

Sample Structured Interview Questions

Based upon CSSS competency areas.

Instructions: This document contains example structured interview questions for agencies supporting persons with disabilities. The questions are based on the Community Support Skills Standards (*available from HSRI <http://www.hsri.org/cgi/hsri.cgi>*). We recommend that you choose questions that suit the needs of your agency and the people to be interviewed. We suggest your agency ask the same set of questions of all applicants for a particular position.

A. Competency area 1: PARTICIPANT EMPOWERMENT

1. Describe a situation when you assisted an individual recognize that he or she had several choices in how to handle a difficult problem. What was the situation, what did you do, and what was the final outcome?
2. A participant at the group home in which you work has recently told you she thinks she might be a lesbian, and would like to meet other women in the gay community. What steps would you take to empower her?
3. Describe a situation where you've encouraged someone to advocate for themselves?
4. You and a person with disabilities you support are at a local restaurant. When the waitress comes to take your order, she looks and speaks only to you. The person you are with can give his/her own order. What would you do?

B. Competency area 2: COMMUNICATION

1. Describe ways in which you have communicated with a person who does not communicate verbally?
2. Your new coworker Mohamed, is Muslim. During the month of Ramadan he is fasting during the day, and has asked you to change duties with him so he will not have to cook for the people who live in the group home. You cook a great deal already, and don't want to take on the extra duties for him. How do you respond to him?
3. Your coworker has a habit of interrupting you at staff meetings. In the past you've waited for her to finish and bring up your point again, only to have her interrupt once more. As a result, you often leave staff meetings feeling frustrated because your issues were not addressed. How do you address this issue?
4. Describe a situation in which your attempts to communicate with someone were ineffective. What was the situation, what did you do and what happened as a result?
5. Describe the worst misunderstanding you were involved in at your last job. What was the situation, what did you do and what happened as a result?

C. Competency area 3: ASSESSMENT

1. Sally's mother expresses concern to you that Sally may be hard of hearing, and tends to ignore her when she is talking. You have noticed this, but have also found that when Sally is around friends or watching television her hearing appears to be fine. You suspect Sally is choosing to not listen to her mother. Sally's mother recently told you she wants her daughters hearing tested and asks you your thoughts. How might you share your assessment of the situation with her mother?
2. Tell us about a time when someone was injured and you had to make an immediate judgment on what needed to be done to help the person. Describe the injury and your steps in making the assessment.
3. Describe a situation in the past where you've participated in a team assessment process. What was your role?
4. Tell me about the last time you solved a problem where you had to do a lot of hard thinking and analysis; what difficulties did you encounter, how did you overcome them, what was the result?

D. Competency area 4: COMMUNITY & SERVICE NETWORKING

1. A person you support tells you when he was a child his family went regularly to a Catholic church and he would like to become active in the faith again. How do you support him in this goal?
2. Midori, a Japanese-American is quiet and doesn't leave the house. She is not involved in any activities and has no personal relationships. Midori claims she has no areas of interest but seems unhappy with her life. How might you assist Midori in recognizing and developing areas of interest?
3. Please describe some community resources you have had contact with in your own neighborhood. How might those resources be used by a person with a disability?
4. Think about the last time you moved to a new community. What strategies did you use to find places to engage in your favorite leisure activities? How did you go about meeting people with interests similar to yours? John recently moved from a large institution to a supported living setting. How might you assist John to learn about and become part of his new community?
5. Describe the most embarrassing situation you have experienced when you were with a person with a disability. What was the situation, what did you do, what happened as a result? What, if anything, would you do anything differently if you experienced a similar circumstance in the future?

E. Competency area 5: FACILITATION OF SERVICES

1. Tell me about a time when you had to practice professional confidentiality. What was the situation? What did you do? What was the outcome?
2. When working with persons with developmental disabilities, what do you think is key in establishing a solid working relationship?
3. A few weeks after developing her support plan, Rachel changes her mind about wanting to get a job. How might you respond?
4. Describe a situation in which you helped a person set a goal and then supported the person to achieve that goal. What was the goal and how did you help?
5. Describe a situation in which you or someone you know needed a medical, psychological or other support service but was having trouble getting it. What was the situation, what did you do, what was the result?

F. Competency area 6: COMMUNITY LIVING SKILLS & SUPPORTS

1. Describe the best meal you have ever prepared for a group of people.
2. Describe the household chore or duty you like least. What strategies do you use to ensure that the chore or duty is completed?
3. Describe the household chore or duty you like most. What strategies do you use to ensure that the chore or duty is completed?
4. What actions would you take if you recognized a person showing signs of having an allergic reaction (e.g., hives)?
5. Kamol, a resident in the group home where you work was raised in a Thai community. Lately, he has expressed how much he misses his mother's cooking and talks about Thai dishes he loved as a child. How might you respond to this situation?
6. Describe a time when you were required to provide medical assistance or treatment to another person. What was the situation, what did you do, what happened as a result?

G. Competency Area 7: EDUCATION, TRAINING, & SELF-DEVELOPMENT

1. How have you kept up on relevant resources and information about a topic of interest to you?
2. What else besides your education and job experience qualifies you for this job?

3. Describe the last thing you did for self-improvement?
4. Tell me about the best class you have ever taken. What was the class? Why was it good?
5. What is the next thing you want to learn how to do, or how to do better? What is your plan for accomplishing this?

H. Competency Area 8: ADVOCACY

1. What advocacy organizations/services are available in this community that might assist persons with disabilities?
2. Tell me about a situation where you have advocated on behalf of another person or a time when someone else has advocated on your behalf. What made that advocacy successful or unsuccessful?
3. Describe a time when you witnessed a person with disabilities being teased by a coworker or other person. What did you do? What could you have done to assist that person?

I. Competency Area 9: VOCATIONAL, EDUCATIONAL, AND CAREER SUPPORT

1. Mali would like to join a Hmong quilting group, but she has no method of transportation other than the bus, which is a long and confusing ride. What could you do as her DSP to support her in gaining access to this program?
2. Describe a time when you have supported another person in a vocational or education program or with their career development?
3. Describe the things you have done in the last couple of years to advance your career. What supports did you use/receive? What was the most helpful assistance you got?
4. Describe the first job you ever had. What would you do to adapt that job so that it could be performed by someone who could not walk (talk, see, hear etc.)?

J. Competency Area 10: CRISIS INTERVENTION

1. Betty a person in the home where you work is sensitive to loud noises. One afternoon, the maintenance crew comes to the house to do yard work and the sound of the riding mower sends her into a panic. She begins pacing rapidly while crying and covering her ears. She picks up a nearby object in attempt to throw through the window towards the maintenance worker. How would you handle this situation?
2. Describe the last time you became involved in a conflict or crisis situation. What was the situation? What did you do? How well did it work? What would you have done to prevent the situation from occurring?
3. Describe the most difficult person you remember ever dealing with at work or school. Describe the most difficult situation you remember encountering with that person. How did they react to you? How did you deal with the situation? What did you do about your own feelings? Did you ever discuss your differences with this person? If not, why not? If yes, what happened?

K. Competency Area 11: ORGANIZATIONAL PARTICIPATION

1. Tell me about the mission of the last company you worked for. Did you agree or disagree with that mission, why?
2. Describe a situation where you played a role in making a change within your last place of employment (or church, community center or club). What was the situation, what did you do, what was the result?
3. Describe a situation in which you had a conflict with a co-worker. What was the issue, what did you do, what was the outcome of the conflict?
4. Describe a situation in which you had a conflict with your supervisor. What was the issue, what did you do, what was the outcome of the conflict?

5. What was the best experience you have ever had as a member of a team? What was your role on the team? What made it a good experience?
6. Describe the worst supervisor you have ever had. What made that person a poor supervisor? How did you work with that person to complete your job duties?
7. Tell me about the last time you found yourself trying to do too many different things at the same time. How did you handle the situation?
8. Describe the co-worker that you most appreciate? What characteristics or qualities of that person do you most appreciate?
9. What behaviors do you think are most important/most valued by team members or co-workers in the work place? Of the behavior you just listed, please do a self-evaluation and tell me which is your strongest most positive co-worker behavior? Which might be a possible improvement area for you?
10. What does team work mean to you? Give some examples of things you have done to be a good team member, or to improve teamwork.

L. Competency Area 12: DOCUMENTATION

1. Tell me some of the reasons you feel documentation is important.
2. Describe a situation in which someone you know used words to describe a person or a group of people that showed disrespect. What if anything did you do in that situation?
3. Describe a situation in which you were asked to document an event. Describe what occurred, what information was documented, and the reasons behind your documentation.
4. What was the best thing you ever wrote? What was the topic; what made this the best thing you ever wrote?
5. Describe the most difficult writing assignment you have ever had. What was the assignment, how did you handle it?
6. Describe the last paper or writing assignment you completed in school or at work. What was the assignment, what did you do, what was the outcome of the assignment?

Experience, Credentials and Self-Evaluation/Opinion Questions

1. Describe a typical day in your most recent job.
2. Describe any classes, experiences, or training you have received that prepare you for this job.
3. Most of us have more than one reason for leaving a job. What are some of yours, from past or present experience?
4. What one or two words would most of all of your previous supervisors use to describe you?
5. What part(s) of you last/present position did you like least? What did you do to try to overcome the situation? What would you think if you know in advance that this situation would be present in your new job?
6. Under what circumstances might you seek out a co-worker or peer for advice or suggestions? Provide examples of time you did that in the past.
7. Describe your ideal job. Discuss the amount and type of supervision you prefer, contact and kinds of relationships with co-workers, job tasks, and freedom to work or to make decisions.
8. Under what circumstances might you seek out a co-worker or peer for advice or suggestions? Provide examples of time you did that in the past.
9. If you had the authority or power, what one thing would you change about your current/last position?
10. Other than money, what rewards, benefits, or work situations are most important for you?
11. How much time did you miss from work last year? The year before?
12. What suggestions has your supervisor given you for performance improvement or development?
13. We have all made mistakes in our job, some bigger than others. Tell me about the biggest work place mistake you ever made. What were the circumstances, and how did you deal with it? What did you learn from the experience?
14. Tell me about your schedule flexibility, and your work schedule preferences.

15. If you were offered this position and you accepted, what one or two major contributions do you think you would make, in the short term (in the first few weeks) and in the long term (after a year or so)?

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A Primer on Structured Behavioral Interviewing

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Guiding Principles

- The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior in similar circumstances that was recent or that reflected long-standing behavior patterns
- Ask candidates to describe situations they have faced and how they handled them. (Situation, Behavior, Outcome)
- If you use more than one interviewer, divide up the competency areas ahead of time, allow each interview to address a smaller number of areas.
- When you sell your organization be realistic
- Keep your questions open-ended
- Start with the assumption that the candidate has no skills and allow him or her to demonstrate capabilities.
- Consider the interview a collection of “movies” which contain three elements - situation, behavior, outcome.

Problems To Avoid

- Assuming that people are better at the things they like to do
- Taking information on strengths and weaknesses at face value
- Asking why do you want the job or what are your career goals (most candidates cannot predict accurately their future career paths)
- Statements of attitude and philosophies are poor predictors of people’s actual behaviors
- Hypothetical questions force candidates to say what the he/she thinks the interviewer wants to hear

Strategies For Gathering Information In An Interview:

Experience Questions

- Used to put candidate at ease, provide overview of past experience, and to set stage for other questions
- Example questions
 - Duties in last job
 - Responsibilities in last position
 - What do you typically do when you have a difference of opinion with your boss
 - Describe a typical day in your most recent position

Credentials

- Obtain information about a person’s education, employment history, and past achievements which is verifiable using other sources
- Example questions
 - What degrees do you hold?
 - What was your major?
 - What special recognition have you received?

Self-Evaluation Opinion

- Yields information about what the applicant thinks about a topic
 - Reveals areas for probing
 - Provides information the applicant thinks is important
 - Invites applicant to say what he thinks you want to hear
 - Makes a candidate who thinks quick and speaks fluently seem very competent
 - Don’t provide any evidence about what the candidate has done

- Falsely implies that if a candidate likes a task that he or she can perform it

Behavior Description

- Situation, behavior, outcome - detailed accounts of specific events from an applicant's past
- Example: tell me about the last time you solved a problem where you had to do a lot of hard thinking and analysis; what difficulties did you encounter, how did you overcome them, what was the result?
- Types of Behavioral Questions
 - Superlative adjectives
 - most/least
 - best/worst
 - hardest/easiest
 - First and last questions.
 - Tell me about the last time you...
 - Accomplishment.
 - Describe your most significant accomplishment in ... Advantages: more objective assessment of applicant qualifications, applicants enjoy telling what they've done, top performers can describe accomplishments
- Disadvantages: takes more time, requires more skill and effort

Technical Questions

- Technical questions - help determine if a candidate has the technical knowledge needed
- Example: How do you write a goal or objective?
- Advantages: can provide clues about whether the applicant has the skills indicated on the credential
- Disadvantage: may be easier to collect as a work sample test; requires technical knowledge to evaluate the response

Primer based on a seminar by Harry Brull at the 1991 Association on Residential Resources in Minnesota Annual Conference, Bloomington, MN.

Interviewing Resources:

Curzon, S.C. (1995). *Managing the Interview: A how-to-manual for hiring staff*. New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc.

Eder, R.W., & Harris, M.W. (Eds.) (1999). *The employment interview handbook*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publishers, Inc.

Yate, M. (1994). *Hiring the best: A manager's guide to effective interviewing*. Holbrook, MA: Adams Media Corporation.

Maddux, R.B. (1994). *Quality interviewing: A step-by-step action plan for success*. Menlo Park, CA: Crisp Learning

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