

Interview Techniques for the Pregnancy and Birth or Adoption Interview Research Project

Skillful, Non-judgmental Interviewing

The purpose of an interview is to deeply hear *someone else's* beliefs, attitudes, and experiences. It is critical, therefore that *your* beliefs, attitudes and experiences stay out of the interviewing situation. First and foremost, this means listening carefully, respectfully, and with your full attention on the speaker. This also means wording questions in such a way that they do not imply the answer you think is the "right" one. Instead you need to look for the most neutral way you can word each question.

For example, the interview question "*How long did you have morning sickness?*" implies that 1) you consider morning sickness an expected part of pregnancy, and 2) it is relatively significant in the experience. A more **neutral question** would be "*How did you feel physically during your early pregnancy?*" This gives the speaker room to tell you what she thinks is significant about her health rather than what you thought was important.

Questions that can be answered with yes or no, or with a one-line answer -- will usually result in a yes or no or a one-line answer!! Broad, open-ended questions provide the speaker with more room to tell their own story in their own way. You can always follow up your original question with more specific ones depending on the answer you receive. For example if the answer to the above question was "*I felt great except for the exhaustion. I kept falling asleep at work!*" An **open-ended follow up question** might be "*Tell me about the exhaustion.*" or "*How long did that go on?*" or "*Falling asleep at work??*"

Once a person has begun to talk, **neutral probes** can be used to elicit more information. Examples are:

"Such as?"	"And then?"
"What next?"	"How's that?"
"Tell me more."	"Can you explain that?"

Another way to help the speaker, is to repeat what they have just said in the form of a question.

Speaker: "*So I told my parents.*"

Interviewer: "*You told your parents?*"

Speaker: "*Yeah, they were tickled pink!*"

Interviewer: "*Tickled?*"

Speaker: "*Well it was their first grandchild and they had been waiting a long time for her!*"

An even better way to help the speaker go deeper into the story is to **reinforce the feeling** being expressed. For example:

Speaker: "*Well after all, I was working days, going to school nights, had two kids at home - my old man and I were hardly talking -- and then Whammo!! another kid on the way.*"

Interviewer: "*Sounds really hard*" or "*all that responsibility and work and then another pregnancy!*"

Speaker: "*You bet it was hard. And you know, I was so afraid that if I told him I was pregnant, he'd just split.*"

Interviewer: "*How frightened you must have been!*"

For each question you ask about in the interview, there are four kinds of information you hope to find out.

- 1) What happened?**
- 2) How did the speaker feel about what happened?**
- 3) With whom, if anyone, did the speaker share what happened?**
- 4) How did that person(s) feel about what happened?**

You will find it is very helpful if while the speaker is talking, you keep a **mental picture** going in your head of the order of the events. Then your questions will flow from the speaker's story rather than rigidly following your preplanned order. You may not get to ask exactly what you intended, but you will "hear deeper" and more honestly. Getting the facts is important of course, but so are the feelings the person had at the time and the insights he or she has had since the birth.

Preparing Your Interview Questions

Plan your questions ahead of time being careful that they are open-ended and neutral in tone. Areas you must cover in the interview include:

- Year of the child's birth/adoption
- Lifestyle prior to the pregnancy /adoption
- Lifestyle at time of pregnancy/adoption including age, relationship with the baby's other parent, working or not, etc.
- How did she/he know she was pregnant/decide to adopt?
- Reactions to the pregnancy/adoption by others (mother, father, friends, relatives, co-workers, etc).
- What was the progress of the pregnancy/adoption?
- What care (if any) did the biological mother receive during the pregnancy? (medical, diet, exercise?)
- How did the pregnancy/adoption affect the parent's daily life?
- How did she know she was in labor?
- Progress of labor and of birth (progression, care, feelings about medication and about personal treatment, other's reactions)
- First reaction to seeing the child?
- How was the child's name chosen?
- Any type of ceremony?
- Reactions of others?
- What were the first few weeks like after the birth or adoption?

You should develop your first draft of questions to bring to our next class meeting. You will have an opportunity to practice interviewing and to refine your questions in class. The above questions should be used as a guide. Rephrase them, elaborate on them, add to them, but keep the ideas in chronological order.

And Most Importantly...

Finally, the interview is the **speaker's story**. What ever they choose to tell you, however the person lived through the experience, what ever they did or did not do, your important job is to listen non-judgmentally, with full attention, and complete respect. A caring, respectful attitude is more important than any of the above techniques. Have a wonderful time!

The Actual Interview

You are encouraged to interview your own parent about your own birth or adoption. Even if you have heard some of the story, it is rare for children to know what the family issues were or what the pregnancy/adoption meant in the life of the parent. If you chose not to do this, you are encouraged to interview someone outside of your family whose story may be quite different from anything you already know. I encourage you to interview your own mothers for the pregnancy/birth interview. You may interview fathers if they were present for the birth. You may interview adoptive parents if you prefer, but you will need to develop a different list of questions.

When you invite the parent to participate in the interview, assure them that the story is confidential and that only first names, or initials will be used. Set up a time free from interruptions and when no one else will be present. This is essential! You cannot successfully interview someone when others are listening. If you do, the speaker will end up shaping the story to their audience.

You may tape the interview and then transcribe the tape, or you may take notes during the interview and then transcribe your notes. Remember – ***do not actually do the interview until after you have been through the training in class*** and practiced interviewing.

Positive Adoption Language

Choose the following positive adoption language instead of negative talk that perpetuates the myth that adoption is second best. By using positive adoption language, you'll reflect the true nature of adoption, free of innuendo.

Positive Language

birth parent
biological parent
birth child
my child
to parent
parent
intercountry adoption
child from abroad
search
was adopted
make an adoption plan

Negative Language

real parent
natural parent
real child
adopted child/own child
to keep
adoptive parent
foreign adoption
foreign child
track down parents
is adopted
give up chil