

Screening Questions for Routine Intake Assessment

You should use screening questions to routinely ask about abuse and neglect.

Most mandated reporters, regardless of where they work, perform some kind of routine intake assessment—for example, as a child enters a new school, as part of a medical examination, or as part of case management services.

Screening questions about child abuse and neglect can be added to your assessment form.

You can learn to ask these questions in a gentle, non-threatening manner.

Screening questions should be asked in a way that does not create lasting anxiety or fear.

If possible, alternate between questions that could uncover abuse, and questions about more conventional subjects, keeping the interview positive and informational.

If children describe situations that could be related to abuse or neglect, be sure to avoid placing blame, accusing, or making the child feel shame for what has occurred.

Begin your assessment with open-ended questions.

If your questions are answered in a way that makes you wonder, you may need to follow with closed-ended questions that must be answered with simple statements of fact.

The following questions are examples and should be tailored to your setting.

WHAT Screening Questions Should I Ask Children and Adolescents?

Questions about physical abuse:

- Have you ever been hurt by someone taking care of you?
- How did that happen?
- Have you ever been taken to the hospital/emergency room because you were hurt?
- How did that happen?

Questions about sexual abuse:

- Is anyone making you do anything that you feel uncomfortable about?
- What have you learned about “good touch/bad touch?” How did you learn that?
- What would you do if someone were trying to touch your private areas?
- What if it was someone that you know?

Questions about neglect:

- What kind of things make you scared when you are at home?
- What does the word "discipline" mean to you?
- How was your mother disciplined when she was growing up? How about your dad?
- What is discipline like for you? Your brothers or sisters?
- How do you think kids should be disciplined if they do something bad?
- Who is at your house when you come home from school (when you get up in the morning, go to sleep at night)?
- Who helps you get ready for school?
- What do you think you are worth as a person?
- Are there times when you feel bad about yourself? How does that happen?

If sexual abuse is suspected, leave detailed questions for professional interviewers.

It is best to have a general conversation where the child discloses spontaneously, and note the child's voice changes, eye contact, breathing patterns and change of subject when describing situations or people.

Limit your questions to only what is necessary for you to feel there is reasonable suspicion to make a report, so that the child isn't put through multiple extensive interviews.

1. To assess neglect, ask child to describe a typical day – what they eat, who makes the food, where do they play, who comes to or leaves the house and when, do they have electricity, etc.
2. Does any place on your body hurt?
3. What happens when you do something your parents don't like?
4. What happens at your house (or daycare) when people get angry?
5. Do people ever hit? Who do they hit? What do they hit with? How often does it happen? Is it scary?
6. Are you afraid of anyone?
7. What happens when you take a bath?
8. Where do you sleep? What happens when you go to sleep?
9. Has anyone touched you in a way you didn't like?