

Guidelines for Opening up Conversations with Families

In addition to introducing the overall Bridge to Child and Family Self-Reliance, it is helpful to introduce each individual pillar. Once each pillar has been introduced, you can follow up with a variety of questions to stimulate additional conversation. You do not have to ask all of the questions below, and this is not an exhaustive list. Select questions you think will be most relevant to the individual, ECEAP, and ECEAP's goals. Plan to follow up on these questions with additional open-ended questions to gather more information.

Use this guide to help you gather information you need for the assessment and for conversations with families.

Family Stability: Housing

Introductory Statement: It is easier to move forward toward economic independence when you have a stable, safe, affordable living situation. This pillar ranges from homelessness to living in an unsubsidized apartment or home, where you pay less than 30% for rent or mortgage. How would you describe your living situation?

Sample follow up questions:

- What type of housing do you live in (e.g. shelter, Section 8, public housing, transitional housing)?
- How long have you been in your current living situation? What is your previous housing history?
- What type of housing would you like to live in?
- If housed:
 - How is this arrangement working for you?
 - Is your housing at risk for any reason? If so, what are you doing to prevent homelessness?
 - Have there been any problems with your rental (difficulty paying rent, issues with the landlord, condition of your apartment)?
 - What percentage of your income do you think you pay towards housing? How much do you pay (dollar amount)?
- If homeless:
 - How did you become homeless?
 - What steps have you taken so far to get housing?
 - Who is helping you with your housing search?
 - How are you feeling about the likelihood that you will find housing?
 - Are there any barriers that will make it hard for you to find housing?
 - How do you feel about living in a shelter? What has been helpful/not helpful?

Notes:

Family Stability: Family & Dependents

Introductory Statement: Parents work hard to meet their children’s needs. The following pillar is not about whether you are a good parent or not. The pillar asks about how much time and energy you have to devote to meeting your family’s needs, and how much that effort takes away from the time and energy you can devote to working on your own goals (especially work and school). Examples of needs that might prevent you from moving forward include: a child who gets sick often, not being able to find consistent, appropriate child care, a child who has learning challenges and is not getting help for them, and not having adequate transportation for your family. How would you describe your family’s needs, and the effects those needs have on you and your family?

Starting Questions

- How many children do you have? How old are they?
- Do you have any child care in place?
- Do you have concerns about paying for child care?
- Does your child have any health or behavioral health issues that require attention?
- If there is a non-custodial parent, what is your child’s relationship like with her or him?
- Are there people who can babysit or provide short term care when needed?
- Who can care for your child when he or she is sick?

Basic Household Needs

- Do you have access to basic household needs, such as food, toiletries, furniture, and clothing?
- Do you feel that you can get these needs met all the time, or do you worry about where you will get these items on a regular basis?

Access to Transportation

- Do you have access to transportation?
- Do you have dependable transportation?
- Do you have concerns about your child’s safety when you are transporting them?
- Can you get to run errands or go to appointments easily?
- What kind of transportation do you use?
- What kind of transportation would be ideal for you and your family?

Legal Issues

- Are you currently facing any legal issues that make it hard for you and your family?
- Are you in the process of solving a legal issue?
- Do you need information or resources on how to solve this issue?

Introductory Statement: This section will now focus on family dynamics and parenting. Like above, these questions are not about whether you are a good parent. In addition, this section can help you identify areas you find interest in learning more about.

Conflict Resolution

- How does your family handle conflict?
- How frequently does your family engage in conflict?
- Is your family able to solve conflict in a positive way?

Managing Parenting Stress

- How do you manage stress?
- Are you able to cope with feelings of frustration or anger in a positive manner?
- What techniques do you use to help yourself calm down in a stressful situation?

Developing Parenting Skills

- What specific challenges do you face in parenting your child?
- Would you like information about age-appropriate ways to interact with your child?
- How do you handle your child's behavior?

School Involvement and Advocacy

- Do you have any interest in getting involved in your child's classroom?
- Do you know about the leadership opportunities for parents in ECEAP?
- What support do you need to participate in these opportunities?
- Do you feel confident in your ability to advocate for your child's needs at school?

Wrap-Up Questions

- How much time do you spend doing activities (in or out of the home) with your children?
- Do you feel like you have enough time to spend having fun with your children?
- What types of activities do you do with your children?
- What types of things would you like to be able to do with your family?
- Overall, how do you feel your time balances between family and any personal goals you are working on?

Notes:

Well-Being: Physical & Mental Health

Introductory Statement: Physical and mental health issues can make it more difficult to make progress toward your self-sufficiency goals. How would you describe your physical and mental health? What impact do health or mental health issues have on your ability to focus on school, work, or family the way you would like to?

Sample follow up questions:

- How would you describe your physical health and mental health?
- Are there any health issues that you are particularly concerned about?
- Do health or mental health issues impact your ability to work, attend school, or care for your children? If yes, what type of impact?
- How have you managed health or mental health issues in the past? Are you using these same strategies now?
- Have you experienced domestic violence or other traumatic events?
- Do you see a therapist? If so, how has that experience been?
- Are you on medication to manage a physical or behavioral health condition? If so, how is that working? Are there any side effects that affect how you function?
- Do you know how to access nutritious foods?
- Do you exercise during the week?
- Do you know how to find information on nutritious foods or exercise if you are interested?

Notes:

Well-Being: Personal & Professional Networks

Introductory Statement: Your ability to make progress toward your goals can be affected by your support system, whether people in your life are draining or supportive, whether the people around you think your goals are important and can share resources to help you make progress. How would you describe your networks, both personal and professional?

Sample follow up questions:

- Do you have family in the area? What about friends?
- When you think about the important relationships in your life, which ones are supportive and which ones are draining?
- Are you in a relationship with a significant other? If so, what is that relationship like?
- Are you involved with any religious organizations, community organizations, etc.?
- Who could you turn to for support in an emergency?
- Are there people in your life who can help you make progress on your goals (e.g. give you advice about school, provide job leads, serve as a mentor, and give you other information or resources that could help you)?
- Do you know of programs in your community that offer support and resources? If so, are you using any of these supports?
- Are you struggling to get access to any community resources?

Notes:

Financial Management: Debts

Introductory Statement: Owing money can cause stress, and can prevent you from moving forward economically. The debt pillar ranges from debts in default to having no debt at all. How would you describe your debt?

Sample follow up questions:

- Do you have outstanding rental, utility, or other housing-related debts?
- Do you have credit card debt?
- Do you have student loan debt?
- Do you have outstanding car payments?
- Do you have any other types of debt?
- For any of the debts above, do you know how much you currently owe?
- Are there structured payment plans in place for any of this debt?
- Are you making regular payments on any debts? Which ones, and how much are you paying? Are you able to meet the minimum payment requirements?
- Have you recently viewed your credit report?
- Would you like help in understanding or managing your debt?

Notes:

Financial Management: Savings

Introductory Statement: It is easier to cope with changes or crises if you have money saved to pay for the things you need and want. Think about the amount of money that you have saved. If your income stopped today (but all other benefits—such as subsidized housing or child care—continued) how long would you be able to pay for your expenses?

Sample follow up questions:

- Do you have a bank account? If so, do you have savings, checking, or both?
- If you have a savings account, how much do you have saved?
- If you don't have a bank account, are there barriers to opening an account?
- If you don't have a bank account, do you save money in other ways?
- If you are not saving now, have there been times in the past when you have been able to save?
- If you are not saving now, what factors make it difficult to save?
- Would you like to be able to save? If so, are there specific ways you would want to use your savings?
- Do you have a balanced spending plan or budget?
- Do you know how you keep track of your expenses?
- Does anyone help you financially on a regular basis?
- In case of emergency, would anyone be able to help you financially?

Notes:

Education & Training: Educational Attainment

Introductory Statement: Education and training can position you to get a job that pays a family-sustaining wage. What is your highest level of education?

Sample follow up questions:

- Do you have a high school diploma, GED, or High School 21+?
- Have you ever participated in a job training program? If so, what type? Did you earn a certificate for completing it?
- Are you currently enrolled in any type of education or training? If so, what type of program?
- If you are enrolled in college, are you taking developmental courses (usually 090 course numbers) or college level classes (usually 100 level or above)?
- Are you interested in continuing your education? If so, what areas interest you?
- What has school been like for you?
- Do you have special learning needs? If so, did you receive extra support in school for those needs? How was that experience?
- Have you ever taken out student loans? If so, are making payments, and are the payments manageable?

Notes:

Employment & Career Management: Earnings Levels

Introductory Statement: ECEAP uses a tool called The [Self Sufficiency Calculator for Washington State](#) that helps people figure out how much they would need to earn in order to be self-sufficient. Generally, economic self-sufficiency means being able to support your family without getting any government assistance (such as food stamps, TANF, and subsidized housing or child care). Let's calculate the WA Living Wage for your family type and figure out how much you would need to earn to be self-sufficient. This number may seem very high. Our goal in calculating your WA Living Wage isn't to discourage you, but to help you figure out pathways that would move you closer to your living wage. You may only work on part of your journey while you are in ECEAP. During that time, we want to make sure we support you to make as much progress as you can.

Sample follow up questions:

- Are you currently employed? If yes, what is your employment status (full-time, part-time, temporary, or permanent)?
- If you are employed, are there opportunities for growth in your current job?

- If you are not currently working, have you worked in the past? What types of jobs? What did you learn from previous jobs about what you enjoyed most or were good at?
- Are you looking for a job? If so, what type of job and what have you tried?
- What skills or knowledge would you bring to a job?
- What type of career interests you? Would you like information about different career paths?

Notes: