preventing them from communicating with the interviewer in any positive manner. In order to avoid passing judgment unwittingly, the interviewer's own biases (outlined above) must be addressed.²⁵ The attorney should enter the interview situation understanding his own biases and regulating his questions in order to minimize his biases' impact on the child. Negatively posed questions about the child or the child's family will often be interpreted as judgment by the child. Another method of avoiding the placement of unnecessary judgment upon a child is through focusing on the positive aspects of the child's circumstances.

The language used in an interview with a child who has not experienced trauma must be modified to consider an abused/neglected child's mental state. Clarity, fact-based questioning, and deference to the child's knowledge of his situation are vital to open communication with a child impacted by trauma. Given the differing thought processing of an abused or neglected child and that of his non-abused counterpart, an abused child needs especially clear, concise questions in order to be able to comprehend what the interviewer is asking. A baseline of easily answered, factual questions allows the child to gain confidence in his answers and willingness to answer future questions.²⁶ Allowing the child's answers to stand as fact is also important when conducting an interview of a child who has experienced trauma. When answers given by a child are conflicting, it is important to ask for clarification not in terms of the child's previous answers being incorrect, but as a wish for a clearer understanding on the part of the interviewer. Confronting a child about conflicting answers creates a feeling of embarrassment and/or shame in the child which both deters the child from answering any further questions and increases the likelihood that the child will respond with what he thinks the attorney wishes to hear.²⁷

Section III:

Three practical materials are included in order to help attorneys conduct a more successful interview with a child-client who has experienced trauma. The attached "Concepts on

Interviewing Child Clients”, “Question Reference Guide”, and “Attorney Guide” address practical ways for attorneys to integrate best practices into their interviews.

The “Concepts on Interviewing Child Clients” document (included on pages 6-10) provides an outline of different phases of an interview and concepts that are important in each. It delineates the concerns present in the rapport building and information gathering phases of an interview, including considerations that can help the attorney avoid common pitfalls. These concepts are a synthesis of the information on interviewing children and abused/neglected children previously discussed. As part of this document there are also age-specific recommendations based on developmental, not chronological age. Some concepts and suggestions are duplicated where they pertain to multiple categories. Attorneys can use this document as an aid in formulating questions or planning an interview.

Additionally, the “Question Reference Guide” (included on page 11-14) gives attorneys suggested phrasing and lines of questioning. This list can serve as a question resource for attorneys to use if the attorney is not comfortable creating questions based on the concepts in the “Concepts on Interviewing Child Clients” document. This guide provides many ways of asking the same questions, allowing the attorney to utilize whichever questions make the client and/or the attorney most comfortable. This guide goes through both the rapport building and information gathering portion of an interview.

The “Attorney Guide” (included on page 15-16) is a short synthesis of the previous two documents intended to be used as a guide during the conduct of an interview. The most vital concepts and sample questions are included. This document includes suggestions for five phases of an interview: introduction, engagement, questioning, response, and closing of an interview.

Concepts on Interviewing Child-Clients

I. Child's Comfort

- a. Create a child-friendly environment (provide snacks, toys, other inviting items)
 - i. Giving the child something to hold onto (a spinning top, squeeze toy, Rubik's cube) while talking will help them decrease their anxiety
 - ii. Talking to a child while driving them somewhere or while eating will often make them much more receptive to a conversation
- b. Use techniques that will make the child feel more powerful and make the attorney more approachable to the child
 - i. Sit on the same level as the child
 - ii. Limit the number of words in your sentence
 - iii. Try to replace "why" with "what", "feel" with "think", and "but" with "and"
 - iv. Use names instead of pronouns (e.g. "Amelia" instead of "she")
 - v. If concerned about the child's understanding, ask further questions to make sure the child is not confused
 1. For example, ask "Can you tell me what you just heard me say?" or "Tell me what that means to you."
- c. Consider that the child is likely nervous about this meeting
 - i. Consider allowing the child to bring their caretaker or other adult into the meeting with them until the child becomes more comfortable
 - ii. Ask the child fact-based questions to which he readily knows the answer
- d. Give the child a way to communicate without speaking
 - i. Use a Time Out or Take a Break Tool – keep a ball or other small object that the child can pick up when they feel overwhelmed
 - ii. Set up a signal with an object so that a child can ask to stop talking about a subject by picking up or holding up the object without having to verbally communicate their discomfort.
 - iii. Children often struggle with disobeying authority. Using this tool gives the child a means of telling the interviewer that they are uncomfortable, scared or overwhelmed without having to actually say it.
 1. E.g. "Bounce the ball to say 'I don't want to talk about it.'"
 - iv. Using methods of non-verbal, non-confrontational communication will assist in preventing meltdowns, silence, or acting out.
- e. Avoid subjecting the child to a barrage of questions.
 - i. A child will be more receptive to answering questions and more open with their answers if the questioning is done through an activity or with frequent breaks for a low-pressure activity/subject matter.
- f. Focus on Listening
 - i. Children can sense whether the person they are speaking with is engaged or not.
 - ii. Nonverbal cues can provide insight into what the child is thinking/feeling.
 1. Reflect to the child what emotion they seem to be exhibiting. "You seem [excited, frustrated, concerned, etc.] about that."

- iii. Validating what the child says by being attentive and/or repeating back what he says to ensure that the attorney fully understands what the child means helps encourage the child to share
- g. Establish what the child already knows/ is misinformed about
 - i. Consider asking the child why they think they are here/ why they think they are talking with an attorney
- h. Explain role of attorney for the child
 - i. Inform the child of the power they have through their attorney
 - ii. Explain the concept of attorney-client privilege and confidentiality
 - iii. Ask the child what he hopes to gain from the interview
 - iv. Tell the child what the attorney hopes the child will gain from the interview

II. Child's Involvement in the Court Process

- a. Inform the child of what will happen
- b. Inform the child of their rights and responsibilities
- c. Consider that most children think attorneys' role is to get people "out of trouble" and will therefore assume that talking with an attorney means they are in trouble
- d. Define the roles of all involved persons (judge, attorneys, DSS caseworker, CASA, foster parent/caregiver, therapist, etc.)
- e. Give older children a written list of legal terms that they are likely to come across.
 - i. This list should include the term, a simple definition, and room for the youth to take notes
- f. Explain the purpose of the proceedings
- g. Review the concepts of truth and falsity
 - i. Explain to the child the importance of being truthful in this circumstance
- h. Ask if the child would like the attorney to say anything to the judge or if the child themselves would like to say something to the judge (as appropriate)
 - i. For older children: offer the child the opportunity to write down anything they would like mentioned to the judge
 - ii. Invite younger children to draw a picture of what they would like the Judge to know. Then ask the child "Tell me about your drawing" to gain insight into the child's wishes to be represented.

III. Addressing Past Events

- a. Explain to the child what has already happened
- b. Ensure that the child understands that he/she is not to blame
- c. If the child has been separated from their parent(s) make sure the child knows where their parent is and what is happening to them

IV. Discussing Abuse/Neglect

- a. Avoid direct questions unless absolutely necessary
- b. Encourage the child to give descriptions of both neutral and relevant subjects
- c. Use neutral subjects (child's favorite hobbies, friends, school, etc.) to provide a basis from which to move towards more relevant subjects
- d. Ensure that the child understands that what they say will not be discussed with anyone (including parents, caseworkers, etc.) without their consent
- e. Avoid leading questions – allow the child to furnish details through broad spectrum questioning

- i. Do not discuss details of alleged abuse/neglect established by a third party until the child has already disclosed such details themselves
- f. Avoid yes/no questions
- g. Help the child find small steps that can be taken to improve their situation
 - i. Children will rarely believe an adult who offers a “solution”, it builds more trust to consistently follow through on small steps that slowly move towards a better circumstance
- h. Frame things in terms of what works well and what can be improved

V. For Foster Children

- a. Discuss what the situation at the foster home is like
- b. Address changes to school, doctor, child’s support system (grandparents, past teachers, family friends)
- c. Ascertain what aspects of the transition are still problematic (important belongings left behind, issues with new foster siblings, inadequate transfer of services)
- d. Children need to maintain connections to friends, siblings, family activities, former neighborhoods, and former foster parents. Be sure to specifically explore each of these necessary connections.
- e. Ensure that the child is getting the desired visitation with his parent(s)

VI. For Developmentally Disabled Children

- a. Meet multiple times to gauge their understanding of your conversations
- b. Gain as much knowledge from the child himself as possible
- c. Treat any assistive device as part of the personal space of the child
- d. Speak with parents, foster parents, teachers, etc. to increase understanding of child

VII. Cultural Awareness and Social Norms

- a. Avoid assumptions
 - i. Children may have issues that have not yet been identified because the child is embarrassed. If the child believes the attorney will judge them for an aspect of their life/personality, he will be reluctant to share information.
 - ii. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Questioning (LGBTQ) youth are especially sensitive to being judged. Commonplace terminology (boyfriend/girlfriend vs. partner, asking gender-specific questions) can deter them from disclosing information for fear of being “outed”.
- b. Consider the child’s ethnic background
 - i. In many cultures, child-rearing is a communal responsibility so extend the scope of inquiries to contemplate more than the nuclear family
 - ii. Kinship bonds in immigrant families are especially strong, making it more difficult for a child to speak against a member of his family or community
 - iii. Historic oppression and lack of economic opportunity often fosters resentment towards the government and people of different races or socio-economic backgrounds

VIII. Addressing Comprehension and Effectiveness Based on Age/Development

- a. Consider the modality of the child’s thinking
 - i. Until late adolescence, children are often limited to dichotomies (good/bad, wrong/right) and cannot understand middle ground

- b. Meet multiple times with children to gauge how much they comprehend
- c. Explain concepts to an age appropriate level, keeping in consideration that older children have a much greater understanding of their situation
- d. Consider and address accordingly which portion of communication (input, processing, or output) is hindered for the child

IX. For Children Who Are Experiencing Challenges

- a. For these children, embarrassment often transfers immediately into shame
 - i. An adult expressing disappointment or frustration will tend to make the child feel shameful and the child will often become less able to meet the expectations
- b. Frame any present challenges in terms of what was positive in the past
 - i. Try to elicit what helped the child succeed in the past rather than what is contributing to his struggle in the present
- c. Avoid telling the child what he *needs* to do
 - i. Giving the child options and letting him choose will increase his engagement
 - ii. Telling the child what jobs need to be done for the court to move forward is less confrontational
 - 1. Consider the phrasing: “We all have jobs. The court’s job is to..., Mom/Dad’s job is to..., your job is to...” outlining necessary tasks.

X. For Babies (0-3yrs)/Non-verbal Children

- a. Look for signs of wellness through observation
- b. Unusual fussiness; a lack of receptiveness to being held; avoidance of eye contact; excessive sleeping; holding his own hands together and focusing on them; other signs of discontentment.
- c. Ensure, through speaking with parents/foster parents/CASA/etc., that the child has all important belongings (security blanket/toy; medications)
- d. Check medical records for any currently untreated conditions
- e. Interview should provide a sense of how secure the child feels

XI. For Toddlers (3-6yrs)

- a. Keep in consideration toddlers’ tendency towards concrete thinking
- b. Toddlers assert their will power to try and be autonomous, so it is difficult to have structured conversations/activities
- c. Gain as much knowledge from the child as his ability to communicate allows
- d. These children are likely to give inaccurate information when they do not know what they are being asked, feel confused, or want to avoid telling what they know
- e. Consider that these children often have no concept of what has happened to their parents or where their parents are
 - i. These children have little concept of time, so understanding when they will be reunited with their parents may take additional explanation
 - ii. These children are often worried that their parent is sick, hurt, or has died/disappeared
 - iii. Telling a child that you do not know something is alright. Tell them what is known. Consider focusing on small time frames (no more than a month in advance).

XII. For Young Children (6-9yrs)

- a. Children of these ages are especially likely to take blame upon themselves
- b. These children are more comfortable with people of the same gender
- c. These children need to feel a sense of control over what they will be doing in the interview
- d. These children have some concept of what has happened to their parents, but they are still scared that their parent is sick, hurt, or has died/disappeared

XIII. For Prepubescent Children (9-12yrs)

- a. These children enjoy being challenged through more complex activities
- b. These children are especially likely to take blame upon themselves
- c. Consider that these children are able to understand more of their situation and therefore can benefit from a more thorough explanation of the court process
- d. These children are more comfortable with people of the same gender
- e. Offer these children the opportunity of going to court hearings and being part of the process (as appropriate) as a way to engage them in their case

XIV. For Adolescents (12-17 yrs)

- a. Consider that these children are very resentful of condescension
- b. These children have the cognitive abilities to understand the realities of their life situation
 - i. However, these children are often very reluctant to ask for clarification or acknowledge that they don't understand
- c. Offer these children the opportunity of going to court hearings and being part of the process (as appropriate) as a way to engage them in their case

XV. Finishing the Interview

- a. Thank the child for his/her cooperation
- b. Reserve time for the child to return to a state of equilibrium if the child has been stressed by the interview
 - i. Allow for a few minutes of silence, shift to neutral topics or end with a game.
- c. Make sure the child does not leave the meeting confused
- d. Make sure the child (and their caretaker) know how to contact the attorney

Question Reference Guide

Breaking the Ice:

- Possible games/activities:
 - Providing juice, a small piece of candy, or a snack will often make a child feel more comfortable and start a conversation.
 - Squiggle Game/Doodle: the child and the interviewer each take a turn making a “squiggle” on a blank sheet of paper. The child creates a drawing from the squiggle and describes what they’ve drawn.
 - Draw Yourself: Ask the child to draw a picture of himself. After the child creates this drawing, ask the child to tell you some words that describe what this child is like, thinking, or feeling.
 - Build a Man (approx. 8yrs+): As the child to draw a platform and pick a word for you to guess. Consider asking the child to pick a word that will tell you how the child feels about being in this interview. The child then draws blank lines to represent each letter of the word below the platform. Begin guessing letters; if they are not part of the word, the child writes the letter on the paper and begins to “build you” by putting a part of the body on the platform for each letter guessed incorrectly. Establish in advance which body parts will be drawn. If you guess the correct letter, it is written on the appropriate blank line.
 - Having toys available such as bubbles, blocks, Legos, or dolls/action figures gives children a way to participate in activities that are normal for them, decreasing their anxiety.

Introduction:

- What do you know about coming to meet with me?
- What do you know about me?
- What do you think I'm here to do for you?
- Is there anything that would make you more comfortable having this meeting?
- Is there anyone (CASA volunteer, caseworker, caregiver etc.) who you would like here for support?
- Do you understand what has happened so far?
- What do you think about it?
- What are you wondering about?
- What are your biggest concerns about the case?
- Do you have any questions about the case/court process?
- What do you hope to have happen?
- Don't tell me what you think I want to hear - this is your chance to let the court know what you want.
- For older children:
 - What do you want to come out of this meeting?
 - What can I do that would be helpful to you?

Court Proceedings:

- Can you tell me what you know about what is happening in court?
- How did you know?
- Is there anything you want the judge to know?
- Do you understand what your mom/dad's job is?
- Explain what the parent is doing.
- Explain what the child's “job” is.
- Explain that the parent is trying to be reunited with the child.
- What questions do you have about what your mom/dad is doing? About what you are doing?

Child:

- Tell me about yourself.
- How old are you?
- Where do you live?
- Who lives with you?
- Who is important to you?
- Tell me about them.

Fun Activities:

- What is your favorite color?
- What are your favorite hobbies?
- Do you have pets? Describe.
- What is your favorite game/toy? Tell me what you like.
- What is your favorite food/drink?
- What are your favorite things to do?
- When you go out, where do you like to go best? Tell me about it.
- Tell me about your friends.
- What do you like to do with your friends?

School/Schoolwork:

- On a scale of 1-10, 1 being that you never want to go to school and 10 being that you would go to school all the time if you could, where would you rate going to school?
- What makes it a [#]?
- What could make it a [+1]?
- On a scale of 1-10, 1 being that you never go to school and 10 being that you have never missed a day of school, where would you rate yourself?
- What makes it a [#]?
- What could make it a [+1]?
- What would your mom/dad rate you?
- What makes them say it is a [#]?
- On a scale of 1-10, 1 being that you never can even try your homework because it's too hard and you don't want to do it and 10 being that homework is no problem at all, where would you rate your homework?
- What makes it a [#]?
- What could make it a [+1]?
- How do you manage to go on the days you are at school?
- How do you manage to get you homework done on the days you complete it?

Brothers/Sisters:

- Do you have any brothers/sisters?
- What are their names? Ages?
- Tell me about them.
- What do you do with your brother(s) and/or sister(s)?
- On a scale of 1-10, 1 being that you don't ever want to play with your siblings and 10 being that you always want to play with them, where are you?
- What makes it a [#]?
- What could make it a [+1]?

Health:

- Tell me about how you think your body is doing.
- On a scale of 1-10, 1 being that every part of your body doesn't work/hurts and 10 being that everything is working perfectly, how would you rate yourself?
- What makes it a [#]?
- What would make it a [+1]?
- Follow up questions:
 - How often does that happen?
 - Can you tell me about a time when everything in your body worked?
- If you went to the doctor, what would he say?

Home Life:

- If your life were a movie that I was watching, what would I see when:
 - You wake up?
 - You go to school?
 - You are at school?
 - You are at home?
 - You are happy?
 - It is the weekend?
 - You are with mom/dad?
 - You have dinner?
 - You go to bed?
- Do you ever babysit yourself?
- For how long?
- On a scale of 1-10, how safe do you think you are at home?
- What makes it a [#]?
- How could it become a [+1]?
- If your friends came over, where would they rate how safe your house is?
- How do you would you rate how safe your friend's house is?
- Tell me about your mom/dad.
- Compared to your friends' houses, how safe do you think your house is?
- On a scale of 1-10, how would you say things are at home? What makes it a [#]?
- When you are a [+1], what will be different at home?
- What are the rules at mom/dad's house?
- What do you think about them?
- What does mom/dad do if you do something wrong?
- If you woke up without [problem], how would you know? What would be different?
- Tell me about the times when everyone is getting along? What is different about those times?
- How do you let mom/dad know when you are:
 - happy?
 - scared?
 - hungry?
 - not feeling well?
- Do you ever get scared? When?
- What do you do when you get scared?
- What does mom/dad do when you get scared?
- When everything is better, what will be different?
- What do you hope for the future?
- If you had a magic wand and could change anything you want, what would you change?
- Are there any issues that you think are especially important?

For Children in Foster / a Relative's Care:

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- How did you end up living where you live now?
 - How did you get there?
 - When did you get there?
- On a scale of 1-10, where 1 is completely different in every way and 10 is entirely the same, how would you rate the difference between your old house and your new house?
 - What makes it a [#]?
 - What would make it a [+1]?
- Do you feel settled where you live now?
- Do you feel safe where you live now?
- Are you going to a different school?
 - If yes:
 - On a scale of 1-10, where 1 is completely different in every way and 10 is entirely the same, how would you rate the difference between your old house and your new house?
 - What makes it a [#]?
 - What would make it a [+1]?
 - Tell me about your friends.
 - If you have a problem at school, what do you do?
- If you made a movie about your new home, what would I see when:
 - you are with your foster parents?
 - you are in your room?
 - you are playing?
 - you are happy?
 - You eat dinner?
 - You are with your foster siblings?

Visitation:

- Your caseworker tells me you get [X] visitation with your mom/dad? Is that what is happening?
- Are you seeing your parent(s) enough?
- On a scale of 1-10, 1 being it's the worst and 10 being it's the best, how would you rate the visitation?
- What makes it a [#]?
- What would make it a [+1]?
- What would your mom/dad rate the visitation as?
- How do you know?
- If I was watching the visitation with your mom/dad, what would I see?
- Is there anyone who you want to be seeing (grandparents, siblings, etc.) who you are not seeing? Who?

Questions for Toddlers (3-6 yrs):

- What did you do today?
- What did you have for breakfast?
- Are you going to do anything after you leave?
- What is the silliest thing you've ever done?
- What is your favorite color? What makes it your favorite?

Questions for Adolescents (12-17yrs):

- What would you want to say if you were in court?
- What do you think I can do for you?
- Explain that this is the teenager's opportunity to address his concerns or questions and share his views.
- Explain that the attorney is the teenager's voice in the courtroom.

Conclusion:

- What questions do you have? (give examples of possible questions)

Attorney Guide

Action	Description	Suggested Phrasing
Introduce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Explain your role and the role of others the child will meet with (judge, DSS, CASA) -Make the child comfortable with a child-friendly environment -Invite the child to have a caregiver or other adult present until the child feels more comfortable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -What do you know about coming to meet with me? -What do you think I'm here to do for you? -Is there anyone (CASA volunteer, caseworker, etc.) who you would like here for support? -Do you understand what has happened so far? -What do you think about it? -What are you wondering about it? -What are your biggest concerns about the case? -Do you have any questions about the case/court process? -What do you hope to have happen? -Don't tell me what you think I want to hear - this is your chance to let the court know what you want. -What do you know about what is happening in court? -How did you know? -Is there anything you want the judge to know?
Engage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Make general conversation to ascertain the developmental age of the child and build rapport. -Avoid jargon or acronyms -Engage the child in a discussion of their care -Actively listen to the child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Tell me about yourself. -How old are you? -Where do you live? -Who lives with you? -Are you close to any family members who are not your parent(s)? -Tell me about them. -Are there other adults in your life (other than your family) that you are close to? -Tell me about them. -What is your favorite: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -[color? Hobbies? TV show? Game? Toy? Food? Drink? Thing to do?] -Do you have pets? Describe. -When you go out, where do you like to go best? -Tell me about your friends. -What do you like to do with your friends?
Ask	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Question the child with the goal being to get a narrative, not specific answers -Ask non-judgmental, solution focused questions -Try to get a holistic view of the child's life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -On a scale of 1-10, 1 being that [X] and 10 being that [Y], where would you rate [issue]? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Going to school; health; safety of the home; how things are at home; differences between home and foster home; difference between schools; visitation; et cetera -What makes it a [#]? -What could make it a [+1]? -When you are at a [+1] what will be different? -What would your mom/dad/doctor/friend rate you? -What makes them say it is a [#]? -If your life were a movie, and I were watching it, what would I see when X <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -[you wake up? you go to school? you are at home? you are happy? you are with mom/dad?

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		<p>you go to bed? et cetera]</p> <p>-If you woke up without [problem], how would you know?</p> <p>-What would be different?</p> <p>-Tell me about the times when everyone is getting along? What is different about those times?</p> <p>-How do you let mom/dad know when you are [happy? scared? hungry? not feeling well? et cetera]</p> <p>-If you had a magic wand and could change anything you want, what would you change?</p> <p>-Tell me about your mom/dad.</p> <p>-How did you end up living where you live now? -How did you get there? -When did you get there?</p> <p>-Your caseworker tell me you get [X] visitation with your mom/dad? Is that what is happening?</p>
Respond	<p>-Validate the child's input</p> <p>-Recite back your understanding of the child's words</p> <p>-Encourage the child to elaborate</p>	<p>- So, you are saying that X? Is that right?</p> <p>-Tell me about it.</p> <p>-Tell me more.</p> <p>-Then what happens?</p> <p>-What do you think about that?</p>
Closing	<p>-Allow a few minutes of silence to let the child think and to give control back to the child</p> <p>-Move to a neutral topic</p> <p>-Discuss something good that has happened or play a game</p> <p>-Give the child contact information</p> <p>-Make sure the child does not leave the meeting confused</p> <p>-Answer the child's questions</p> <p>-Thank the child for his cooperation</p>	<p>-The next time we see each other will be when...</p> <p>-This is what is going to happen next...</p> <p>-What questions do you have?</p> <p>-Thank you for meeting with me today.</p>

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