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Child and Family Services Reviews Quick Reference Items List

Outcomes

Safety Outcome 1: *Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.*
- **Item 1:** Were the agency’s responses to all accepted child maltreatment reports initiated, and face-to-face contact with the child(ren) made, within time frames established by agency policies or state statutes?

Safety Outcome 2: *Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.*
- **Item 2:** Did the agency make concerted efforts to provide services to the family to prevent children’s entry into foster care or re-entry after reunification?
- **Item 3:** Did the agency make concerted efforts to assess and address the risk and safety concerns relating to the child(ren) in their own homes or while in foster care?

Permanency Outcome 1: *Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.*
- **Item 4:** Is the child in foster care in a stable placement and were any changes in the child’s placement in the best interests of the child and consistent with achieving the child’s permanency goal(s)?
- **Item 5:** Did the agency establish appropriate permanency goals for the child in a timely manner?
- **Item 6:** Did the agency make concerted efforts to achieve reunification, guardianship, adoption, or other planned permanent living arrangement for the child?

Permanency Outcome 2: *The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.*
- **Item 7:** Did the agency make concerted efforts to ensure that siblings in foster care are placed together unless separation was necessary to meet the needs of one of the siblings?
- **Item 8:** Did the agency make concerted efforts to ensure that visitation between a child in foster care and his or her mother, father, and siblings was of sufficient frequency and quality to promote continuity in the child’s relationships with these close family members?
- **Item 9:** Did the agency make concerted efforts to preserve the child’s connections to his or her neighborhood, community, faith, extended family, Tribe, school, and friends?
- **Item 10:** Did the agency make concerted efforts to place the child with relatives when appropriate?
- **Item 11:** Did the agency make concerted efforts to promote, support, and/or maintain positive relationships between the child in foster care and his or her mother and father or other primary caregivers from whom the child had been removed through activities other than just arranging for visitation?

Well-Being Outcome 1: *Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs.*
- **Item 12:** Did the agency make concerted efforts to assess the needs of and provide services to children, parents, and foster parents to identify the services necessary to achieve case goals and adequately address the issues relevant to the agency’s involvement with the family?
- **Item 13:** Did the agency make concerted efforts to involve the parents and children (if developmentally appropriate) in the case planning process on an ongoing basis?
- **Item 14:** Were the frequency and quality of visits between caseworkers and child(ren) sufficient to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of the child(ren) and promote achievement of case goals?
- **Item 15:** Were the frequency and quality of visits between caseworkers and the mothers and fathers of the child(ren) sufficient to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of the child(ren) and promote achievement of case goals?

Well-Being Outcome 2: *Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.*
- **Item 16:** Did the agency make concerted efforts to assess children’s educational needs, and appropriately address identified needs in case planning and case management activities?

Well-Being Outcome 3: *Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.*
- **Item 17:** Did the agency address the physical health needs of children, including dental health needs?
- **Item 18:** Did the agency address the mental/behavioral health needs of children?
Interview Guides

These Interview Guides on the next 23 pages have been developed for key case participant interviews: [Child(ren), Parents/Caregivers, Foster Parents, and Caseworkers]. They include suggested language for introducing the interview process to the interviewee as well as specific questions that cover the key areas in the OSRI that should be informed by case participant information. The questions in the guides can be modified to fit the specific needs of participants as well as the circumstances of the case.

The Children’s Bureau strongly recommends that the guides be used for interviews to ensure that adequate and consistent information is gathered through the interviews across the sample of cases being reviewed.

Reviewers are encouraged to review the guides before interviewing case participants so they can highlight questions that they plan to ask and develop additional questions that may be needed based on case specifics.

Tips for CFSR Case-Related Interviews

- Remember the purpose of interviews.
- Refrain from sharing case information obtained in interviews with subsequent interviewees.
- Prior to the interview, plan the information you need from each person interviewed.
- Discuss prior to the interview the role each of you will take during the interview (i.e. asking questions/taking notes).
- Explain the CFSR and purpose of interviews to each person interviewed.
- Put interviewees at ease and never force someone to answer a question to which they are uncomfortable answering.
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Confirm contact information in case you realize you forgot to ask an essential question.
Child/Youth Interview

Because the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs) are focused on outcomes for children and families, hearing first-hand from children about their experiences is a crucial part of the review process. Questions to be used in interviews with children will vary depending on age, development, and the circumstances of the case. Reviewers should use their professional judgment when determining which topics to cover and how to phrase questions, but every effort should be made to obtain as much information as possible from children/youth about their experiences. Reviewers should be prepared to ask additional questions not included in this guide to clarify or verify information that was found in case documentation or obtained through other interviews.

When beginning the interview, start by explaining the purpose of the interview and asking about the child/youth’s understanding of his or her involvement with the agency. The following example can be modified based on the age of the child/youth:

Thank you for talking with me today. We are here to make sure those children who are involved with the child welfare agency get the best services they can, so I’m here to ask you about the kinds of services you received during [provide dates of the period under review, or depending on age of child just say “the past year”] and what your experiences were like as you worked with your caseworker. I want to encourage you to be open and honest with me as I ask you questions because this information will be used to give the agency feedback about how they can improve their services. While I will share information about what was gathered during the case review process, the agency will not know who said what. I understand that some of these questions or topics may be difficult to talk about, so please feel free to respond in whatever way you are most comfortable, and if you prefer not to answer a question, just let me know. Do you have any questions about this process? I have some specific questions to ask you, but before I start, can you tell me why the agency is/was involved with your family?

Use the item focus (in bold below) as a way of explaining to the child what the questions will be about as you move from item to item. Again, depending on the child’s age, you should explain that he or she should respond to the questions based on experiences within the dates of the period under review or just within the last year.

Item 3—Ask about the child’s experience during the period under review, whether he or she felt safe, and whether the agency was checking in about safety.

- For in-home cases: Did/do you feel safe in your family home? If not, what was/is going on to make you feel unsafe? [If necessary, ask about specific risk and safety concerns present during the period under review.]

- For foster care cases: Did/do you feel safe in your foster home? During visits with your family? If not, what was/is going on to make you feel unsafe? [If necessary, ask about specific risk and safety concerns present during the period under review.]
• Did you share any concerns about how you were feeling with the caseworker? How did he or she respond?

• When the social worker visited, did he or she meet with you privately during part of each visit? Did he or she ask if you felt safe in your home (or foster home), or during visits with your family?

**Item 4—Ask about the child’s placement history during the period under review, reasons for any changes, and stability of current or most recent placement.**

• Do you know why you had to move from [describe placement/foster home name] to [describe next placement/foster home name]? How did you feel about moving?

• How do you feel about where you are living now (or where you were placed last)?

**Item 5—Ask about the appropriateness of the child’s permanency goals during the period under review.**

• Explain the current or most recent permanency goal to the child and ask how the child feels about the goal: is it what he or she wanted; why or why not?

• Has anyone discussed [indicate the permanency goal] with you? If yes, what did you talk about?

**Item 6—Ask about the efforts made to achieve permanency for the child during the period under review.**

• Do you know what the agency or the court did to try to make sure you could be (reunified/adopted/placed in guardianship, etc.)?

• (If permanency was not achieved timely, older youth may provide input as to reasons for delays.) What do you think happened that made it hard for [specify goal] to happen sooner?

**Item 7—Ask about efforts made to place siblings in foster care together.**

• Ask the child about his or her siblings, and their relationship.

• If placed separately, ask about when that happened (initial placement or later); ask the child why he or she believes they are currently separated and what contact they now have.
Item 8—Ask about the visitation arrangements for children with siblings and parents/caregivers.

- How often do/did you visit with your parents? What about visits with siblings?
- Where did visits take place?
- How long were the visits? Did you feel they were long enough?
- Were visits supervised? If yes, do you know why they were supervised?
- Did you enjoy the visits? Is there anything that would have made visits better or more enjoyable for you and your parents and siblings?

Item 9—Ask about the child’s connections and how they were preserved during the period under review.

- Were any efforts made to ensure that you stayed connected with friends and family after you were placed in foster care?
- What about other connections like church and school?
- Do you have Native American heritage? Any Tribal affiliations?

Item 10—Ask about efforts to identify, locate, inform, and evaluate both paternal and maternal relatives as placement resources.

- Did your caseworker ask you about relatives (maternal and paternal) that you could possibly be placed with?

Item 11—Ask about efforts to promote, support, and maintain the child’s relationship with parents/caregivers during the period under review.

- Aside from visitation, did you have any other contact with your parents? For example, did they come to school activities or attend doctor's appointments with you?

Items 12, 16, 17, and 18—Ask about how the child(ren)’s needs were assessed (comprehensive, education, physical, dental, mental health), what needs were identified, and how services were provided to meet needs. (In-home cases should focus on all children in the home; Foster care (FC) cases should focus on just the target child.)
• Ask about any specific needs known to you (from items 12, 16, 17, and 18) and ask if the child was getting services to help. If the child is an adolescent, ask about assessment and services for independent living skills.

• If no known needs, ask generally, did you participate in any activities or services? For example, afterschool programs, counseling or therapy, mentoring, sports, tutoring, special education services.

• Was there anything you wish your caseworker had helped you with?

• How are you doing in school?

• Did you have any health or dental problems that the caseworker did not attend to?

Optional questions for older child/youth, depending on case circumstances: Ask about how the parents’ needs were assessed, what needs were identified, and how services were provided to meet needs.

• Do you think your parents received the services and help that they needed to take care of you and keep you safe?

• Is there anything you think they needed help with that they did not get?

Optional questions for older child/youth: Ask about how the foster parents’ needs were assessed, what needs were identified, and how services were provided to meet needs.

• Do you think your foster parents had what they needed in order to take good care of you?

• Is there anything you think they needed help with that they did not get?

Item 13—Ask about how the child was involved in case planning.

• Did the caseworker talk to you regularly about what was happening in your life, asking you questions about how you were doing and what you may have needed?

• Were you involved in any meetings where your case plan was discussed?

Item 14—Ask about the frequency and quality of the caseworker’s visits with the child.

• How often did your caseworker visit you?
• Where did you usually visit?
• What did you talk about?
• About how long were the visits?
• Were the visits helpful for you?
• If you ever needed to talk to your caseworker, were you able to contact him or her?

Complete the interview by thanking the child/youth for his or her time and asking if there is anything else he or she would like to share with you.
Parent/Caregiver Interview

Because the Child and Family Services Reviews are focused on outcomes for children and families, hearing first-hand from parents/caregivers about the outcomes they have experienced is a crucial part of the review process. Questions to be used in interviews with parents and/or caregivers may vary depending on the circumstances of the case. Every effort should be made to obtain as much information as possible from parents and/or caregivers about their experiences. Reviewers should be prepared to ask additional questions not included in this guide, to clarify or verify information that was found in case documentation or obtained through other interviews.

When beginning the interview, start by explaining the purpose of the interview and asking about the parent/caregiver’s understanding of his or her involvement with the agency. The following is an example:

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. We are conducting a review of the services provided to children and families by [agency name]. The goal of the review is to provide feedback to [agency name] about how they can make improvements in their system so that children and families have the best outcomes. I am here to ask you about the kinds of services you received during [provide dates of the period under review] and what your experiences were like as you worked with the agency. The information you share with me is confidential. While I will share information about the case review process with the caseworker, the caseworker will not know who shared what information during the case review process. I want to encourage you to be open and honest with me as I ask you questions because your feedback is a very important part of this review process. I understand that some of these questions or topics may be difficult to talk about, so please feel free to respond in whatever way you are most comfortable, and if you prefer not to answer a question, just let me know. Before we begin, do you have any questions about the interview or the review process? I have some specific questions to ask you, but before I start, can you tell me why the agency is/was involved with your family?

Use the item focus (in bold below) as a way of explaining to the parent/caregiver what the questions will be about as you move from item to item.

Items 2 and 3 (Ask these questions to assist in determining whether item 2 is applicable for assessment)—Ask about how the agency assessed risk and safety during the period under review and what concerns were present in the case during the period under review.

- What is/was your understanding of the risk and safety concerns that existed during the period under review?

- What kinds of things did the caseworker look for or ask about in order to determine that those concerns were being resolved?
• Did you have a safety plan developed for your family? If so, can you talk about the plan? How was it monitored?

• (This question should be asked on all in-home cases, and should be asked in foster care cases in which the child entered foster care during the period under review or was reunified during the period under review.) Were services offered to your family to keep your children safe in your home?
  - If not, do you know why not?

• (For foster care cases) Did you have any concerns about the safety of your child while he or she was in foster care?

• (If the case was closed during the period under review)—Can you describe what happened when your case was closed? For instance, did the caseworker come to your home and have a final conversation with you?

Item 5—Ask about the appropriateness of the child’s permanency goals during the period under review.

• What was/were the permanency goal(s) for your child when he or she was first removed from your home? What is the current permanency goal for your child? (Parents may not be familiar with the term “permanency goal,” so provide examples and explain goals like reunification/return home, adoption, etc.)

• Did the caseworker discuss the permanency goal(s) with you? If so, can you tell me what those conversations were like?

• (If permanency goals changed during the period under review and/or there were concurrent goals in place)—Do you think the goals in place during the period under review were appropriate for your child based on what was happening with the case and the child’s needs?

Item 6—Ask about the efforts made to achieve permanency for the child during the period under review.

• What did the agency or the court do to try to ensure that your child achieved the goal of (indicate the child’s permanency goal)?

• (If permanency was not achieved timely)—What were the barriers that you experienced in achieving [indicate permanency goal] in a timely manner?
• (If the child had concurrent goals)—What was your understanding of the concurrent plan of (name concurrent goal)? How did the caseworker explain that to you?

Item 7—**Ask about efforts made to place siblings in foster care together.**

• Were any of your children placed in separate foster homes? If so, do you know why?
• Do you know what efforts the agency made to place them together?

Item 8—**Ask about the visitation arrangements for children with siblings and parents/caregivers.**

• Was a visitation plan developed for you and your children? If so, were you involved in developing it?
• What was the frequency of visitation and how was frequency determined?
• Where did visits take place? How was the location of visits determined?
• How long were the visits? Did you feel they were long enough?
• Were visits supervised? If so, how and why?
• (If children were placed in separate foster homes)—Did your children have visits with their siblings in addition to visits with you?
• Is there anything that would have made visits better for you and your child?

Item 9—**Ask about the child’s connections and how they were preserved during the period under review.**

• Were any efforts made to ensure that your child stayed connected with friends and family after they were placed in foster care?
• What about other connections like church and school?
• Does your child have Native American heritage?
  - If yes, is the child a member or eligible for membership in an Indian Tribe? If yes (if the child came into foster care during the period under review or had a TPR hearing during the period under review), were efforts made to notify the Tribe about foster care placement and/or TPR hearings?
- If unsure, did the agency make any efforts to determine the child’s eligibility for membership?

Item 10—Ask about efforts to identify, locate, inform, and evaluate both paternal and maternal relatives as placement resources.

- Did the worker ask you about relatives (maternal and paternal) with whom your child could possibly be placed?
- What other efforts did the agency make to find and/or place child with relatives?

Item 11—Ask about efforts to promote, support, and maintain the child’s relationship with their parents/caregivers during the period under review.

- What efforts, aside from visitation, were made to support and strengthen your relationship with your child while he or she was in foster care? For example, were you encouraged to participate in school activities and case conferences, attend doctor’s appointments, or engage in the child’s extracurricular activities?
- What kinds of interactions (if any) did you have with your child’s foster parents?
- Were you offered or provided with transportation or transportation funds to participate in events/appointments with your child?

Item 12—Ask about how the child(ren)’s needs were assessed, what needs were identified, and how services were provided to meet needs. (In-home cases should focus on all children in the home; FC cases should focus on just the target child.)

- Do you believe the agency accurately assessed your child(ren)’s needs during the period under review?
- What kinds of services did your child(ren) receive? Were the services helpful?
- Was there anything your child(ren) needed that the agency did not provide for?

Ask about how the parent’s needs were assessed, what needs were identified, and how services were provided to meet needs.

- Do you believe the agency accurately assessed your needs during the period under review?
- How did they assess your needs? What kinds of questions were you asked?
• What kinds of services did you receive?
• Were the services helpful to you? How were they helpful?
• Were services easily accessible?
• Was there anything you needed that the agency did not provide for?

(Optional, if the parent/caregiver has a relationship with the foster parents)—Ask about how the foster parents’ needs were assessed, what needs were identified, and how services were provided to meet needs.

• How were the foster parents’ needs assessed during the period under review?
• Did the foster parents have any needs related to their ability to care for the child in their home?
• Were any services provided to the foster parents?
• Were there any barriers to accessing services?
• Was there anything the foster parents needed that they were not provided with?

Item 13—Ask about how the child, mother, and father were engaged in case planning.

• Were you able to provide input in developing your case plan?
• What types of conversations did you have with the caseworker about your case plan?
How frequently did the caseworker discuss the case plan with you?
• Did you understand the purpose and content of your case plan? Did you have a copy of your plan?
• How was your child involved in case planning activities?

Item 14—Ask about the frequency and quality of the caseworker’s visits with the child.

• How frequently did the caseworker visit the child(ren) during the period under review?
• Where did visits typically occur?
• If you were present during the visit, what was discussed?
• Did the worker visit with the child(ren) alone?
• Typically, how long were the visits?

• Did the child(ren) have regularly scheduled visits or were visits prompted by other things?

Item 15—Ask about the frequency and quality of the caseworker’s visits with the parents/caregivers.

• How frequently did the caseworker visit you? Did you feel they were frequent enough?

• Where did visits occur?

• What was discussed during visits?

• Typically, how long were the visits? Did you feel they were long enough?

• Did you have regularly scheduled visits or were visits prompted by other things?

• Did you feel like your caseworker was accessible to you?

• Were you able to talk about things during your visit that you felt were important, regarding your child(ren) and your case?

Item 16—Ask about how the child’s educational needs were assessed and met.

• Did you have any concerns about your child(ren)’s education during the period under review?

• Did your child(ren) need or receive any special services?

Item 17—Ask about how the child’s physical and dental health needs were assessed and met.

• Did you have any concerns about your child(ren)’s physical health during the period under review?

• Did they need or receive any services?

Item 18—Ask about how the child’s mental health needs were assessed and met.

• Did you have any concerns about your child(ren)’s mental or behavioral health during the period under review?

• Did they need or receive any services?
Complete the interview by thanking the parent/caregiver for their time and asking them if there is anything else they would like to share with you regarding their experience.
Foster Parent Interview

Because the Child and Family Services Reviews are focused on outcomes for children and families, hearing first-hand from foster parents about the outcomes they have experienced is a crucial part of the review process. Questions to be used in interviews with foster parents may vary depending on the circumstances of the case and how long they had the child in their care. Every effort should be made to obtain as much information as possible from foster parents about their experiences and the experiences of the child in their care. Reviewers should be prepared to ask additional questions not included in this guide to clarify or verify information that was found in case documentation or obtained through other interviews.

When beginning the interview, start by explaining the purpose of the interview. The following is an example:

*Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. We are conducting a review of the services provided to children and families by [agency name]. The goal of the review is to provide feedback to [agency name] about how they can make improvements in their system so that children and families have the best outcomes. I am here to ask you about the kinds of services you and your foster child received during [provide dates of the period under review] and what your experiences were like as you worked with the agency. The information you share with me is confidential. While I will share information about the case review process with the caseworker, the caseworker will not know who shared what information during the case review process. I want to encourage you to be open and honest with me as I ask you questions because your feedback is a very important part of this review process. Before we begin, do you have any questions about the interview or the review process?*

Use the item focus (in bold below) as a way of explaining to the foster parent what the questions will be about as you move from item to item. Explain to the foster parent that he or she should respond to the questions based on experiences during the period under review, and mention the dates of that period.

**Item 3—Ask about any specific risk and safety concerns present in the case during the period under review.**

- Did you have any concerns about the child’s safety during visitation with parents and/or other family members?

**Item 4—Ask about the child’s placement history during the period under review.**

- (If the child is no longer in your home)—What was the reason for the child leaving your home? Is there anything that could have been done to prevent the child moving from your home?
• (If the child is still placed with the foster parent)—Do you plan to continue to provide a home for the child as long as a placement is needed? Do you have any concerns with the child’s current placement in your home or your ability to care for him or her?

Item 5—Ask about the appropriateness of the child’s permanency goals during the period under review.

• Did the caseworker discuss the child’s permanency goal of (indicate specific goal/s) with you?

• Do you believe the goal of [indicate permanency goal] is/was appropriate based on the child’s needs and the circumstances of the case? Why or why not?

Item 6—Ask about the efforts made to achieve permanency for the child during the period under review.

• What did the agency or the court do to try to ensure that the child achieved the goal of (indicate permanency goal) in a timely manner?

• (If permanency was not achieved timely)—Do you know what the barriers were in achieving the goal of [indicate permanency goal] in a timely manner?

Item 7—Ask about efforts made to place siblings in foster care together.

• Were any of the child’s siblings placed in separate foster homes? If so, do you know why?

• Do you know what efforts the agency made to place them together?

Item 8—Ask about the visitation arrangements for children with siblings and parents/caregivers.

• Was a visitation plan developed for the family? If so, were you involved in developing it?

• What was the frequency of visitation and how was frequency determined?

• Where did visits take place? How was the location of visits determined?
• How long were the visits? Did you feel they were long enough?

• Were visits supervised? If so, how and why?

(If children were placed in separate foster homes)—Did the child have visits with siblings in addition to visits with parents?

• Did you have any concerns regarding visitation for the child? Is there anything that would have made visits better for the child?

Item 9—Ask about the child’s connections and how they were preserved during the period under review.

• Were any efforts made to ensure that the child stayed connected with friends and family after placement in foster care?

• What about other connections like church and school?

Item 11—Ask about efforts to promote, support, and maintain the child’s relationship with parents/caregivers during the period under review.

• What efforts, aside from visitation, were made to support and strengthen the relationship between the child and parents/caregivers while he or she was in foster care? For example, were parents/caregivers encouraged to participate in school activities and case conferences, attend doctor’s appointments, or engage in the child’s extracurricular activities?

• What kinds of interactions (if any) did you have with your child’s parents/caregivers?

• Were there any concerns with transportation for parents/caregivers to have additional contact with the child?

Item 12—Ask about how the child(ren)’s needs were assessed, what needs were identified, and how services were provided to meet needs.

• Do you believe the agency accurately assessed the child’s needs during the period under review?

• What kinds of services did the child receive? Were the services helpful?

• Was there anything the child needed that the agency did not provide for?
Ask about how the foster parents’ needs were assessed, what needs were identified, and how services were provided to meet needs.

- How often did the caseworker visit with you? What types of things were discussed during visits/contact with the caseworker?
- Did you have any needs relating to your ability to care for the child?
- Were you provided with any services? Were they helpful?
- Were there any barriers to accessing services?
- Did you have the training you needed to meet any specific needs of the child?
- Was there anything you needed that you were not provided with?

Item 13—Ask about how the child was engaged in case planning.

- Was the child able to provide input in developing the case plan? How was your child involved in case planning activities?
- What types of conversations did the caseworker have with the child about the case plan? How frequently did the caseworker discuss the case plan with the child?
- Did the child understand the purpose and content of the case plan?

Item 14—Ask about the frequency and quality of the caseworker’s visits with the child.

- How frequently did the caseworker visit the child during the period under review?
- Where did visits typically occur?
- If you were present during the visit, what was discussed?
- Did the worker visit with the child alone?
- Typically, how long were the visits?
- Did the child have regularly scheduled visits or were visits prompted by other things?

Item 16—Ask about how the child’s educational needs were assessed and met.

- Did you have any concerns about the child’s education during the period under review?
• Were any educational needs appropriately assessed?

• Were you provided with needed access to the child’s school records?

• Did the child need or receive any special services?

Item 17—Ask about how the child’s physical and dental health needs were assessed and met.

• Did you have any concerns about the child’s physical or dental health during the period under review?

• Is the child up to date with any needed immunizations, annual check-ups, and periodic dental screenings?

• Were you provided with or did you have access to the child’s health records?

• Did the child need or receive any services? If so, were they helpful and adequate to meet the child’s needs?

• Was the child on any medications? If so, how were they monitored?

Item 18—Ask about how the child’s mental health needs were assessed and met.

• Did you have any concerns about the child’s mental or behavioral health during the period under review?

• Did the child need or receive any services? If so, were they helpful and adequate to meet the child’s needs?

• Was the child on any medications? If so, how were they monitored?

Complete the interview by thanking the foster parents for their time and asking them if there is anything else they would like to share with you regarding their experience.
Caseworker Interview

Because the Child and Family Services Reviews are focused on outcomes for children and families, hearing first-hand from caseworkers about the work the agency has done with families is a crucial part of the review process. Every effort should be made to obtain as much information as possible from the caseworker and, in most cases, reviewers should include all of the questions in this guide during their interviews. Reviewers should be prepared to ask additional questions not included in this guide, to clarify or verify information that was found in case documentation, or obtained through other interviews.

When beginning the interview, start by explaining the purpose of the interview. The following is an example:

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today about the [case name] case. As you know, we are conducting a review of the services provided to children and families by [agency name]. The goal of the review is to provide feedback to [agency name] about how they can make improvements in their system so that children and families have the best outcomes. As a caseworker, your work with children and families is extremely important and we want to be able to capture your experience in working with the family. In addition, we also want to understand how your agency works in collaboration with other state systems like education, health, and the courts in working to meet the needs of families. In addition to reviewing the case record, we will be conducting interviews with children, parents, and foster parents as well, so I may ask you some clarifying questions based on information that we have gathered about the case. The information you share with me is confidential, and I want to encourage you to be open and honest with me as I ask you questions because your feedback is a very important part of this review process. Our review is focused on a specific period of time [indicate the period under review], so when you provide your responses, please consider things that happened during that time period. Before we begin, do you have any questions for me about the interview or the review process? I have some specific questions to ask you, but before I start, can you provide me with a quick summary of why the agency is/was involved with this family?

Use the item focus (in bold below) as a way of explaining to the caseworker what the questions will be about as you move from item to item. Remind the caseworker that he or she should respond to the questions based on experiences during the period under review. If another social worker was responsible for a portion of the period under review and is not available to be interviewed, encourage the worker you are interviewing to respond as best as he or she can for the entire period.

General information to obtain: Confirm who the key case participants are who are being assessed as Mother, Father, and Foster Parents in the review. If the case involves birth parents who could not be located during the period under review, ask about the concerted efforts that were made to locate them.
Item 1—Ask about the reasons for any delays in initiating investigations and/or completing face-to-face visits with victims.

- Based on documentation in the case record, verify with the social worker any noted delays in the investigation process.

- What were the reasons for delays?

Items 2 and 3 (Ask these questions to assist in determining if item 2 is applicable for assessment.) Ask about general practice for assessing risk and safety during the period under review.

- What did the assessment process involve?
- Were specific assessment tools used?
- Was your supervisor involved in reviewing assessments?
- How often were assessments conducted?
- Were assessments updated? If so, when/under what circumstances?
- How were assessments documented (formal and informal)?
- (If the case was closed during the period under review)—Did you do an assessment of risk/safety before case closure? If so, can you describe that process?

Ask about the specific risk and safety concerns present in the case during the period under review.

- Can you describe any risk and safety concerns that existed during the period under review?

- If safety concerns existed during the period under review, was a safety plan developed? How was it developed and monitored? Was it updated?

- Were services offered to the family to address safety concerns and prevent foster care placement or re-entry after reunification?
  - If not, why not?
  - If yes, what types of services were offered? How did the services address the specific safety concerns?
- For foster care cases: Did any safety concerns exist for the child in care during visitation or in the foster care placement?
  - If yes, what were the concerns? What did you do to ensure the safety of the child?

Item 4—**Ask about the child’s placement history during the period under review.**

- Verify the child’s placement history during the period under review based on the case record documentation.

- For each placement during the period under review ask, how was this placement identified for the child? What was the reason for the change in placement?

- How stable is the child’s current placement?

Item 5—**Ask about the appropriateness of the child’s permanency goals during the period under review.**

- (If a goal is not documented in the case record)—What is/are the child’s current permanency goal(s)?

- Describe the goals in place during the period under review and ask for each goal, was this the most appropriate goal for the child? Why?

- What were the reasons for any goal changes? Discuss any concerns about the timeliness of establishing goals and/or changing goals.

- (If the child had concurrent goals)—How was concurrent planning implemented in the case?

- Obtain any clarification needed regarding filing for termination of parental rights, if applicable.

Item 6—**Ask about the efforts made to achieve permanency for the child during the period under review.**

- Has or will the child achieve permanency within an appropriate time frame (12 months for reunification, 18 months for guardianship, 24 months for adoption)?

- What efforts have been made by the court and the agency to achieve permanency in a timely manner?
• For a child with the goal of "other planned permanent living arrangement," what formal steps have been taken to make the living arrangement permanent?

• (If the child will not achieve permanency timely)—What were/are the barriers in achieving the permanency goal(s) timely?

• Is there a justifiable reason for any delay in achieving permanency for the child [see examples in the OSRI]?

Item 7—Ask about efforts made to place siblings in foster care together.

• Was the child placed separately from siblings? Why?

• (If a valid reason for separation existed at one point during the period under review)—Were the circumstances for separate placement re-evaluated to consider if the siblings could be reunited?

Item 8—Ask about the visitation arrangements for children with siblings and parents/caregivers.

• Was a visitation plan developed for the family? Who was involved in developing the plan?

• What was the frequency of visitation and how was frequency determined?

• Where did visits take place? How was the location of visits determined?

• How long were the visits?

• Were visits supervised? If so, how and why?

• Did children have separate sibling visitation or was it only in the context of parent visitation?

• What efforts did the agency make to support and encourage visitation?

Item 9—Ask about the child’s connections and how they were preserved during the period under review.

• What were the child’s important connections?

• What efforts were made to preserve these connections?
• Has the child been maintained in the same school? If not, why not?

• Does the child have Native American heritage?
  
  – If yes, is the child a member of, or eligible for membership in, a federally recognized Indian Tribe?
  
  – (If yes, and the child came into foster care during the period under review or had a termination of parental rights hearing during the period under review)—What efforts were made to notify the Tribe about placement in foster care and/or termination of parental rights hearings? Was the child placed in accordance with Indian Child Welfare Act placement preferences?
  
  – If unsure, what efforts were made to determine the child’s eligibility for membership?

Item 10—Ask about efforts to identify, locate, inform, and evaluate both paternal and maternal relatives as placement resources throughout the period under review.

• What efforts were made to identify, locate, inform, and evaluate maternal relatives as placement resources?

• What efforts were made to identify, locate, inform, and evaluate paternal relatives as placement resources?

• Were efforts made throughout the period under review or just when the child first came into care?

Item 11—Ask about efforts to promote, support, and maintain the child’s relationship with parents/caregivers during the period under review.

• What efforts, aside from visitation, were made to support and strengthen the child’s relationship with parents/caregivers? For example, were parents encouraged to participate in school activities and case conferences, attend doctor’s appointments, or engage in the child’s extracurricular activities?

• Were efforts made to support a relationship between the foster parents and the child’s parents/caregivers so that they could serve as support system/mentors?

• Were efforts made to provide transportation or transportation funds for the parents/caregivers to participate in events/appointments with the child?
Item 12—Ask about how the child(ren)’s needs were assessed, what needs were identified, and how services were provided to meet needs. (In-home cases should focus on all children in the home; foster care cases should focus on just the target child.)

- (If the case was opened during the period under review)—Was an initial comprehensive assessment of the child(ren) conducted?
  - How was the assessment done?
  - What needs were identified?

- (If the case was opened before the period under review)—Were periodic comprehensive assessments conducted during the period under review to assess needs and inform case planning?
  - How were assessments conducted?
  - What types of needs were identified and/or did the child’s needs change during the period under review?

- (If the child was exposed to domestic violence)—Was the child’s exposure to domestic violence in the home assessed to determine if he or she needed further mental health assessment or services?

- What services were provided for the child during the period under review?

- How did these services meet the child’s identified needs?

- Were there any barriers to accessing services?

Ask about how the parents’/caregivers’ needs were assessed, what needs were identified, and how services were provided to meet needs.

- (If the case was opened during the period under review)—Was an initial comprehensive assessment of the mother/female caregiver and father/male caregiver conducted?
  - How was the assessment done?
  - What needs were identified?

- (If the case was opened before the period under review)—Were periodic comprehensive assessments conducted during the period under review to assess needs of the mother/female caregiver and father/male caregiver?
  - How were assessments conducted?
- What types of needs were identified and/or did their needs change during the period under review?

  - What services were provided for the mother and father during the period under review?
  - How did these services meet identified needs?
  - Were there any barriers to accessing services?

Ask about how the foster parents’ needs were assessed, what needs were identified, and how services were provided to meet needs. (Cover all foster parents providing care to the child during the period under review.)

  - How were the foster parents’ needs assessed during the period under review?
  - Did the foster parents have any needs related to their ability to care for the child in their home?
  - Were any services provided to the foster parents?
  - Were there any barriers to accessing services?

**Item 13—Ask about how the child and parents/caregivers were engaged in case planning. (Ask specifically for child(ren), mother, and father.)**

  - Describe the process you used to engage the parents/caregivers in case planning. How did you describe the purpose of the case plan to parents/caregivers?
  - How frequently did you engage parents/caregivers in case planning discussions?
  - What input did the parents/caregivers provide into the case plan?
  - Describe the process you used to engage the child(ren) in case planning. How did you describe the purpose of the case plan to the child(ren)?
  - What input did the child(ren) provide into the case plan?

**Item 14—Ask about the frequency and quality of the caseworker’s visits with the child.**

  - How frequently did you visit the child during the period under review [refer to any available documentation of visits from the case record]?
  - Where did visits occur?
• What was discussed during visits?

• Did you visit with the child in the presence of parents, foster parents, or others?

• Typically, how long were the visits?

• Did you have regularly scheduled visits or were visits prompted by other things?

Item 15—Ask about the frequency and quality of the caseworker’s visits with the mother and father. (Ask questions for each parent/caretaker.)

• How frequently did you visit the mother/father during the period under review [refer to any available documentation of visits from the case record]?

• Where did visits occur?

• What was discussed during visits?

• Typically, how long were the visits?

• Did you have regularly scheduled visits or were visits prompted by other things?

Item 16—Ask about how the child’s educational needs were assessed and met.

• What is the child’s current status in school (grade level, reading level)?

• Were educational assessments conducted during the period under review? If so, how were they conducted?

• What needs were identified?

• What services (if any) is the child receiving and how are they meeting identified needs?

• Are there any barriers to accessing needed services? What efforts has the agency made to access the services?

Item 17—Ask about how the child’s physical and dental health needs were assessed and met.

• (If the child entered foster care during the period under review)—Was an Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment test or other medical examination conducted upon the child’s entry into care?

• When was the child’s last physical and dental exam?
• What physical and dental health needs does the child have?

• What services (if any) have been provided to the child and are they meeting the identified needs?

• Is the child on any medication related to physical health? If so, how is that being monitored?

Item 18—Ask about how the child's mental health needs were assessed and met.

• During the period under review, did the child have or develop any mental or behavioral health needs?

• How were they assessed?

• What services were provided to meet the identified needs and are they meeting these needs?

• Is the child on any prescription medications for mental health issues? If so, how is that being monitored?

Complete the interview by thanking the caseworker for his or her time and asking if there is anything else the caseworker would like to share with you.
Quick Cheat Sheet for Often Troublesome Items

Safety:
- **Item 1** is the only item where reviewers consider the state’s individual policy when rating.
- If there are safety concerns under the applicability in **Item 2**, reviewers must answer question 3 C (related to safety plans) and 3D1 (related to recurrent maltreatment). It may be helpful to rate **Item 3** before **Item 2**.
- **Item 2** captures safety-related services; **item 12** is much broader, capturing services offered to the family that were not safety-related.
- Paramours that have contact with children are considered for **items 2 and 3**.

Permanency:
- If a child or youth has spent less than 45 days in foster care, many items are rated differently. These items are to be identified up front. Alert your QA specialist immediately and review together *Special Instructions for Short Term Foster Care Cases*.
- **Question 4B**: Moves due to foster parents not being able to handle the behaviors of a child are generally under the control of the agency through the selection of an appropriate foster care home that can meet the needs of the child, monitoring and supportive services.
- In **Item 6**, although there does not have to be a signed agreement with the foster parents/facility or a court order that specifies the permanency arrangement for **APPLA cases**, in answering Item 6C2, there should be some evidence of formal steps that were completed to make the arrangement permanent.
  - 6C2 should not be rated based on the establishment of a goal of APPLA by the court but ONLY on the commitment of a caretaker to provide permanency of a child until discharge form foster care.
- For **Item 9**, the only parents included will be a noncustodial parent with whom a child had an existing relationship that should be preserved, the child was not removed from and the child will not be returned to.
  - A non-custodial parent with whom a child had an existing relationship, but was not removed from and will not be returned to would be considered in this item if that relationship should be preserved.
- **Item 11** assesses the efforts made to promote/support/maintain a positive relationship between the child and the parent, not visitation.
- Reviewers must evaluate the definitions of parents for **items 8 and 11** (and different individuals may be identified as parents in **items 12, 13, and 15**).
  - The same “parent” with whom a child has a “meaningful connection” is considered for both **items 8 and 11**.

Well-being:
- In **item 12B**, if a parent does not have an existing relationship with the target child in a foster care case, consider whether locating/developing a relationship would be in the best interest of a child. If there were no concerted efforts to locate an absent parent, **item 12B** is ANI and **items 13 and 15 N/A**.
- The same “parent” is selected for **items 12B, 13 and 15** – (but may be different from the “parent” considered for **items 8 and 11**.)
• Paramours that have contact with children are included if in the household with the appropriate parent in **Item 12B**.

• The assessment and provision of services related to the child’s **education**, **physical** and **mental health** should be captured in **items 16, 17, and 18**, NOT **Item 12A**.

• For **items 14 and 15**, substantial justification must be provided to support a strength rating if visits are less than once a month.

• **Item 14**: A visit is defined as a face to face meeting. The definition of **another responsible party** must be reviewed. A general service provider does not always meet the definition of **another responsible party**.

• In-home cases are only applicable for **items 16, 17, and 18** if an **educational** (**item 16**), **physical health** (**item 17**) or **mental/behavioral health** (**item 18**) issue was relevant to the reason for the agency’s involvement with the family AND/OR the agency should be reasonably expected to address the issue(s) given the case circumstances.

• **Items 12, 16, 17, and 18**
  
  o The quality of the assessments must be rated on how well they identify all of the person’s individualized and underlying needs. Just because a formal assessment tool was completed, doesn’t mean it resulted in a quality assessment.

  o Needs are not services.

  o The quality of services must be rated on their level of accessibility and how well they met the identified needs in the assessment.
Special Instructions for Short Term Foster Care Cases

Apply the following guidance when rating foster care cases in which the child has been in foster care fewer than 45 days:

**Items 1-7, 10, 14, and 16-18:** There is no difference in rating/applying the instrument for these items.

**Item 8:** A Not Applicable rating for this item should be based on the length of time the case is open, the case circumstances, and how reasonable it is to expect visits to have been arranged with the target child and parents/siblings. Typically, a child should have visits arranged within 1- 2 weeks of being placed in foster care.

**Item 9:** Reviewers should rate this item as Not Applicable if the child is not of Native American heritage and not yet school-aged.

**Item 11:** A Not Applicable rating for this item should be based on the length of time the case is open, the case circumstances, and how reasonable it is to expect the agency to have made efforts to strengthen the parent-child bond while the child is in care through activities other than visitation.

**Item 12:** Because reunification is assumed to be the goal in short-term foster care cases, unless there is evidence another goal is in place, this item should be rated based on the assessment and services necessary while the case is open to achieve reunification (or another goal). If the parents' whereabouts are unknown, reviewers should clarify with QA staff what is reasonable to expect based on the case circumstances regarding efforts to locate the parents, in the short period of time that the case was open, in order to determine whether this item is applicable for parents (sub-item 128).

**Item 13:** Because reunification is the assumed goal in short-term foster care cases, unless there is evidence another goal is in place, this item should be rated based on the planning that occurs regarding case direction while the case is open, given that a formal case plan may not be expected in short-term cases. If the parents' whereabouts are unknown, reviewers should clarify with QA staff what is reasonable to expect based on the case circumstances regarding efforts to locate the parents, in the short period of time that the case was open, in order to determine whether this item is applicable for parents.

**Item 15:** There is no difference in rating/applying the instrument for this item unless the parents' whereabouts are unknown. If the parents' whereabouts are unknown, reviewers should clarify with QA staff what is reasonable to expect, based on the case circumstances, regarding efforts to locate the parents in the short period of time that the case was opened, in order to determine whether this item is applicable for parents.
OSRI Frequently Asked Questions

General Questions:

General Question: How should reviewers apply the OSRI to foster care cases with an alleged father? (Added December 3, 2014)

The agency must have made concerted efforts to identify and locate alleged fathers in order for questions related to fathers in Items 12, 13, and 15 to be answered Not Applicable (NA). If the agency did NOT make concerted efforts to identify/locate the alleged father, the lack of efforts regarding the father would be rated in Item 12 (Question B2 would be answered No), resulting in an Area Needing Improvement (ANI) rating for Item 12, and the questions related to the father in Items 13 and 15 would be answered NA. If the child came into foster care before the period under review (PUR), the agency made concerted efforts to identify/locate the alleged father before the PUR, and there were no case circumstances during the PUR that would warrant further efforts (e.g., additional information about the father's identity or location was discovered), questions related to the father in Items 12, 13, and 15 would be answered NA.

General Question: Item 8, 11, 12, 13, 15: If the court issues a “cease reunification” order, ending reunification and/or other services to parents, does that automatically make Items 8, 11, 12, 13, and 15 “not applicable”? (Added November 22, 2016)

No, not automatically. Reviewers need to consider the case circumstances and the best interests of the child in determining the applicability of these items. Although the definition of parents in Items 8 and 11 seems to indicate that reviewers would stop assessing a parent who was no longer working toward reunification, if it is in the child’s best interests to continue visitation or continue supporting the relationship even post-termination of parental rights (TPR), that parent would remain applicable in those items. If it was not in the child’s best interests to continue to support the relationship with that parent based on case circumstances, from that point in the PUR Items 8 and 11 would stop being applicable and those items would only be rated for the portion of the PUR when contact with the parent was appropriate. Circumstances may warrant continued work with the parents in Items 12, 13, and 15, but the application of the item instructions may shift due to the case circumstances. For example, in Item 12, a comprehensive assessment and services to support all identified needs may not be applicable in cases where the parent and agency are no longer working toward the goal of reunification, but an assessment of what the parent may need to continue a positive relationship with the child post-TPR and services to support that need may be warranted, and that should be captured in 12B. In Item 13, although the case plan goal of reunification may have changed, the agency should
still be engaging with the child and parents to work toward an alternative permanency goal and ensure that any other case goals (such as supporting a positive long-term relationship post-TPR between the parent and child) are achieved. The family should also be informed about what steps are needed for successful case closure. Similarly, monthly contact in Item 15 may no longer be warranted based on case circumstances, but adequate contact with the parent to continue to work toward permanency for the child and ensure that any other case goals are achieved should be assessed in Item 15. This may be monthly or less than monthly contact, depending on the circumstances. (Added November 22, 2016)

**General Question:** Items 12B, 13, 15: We have some questions regarding a specific type of case and how to deal with the issue of engaging a non-custodial parent. In this case example, it is an in-home, non-court-involved case. We were wondering if there was any specific guidance on how to assess the non-custodial parent when the custodial parent refuses to provide identifying information or consent to contact the non-custodial parent. Since it is a non-court-involved case and we do not have custody of the child, how should the reviewer proceed (especially on Items 12B, 13, and 15) when the custodial parent does not want the non-custodial parent involved? (Added November 15, 2016)

Per the definition of parents in Items 12, 13, and 15 for in-home cases, inclusion of a non-custodial parent is determined based on case circumstances. The following are examples of when it would be appropriate to expect agency engagement of non-custodial parents: • The non-custodial parent has ongoing contact with the children. • Children are at high risk of entering foster care; e.g., safety issues exist that cannot be mitigated in the short term, or the custodial parent is not compliant with safety services or the safety plan. • The non-custodial parent was notified/made aware of child welfare agency involvement and has a desire to be involved as a resource for the children. In situations where a custodial parent refuses to allow the agency to contact a non-custodial parent, the agency would be expected to include the non-custodial parent only if the court orders his or her involvement, if the children are at risk for foster placement, or if the children have ongoing contact with the non-custodial parent that necessitates an assessment of that parent. Note that if the above circumstances exist, but the custodial parent expresses a history of abuse, neglect, domestic violence, substance abuse, etc., by the non-custodial parent, this should be taken into consideration and assessed accordingly. (Added November 15, 2016)

**General Question:** Case Interviews: In completing the OSRI, should specifics about case interviews—such as which party indicated a certain fact—be included? If so, does this go against the assurance of maintaining the confidentiality of the interview process? (Added November 22, 2016)

We ask reviewers to justify in their narrative how information gathered in the interview process supports their ratings. However, this information is confidential,
and since some states share the completed OSRI with the caseworker/supervisor as part of the CQI feedback loop, this can affect confidentiality. It is suggested that reviewers include the information in the rating justification but do not directly indicate who provided the information. For example: “This item is rated ANI because at least one person interviewed indicated that the agency did include the parent in case planning meetings, but drafted the case plan in advance and only presented it to the parent for signing at the meetings.” (Added November 22, 2016)

General Question: A maltreatment report was received concerning siblings of the target child who remained in the home with their biological father during the period under review. The report was received after the target child's adoption was finalized and there was no ongoing open case with the biological mother or other parent. Should we consider this new report when rating Item 1, and should we consider these other children when we are rating ongoing assessment of risk and safety in Item 3? (Added December 19, 2014)

The children that were considered as part of the family in the case being reviewed at the beginning of the period under review (PUR) remain that way until the case closed, for rating purposes of safety, regardless of whether there is an intervening adoption for the target child during the PUR. So in the first example, the new report that came in on the child's originating family during the PUR would be considered if the report came in prior to case closure.

General Question: We received a report concerning children remaining in the care of a parent after termination of parental rights of the target child, but the target child remains in foster care. Should we rate this in Items 1 and 3? (Added December 19, 2014.)

The termination of parental rights for the target child in foster care does not change the fact that the siblings are still part of the family's case and so information and circumstances related to them should be considered in rating Items 1 and 3.

General Question: If, during the PUR, multiple counties/offices in the state handled a case, should reviewers only rate the case based on the work of the county/office that had the case open during the time of the review? (Added March 31, 2015)

No, reviewers must rate the case based on case practice that occurred during the entire period under review, regardless of which county or office was responsible for the case at the time of the review. The review focuses on statewide practice, and review findings reflect the outcomes for children and
families that were achieved during a set period of time (period under review). States have the option of documenting county/office-specific issues in the open narrative field for each item if they would like to note specific concerns due to changes in county/office case assignments.

**General Question:** If a case is being reviewed and the youth turns 18 during the period under review but the state continues to provide services to the youth, do we continue to review for services provided and to rate the case for activities that occurred after age 18? (Added May 22, 2015)

No. We review only for services and activities up to the age of 18. On the Face Sheet, use the date the child turns 18 as the discharge date. However, the date of case closure should reflect the actual date the case was closed with the state. If the state continues to provide services to the youth after his or her 18th birthdate and the case remains open, or is closed beyond the age of 18, use that date as the date of closure (not the 18th birthday). (Added November 22, 2016)

**General Question:** When reviewing a case, what should reviewers consider for assessment in the OSRI during the period under review? (Added May 22, 2015)

The "period under review" refers to the established date that the case review begins (the start of the sampling period) and includes all agency services and actions on all accepted maltreatment reports and open cases from the start of the period under review up to the date that the case is reviewed or case is closed, whichever comes first. To answer accurately, all questions in the OSRI, it is necessary for reviewers to consider all services and actions provided by the state during the entire period under review. For example, during the period under review a state may be conducting safety and risk assessments linking families to services and coordinating safety planning during an investigation or differential response assessment before actually opening the case. These agency services and actions would be considered and taken into account when completing OSRI questions. Similarly, if multiple cases were open during the period under review, all of those cases would be considered for assessment in the OSRI. If the case being reviewed is a foster care case, any other cases opened during the period under review that involved the identified target child (foster care or in-home) would be considered for assessment.

**General Question:** In a foster care case, were safety concerns in a foster care placement addressed in the OSRI—both accepted reports and safety concerns for the target child and/or other children in the foster care placement when the concerns could affect the target child’s safety? (Added May 22, 2015)

Safety concerns in the foster care placement that affect the safety of the target
child being reviewed are assessed in Item 3, Question F1, and any safety concerns for the target child that were not adequately addressed by the agency are captured in Item 3, Question F. Only accepted reports that relate to the target child in foster care or the children in the target child's family are assessed in Item 1 and not with regard to other children in a foster family home or placement.

**General Question:** How should the OSRI be applied to cases that were open for 45 days or longer but only included an initial investigation or assessment and did not include provision of services or case planning beyond that during the period under review? (Added June 4, 2015)

For cases in which only an investigation or assessment occurred and no ongoing services or case planning was provided beyond that, reviewers should apply the following guidance in determining how to respond to Items 12 and 13. Reviewers must first determine if an adequate assessment of risk/safety was completed in Item 3. If there were no substantiated allegations and no identified risk or safety concerns with the family that would necessitate any further services beyond the initial investigation/assessment, comprehensive assessment of the child(ren)/parents and case planning with the family would not be necessary, so Items 12 and 13 could be rated Not Applicable in these cases. In cases where there are substantiated allegations or if it is determined that there are high risk or safety concerns present, even if there is no substantiation of maltreatment, it is reasonable to expect the agency to conduct a comprehensive assessment of needs and services and to engage the family in case planning so Items 12 and 13 should be rated.

Reviewers would apply the OSRI instructions as they would in any other case to determine how to rate all other items for these cases.

**General Question:** How should reviewers apply the OSRI to in-home cases involving children living in temporary, alternative childcare arrangements, such as with extended family members/friends via voluntary agreements or conditional custody orders? (Added June 4, 2015)

This guidance applies to in-home cases in which children are living with extended family members or other family friends via voluntary agreements with the parent(s), conditional custody orders, or other court orders that do NOT place the child under the care and placement responsibility of the agency. In some states, these arrangements may be considered placement with safety resources or out-of-home safety plans.

Face Sheet
It is very important that reviewers indicate in the case participant table all the alternative care providers with whom children are living. This will help to
determine who will be rated in Items 12A and 12B, and what homes need to be considered in risk/safety assessments in Item 3.

Item 2
Reviewers should not consider the child(ren)'s placement in a temporary, alternative living arrangement outside the family home as an "entry into foster care" because the child welfare agency does not have placement and care responsibility for these children.
If only a safety plan was needed and no safety-related services were necessary based on the circumstances of the case, then the case is not applicable for Item 2. If the only thing necessary to keep children safe during the period under review was a safety plan that placed the children with an alternative care provider, then this item is not applicable. Placement with an alternative care provider is not considered a safety service.

If, during the period under review, there were safety concerns with the biological/legal parent OR with the alternative care provider with whom the child(ren) live, the first box for applicability would be answered Yes and reviewers would respond to question A by determining whether appropriate safety-related services were provided to either the bio/legal parents or the alternative care provider to ensure the children’s safety and to prevent the child(ren)’s actual placement in foster care.

If, during the period under review, there were concerns with the alternative care arrangement and the children were at risk of foster care placement, the second box for applicability would be answered Yes and reviewers would respond to Question A by determining whether appropriate safety-related services were provided to either the bio/legal parents or the alternative care provider to ensure the children’s safety and to prevent the child(ren)’s actual placement in foster care.

Question 2B would always be answered NA in these cases because the case is being rated as an in-home case, which means the children were never removed from the home and placed in foster care during the period under review.

Item 3
When responding to Questions 3A and 3B, reviewers should consider whether risk and safety assessments were conducted in the home(s) where children were living as well as in the home of their biological/legal parent.

When responding to Question 3C, the safety plan would include the plan to place the children with an alternative care provider as well as any other safety-related services that were provided to the bio/legal parent and/or the alternative care provider (if applicable based on case circumstances).
Item 12
Alternative care providers should have their needs assessed and be provided necessary services as this relates to their ability to meet the identified needs of the children living with them. Therefore, the assessment and services for these caregivers would be captured in 12A for the children. The agency is not required to conduct a comprehensive assessment of these caregivers as they are for parents in 12B because these caregivers are not the focus of the case plan and are not the legal/permanent caregivers for the children.

Only biological and/or legal and permanent parents or guardians of the children would be assessed as Mother and Father in 12B. If an alternative care provider becomes a legal guardian or adoptive parent of a child during the period under review, the alternative care provider should also be included as a parent in 12B. If a biological parent was not the parent with whom the children were living, reviewers would need to determine if he or she should be included based on the guidance provided in the definitions for Mother and Father for in-home cases in the instrument.

Items 13 and 15
The same parents identified as Mother and Father in 12B would be rated in Items 13 and 15.

General Question: How should the OSRI be applied in a case involving a youth who was on runaway status for a majority of the PUR? (Added September 17, 2015)

Whether the state is taking all reasonable steps, on an ongoing basis, to find a child who has run away from a placement will affect the reviewer’s assessment of several items. If the state is not taking all reasonable steps to find the child, it follows that the agency would be unable to appropriately assess, visit, engage, or provide services to the youth, which would affect ratings in Items 3, 13, 14, 16, 17, and 18 (if applicable). If the state is actively attempting to locate the child on an ongoing basis, the reviewer should not consider the period of time during which the child was on runaway status in the assessment of Items 13, 14, 16, 17, and 18 (if applicable). In Item 3, the efforts being made to locate the child should be considered positively in the reviewer's overall evaluation of ongoing risk/safety assessment during the PUR.

Regardless of the agency's efforts to locate a youth on runaway status, the agency should still be able to identify appropriate permanency goals for the child, process timely termination of parental rights as applicable, work toward achieving timely permanency (e.g., searching for/preparing permanent placements for the child or working with parents toward reunification, based on case circumstances), and formulate assessments of the youth's needs including identifying needed services for the child. Therefore, Items 5, 6, and 12 should be rated based on the
agency's efforts in these areas.

**General Question:** In the OSRI for names, the instructions state, "enter the first and last names," and the OMS Tutorial and video at [https://training.cfsrportal.org/section-1/module-4](https://training.cfsrportal.org/section-1/module-4) show the mock case listed with the mother's first name, then last name. However, we have heard elsewhere that we should list names in last name, first-name order. Please provide feedback as to what order names should be listed. (Added December 3, 2015)

**Answer:** The names should be entered in accordance with the OSRI instructions: first name followed by last name.

**General Question:** I am rating a case in which the foster child was placed by the agency with a relative, out of state, through an ICPC for most of the period under review. How do I address Items 3, 14, and 15 in a situation when an out-of-state DSS agency was responsible for supervising the placement? (April 1, 2016)

**Answer:** Although the placing state has asked the receiving state to monitor the child's safety, permanency, and well-being through an ICPC agreement, the placing state is still responsible for reviewing ICPC reports and ensuring the child is safe, and that his or her needs are being addressed by the receiving state. To answer the OSRI questions for Items 3, 14, and 15, Reviewers should talk to the placing state regarding the child's safety (Item 3), and worker visits with the child (Item 14), as well as review ICPC reports and possibly conduct a phone interview with other case participants, such as the receiving state's worker, the relative caregivers, and the child. Reviewers would need to ascertain the location of the parent (for Item 15) and determine which state is conducting visits with the parent, though the placing state should ensure that these contacts are being made.

CB case elimination guidance allows ICPC cases to be eliminated if they come up in the receiving state's sample.

**General Question:** There are significant (months) delays in transferring a case from investigation to ongoing services; however, once the ongoing caseworker is assigned, the family receives assessment and services, case planning, and regular worker contacts. How do case transfer delays impact outcome ratings? (Added September 13, 2016)

**Answer:** Once the agency determines that a family requires services to keep children safe and to reduce risk of further abuse/neglect, the agency should make concerted efforts to provide those services in a timely manner. Significant (months) gaps in time that agency workers are not seeing children and assessing their needs can impact not only the physical safety of the children, but also their permanency and
well-being. As with other gaps in service provision, reviewers will need to assess the total time that the case was opened for services during the period under review and consider the case circumstances and the impact of those delays on the outcomes for the family. (Added September 13, 2016)

Face Sheet

**Question:**
**Face Sheet: How should we capture same-sex parents? (Added October 10, 2014)**

Parents who are of the same gender should be captured according to their role as you would for other parents. The instrument allows capturing more than one "mother" and more than one "father." (8/4/2014)

**Question:**
**Face Sheet: For Question I, should the reviewer enter the date on which in-home and foster care services first began (i.e., date of the disposition of the investigation) or the date on which the investigation begins? (Added November 19, 2014)**

Question I on the OSRI Face Sheet asks, "What is the date of the first case opening, of the cases open for services during the period under review?" The date that should be entered is the date on which the agency opened the case for services or referred the case for services under an alternative response system. Depending on the state's policy, the case could be considered open for services after the disposition of the investigation and a decision to open the case, or could be considered open as of the date on which the investigation begins. To ensure that reviewers are using the correct definition of "open for services," we recommend discussing the state's policies on when a case is considered to be open with the Children's Bureau Regional Office Specialist.

Question L on the Face Sheet asks, "What is the date of the most recent case closure during the period under review?" The date that should be entered is the date on which the agency has completed all case closure activities required by the state's policy. Again, to ensure that reviewers are using the correct definition of "case closure," we recommend discussing the state's policies and requirements for case closure with the Children's Bureau Regional Office Specialist.

**Question:**
**Face Sheet: Can states add a text box in the OSRI Face Sheet? If so, where? (Added April 7, 2015)**
States do not have the option of adding a text box in the OSRI Face Sheet in the CFSR Online Management System.

**Question:**
**Face Sheet:** Question M asks why a case was opened for services. Is the reason(s) for case opening based on the state’s legal definitions of maltreatment as reflected in the reason for substantiation of abuse, or is it based on the social worker’s identified concerns as reflected in the child abuse assessment information? (Added May 22, 2015)

The reason for case opening should be based on whatever information is available in the case record and from interviews that identifies why the agency opened the case. This would include the maltreatment type that was substantiated or resulted in case opening and it could also include other information that informed the agency's decision to open the case.

**Question:**
**Face Sheet:** How should reviewers record parents when there is a known/available father or mother, but there is no name in the record; e.g., the parent is mentioned in interviews? (Added November 22, 2016)

It is acceptable to add the parent to the Face Sheet as Jane or John Doe. (Added November 22, 2016)

**Question:**
**Face Sheet:** Who should be included in the case participant table of the Face Sheet, and what information should be included regarding “relationship to child”? (Added November 17, 2016)

In the online OSRI training provided by the Children’s Bureau, the following instructions are provided: When determining who to include in the case participant table, reviewers should always include biological and legal parents, regardless of their involvement with the child or children at the time of review. If the parent is deceased, if their parental rights have been terminated (even if this occurred prior to the period under review), or if their whereabouts are unknown, reviewers should note that in the “relationship to child” section. It is also important to indicate whether the parent served as a caregiver and/or whether he or she lived in the same home with the child(ren). Paramours to parents or caregivers who live in the home with the child(ren) should also be listed in the table. If they serve in a caregiving role with the child(ren), indicate their role as “caregiver,” and if they do not serve in that role but they have access to the child(ren), indicate their role as
“other” and explain their status in the “relationship to child” section. (Added November 17, 2016)

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Safety Outcome 1

Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.

**Question:**

Item 1: Reviewers are asked to indicate in the table the "Date Investigation or Assessment Initiated," and the instruction for that column states, "The date the investigation or assessment was initiated is the date on which the agency made the first attempt to contact the family." We would like to clarify whether that instruction includes whatever a state’s policy requires related to initiating an investigation or an assessment. (Added February 3, 2015)

Reviewers should include the date on which the investigation/assessment was initiated per state policy, or if no state policy exists, reviewers should include the date when contact with the family was first attempted.

**Question:**

Item 1: How should reports be documented in the Item 1 table? (Added February 9, 2015)

Reviewers should list reports by date, per child, and per allegation. If the same child had multiple allegations that resulted in separate dispositions, each allegation should be indicated in a separate row in the table so that the disposition can be noted for each allegation. If multiple allegations received the same disposition, all allegations may be indicated in the same row. When tallying the number of reports in responding to Questions A, B, and C, reviewers should not count each allegation or child as a separate report but rather consider the date of the report as a distinct report made to the agency.

**Question:**

Item 1B: Does "and requirements" in this question mean other contact requirements such as following the state’s interview protocol? (Added January 13, 2015)

The "requirements" noted in 1B refer to any requirements, beyond time frames, that are noted in state policies or statutes related to initial face-to-face contact with the children in accepted maltreatment reports.
Question:
Item 1: Parental rights were terminated prior to the PUR and the child was moved into his own individual case. During the PUR, there was a report of abuse and neglect involving the birth parents and one of the siblings. Is this captured under Item 1? (Added November 22, 2016)

No, because the TPR occurred prior to the PUR and the target child was in his own individual case during the entire PUR. (Added November 22, 2016)

Question:
Item 1: We received a report concerning children remaining in the care of a parent after termination of parental rights of the target child, but the target child remains in foster care. Should we rate this in items 1 and 3? (Added November 22, 2016)

The TPR for the target child in foster care during the PUR does not change the fact that the siblings are still part of the family’s case; therefore, information and circumstances related to them should be considered in rating Items 1 and 3. (Added November 22, 2016)

Safety Outcome 2

Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.

Question:
Item 2: How do you apply the OSRI, Item 2 to cases involving a trial home visit during the PUR? (Added August 21, 2015)

If it is a foster care case and the child was returned home on a trial home visit during the period under review and the reviewer determines that there are concerns regarding the safety of that child in the home, then Item 2 would be applicable, per the applicability criteria. Reviewers would answer Question A based on whether concerted efforts were made to provide or arrange for appropriate safety-related services to protect the child in the home during the trial home visit. When responding to Question B, reviewers should consider a child's
return to a foster home placement (from the trial home visit) as a "removal" from the home, for purposes of this OSRI item. Reviewers should apply the instructions for B in the same way that they would for a case involving an entry into foster care or a re-entry into care post-reunification.

**Question:**
**Item 2:** Is item 2 applicable when the agency has determined that a child is safe based on the results of a structured decision making (SDM) instrument or other tool that was completed? (Added September 13, 2016)

Reviewers should not rely solely on the results of a safety assessment tool to determine if safety concerns were present that would have necessitated the provision or arrangement of safety related services. Some safety assessment tools are designed to determine only if a child should remain in the home with protections and don't necessarily assess for and identify needed safety services. If the reviewers determine that there were safety concerns present that immediately impact parents' abilities to protect children and keep them safe which could lead to a child's placement or re-entry into foster care – such as active domestic violence or substance abuse, or lack of supervision, for example - then the expectation would be that item 2 is applicable. (Added September 13, 2016)

**Question:**
**Item 2:** The FAQ regarding how to apply the instrument to in-home cases in which the children are living with an alternate caregiver says that item 2 can be not applicable if the only thing necessary to keep the children safe during the period under review was a safety plan that placed the children with an alternate caregiver. So, if an alternative caregiver arrangement is in place to ensure the children’s immediate safety, does this relieve the agency of making immediate concerted efforts to provide services to the bio/legal parents either before or concurrent with the alternative caregiver arrangement to address the safety concerns that existed in the home? (Added September 13, 2016)

No. Alternative caregiver arrangements are voluntary and temporary, and without services to the biological or legal parents the safety concerns that brought the family to the attention of the agency may still exist. If only an alternative caregiver arrangement is in place as a safety plan, reviewers should determine whether appropriate safety related services were needed and provided to the bio/legal parents to ensure the children’s safety, ameliorate the safety and protection concerns that brought the children to an alternative caregiver arrangement and prevent potential placement in foster care. (Added September 13, 2016)

**Question:**
**Item 3:** The directions related to ongoing risk and safety assessment clearly state
formal and informal risk and safety assessment, but the directions related to the initial assessment (3A) do not have this wording. Can we still consider both formal and informal at the initial stage or should we focus only on formal assessments at this point? (Added October 10, 2014)

Yes. In all of Item 3, consider both formal and informal assessments for initial and/or ongoing assessments.

Question:
Item 3(C): As we are working through the Shawntese Jordan foster care mock case, I see that for Item 3C, there is a response of "N/A." We've had many questions on why this is not "Yes." Is it because after the youth reunified, a formal safety plan was not completed? We have observed though, that the agency was involved in assessing risk and safety after reunification and that the mom and youth knew what needed to happen and what could not happen. It seems there was at least an informal safety plan in place during this time and one could rate this item as "Yes." Would there be a significant conflict should a reviewer rate this item (3C) as "Yes" instead of "N/A"? (Added May 20, 2015)

As explained in the rationale video for this mock case, Question 3C is rated "Not Applicable" because there were no safety concerns when Shawntese was reunified, and therefore a safety plan was not needed. Item 3 requires that reviewers determine whether safety concerns were in fact present in order to assess whether the agency responded appropriately to safety concerns. In this mock case, the mother's mental health concerns had been addressed and appropriately managed for some time and housing was the only pending issue that needed to be resolved before reunification could occur. The worker ensured that the mother had a crisis plan in place and that the child and mother had a support system in place before reunification, but that is different from a safety plan that is controlling active threats to the child's safety in the home. If a reviewer selected “Yes” instead of "N/A" for Question 3C, he or she would need to be able to identify what the actual safety threats were and how they were being controlled and mitigated by a safety plan. In this mock case, a "yes" response to 3C would not be correct.

Question:
Item 3(D): What kinds of safety issues should reviewers capture in Question D for a child in foster care? How is that unique from what is captured in Questions E and F? (Added April 27, 2016)

Answer:
In responding to Question D, reviewers must consider whether the safety-related incidents outlined in D1 were present in the foster care case. Recurring maltreatment may occur in a foster care case so reviewers must assess that. The
other safety incidents outlined in D1 occur with the child's family, typically in the family home. These kinds of concerns may be applicable to a foster care case if the child was reunified or placed on a trial home visit during the period under review. Questions E1 and E consider safety issues specifically related to visitation with family members (visitation here refers to periodic visitation and not a trial home visit) and Questions F1 and F focus specifically on safety issues that occur in the child's foster care placements and/or with foster parents.

**Question:**
**Item 3(E):** In answering E in a juvenile justice services case, should a youth's behaviors be considered during visitation or only the parents' behavior? (Added April 7, 2015)

If a youth's behaviors pose a risk to his or her own safety during visitation that should be considered in Item 3, Question E. Reviewers should identify any concerns about the youth's safety as a result of the youth's behaviors in question E1 by selecting "Other" and describing the safety concern that existed for the youth. Since the focus of Item 3 is on child safety, any concerns related to the safety of others due to the youth's behaviors during visitation should be captured in Item 8 when responding to questions about the quality of visitation.

**Question:**
**Item 3(E, E1):** Should reviewers be answering E1 "Other" if there were safety concerns that were being mitigated? This would lead to an ANI that does not seem appropriate. (Added April 7, 2015)

No, if safety concerns were mitigated, they would not be considered safety concerns in Item 3 E1 or E. Reviewers should only capture concerns that actually affected the safety of the child in Questions E1 and E. If no unmitigated concerns existed, E1 should be answered, "No safety concerns related to visitation were present."

**Question:**
**Item 3(E, F):** For foster care cases, if there are NO safety concerns related to E and F, how should reviewers capture that in the instrument since there is no N/A option for foster care cases? (Added April 27, 2016)

Since there is no NA option in these questions for foster care cases, if there are no safety concerns related to E and F, reviewers should respond as follows: Reviewers should select the option, "No unmitigated safety concerns related to visitation were present," in E1 and answer No to E. Reviewers should select the option, "No safety concerns existed for the target child while in foster care placement that were not adequately addressed," in F1 and answer No to F.
Permanency Outcome 1

Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.

**Question:**
**Item 4:** A state places a child in a 30-day Assessment program; all children going into the program are court-ordered into it. The program is designed to assess the child's needs and determine appropriate placement and services for the child. Many, but not all, of the children ordered into the program are Juvenile Justice Youth. If this is the first placement for the child, who is then reunified, how would we answer Question 4C regarding the stability of the placement? (Added April 15, 2016)

Since these assessment centers are generally meant to be temporary, 4C1 would be answered, "The child's current setting is in a temporary shelter or other temporary setting," and 4C would be answered "No" because the most recent placement was not stable because it was a temporary assessment program.

**Question:**
**Item 4:** In the placement table, if there are two foster care episodes during the PUR, what reason is used for the first one? Would it be “not applicable, this is the current placement,” or “other” with an indication that the child returned home? (Added November 22, 2016)

Reviewers should use “other” and explain the circumstances. (Added November 22, 2016)

**Question:**
**Item 4:** A child moved up to a higher level of care and the reviewer believes that the child’s behavior warranted the restrictive placement, so the move was in the child’s best interests. When could this be a Strength? What are the factors to support this? (Added November 22, 2016)

Placements for children should be in the most family-like setting and the least restrictive environment that ensures safety. When a child is moved to a more restrictive higher level of care, reviewers must determine if appropriate measures were first taken to stabilize the initial placement through services and supports for foster parents. Ensuring that foster parents receive needed training, respite arrangements, and ongoing support is critical in supporting the stability of placements. If efforts were not made to stabilize placements before moving a child, that should be reflected in Item 4 in support of an "Area Needing
Improvement” rating because the move to a more restrictive placement without first attempting to stabilize the previous placement would not have been the best way to meet the child’s needs. If the child’s safety could not be ensured while making efforts to stabilize a placement, then it could be determined that a move to a more restrictive setting was in fact in the child’s best interests to meet his or her needs, and this would be reflected as a Strength. Likewise, if the agency made efforts to support the placement through services to the foster family, and it was determined that the child later needed to be moved to a more restrictive placement, this too could be reflected as a Strength. (Added November 22, 2016)

Question:
Item 5: A child was placed in foster care from February 1, 2013, and was discharged from foster care May 31, 2013. The child then re-entered foster care on September 1, 2013, and then was placed back with the parent for a trial home visit from February 1, 2014 to June 1, 2014. The child was then removed again on October 1, 2014, placed in foster care, and remained in foster care at the time of the review. Does the count for 15- out of 22-months include the trial home visit months while the child was in the care of the state but placed in the home with the parent? (Added January 14, 2015)

No, we do not include trial home visits (or runaway episodes) in calculating 15-out of 22-months in foster care (see 45 CFR § 1356.21(i)).

Question:
Item 5: What if a family is receiving in-home services when the child’s case is adjudicated but then the child is removed from home a few months later? Would the count for 15- out of 22-months start at adjudication or at the removal date? (Added February 6, 2015)

The provision to file a petition for a child who has been in foster care for 15/22-months only applies to children while they are in foster care, so the count would begin on the date the child entered foster care.

Question:
Item 5: If there were concurrent goals established but subsequently one goal is dropped and the other goal becomes the primary goal, which date should be used to determine when the primary goal was established: the date when it was established originally as a concurrent goal or the date when it changed to become a single goal? (Added May 3, 2016)

Reviewers should use the date it was first established as a concurrent goal.
Question:
Item 5: A child was placed in foster care in State A but then the child was moved to a relative placement in State B where the case was transferred and is being reviewed. In calculating 15/22 months for ASFA in Item 5, would the count for length of time in out-of-home care begin with the date the child entered care in State A or the date the child's case transferred to State B? (Added December 07, 2016)

The count for 15/22 begins with the date of the judicial finding of child abuse and neglect (usually the adjudicatory hearing) or 60 days after the child’s entry into foster care, whichever is earlier, so it would begin when the child first entered foster care in State A. (Added December 07, 2016)

Question:
Item 5: How do reviewers consider the timeliness and appropriateness of permanency goals when answering questions 5 B and C? (Added September 09, 2016)

The expectation is that goal(s) are established with the child’s best interest for permanency in mind and drive the planning and activities to accomplish permanency for the child. Whether single or concurrent goals are in place, reviewers should consider whether each permanency goal was established timely and was based on the needs of the child and the case circumstances for the period of time in which the goal is in place. Reviewers should also factor in whether single and concurrent goal changes are being made timely and appropriately. Reviewers should consider goals as inappropriate if they are selected or changed primarily due to the agency’s lack of resources, such as few preadoptive families, subsidy limitations, or agency and court process delays related to permanency. (Added September 09, 2016)

Question:
Item 5 (Permanency Goal Established): If a child was placed in detention during a foster care episode, would the time in detention count toward the 60-day time frame for establishing a case plan? (Added November 22, 2016)

No, a child’s time in detention should not be counted because the child is not considered to be “in foster care” due to the nature of the placement facility. The 60-day requirement for establishing a case plan is based on 60 days from the date on which the child was placed in foster care. (Added November 22, 2016)

Question:
Item 5: In determining the date on which the permanency goal was established, do reviewers need to use the date on which the goal was first indicated in a court order? (Added November 22, 2016)
No. We do not require that the case plan goal be court-ordered for it to be considered “established” for CFSR purposes. If the case plan goal is identified in the child’s case plan, or described in an administrative review or case plan meeting, reviewers can consider this as the date on which the goal was established. (Added November 22, 2016)

**Question:**
Item 5: When a child is in foster care and placed with a relative, do reviewers need a “compelling reason” documented in a case plan or court order to permit the 5G1 exception to TPR to be noted? (Added November 22, 2016)

No, as long as the child is placed with a relative, a documented compelling reason is not required for the purposes of Question 5G1. In this situation, 5F and 5G1 would be “not applicable.” (Added November 22, 2016)

**Question:**
Item 5(D): This question asks, "Has the child been in foster care for at least 15 of the most recent 22 months?" The instructions state: "In answering Question D, begin the count with the date of the judicial finding of child abuse and neglect (usually the adjudicatory hearing) or 60-days after the child’s entry into foster care, whichever is earlier." Does this instruction guide reviewers to look only at children who entered foster care due to child abuse and neglect, or does this question also pertain to children in out-of-home care due to other adjudication types (e.g., status offenders, juvenile offenders, or cases opened due to child behaviors)? (Added May 21, 2015)

Item 5, Question D, applies to all children in foster care regardless of adjudication type.

**Question:**
Item 5(G): If a compelling reason not to file termination of parental rights (TPR) was found but that reason was not relevant during the entire period under review (case circumstances changed), is Question G answered "yes"? (Added May 22, 2015)

Yes, a compelling reason for not filing TPR needs to be made only once.

**Question:**
Item 6: A child was on an Other Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (OPPLA) plan and there was no signed agreement with her placement (C2). The child was in a Supervised Independent Living (SIL) program and she did remain there beyond her 18th birthday. It was a stable placement for her and her own baby. From the reviewer guide, it seems that we can rate the item as a Strength even if there is no date for Question C because the living arrangement was permanent. Is
this correct? (Added November 19, 2014)

While it is correct that the instrument does not require that there be a signed and dated agreement to justify a Strength rating, the reviewer must have evidence of formal steps that were completed to make the arrangement permanent to support the Strength rating. This should not be assumed solely because the child remained in the facility beyond her 18th birthday.

Question 6C asks, “For a child with a goal of other planned permanent living arrangement during the period under review, did the agency and court make concerted efforts to place the child in a living arrangement that can be considered permanent until discharge from foster care?”

And the instructions for that question ask the reviewer to consider:
- The child's current living arrangement and whether formal steps were completed to make this arrangement permanent.
- Whether this might have included the agency's asking foster parents or relatives to agree to and sign a long-term care commitment or ensuring that a child who is in a long-term care facility to meet special needs will be transferred to an adult facility at the appropriate time.

Finally, the Quality Assurance guide says, "If Question C is answered Yes but Question C2 is answered no date, ask reviewers why they believe the child's living arrangement can be considered permanent."

The intent of all of these instructions is to find out from the reviewer what concerted efforts/formal steps were made to make the arrangement permanent that could lead to a Strength rating.

Question:
Item 6: If a youth turns 18 during the period under review, is the permanency goal in Item 6 considered achieved? (Added November 22, 2016)

No. Reviewers need to answer 6B, 6C, and 6C2 based on the efforts the agency made during the PUR prior to the youth turning 18. (Added November 22, 2016)

Question:
Item 6: If the agency achieves adoption for a child within 24 months, are there circumstances in which item 6 could be rated Area Needing Improvement? (Added September 09, 2016)

Yes. The CFSR is not only a review of the child welfare agency, but the system as a whole, which includes the court and other entities working to achieve permanency for children. Item 6, Question B instructs reviewers to answer “no” to concerted efforts to achieve timely permanency if reviewers “determine that the
agency and court have achieved the permanency goal before the suggested time frame, but there was a delay due to lack of concerted efforts on the part of the agency or court during the period under review”. Such delays could include or be a result of: not establishing timely and appropriate permanency goals, court docketing challenges, agency and/or court and attorney staffing limitations or high caseloads, agency policies and procedures that create barriers, etc. Reviewers will need to determine whether the delay is significant enough in light of the case circumstances to consider the item an area needing improvement. (Added September 09, 2016)

**Question:**

Item 6(B): The instructions for this item state: "If the only goal for the child during the period under review was other planned permanent living arrangement, select NA." If the child's current permanency goal is OPPLA (established 2 months before end of PUR or case closure) and the child has no concurrent goal at that time, do the instructions guide reviewers to look at other goals that were in place during the PUR prior to the most current goal of OPPLA when answering 6B? (Added May 29, 2015)

In Item 6, reviewers are asked to consider only current (or most recent) permanency goals. If the child's current goal is OPPLA and concurrent goals are not in place, 6B would be answered N/A and only 6C would be answered Yes or No.

**Question:**

Item 6 (B, C): The third bullet in the instructions for this item states: "If concurrent goals are in place and one of the goals is other planned permanent living arrangement but permanency will not be achieved in a timely manner, answer Questions B and C No and indicate in the documentation specific barriers to implementing concurrent planning." Does "permanency" in the instructions refer to the concurrent goal in place that is different from OPPLA? (Added May 29, 2015)

The third bullet in the instructions for 6B and 6C refers to cases in which the child has a goal of OPPLA and a concurrent goal of reunification, guardianship, or adoption and neither goal will be achieved for the child in a timely manner. Permanency in this bullet refers to both the achievement of the goal of OPPLA and the achievement of the other concurrent goal. In determining whether permanency can be achieved timely for the goal of OPPLA, reviewers should consider whether formal steps were completed in a timely manner to establish a permanent living arrangement for the child.
Question:
Item 6(C): Do reviewers always answer No to 6C if the concurrent goal, other than OPPLA, is not likely to be achieved, but the child is placed in a living arrangement that can be considered permanent during the PUR? (Added May 29, 2015)

No, if a child has a concurrent goal of OPPLA and the child is already placed in a living arrangement that can be considered permanent, Question 6C would be answered Yes because the goal of OPPLA has already been achieved.

Permanency Outcome 2

The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.

Question:
Item 7: We did not see the specific language about large sibling groups. Can we still consider a sibling group of five or more a reason that separation might be warranted? (Added October 10, 2014)

Size of the sibling group alone does not warrant a separation, as this single consideration may have more to do with the agency's lack of resources versus the children's needs. In cases of large sibling groups, reviewers should determine if concerted efforts were made to place the child with any of his or her siblings who were also in foster care, even if he or she was not placed with all siblings. If, for example, the agency was able to split a large sibling group into two placements so that the target child was in fact placed with some of his or her siblings, it could be determined that the agency made concerted efforts to place siblings together and that would be reflected in the response to Question B.

Question:
Items 7 and 8: The target child was separated from her siblings upon entry into care because a foster home could not be identified that would take a sibling group of four. This was determined to be a resource issue and Item 7 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement. The agency worked to identify a home for the sibling group and they were placed together after 8 days. There were no face-to-face sibling visits during those 8 days, although the agency did facilitate phone calls. We wanted to rate sibling visits as N/A for Item 8, but the OMS would not allow an N/A response because the children were separated for a very brief time. We thought that N/A would be appropriate, extrapolating from the guidelines for rating short-term foster care cases, which state that a child should have visits arranged within 1 to 2 weeks of being placed in foster care. (Added February 4, 2015)

In this scenario, because the child was only placed apart from her siblings for 8
days during the PUR and at the time of review the siblings were placed together, the reviewer should check "No" in Item 8 under Applicable Cases in response to "the child has at least one sibling in foster care who is in a different placement setting." In doing so, visitation for siblings would not need to be assessed in Item 8.

**Question:**
Item 8: When assessing this item, can visits via Skype or FaceTime be considered face-to-face visitation? For example, the target child and her sibling were placed in different communities about two hours apart in the case being reviewed. The agency arranged for monthly in-person visitation and weekly visits through FaceTime. (Added December 3, 2014)

Visitation between parents and siblings should be in-person unless such contact is not possible. For example, the parents/siblings live far away in a different state. In the scenario described, in-person visitation is possible, so reviewers would assess whether the monthly in-person visitation that occurred was of sufficient frequency to maintain or promote the continuity of relationships between siblings and between the child and parents.

**Question:**
Item 8: The definition for this item includes parents/caregivers from whom the child was removed and with whom the agency is working toward reunification. How do we assess applicability for multiple parents/caregivers? As examples, consider a child who lived with and was eventually removed from his mother and stepfather but had an ongoing relationship with his biological father (for example, weekend visits) or who was removed from grandparents but had an ongoing relationship with his parents. (Added October 27, 2014)

The goal of the item is to ensure that the child’s previous relationships with parents/caregivers are preserved in a way that supports the achievement of permanency with those parents/caregivers. Reviewers should apply a general principle that is consistent with the definitions provided in the item. When biological parents are considered a potential reunification resource and have an established relationship with the child before the child’s entry into foster care, the biological parents should be included in the assessment of the item even if they were not the primary caregivers for the child at the time of removal. Any other parents/caregivers from whom the child was removed and with whom the agency is working toward reunification, should also be included in the assessment of the item. The reviewer may also need to consider the timing of reunification plans during the period under review and how that affects which parents/caregivers are included in the assessment.

Please note, applicability, and definition of parents in Items 8 and 11 are the
Question:
Item 8 (pre-applicability bullets): How does a reviewer document in the OMS when different conditions apply to each parent when the pre-applicability bullets state that the condition applies to both parents? For example, one parent was deceased for the entire period under review and parental rights for the other parent were terminated during the entire period under review. (Added September 18, 2015)

As long as one or more of the conditions applies to each of the parents, the reviewer can mark the item as not applicable for assessment for the parents from the Item 8 applicability page in the OMS. The reviewer should select the two (or more, if applicable) bullets that apply to the parents. Reviewers are encouraged to document which condition applies to which parent in the optional comments narrative field on each item applicability page, although reviewers could also put the information in the optional comments narrative field on the item rating page or in a QA Note.

Question:
Items 8 and 11: What level of prior relationship constitutes applicability for Item 8 and 11? (Added April 7, 2015)

*Relationship* in Items 8 and 11 is defined as a meaningful connection between the child and the parent. The reviewer would need to consider the frequency and quality of contact, as well as the child's perception of the parent and their relationship, to determine whether this parent had an applicable relationship with the child. Permanency Outcome 2 is focused on preserving the continuity of relationships and connections that the child had before entry into care, so that context should guide the reviewer's understanding of what is meant by the term "relationship" in these items.

Question:
Item 9: There are many items that address concerted efforts to meet the needs of a child; e.g., Item 9 addresses efforts made to maintain the child's connections. How would an item be rated if the concerted efforts were made by others and not necessarily the agency? For example, the child's connections were preserved but not as a result of anything done by the agency; e.g., the child and relatives ensured that connections happened? (Added May 22, 2015)

If an outcome was achieved for a child but not as a direct result of what the agency did, reviewers can consider the concerted efforts made by others involved in the child's life. However, there may be some case situations where efforts made by others might not be the most appropriate expectation and that
should be taken into consideration when rating this item. For example, the child asked the worker to help make connections with an extended family member, the worker did not follow through, so the child asked someone else to step in and help facilitate the connection.

**Question:**
Item 9(A) instructions indicate that if prior to the placement in foster care the child had a relationship with the biological parent who was not the caregiver or not part of the case plan, that connection may be included in this item if it is in the child’s best interest to preserve that relationship. Are biological parents who did not have a previous relationship with the child prior to entry into foster care considered in this item? (Added February 6, 2015)

No, this item is focused on preserving connections that a child had prior to entry into foster care. So if the child did not have a previous relationship with the biological parent, that parent would not be assessed in this item. Developing a new relationship with this parent could be captured in Item 12B.

**Question:**
Item 9(A): This item has received some clarification about the need to preserve the child’s important connections once they are removed, and the item is specifically about preserving connections (not establishing new ones) that the child had prior to entry in foster care. The tool allows us to N/A the item in the event of an abandoned infant, but we have additional questions specifically surrounding infants removed at birth. For an infant removed directly at birth from the parents, is that considered an applicable reason to NIA this item if the infant does not have any important connections at the time of removal? Or is an infant removed directly at birth applicable for assessment of this item? (Added September 17, 2015)

An infant removed from his or her parents at birth would typically have connections to the birth family that should be preserved. Reviewers must explore the case circumstances to determine whether the case is applicable for assessment in Item 9. In the case of an abandoned infant, birth family connections are unknown; therefore, the item is not applicable.

**Question:**
Item 9(C): This question asks if the tribe was provided with timely notification if the child may be a member of, or eligible for membership in, a federally recognized Indian Tribe. How would this be answered if the parent is eligible for membership in the tribe but has not done what is necessary to be enrolled? Is the child eligible for membership? (Added May 22, 2015)
Eligibility for membership in a federally recognized Indian Tribe is determined by each tribe. If the state is aware that a child may be Native American, the tribe should be provided with notification so that eligibility can be determined by that tribe.

**Question:**
Item 10: The tool defines a relative as a person related to the child by blood, marriage, or adoption. We had some questions as to whether certain people are relatives based on that definition. In one case, the target child was placed with the adoptive parent of a half sibling. Some of us felt that met the definition and others did not. In another case, the child was placed with the aunt and uncle of a half sibling. Again, there was debate about whether this met the definition of a relative. (Added December 22, 2014)

Yes, in both examples described, the individual can be considered to meet the definition of "relative."

**Question:**
Item 10: We have a case where the child is placed with her uncle's ex-wife. In other words, this was her aunt by marriage. Since a divorce has occurred, is this woman still considered a "relative" for purposes of the CFSR? (Added April 20, 2015)

In the example provided, the individual can be considered to meet the definition of "relative."

**Question:**
Item 10(B, C): A child was placed in a pre-adoptive home prior to the period under review and remained in this placement throughout the period under review; the adoption was finalized during the period under review. Are the questions in Item 10, Relative Placement, in B and C applicable in this case? (Added May 22, 2015)

Yes, in Item 10, Questions B and C are applicable even though the child was placed in a pre-adoptive home and the adoption was finalized. Reviewers should follow the instructions provided for Questions B and C to determine if the agency made concerted efforts prior to or during the period under review to identify, locate, inform, and evaluate relatives in light of the child's particular needs. If the agency had searched for and evaluated relatives prior to the period under review, then B and C could be answered as Not Applicable. If no search had been done prior to or during the period under review, then B and C would be answered No.
**Question:**
Item 10(C): If the agency did not make concerted efforts to search for a putative father, could this affect how this question is answered with regard to efforts to identify, locate, inform, and evaluate paternal relatives as potential placement resources for the child? (Added May 22, 2015)

Question C would not be *not applicable* just because the agency did not attempt to search for a putative father. If the agency does not make efforts to locate a putative father and therefore they were not able to identify, locate, inform, and evaluate paternal relatives, Question C should be answered "No."

**Question:**
Item 11: The definition for this item includes parents/caregivers from whom the child was removed and with whom the agency is working toward reunification. How do we assess applicability for multiple parents/caregivers? As examples, consider a child who lived with and was eventually removed from his mother and stepfather but had an ongoing relationship with his biological father (for example, weekend visits) or who was removed from grandparents but had an ongoing relationship with his parents. (Added October 27, 2014)

The goal of the item is to ensure that the child's previous relationships with parents/caregivers are preserved in a way that supports the achievement of permanency with those parents/caregivers. Reviewers should apply a general principle that is consistent with the definitions provided in the item. When biological parents are considered a potential reunification resource and have an established relationship with the child before the child's entry into foster care, the biological parents should be included in the assessment of the item even if they were not the primary caregivers for the child at the time of removal. Any other parents/caregivers from whom the child was removed and with whom the agency is working toward reunification should also be included in the assessment of the item. The reviewer may also need to consider the timing of reunification plans during the period under review and how that affects which parents/caregivers are included in the assessment.

Please note, applicability, and definition of parents in Items 8 and 11 are the same.

**Question:**
Item 11: How do we capture multiple parents in the OSRI? (Added October 27, 2014)

Reviewers should note the names of all parents included in the narrative box that says, "Indicate the case participants who are included in this item as Mother and Father." For example, if the child has one mother but two fathers, the biological
father and the stepfather, reviewers would answer questions about the "Mother" using the mother in the case and answer questions about the "Father" using both the biological father and the stepfather. If reviewers answer Yes for one father but No for the other, the answer to the question would be No.

It is recommended (but not required) that the state explain the different responses for multiple mothers or fathers in the last narrative box after the rating criteria.

**Question:**
**Item 11 (pre-applicability bullets):** How does a reviewer document in the OMS when different conditions apply to each parent when the pre-applicability bullets state that the condition applies to both parents? For example, one parent was deceased for the entire period under review and parental rights for the other parent were terminated during the entire period under review. (Added September 18, 2015)

As long as one or more of the conditions applies to each of the parents, the reviewer can mark the item as Not Applicable for assessment for the parents from the Item 11 applicability page in the OMS. The reviewer should select the two (or more, if applicable) bullets that apply to the parents. Reviewers are encouraged to document which condition applies to which parent in the optional comments narrative field on each item applicability page, although reviewers could also put the information in the optional comments narrative field on the item rating page or in a QA Note.

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**Well-Being Outcome 1**

**Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.**

**Question:**
**Items 12, 13, and 15:** A child is placed with a relative, but the relative does not have a legal relationship (e.g., guardianship). The child is removed from the relative and the plan is reunification with the relative because the parents are unable to care for the child. Should Items 12, 13, and 15 be rated only for the birth parents because the relative is not a legal guardian? Or should the relative be considered for these items? (Added February 19, 2015)

Items 12, 13, and 15 should consider the relative as well as the birth parents in this situation because the plan is to reunify the child with the relative. Regardless of the child's legal relationship with the relative, it is important for the agency to review the assessment and services provided to that relative, the involvement of the relative in case planning, and worker contacts with the relative...
to ensure that the child can achieve a safe and successful reunification.

**Question:**
**Items 12, 13, and 15:** In the OSRI Quality Assurance Guide, on page 6 under sub-item 12B, it states: If the whereabouts of a parent were unknown during the PUR and the agency did not make concerted efforts to locate them, the applicable item questions for that parent should be answered No, resulting in an Area Needing Improvement rating for sub-item 12B as well as Item 12. This parent should not be assessed in Items 13 and 15. Questions for that parent in those items should be answered N/A. In Well-Being Outcome 1, concerns about efforts to locate a parent should only be reflected in Item 12. Does this apply to both in-home and out-of-home cases? Instructions in the OSRI and the QA guide may be contradictory. Please clarify. (Added April 7, 2015)

Parent applicability is different for in-home and foster care cases. Reviewers would need to determine if a parent in the in-home case was applicable before determining if concerted efforts to locate that parent were required. In the example provided, although it may be true that the father did not have a desire to be involved with the children based on his lack of contact for several years, other things must be considered before determining that the father is not applicable for assessment of these items. If the father was an alleged perpetrator in the case, if the case is court-supervised, or if there is a risk of foster placement for the children, it may be appropriate that the agency made efforts to locate the father to ensure the child's safety, permanency, and well-being needs were met and to identify paternal family members who could be a resource for the children.

Regarding whether or not the instructions in the two documents are contradictory, the instructions in the QA guide are correct. The determination that concerted efforts were not made to locate a parent must be verified in the QA process. Once it has been verified in QA, concerns about the lack of concerted efforts to locate should only be reflected in the rating for Item 12 (which will affect the overall outcome rating) so that all of the Well-Being 1 items are not rated ANI for the same practice concern (this is a shift in rating guidance for this round of reviews). QA staff should instruct reviewers to answer the questions for that parent as "Not Applicable" in Items 13 and 15, contrary to the OSRI instructions for those items.

**Question:**
**Items 12, 13, and 15:** The CFSR QA guide instructs reviewers to rate Items 13 and 15 not applicable if Item 12 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement (ANI) because there were not concerted efforts to locate a parent. Would the need to rate Items 13 and 15 as Not Applicable apply in any other situations where the agency was cited with ANI for Item 12B (example, parent is incarcerated and will continue to be until long after the child turns 18, but the agency never contacted
the parent to evaluate interest in the child and never assessed for plan)? (Added May 22, 2015)

The applicability instructions for Items 13 and 15 provide guidance on when these items are not applicable. But the example above would not necessarily apply unless the agency made efforts to rule out the appropriateness or need for parental involvement. Just because a parent is incarcerated-and will be for a long time-does not negate the agency’s responsibility to reach out to that parent to ask about their desire to be involved, and to assess the appropriateness and level of their involvement.

**Question:**
**Item 12:** (CB provides a lot of feedback on how Reviewers rate Item 12) Needs and Services of Child, Parents, and Foster Parents. Is there further information available that can help us understand what Reviewers should be considering when examining how case participants’ needs are assessed and services are provided? (Added January 28, 2016)

CB has developed a reviewer brief that provides background information and case examples. [https://training.cfsrportal.org/resources/3105](https://training.cfsrportal.org/resources/3105)

**Question:**
**Item 12:** If a child is living with his or her mother when they become involved in the agency and the father was not involved in their lives at the time, would the mother be the only person considered for these items even if the biological father’s rights are still intact but there is no evidence that the father desires to be involved in the child’s life? If the child does not have any contact with his or her father at the time of agency involvement or during the PUR, is there an expectation that the agency will seek out the father to determine if he has a desire to be involved with his own child? (Added December 17, 2014)

Circumstances must be considered when determining whether to include an uninvolved father in the assessment of this item for in-home cases. For example, if the case was only opened for a short time and the concerns with the family were not significant (no ongoing safety issues or high risk concerns), it may not be necessary for the agency to contact an uninvolved father since the agency’s involvement is very limited. For cases that are court-involved and not voluntary, for cases opened for a longer period of time due to ongoing safety concerns, or for cases in which the mother is not successfully addressing the concerns, the agency should make efforts to contact and inform fathers about the status of the children and engage them in meeting the needs of the children.

**Question:**
Item 12: If a child was living with relatives/guardians at the time of agency involvement and will remain with them, do the biological parents have to be considered as parents if their rights are still intact? (Added December 17, 2014)

Per the instrument instructions, it would depend on the case circumstances. If the case goal is to continue to keep the children with the relatives/guardians and they are the legal custodians of the children, it may not be necessary to involve the birth parents, if the birth parents were not involved in the circumstances that led to the agency's involvement with the family. If there is no legal/permanent arrangement with the relatives, and/or if the case was opened due to issues involving the birth parents, then the agency should be working with birth parents to address concerns and/or ensure that relatives can legally/permanently care for the children.

**Question:**
**Item 12: If a child was removed from relatives/guardians, do the biological parents have to be considered as parents if their rights are still intact? (Added December 17, 2014)**

Yes, per the second bullet in the instructions, biological parents in foster care cases must be included, unless they meet the "Not Applicable" criteria outlined in the applicability instructions.

**Question:**
**Item 12: If the child was removed from the biological mother and stepfather or mother's long-term boyfriend, does the child's biological father have to be considered as a parent if their rights are still intact? (Added December 17, 2014)**

Yes, per the second bullet in the instructions, biological parents in foster care cases must be included, unless they meet the "Not Applicable" criteria outlined in the applicability instructions.

**Question:**
**Item 12: For Question A1, reviewers determine that the agency did not conduct a formal or informal initial and/or ongoing comprehensive assessment. Is Question A2 NO or N/A? (Added May 22, 2015)**

If the agency did not conduct an initial assessment (A1 is "No"), A2 could be answered "No" or "Yes." A2 could be answered "Yes" only if reviewers can determine through clearly documented evidence in the case file that ALL of the child's needs were met with appropriate services. If there is not enough information for the reviewer to ascertain the child's needs, because an assessment was not conducted and the needs are not clearly articulated in the
case file, then A2 should be "No."

**Question:**
**Item 12(A):** A child was in foster care for a period of time during the period under review. He or she is transitioned home and the case is kept open for services for several months after reunification. There are other children in the home who have significant needs. Should those be captured in Item 12A? (Added December 15, 2015)

No. In a foster care case, Item 12A is only answered for the target child. Reviewers can capture the needs of the other children in 12B by assessing the needs of the parent(s) to care for those children and what services the agency provided to assist them.

**Question:**
**Item 12(A):** What case circumstances are considered acceptable reasons not to include a child living in the home in the assessment of this item? (Added December 17, 2014)

The existing online training and OSRI instructions address this item. The online training notes, "Some circumstances to consider include the reason for the agency’s involvement with the family and the impact of any risk and safety concerns present during the period under review." In the "purpose of assessment" for Item 12, the instrument states "the purpose of this item is to assess whether the agency made concerted efforts to assess needs and identify and provide services necessary to achieve case goals and adequately address issues relevant to the agency’s involvement with the family."

For in-home cases, you should consider the reason for the agency's involvement with the family, the goals of the case, and the impact of any risk and safety concerns present during the period under review when determining the applicability of children in the assessment of Item 12. If, for example, the agency became involved in a case because a parent was requesting mental health services for one of his or her children and the other children in the home were not subject to any maltreatment concerns and did not require the same mental health services, it may be appropriate to focus only on the child receiving the services because that was the reason for the agency’s involvement with the family and there were no other risk/safety concerns for the other children. Similarly, for cases in which the agency became involved with the family due to a child's experiencing juvenile delinquency issues, if the other children in the home were not subject to any maltreatment concerns and there are no risk and safety issues present during the period under review that affect the other children, it may be appropriate to focus only on the child for whom the delinquency issues are being addressed in the assessment of Item 12. If the delinquency issues are
affecting the safety of the other children in the home, and safety-related services are necessary, those would be captured in Item 3, not in Item 12.

**Question:**
**Item 12(B):** Definitions for parents in 12B indicate that adoptive parents should be rated in B if the adoption was finalized during the PUR. If those same adoptive parents had been foster parents during the period under review, do they only get assessed in 12B or in C? And would caregivers who became legal guardians during the PUR also be rated in B? (Added May 3, 2016)

Yes, caregivers who became legal guardians during the PUR would be rated in B, similar to adoptive parents. If a foster parent became an adoptive parent or legal guardian during the period under review, reviewers would rate them as a foster parent in 12C up until the adoption or guardianship was finalized. If the case is kept open for services post-finalization or is opened, again during the period under review, reviewers would rate them in B as adoptive parents or guardians for that portion of the period under review.

**Question:**
**Item 14:** For a child who is in pre-adoptive placement out of state (OOS), the sending state requires the caseworker to visit every six months. For the remaining 5 months, they contract with a local social worker for visits. Since the local social worker does not seem to fit the definition of the "other responsible party" as noted in the instrument, are reviewers unable to count the visits made by the local social worker? (Added October 10, 2014)

When we are talking about a child placed out-of-state, reviewers can consider the local worker as a "caseworker" if they are a caseworker from the jurisdiction in which the child is placed, even if they do not meet the definition of "other responsible party." This is why we included special instructions for out-of-state cases:

"If the child is in a placement in another state, you should determine whether a caseworker from the jurisdiction in which the child is placed or a caseworker from the jurisdiction from which the child was placed, visits with the child in the placement on a schedule that is consistent with the child's needs."

In this particular case, since the state has made arrangements for an out-of-state worker to visit the child in addition to doing their own visit every six months, the reviewers should consider the work done by the out-of-state worker in addition to the sending worker and assess all of those efforts in meeting the child's needs.
Item 14: With respect to Item 14 and out of state placements, the Round 2 instrument specified that the sending state caseworker visits are at least annually as required by federal law. We did not see that language in the new tool and were curious if we should still consider that in rating our out-of-state placements. (Added October 10, 2014)

There is no requirement for annual visits by sending state caseworkers, so that should not be a factor in rating cases. Rather, reviewers should use the Item 14 instructions provided in the R3 instrument about children in out-of-state placements, which indicate that "[i]f the child is in a placement in another state, you should determine whether a caseworker from the jurisdiction in which the child is placed or a caseworker from the jurisdiction from which the child was placed, visits with the child in the placement on a schedule that is consistent with the child's needs." In determining whether the schedule of visits was adequate, reviewers should consider the specific child's needs as well as the instrument instructions that guide reviewers to consider a standard of monthly visits unless there is substantial justification that a pattern of visits that was less than monthly was adequate for the child.

Question:
Item 14(B): The instructions indicate that reviewers must rate "No" for the sub-item if the caseworker did not see the child alone for at least part of each visit if the child is older than an infant. How should reviewers rate this if the child is older than an infant but has not reached the stage in development where he or she is comfortable being away from the parent? Would we be able to rate the item "Yes" if the parent is within sight or hearing of the child but not in close proximity to the child and caseworker (e.g., in another room but still within sight?) (Added November 30, 2015)

If reviewers determine that the visitation is conducted in a way that is sensitive to the child's needs but allows the caseworker to determine the safety and well-being of the child, then B can be answered "Yes."

Question:
Item 15: Can we count family team meetings, case planning meetings, and other types of visits with the mother as "visits" for the frequency measure for Item 15? (Added December 22, 2014)

In Item 15, a "visit" is defined as "face-to-face contact between the caseworker or other responsible party and the parent." In answering Questions A2 and B2 (if the frequency of visits between the caseworker and mother/father is sufficient to address safety, permanency, and well-being of the child and promote achievement of case goals), reviewers may include non-private visits such as family team meetings, case planning meetings, and supervised visitations if it
involve face-to-face contact between the caseworker/responsible party and the parent. However, reviewers will need to address the quality of those visits in Questions C and D. To determine the quality of the visits, reviewers will need to consider the location of the visit, including whether or not the location was conducive to open and honest communication between the parent(s) and caseworker.

**Question:**
**Item 15 (A2, B2):** How do caseworkers' efforts to contact parents get assessed in these items? What happens if there is only minimal contact but there is thorough documentation of efforts by the worker to make contact? (Added January 13, 2015)

Item 15 is rated on visits that actually occurred with parents. If a parent's whereabouts are unknown, despite the agency's efforts to locate them, that parent may not be applicable for an assessment of this item (see Applicable-Cases instructions for Item 15).

**Question:**
**Item 15 (A2, B2):** Instructions indicate that the answer to A2 and B2 should be No if the typical pattern of contact is less than once a month, unless you have a substantial justification for answering either question as Yes. What would be considered substantial justifications? It is our understanding that the response to this item should be based on visits that actually occurred with the parents. If the worker is only able to successfully meet with the parents less than once a month but is able to document efforts to meet with the parents during the months the worker is unsuccessful, could this item be rated as a Strength if there is sufficient information to support that the worker is able to address safety, permanency, and well-being during the months that the worker is unable to meet with the parents? (Added January 15, 2015)

Item 15 explains that the purpose of the assessment is to determine whether, during the period under review, the frequency and quality of visits between caseworkers and the mothers and fathers of the child(ren) are sufficient to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of the child(ren) and promote achievement of case goals. Item 15 should be rated according to visits that actually occurred with the parents and should consider the quality of those visits in addressing safety, permanency, and well-being and achievement of case goals. The OSRI instructions for 15C and 15D provide information regarding things to consider when determining the sufficiency and quality of the visits. Justification for less-than-monthly visits is a case-specific issue and is difficult to answer, but reviewers should consider the documented efforts made by the worker to meet with the parents, the reasons why a parent was non-responsive, and whether less-than-monthly visits were sufficient to address the safety,
permanency, and well-being of the child(ren) and achievement of case goals given the specific case issues.

Well-Being Outcome 2

Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.

**Question:**

Item 16: In cases in which an early intervention assessment is arranged due to a substantiated maltreatment report in accordance with CAPTA requirements, should this item be rated? As part of our ongoing CQI, our state has been rating this item even if we indicate that an assessment was conducted and there were no needs. But in cases where the agency failed to make the referral and there are no known developmental delays, we are not faulting the agency and are rating the item as Not Applicable. (Added February 6, 2015)

In determining the applicability of Item 16, note that the instructions read, "Foster care cases are Not Applicable if the child is age two or younger and there are no apparent developmental delays."

Well-Being Outcome 3

Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

**Question:**

Item 17 (A2): What age is considered too young for a dental exam? (Added January 13, 2015)

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommends that children see a dentist as soon as their first tooth comes in or by their first birthday. The same guidelines are used in the Early & Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment Services program.

**Question:**

Item 17: What is the expected periodicity of dental exams in rating Item 17? (Added December 09, 2016)

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) recommends dental exams every 6 months that include oral screening, risk assessment, and preventive care
for most children. Some children need more frequent dental visits because of increased risk factors such as increased rate of tooth decay, unusual growth patterns of teeth, or history of poor oral hygiene. When determining whether the frequency of dental visits is sufficient with a pattern of less than every 6 months, factors that should be considered include whether the last dental visit was within 1 year and whether there was no evidence of tooth decay or disease. When determining whether the frequency of dental visits should be more than every 6 months, factors that should be considered include whether the child has a history of decay or disease based on the results of the last dental visit or a history of poor oral hygiene. (Added December 09, 2016)

**Question:**
**Item 18:** In some cases, there are many services being provided for the child's mental/behavioral health, including medication, but the child's behavior, placement stability, etc. is not improving. How do reviewers consider the progress of the child or lack thereof in rating this item? (Added November 22, 2016)

Reviewers are expected to evaluate the quality of assessments and services provided to ensure that adequate efforts were made to address needs. If a child/youth is not progressing, we would expect to see that the agency has made efforts to continually assess the adequacy of therapeutic interventions and make needed modifications. Reviewers should look at relevant reports, assessments, and conduct appropriate interviews when possible to determine the adequacy of services provided. The rating for Item 18 should reflect the adequacy of efforts made by the agency to assess needs accurately and ensure services appropriate for meeting those needs. There may be situations where a child’s behavior does not show improvement despite the best efforts to address concerns, and that should not negatively affect the rating. (Added November 22, 2016)

Amended with permission from Administration for Children and Families (2016)
Reviewer Brief

This document outlines why an item would be rated a strength. This tool also outlines what constitutes the agency's concerted efforts and provides examples of the special considerations in rating an item that should be applied by reviewers, such as what is "beyond the control" of the agency.

Safety Outcome 1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.

Timeliness of Initiating Investigations of Reports of Child Maltreatment (Item 1)

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether responses to all accepted child maltreatment reports received during the period under review were initiated, and face-to-face contact with the child(ren) made, within the time frames established by agency policies or state statutes.

Strength Rating Defined
Timely face-to-face contact with children occurred on all investigations and/or assessments during the period under review (within state policy guidelines) AND All investigations and/or assessments during the period under review were initiated timely (within state policy guidelines).

OR, if policy guidelines could not be met, it was due to circumstances beyond the control of the agency.

Concerted Efforts Required and/or Special Considerations in Rating
Circumstances beyond the control of the agency may include:
- Other agencies (such as law enforcement) causing delays
- Child/family not located despite documented efforts to locate them

If the state has a policy that allows for exceptions to the face-to-face contact time frames when the child is in the hospital (or other specific circumstances), reviewers should rate the item based on the state's policy requirements.

Safety Outcome 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.
Services to Family to Protect Children in the Home and Prevent Removal or Re-Entry into Foster Care (Item 2)

**Purpose of Assessment:** To determine whether, during the period under review, the agency made concerted efforts to provide services to the family to prevent children’s entry into foster care or re-entry after a reunification.

**Strength Rating Defined**
In cases where safety issues were present, safety-related services were offered to families to prevent removal of children during the period under review.

OR, if safety-related services were not offered, this was because the safety issues warranted immediate removal of the child.

**Concerted Efforts Required and/or Special Considerations in Rating**
This item is solely focused on rating the provision of appropriate safety-related services in response to safety concerns. If implementing a safety plan was, the only provision needed to ensure the children's safety rather than safety-related services, this item should be rated as Not Applicable (NA) and the safety plan should be assessed in Risk and Safety Assessment and Management (Item 3).

Concerted efforts include working to engage families in needed safety-related services, and facilitating a family’s access to those services.

**Risk and Safety Assessment and Management (Item 3)**

**Purpose of Assessment:** To determine whether, during the period under review, the agency made concerted efforts to assess and address the risk and safety concerns relating to the child(ren) in their own homes or while in foster care.

**Strength Rating Defined**
For cases with risk and/or safety concerns present during the period under review, the agency conducted initial and/or ongoing assessments of all children in the family during the period under review, unless the time frame and circumstances did not warrant ongoing assessments.

The assessments were of good quality, accurately identifying risk and safety concerns, and they occurred at key junctures of the case.

If safety concerns were identified during the period under review, the agency adequately addressed concerns and/or responded by developing and monitoring appropriate safety plans that ensured the children’s safety.

There were no repeat maltreatment and/or recurring safety concerns within 6 months of a report substantiated and/or accepted during the period under review.

Additionally, for foster care cases, there were no safety concerns related to visitation...
with parents or family members during the period under review, and there were no safety concerns related to the child's foster care placement during the period under review.

**Concerted Efforts Required and/or Special Considerations in Rating**
Consider worker visitation practices (Caseworker Visits with Child [Item 14] and Caseworker Visits with Parents [Item 15]) when assessing this item. Although a rating on this item does not need to be consistent with the ratings on worker visits, reviewers should consider whether the frequency and quality of worker visits with children and/or parents supported quality assessments of risk and safety.

Documentation of completed assessments in a case record alone is not enough to make a determination that this item could be rated as a strength. Reviewers must also determine that:

- The assessments used were of high quality
- The information from any or all evaluations and screenings are integrated into a broader, more comprehensive assessment by the agency that addresses the underlying needs of a family related to safety, permanency, and well-being for children
- The agency accurately identified all concerns during the period under review
- The agency responded appropriately to all concerns during the period under review
Permanency Outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.

**Stability of Foster Care Placement (Item 4)**

**Purpose of Assessment:** To determine whether the child in foster care is in a stable placement at the time of the onsite review and that any changes in placement that occurred during the period under review were in the best interests of the child and consistent with achieving the child's permanency goal(s).

**Strength Rating Defined**

A child only experienced one placement setting during the period under review and that placement is stable.

OR, the child's current placement is stable and every placement made for the child during the period under review was based on the needs of the child and/or to promote the accomplishment of case goals.

**Concerted Efforts Required and/or Special Considerations in Rating**

None.

**Permanency Goal for Child (Item 5)**

**Purpose of Assessment:** To determine whether appropriate permanency goals were established for the child in a timely manner.

**Strength Rating Defined**

The child's permanency goal(s) was/were documented in the case file (unless case was opened for fewer than 60 days).

Permanency goals during the period under review were established timely (assess timeliness by considering the length of time in foster care and the circumstances of the case).

Permanency goals during the period under review were appropriate for the child's needs and considering the circumstances of the case.

Requirements were met (as applicable) for termination of parental rights under the Adoption and Safe Families Act.

**Concerted Efforts Required and/or Special Considerations in Rating**

Although this item is not focused on achievement of permanency goals, it does require the reviewer to consider whether the agency was conducting appropriate permanency planning for the child since he or she entered foster care and to assess the impact of those efforts during the period under review. The item is rated based on goals in place during the period under review, but reviewers must also document and consider how long the child was in foster care before a goal was established in determining the timely establishment and appropriateness of the goals. For example, in the case of a child who had been in foster care with a goal of reunification for several years before the period.
under review and the goal is changed to adoption at some point during the period under review, the agency's continuation of the reunification goal during the period under review would be considered not appropriate and the establishment of the adoption goal would not be considered timely.

*Achieving Reunification, Guardianship, Adoption, or Other Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (Item 6)*

**Purpose of Assessment:** To determine whether concerted efforts were made, or are being made, during the period under review to achieve reunification, guardianship, adoption, or other planned permanent living arrangement.

**Strength Rating Defined**

During the period under review, the agency made concerted efforts to achieve timely permanency for the child.

OR, for children with the goal of "other planned permanent living arrangement," during the period under review, the agency made concerted efforts to place the child in a living arrangement that could be considered permanent until discharge from foster care.

**Concerted Efforts Required and/or Special Considerations in Rating**

Generally, "timely achievement" is considered to have occurred within 12 months for the goal of reunification, within 18 months for the goal of guardianship, or within 24 months for the goal of adoption. However, the focus of this item is on assessing the efforts that were made to achieve permanency rather than on meeting the specific time frames noted for each goal. For example, if a child was reunified at the 12th month but could have been reunified sooner had concerted efforts been made, the item could be rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Similarly, if a child did not achieve adoption within 24 months but the agency and court had been making concerted efforts to achieve the goal of adoption despite circumstances beyond their control that caused a delay, the item could be rated as a strength.

Concerted efforts toward achieving permanency may include:

- Actively and effectively implementing concurrent planning. Specifically, this means actively working on a second permanency goal simultaneously with the goal of reunification such that there is progress made to have that second goal for permanency achieved quickly should reunification not work out.
- Regularly assessing the safety of the home and family to which the child is to return. This includes utilizing appropriate safety plans and safety-related services to allow reunification to occur timely and safely rather than waiting until all risk and safety concerns are fully resolved before reunification occurs.
- Ensuring appropriate services are provided in a timely manner for parents seeking to achieve reunification.
- In cases of adoption, conducting mediation with the child's parents, as appropriate, to work toward obtaining voluntary terminations and avoiding lengthy court trials.
- Considering open adoptions, when in the child's best interest.
• Addressing any concerns a child, youth, or prospective adoptive family may have about adoption through specific discussions or counseling.
• Conducting searches for absent parents and relatives early on and periodically throughout the case.
• Establishing paternity early on in cases, as applicable.
• Initiating child-specific recruitment efforts to identify permanent placements.
• Ensuring that permanency hearings are held timely, and thoroughly address the issues in the case and the child's need for permanency.
• Ensuring that home studies or other legal processes required to finalize permanency happen in a timely manner.
• Finalizing the permanency of a placement for youth with a goal of Other Planned Permanent Living Arrangement through written.

Permanency Outcome 2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.

Placement with Siblings (Item 7)

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether, during the period under review, concerted efforts were made to ensure that siblings in foster care are placed together unless a separation was necessary to meet the needs of one of the siblings.

Strength Rating Defined
During the period under review, siblings in foster care are placed together unless separation was necessary to meet the needs of one of the siblings. If separation was necessary, the circumstances are reconsidered over time to determine whether separation needs to continue.

Concerted Efforts Required and/or Special Considerations in Rating
Concerted efforts to place siblings together may include
• Asking the children/family about potential placement resources who may accept a sibling group (e.g., relatives and/or fictive kin) and following up with searches and assessments
• Searching for resource homes that can accommodate the sibling group
• For cases where valid reasons for separation exist, providing any services or making arrangements to support the eventual placement of the siblings together

Visiting With Parents and Siblings in Foster Care (Item 8)

Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether, during the period under review, concerted efforts were made to ensure that visitation between a child in foster care and his or her mother, father, and siblings is of sufficient frequency and quality to promote continuity in the child's relationship with these close family members.

Strength Rating Defined
During the period under review, the child had visitation with parents/caregivers and
siblings (as applicable) that was of good quality and at a frequency that promoted
continuity in their relationships.

Frequency of visits is determined based on the child's needs and the circumstances of
the case and not on state policy or resource availability.

Decisions about supervision during visits, location, length, etc., are made in such a way
that supports a positive visitation experience for the child and ensures quality
interactions with parents/siblings.

**Concerted Efforts Required and/or Special Considerations in Rating**

Concerted efforts to ensure frequent, quality visitation may include

- Creating a visitation plan with the family that outlines details for frequency,
  location, duration, etc.
- Engaging relatives or kin in supporting visitation by providing transportation or
  assisting with supervision
- Providing transportation services for parents and children to attend visits
- Assessing the feasibility and appropriateness of visitation in prison facilities for
  incarcerated parents
- Discussing visitation with parents/child to assess whether frequency and quality
  are meeting their needs
- Facilitating the most frequent visitation possible while ensuring the child's safety

**Preserving Connections (Item 9)**

**Purpose of Assessment:** To determine whether, during the period under review,
concerted efforts were made to maintain the child's connections to his or her
neighborhood, community, faith, extended family, Tribe, school, and friends.

**Strength Rating Defined**

During the period under review, the child's important connections (neighborhood,
community, faith, school, extended family, Tribe, and friends) that they had before
entering care were identified and maintained.

For a child who is a member of, or eligible for membership in, a federally recognized
Indian Tribe

- If the child entered foster care during the period under review and/or had a
  termination-of-parental-rights hearing during the period under review, the Tribe
  was provided timely notification of its right to intervene in any state court
  proceedings reviewing an involuntary foster care placement or termination of
  parental rights.
- The child was placed in foster care in accordance with Indian Child Welfare Act
  placement preferences, or concerted efforts were made to do so.

**Concerted Efforts Required and/or Special Considerations in Rating**

Concerted efforts to preserve connections may include
• Having discussions with the child and family, or others who are familiar with the child, in order to identify the child’s most important connections
• Making efforts to maintain the child in the same school, if it is in the child’s best interests to do so
• Ensuring the child has visits or contact with extended family members and siblings who are not in foster care
• Placing the child in a foster home that is located in the same community they lived in previously
• Taking the child to any religious activities he or she used to attend or connecting the child to a faith community with which he or she identifies
• For a child of Native American heritage, ensuring participation in tribal activities he or she had been involved in
• Providing information to foster parents about the child’s cultural heritage and any cultural needs or preferences that should be maintained

Relative Placement (Item 10)
Purpose of Assessment: to determine whether, during the period under review, concerted efforts were made to place the child with relatives when appropriate.

Strength Rating Defined
Unless the child required a specialized placement that precluded placement with relatives or the identity of relatives is unknown despite concerted efforts to locate them

During the period under review, the child was placed with relatives and the placement was stable.

OR, concerted efforts were made to identify, locate, inform, and evaluate paternal and maternal relatives as potential placement resources for the child, as appropriate, during the period under review.

Concerted Efforts Required and/or Special Considerations in Rating
Concerted efforts to identify, locate, inform, and evaluate relatives as placement resources may include
• Asking the child and parents/caretakers about relatives
• Sending letters to relatives to inform them of the child’s status in foster care and need for placement
• Conducting home studies of relatives
• For cases where the whereabouts of the parents/caretakers are unknown and therefore relatives are unknown, evidence that the agency made a sufficient inquiry into the parents’ identity, location, and status. Agencies are expected to use viable sources of information such as parent locator services, case files, and central registries. In some situations, posting a legal advertisement in a newspaper might be the reasonable approach if lesser methods have failed to yield results, as would contacting the parents at the last known addresses or phone numbers.
For cases that have been opened for some time, if concerted efforts were made before the period under review, evidence that any relatives who were previously ruled out were reconsidered (if appropriate) during the period under review.

**Relationship of Child in Care with Parents (Item 11)**

**Purpose of Assessment:** To determine whether, during the period under review, concerted efforts were made to promote, support, and/or maintain positive relationships between the child in foster care and his or her mother and father or other primary caregiver(s) from whom the child had been removed through activities other than just arranging for visitation.

**Strength Rating Defined**
Concerted efforts were made during the period under review to promote, support, and otherwise maintain a positive and nurturing relationship between the child in foster care and the parents/caretakers from whom he or she was removed by encouraging and facilitating activities and interactions that go beyond just arranging for visitation.

**Concerted Efforts Required and/or Special Considerations in Rating**
Concerted efforts may include:

- Encouraging a parent's participation in school-related activities, doctor's appointments for the child, or engagement in after-school activities
- Providing or arranging transportation so that parents can participate in activities with the child
- Providing opportunities for therapeutic situations to strengthen the relationship
- Encouraging foster parents to serve as mentors/role models for parents
- Encouraging/facilitating communication with parents who do not live near the child and/or are unable to have frequent face-to-face visitation
Well-Being Outcome 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs.

*Needs and Services of Child, Parents, and Foster Parents (Item 12)*

**Purpose of Assessment:** To determine whether, during the period under review, the agency (1) made concerted efforts to assess the needs of children, parents, and foster parents (both initially, if the child entered foster care or the case was opened during the period under review, and on an ongoing basis) to identify the services necessary to achieve case goals and adequately address the issues relevant to the agency’s involvement with the family and (2) provided the appropriate services.

**Strength Rating Defined**

Concerted efforts were made during the period under review to accurately and comprehensively assess the needs of the children, parents, and foster parents initially (for cases that opened during the period under review) and periodically on an ongoing basis (as needed) to update assessment information relevant to ongoing case planning.

Assessment of needs for the children does not include education, physical health, and mental/behavioral health (including substance abuse).

Assessment of needs for parents refers to a determination of what the parents need to provide appropriate care and supervision and to ensure the safety and well-being of their children.

Assessment of needs for foster parents refers to a determination of what the foster parents need to provide appropriate care and supervision to the child in their home.

Concerted efforts were made during the period under review to provide appropriate services to the children, parents, and foster parents that were matched to needs identified in assessments. Such services are

- Culturally appropriate and has providers who speak the same language as the family.
- Assessable and provide services at flexible hours to meet a families’ needs, addresses barriers such as transportation, and are free of long wait lists.
- Continually monitored and adjusted based on a family’s changing needs.

**Concerted Efforts Required and/or Special Considerations in Rating**

Concerted efforts to locate parents may include

- Contacting the parents at the last known addresses or phone numbers
- Using the federal parent locator service and/or reviewing case files/central registries
- Asking about relatives and making efforts to contact any identified relatives
- Asking the children’s current/previous schools for parent information
- Posting a legal advertisement in a newspaper, (after all other search methods have been exhausted)
Concerted efforts to assess needs may include

- Conducting formal assessments through a contracted provider or another agency
- Conducting informal but thorough assessments using interviews with the child, family, and service providers
- Spending adequate time engaging with the child, parents, and foster parents to gain an in-depth understanding of their needs
- Using screening and assessment tools to assess specific issues such as domestic violence, substance abuse, cognitive abilities, or parenting skills

Concerted efforts to provide appropriate services may include

- Ensuring accessibility of needed services by providing for transportation
- Monitoring service participation to ensure that the services are meeting needs
- Ensuring availability of services by removing or addressing any barriers to participation, such as waitlists or scheduling conflicts
- Ensuring that services are matched to the parents needs and are culturally appropriate

Reviewers should not rate a parent for this item if, during the entire period under review, the case file documented that it was not in the child’s best interests to involve the parent in case planning. In such a situation, the item questions are not applicable. This would include cases in which there are ongoing safety threats that could emotionally or physically re-traumatize the child and that cannot be mitigated by the agency or other interventions. Typically, both the agency and court are involved in making this determination.

**Strengthening How Reviewers Determine Effectiveness of Agencies’ Assessment of Underlying Needs and Provision of Services for Item 12**

The Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs) Onsite Review Instrument and Instructions (OSRI) is the official instrument used in rating cases for CFSR determinations of substantial conformity. This brief is intended to strengthen how CFSR Reviewers determine, during case reviews, whether or not the agency (1) made concerted efforts to assess the needs of children, parents, and foster parents to identify the services necessary to achieve case goals and adequately address the issues relevant to the agency’s involvement with the family, and (2) provided the appropriate services. It builds upon instructions provided in *Reviewer Brief—Understanding the Federal Expectations for Rating Cases*, and draws on information in the field of child welfare/social work regarding needs-based assessments and service plans.

**Assessment of Needs**

Comprehensive assessment is the foundation for developing service plans that effectively address the needs of children and parents. In a paper on improving
outcomes, Paul Vincent emphasizes the importance of focusing on underlying needs, as opposed to symptoms:

Too often, however, this disproportionate focus on symptoms overlooks the child and family history and experience that underlies and produces these challenging behaviors. As a consequence, the underlying causes of neglect and abuse may not be adequately addressed and many families are again subjects of additional reports of abuse and neglect. Where children are concerned, inattention to needs can lead to instability, increasingly more restrictive placement settings, and the complete absence of permanency.

With regard to assessment, Item 12 of the OSRI first requires Reviewers to determine if the agency completed a formal or informal initial and/or ongoing comprehensive assessment that accurately assessed needs (of the child(ren), parent(s), and foster/pre-adoptive parent(s), if applicable).

While many states may require the use of instruments or tools to guide assessment, Reviewers should not focus on the completion of an instrument but rather on the quality of the assessment. In addition, children and/or parents involved in a case may have had other screenings or assessments completed to address specific issues, such as domestic violence, trauma, parenting capacity, or mental health evaluation. Reviewers should not consider any one of these in isolation as an assessment of needs, but should examine how information from any or all of these evaluations and screenings are integrated into a broader, more comprehensive assessment by the agency that addresses the underlying needs of a family related to safety, permanency, and well-being for children.

In determining if the agency conducted a comprehensive assessment that accurately assesses needs, Reviewers should consider:

- Was an assessment completed initially and periodically on an ongoing basis (as needed) to update assessment information relevant to ongoing case planning?
- What did the assessment identify as underlying needs of the child(ren), parent(s), and foster/pre-adoptive(s) parents, if applicable?
- Given the circumstances of the child and/or family situation, and the history of the case, are there underlying needs that were not identified?
- What was the quality of the assessment and did it identify all underlying needs? Did the assessment go beyond asking questions and examine the

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needs based on the family/child circumstances?

**Note:** In completing the OSRI, it is important to understand that Item 12 is not addressing assessment of needs related to safety and/or children's education, physical health, and mental/behavioral health—including substance abuse. These are addressed in safety and other well-being items.

**Questions to consider for the child(ren):**

- Did the assessment consider needs such as social competencies, attachment and caregiver relationships, social relationships and connections, social skills, and self-esteem? **Examples:** A young child has been severely neglected and has never learned how to interact with other children. A teenager has been sexually abused by several caretakers and wants to form a connection with an adult with whom she feels safe and can trust.
- Did the assessment consider the child’s past abuse/neglect history, separation/grief/loss concerns, and trauma?
- If the child is living or placed with an alternative caregiver outside of his or her home but is not considered to be in foster care, has the agency’s assessment considered the child’s need for permanency and stability?
- If the youth is in foster care and is an adolescent, Reviewers should determine whether the youth’s needs for independent living (IL) skills are being assessed on an ongoing basis as part of the independent living plan. In making this determination, consider the following: Did the agency assess for independent living skills? Is there an independent living plan in the file? (This is required for all youth age 16 and older). **Example:** An older teen is living in residential care and has learned basic IL life skills but expresses a desire to go to community college, so does the assessment also include what he needs to achieve this goal?

**Questions to consider for the parent(s):**

- What does the parent need to provide care and supervision and to ensure the well-being of his or her child? **Example:** The parent has been diagnosed with depression, which affects his ability to get out of bed and get the children off to school on a regular basis.
- What would the parent need to support his or her relationship with the child, or build a relationship if one was not established before the child’s entry into foster care?
- What underlying needs, if they continue to be unmet, will affect the individual’s capacity to parent and nurture his or her child?
• What is the parent’s current capacity to engage in services and what supports may be needed to support engagement?

• If children are in care and going to be reunified, what will the parents need to provide care for all of their children after reunification?

Questions to consider for the foster and/or pre-adoptive parent(s):

• What does the foster and/or pre-adoptive parent need to parent and care for the child? Example: The foster parents usually take older children and they agreed to take a younger child who has a high level of activity and temper tantrums. Does the assessment identify this as a potential challenge for them?

• How do the needs of the child affect the foster and/or pre-adoptive parent’s ability to provide care and supervision and to ensure the well-being of the child?

Assessment case example:

Joseph is 9 years old and lives with his 4-year-old sister, Amanda, in the home of their maternal great-grandmother and elderly aunt. The relatives agreed to take the children last year when their mother went to prison for theft; she is scheduled to be released in a few months. The agency has been involved with the family off and on since Joseph was an infant; currently this is an in-home case.

The father of the children was recently released from prison for drug use and has expressed interest in reconnecting with the children and possibly sharing custody of them once he gets a job and secures housing. The father completed a psychological examination as well as a parenting capacity assessment. Both indicated he experienced abuse as a child and turned to drugs and alcohol as an escape, and also noted his need to understand how to show affection and warmth toward his children. He told Reviewers in an interview that he wanted to stop abusing substances and “have good relationships” with his children, his ex-wife, and their relatives. He discussed his brief participation in a batterer’s group while in prison and admitted that he had hit his ex-wife in the past in front of the children.

The children live with relatives in a rural community, and their transportation is not reliable. Joseph attends school by bus but is isolated and has few friends or after-school activities. He told Reviewers in an interview that he missed his mother but was also angry with her for going to prison. He said he wanted to do activities with his dad, such as play baseball. Joseph told Reviewers that he
wanted his parents to get along and his dad not to hit his mom anymore. He said that while he wasn’t afraid of his father, he did worry about his mom when his dad would get angry at her. Amanda is home all day with her relatives and they told Reviewers they were “worn out” with constantly supervising her and keeping her busy with activities. They said that Joseph was “easy” to care for when he was not having angry outbursts, but they said they may ask the agency to place Amanda in a foster home to give them a break.

During a visit to the home to conduct interviews, Reviewers noted that Joseph was very attentive to his sister. Amanda told Reviewers that she, too, missed her mother and wished she would come home. Reviewers also noted that Amanda was engaged in constant motion and activity, and that she asked her aunt several times to read to her and teach her to do homework, like Joseph. The mother told Reviewers in a phone interview that she wants to make a better life for herself and her children by getting a job, finishing her college degree, and rebuilding her children’s trust. She stated that she would like to have a better relationship with her ex-husband if he could seek treatment for his anger and violence toward her. She stated that he had never physically hurt the children but that he needs to understand how the violence toward her scared them and made them feel unsafe.

What are examples of the needs of each family member?

Joseph:

- To feel secure in his positive connection and relationship with his mother.
- To receive assistance with addressing his anger toward his mother.
- To build peer relationships and have social activities outside of the home.
- To build a positive relationship with his father and to be safe during visits.
- To remain with his sister and in a stable arrangement with his relative caregivers.

Amanda:

- To feel secure in her positive connection and relationship with her mother.
- To build a positive relationship with her father and to be safe during visits.
- To remain with her brother and in a stable arrangement with her relative caregivers.
- To have the opportunity to learn with peers and an outlet for social needs through engagement in early childhood activities.

Father:

- To build relationships with his children and improve his parenting capacities.
- To address concrete needs (housing, employment) so that his children can be more integrated in his daily life.
- To address his past abuse and neglect as a child and understand its impact on
himself and his interpersonal relationships.

- To address his substance abuse challenges.
- To address his past domestic violence toward his ex-wife and understand its impact on her and the children.
- To repair relationships with his ex-wife and her family that help them co-parent positively.

Mother:

- To feel connected through communication and relationships with her children.
- To address financial and other issues that led to her imprisonment.
- To develop plans for integration back into the community in order to reunify with her children.
- To feel safe in building a relationship with her ex-husband that allows for co-parenting.

Relative caregivers:

- To have time for self-care and a break from constant child care.
- To have the children engaged in activities outside of the home.
- To build a relationship with the father of the children that helps them co-parent positively.
- To develop strategies for redirecting Amanda’s energies and her constant need for their attention.

**Provision of Services**

Item 12 of the OSRI also requires Reviewers to determine how the agency ensures provision of services to meet the identified needs of children, parents, and foster/pre-adoptive parents. For services to be effective, they should be:

- Tailored to meet the specific needs of families;
- Culturally appropriate, with providers who can speak the language of the family;
- Accessible to the family (considering wait lists, transportation, and hours available);
- Provided in a setting that is the most effective and responsive to needs; and
- Monitored to ensure that they are meeting family needs.

Providing services to families goes beyond just making referrals. It includes engaging family members in services and monitoring these services to ensure that treatment goals are being achieved and progress is made; and, if necessary, adjusting the provided services relative to goals and progress.

**Questions to consider:**
• In what ways, either through contracted services or direct work from the caseworker, have the identified needs of the child(ren), parent(s), and foster/adoptive parent(s) been met?
• Are there identified or perceived barriers to providing a service?
• In what ways has the agency monitored the services to ensure that they are meeting the needs of the case participants? How has the agency discussed this with them?
• What is the perspective of the parents, children, and foster/adoptive parents regarding the effectiveness of services?
• What identified needs are not being met, and why?
• How has the agency facilitated the family members’ engagement in services?
• Are the services tailored to the unique needs of the family?

Service provision case example:

Jorge is a 17-year-old youth who has been in foster care for 3 years. He has moved several times, bouncing between relative care, non-relative foster homes, and congregate care. He has lived in the same group home for the past year. Jorge has one adult sibling who is in prison and with whom he desires no contact. Both of his parents are deceased. The agency’s comprehensive assessment, including an assessment of IL skills, identified several of Jorge’s needs, including:

• Pursuing his desire to be a successful artist and musician;
• Addressing his anger and grief about the loss of his parents and his inability to live with his aunt;
• Improved social relationship skills with peers;
• A connection to an adult male; and
• Strengthening skills for independence

When Reviewers met with Jorge, he enthusiastically showed them some of his artwork and said he was also writing his own songs and taking guitar lessons. His caseworker and his music teacher at school helped secure funds for the lessons, and also found a donor in the community who purchased the guitar for him. Reviewers also learned that the Independent Living Outreach Worker was assisting Jorge with registering for a tutoring class to improve his college aptitude test scores and was taking him to visit colleges in the fall. Jorge was also involved in activities at the YMCA in his neighborhood, including an after-school basketball league. Both he and his caseworker, as well as group home staff, noted that his social skills with peers had greatly improved since he got involved with basketball and other YMCA activities. Jorge visits with his aunt regularly and
often stays overnight on weekends.

He expressed frustration and sadness because he could not go back to live with her and believed that she was afraid he would “upset her life.” When Reviewers interviewed his aunt, however, she was clear that it was not viable for Jorge to live with her permanently. Jorge also expressed wanting to be with a “big family” and have a nurturing connection with an adult male figure. He missed his parents and was still sad and angry about the accident that killed them. His caseworkers told Reviewers that he was resistant to attending therapy, but Jorge stated that they sent him to a female therapist and, in addition to wanting a male clinician, the office was far away and it required him to take two buses to get there. The case record showed that Jorge completed all of his IL skills classes at the group home, but when asked by Reviewers how confident he felt, he said the group home didn’t require them to shop or cook so he had never really practiced any skills. His aunt does his laundry on the weekends, and he has not applied for summer jobs yet.

How has the agency met Jorge’s needs, and what are the gaps?

- Reviewers found that the agency did a good job of engaging Jorge in his goal of pursuing his art and music, including helping to secure a guitar and lessons. The IL Outreach Worker was assisting him with improving his college aptitude test scores and visiting colleges so he could pursue his dream of studying art and music.
- Jorge’s worker and the group home got him involved with activities at the YMCA and he was able to make friends and improve his social skills with peers.
- While Jorge completed IL skills classes, he was not challenged to practice those skills by being required to shop and prepare meals at the group home. In addition, he was able to avoid laundry responsibilities by having his aunt do his laundry on weekends.
- Jorge’s grief and loss issues after his parents’ death, separation from his aunt, and his desire to belong to a family have not been addressed. The caseworker’s perception is that Jorge is resistant to therapy, but Jorge explained that he would participate in therapy if he had a male clinician that had an office closer to his home.
- The agency has not worked on Jorge’s need for an adult male role model and has not explored the possibility of engaging Jorge in a mentor program.

Summary for Item 12

Comprehensive and accurate assessment of underlying needs of families and caregivers, and engaging them in tailored services to address those needs, is essential to achieving positive and lasting outcomes for children and parents. It is important for Reviewers to consider the key questions provided in this brief when examining the practice strengths and areas of concern addressed through Item
12 of the OSRI, and to expect agencies to critically assess the needs of families based on their unique histories and circumstances.

*Child and Family Involvement in Case Planning (Item 13)*

**Purpose of Assessment:** To determine whether, during the period under review, concerted efforts were made (or are being made) to involve parents and children (if developmentally appropriate) in the case planning process on an ongoing basis.

**Strength Rating Defined**
During the period under review, concerted efforts were made to actively involve the children (if developmentally appropriate) and parents/caretakers in case planning activities.

**Concerted Efforts Required and/or Special Considerations in Rating**
Concerted efforts to engage families in case planning may include
- Having age-appropriate discussions with children and explaining case plans in language they understand
- Ensuring children understand permanency goals and changes made to goals
- Discussing family strengths and needs with children and parents
- Evaluating other case plan goals and progress in services with both children and parents
- Ensuring that case planning meetings are arranged based on the family's availability and is utilized to engage the family in case planning discussions.

*Caseworker Visits With Child (Item 14)*

**Purpose of Assessment:** To determine whether the frequency and quality of visits between caseworkers and the child(ren) in the case are sufficient to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of the child and promote achievement of case goals.

**Strength Rating Defined**
During the period under review, the caseworker visited the children (for in-home cases, all children must be visited) frequently enough to adequately assess their safety, promote timely achievement of case goals, and support their well-being. The visits were of good quality with discussions focusing on the children's needs, services, and case plan goals. The children were visited alone, and the length and location of visits was conducive to open, honest, and thorough conversations.

**Concerted Efforts Required and/or Special Considerations in Rating**
Typically, visit frequency must be at least monthly for a Strength rating, unless there is substantial justification for less frequent visits.
**Caseworker Visits With Parents (Item 15)**

**Purpose of Assessment:** To determine whether during the period under review the frequency and quality of visits between caseworkers and the mothers and fathers of the child(ren) are sufficient to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of the child(ren) and promote achievement of case goals.

**Strength Rating Defined**
During the period under review, the caseworker visited the parents frequently enough to monitor their progress in services, promote timely achievement of case goals, and effectively address their children's safety, permanency, and well-being needs. The visits were of good quality with discussions focusing on the parents and children's needs, services, and case plan goals. The length and location of visits were conducive to open, honest, and thorough conversations.

**Concerted Efforts Required and/or Special Considerations in Rating**
Typically, visit frequency must be at least monthly for a Strength rating, unless there is substantial justification for less frequent visits, which could vary depending on the circumstances of the case. For example, for parents who are incarcerated, efforts should be made to arrange face-to-face contact; however, this may not be permitted or viable in a facility that is out of state. A similar situation would be parents who live out of state. In lieu of face-to-face visits, the agency's efforts to maintain monthly communication with the parent via phone calls and/or letters should be considered.

If the case goal is not to place the child with that parent permanently, monthly face-to-face contact is not always required for a Strength rating, and frequency should be determined based on the circumstances of the case and needs of the children.

**Well-Being Outcome 2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.**

**Educational Needs of the Child (Item 16)**

**Purpose of Assessment:** To assess whether, during the period under review, the agency made concerted efforts to assess children's educational needs at the initial contact with the child (if the case was opened during the period under review) or on an ongoing basis (if the case was opened before the period under review), and whether identified needs were appropriately addressed in case planning and case management activities.

**Strength Rating Defined**
Concerted efforts were made during the period under review to assess the children's educational needs initially (if the case was opened during the period under review) or on an ongoing basis and to provide appropriate services to address needs.
Concerted Efforts Required and/or Special Considerations in Rating
In-home cases are only applicable for this item if (1) educational issues are relevant to the reason for the agency's involvement with the family and/or (2) it is reasonable to expect that the agency would address educational issues given the circumstances of the case.

The focus of this item is on agency efforts, even if those efforts were not fully successful due to factors beyond the agency's control.

Concerted efforts to assess needs may include
- Having an educational assessment conducted by the school
- Conducting an informal assessment based on interviews with the child, parents/caretakers, and/or foster parents

Concerted efforts to provide services may include
- Advocating for services on behalf of the child (by the caseworker and/or foster parents)

Well-Being Outcome 3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

Physical Health of the Child (Item 17)
Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether, during the period under review, the agency addressed the physical health needs of the children, including dental health needs.

Strength Rating Defined
During the period under review, the children's physical health and dental needs were accurately assessed initially (if the case was opened during the period under review) and on an ongoing basis, and any needed services were provided.

In addition, for foster care cases, if the child was prescribed medication for physical health issues, the agency provided appropriate oversight for appropriate use and monitoring of medications.

Concerted Efforts Required and/or Special Considerations in Rating
In-home cases are only applicable for this item if (1) physical health issues were relevant to the reason for the agency's involvement with the family, and/or (2) it is reasonable to expect that the agency would address physical health issues given the circumstances of the case.

Mental/Behavioral Health of the Child (Item 18)
Purpose of Assessment: To determine whether, during the period under review, the agency addressed the mental/behavioral health needs of the children.
Strength Rating Defined
During the period under review, the children's mental and/or behavioral health needs were accurately assessed initially (if the case was opened during the period under review) and on an ongoing basis, and any needed services were provided.

In addition, for foster care cases, if the child was prescribed medication for mental health issues, the agency provided appropriate oversight for appropriate use and monitoring of medications.

Concerted Efforts Required and/or Special Considerations in Rating
In-home cases are only applicable for this item if (1) mental/behavioral health issues were relevant to the reason for the agency's involvement with the family, and/or (2) it is reasonable to expect that the agency would address mental/behavioral health issues given the circumstances of the case.

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