## General Guidelines for Conducting a Phone Interview

Note: “Surveyor” refers to the staff member, intern, or volunteer conducting the survey for the center. “Respondent” refers to the caregiver for OMS Caregiver Surveys or the MDT Member for the Multidisciplinary Team Survey.

***Honor Confidentiality***

Confidentiality is important for the respondent. You want them to feel comfortable answering honestly. It would be ideal if the surveyor and respondent have not had prior contact with each other, to ensure confidentiality and eliminate bias. We realize, however, that this may not be feasible. Using interns, volunteers, or a staff person that is not assigned to the case can help increase confidentiality. If this is not possible and the staff member doing the interview is assigned to the case, staff should emphasize to the caregiver that their responses will not impact the case. The staff member should not allow answers on the survey to impact their own work on the case.

***Emphasize Duration***

Stress that the interview is short and will only take a few minutes of their time. Alternate days/times and methods (i.e. emailing them the survey) can also be offered.

***Stress Survey Importance***

Use strong language to stress the importance of the survey and how it will help them, the center, and the community.

***Stick to the Script***

It is important that the surveyor sticks to a set script and asks the core questions in the exact way they are worded. This will prevent the surveyor from biasing questions in any way. There are select questions (such as optional comment boxes below multiple-choice items) that do not need to be read out loud (these are just to record any spontaneous comments a caregiver might make while answering the core multiple-choice item). You should only reword or explain an item if, after reading the existing item, the caregiver says they do not understand. Make a note of this in the optional comment box and, if it seems appropriate, provide this feedback about the wording of the survey item to your supervisor and/or the OMS Coordinator.

***Understand question – comprehension***

There is a link between how the surveyor understands a question and how the respondent will understand that same question. Therefore a surveyor’s understanding of a question is important. If you do not understand a question, ask your supervisor and/or the OMS Coordinator.

***Remain Neutral***

It is important to remain neutral when interviewing. You must be careful not to give the impression that there are right and wrong answers. When asked to clarify a question, do not reformulate it in a leading way.

***Read Questions Slowly***

Read questions slowly so that respondent can understand them. The surveyor will also appear more confident, legitimate, and in control. This will in turn help the respondent take the survey seriously.

***Provide Feedback***

Providing proper feedback on a phone interview is extremely important. This will help keep the respondent interested. It is important that proper feedback is used (i.e. matches the caregiver’s tone). The feedback should generally keep to neutral language such as: ‘that is helpful’ or ‘that’s useful.’ Note any comments they might make about an item, either positive or negative, and assure them you are listening by saying “I will make a note of that”; do not gloss over a problem by simply saying “OK” and moving on to the next question. If the caregiver expresses a problem, it is a good idea to ask if they would like someone to contact them or at least indicate that you will pass the feedback on to the appropriate personnel.

***Control Conversation***

You want to keep the interview moving and keep the respondent focused. Some people can get chatty on the phone and start telling stories instead of actually answering the question. If a respondent starts talking about how nice everyone was when she came in and so forth, the surveyor can make a note of this in any applicable comment boxes, but must be able to politely get back on track. Again, stick to neutral feedback and keep the interview moving. Saying something like “That is really helpful. The next question is…” is a polite, but firm way for moving forward.

*Controlling the non-response and refusal rates*

It is important to control the non-response and refusal rates to get a more representative sample. There are a number of reasons why respondents might refuse to participate in the survey. A soft refusal (i.e. “I don’t really have time right now”) will constitute reasons which in the surveyor’s perspective might be temporary. In such cases it is worthwhile to try again later. On the other hand, if a potential respondent is harsh and makes it very clear that he/she absolutely does not want to be a part of the study then they should be taken off the list. An example of a hard refusal will be someone asking you not to call them again. Use your judgment to determine the nature of the refusal.

**Call Record**

See the sample call record and instructions (separate document). You are welcome to edit the call log to fit the needs of your center. The staff/intern/volunteer can either fill out the call log electronically or print a copy. Some centers may find that an Excel spreadsheet is preferable to a Word Doc for electronic record keeping. In general, we recommend attempting to contact the caregiver a minimum of 3 times, but this can be through a combination of phone and email attempts, if you are using multiple methods to distribute surveys at your center. If you are using a hybrid attempt combining email and phone calls, be sure to check whether the caregiver has already completed the survey by email before attempting to do the survey over the phone.

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## Phone Interview Script (English & Spanish)

The following script should be used as a guide for completing surveys with caregivers over the phone. However, your center may wish to edit this script to meet the needs of your center and the caregivers in your community. Edits of this type are fine, as long as you read the actual survey items exactly how they are written (with the exception of optional comment boxes mentioned earlier under General Guidelines – Stick to the Script). You should also read the introductory text at the beginning of each survey to ensure the caregiver understands the voluntary nature of every survey item and the confidentiality of their answers.

**We strongly recommend that the staff/intern/volunteer fill in the caregiver’s responses in the online version of the survey**, rather than writing down the answers on a paper copy (which will then need to be entered online later, adding to the time it takes to complete the survey process). Typing is also usually faster that writing, so you should be better able to capture open-ended responses. When using the online version of the survey, be sure to fill in the first item on each survey that says “How did you reach this survey?” If you are on the phone with the caregiver, use the “(Center Staff Only) – Over the Phone” option. If you choose to write down the caregiver’s answers on paper during the interview and then enter them online later, you must select the “(Center Staff only) – Paper & Pencil” option and fill in the month and year the survey was actually completed (this is especially important if there is a significant delay between when you completed the survey on the phone and when you enter the responses online.

The following is a sample script. However, it is important to keep your tone natural and use language that will be welcoming for the caregiver. Feel free to reword these opening statements/questions to better fit your needs, as long as the actual survey items are read exactly as they are written.

**If someone answers the phone:**

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. I’m calling from \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Can I speak to\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_?

*If you have reached the caregiver, proceed with the script below. If the person on the phone needs to go get the caregiver, wait and then proceed with the caregiver. If the caregiver is not present, ask when would be a better time to reach them (use your best judgment or the policies at your center if you decide to leave a message with someone – in many cases, it is preferable to call back another time rather than leave a message, given the nature of a CAC’s work).*

(As I said) My name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and I’m calling from \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. We are interviewing caregivers who have received services through our center. This is a very important survey. We want to make sure we are doing the best we can with the services and programs available to families at our center. The survey is anonymous, and will only take 10 - 15 minutes of your time. Would you be willing to spend a few minutes of your time to participate?

If **No:** I understand that you might not want to do the survey over the phone. Would you prefer if I email the survey to you so that you can take it whenever is most convenient for you?

*If they still say* ***No****, thank them for their time and remind them of the number for the center in case they change their mind or have any questions.*

If **Yes**, then proceed.

Before we start, I would like to explain how the survey will go and answer any questions you might have. We are interviewing clients who have received services through our center. I would like to ask you some questions about you and your child’s experience with the\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

*Introductory text from the survey (altered slightly for the phone interview):*

**The information you provide in this survey will help us to improve our services and better assist our clients. The information you provide is confidential. Your answers will not be traced back to you, nor can this information be used in any legal proceedings. Your participation in the survey is entirely voluntary – if you do not wish to answer a particular question, let me know and we can skip that question.**

We will not be discussing your child’s case in particular, just your experience at the center and any services, programs, or other resources that you and your child were offered. Please only consider your experience with the center itself, not with other agencies you might have had contact with as part of your child’s case (for example, law enforcement or child services).

[*If applicable (interns/volunteers/staff not assigned to the case):* I am not assigned to your child’s case, so I will not be able to answer questions you may have about that.]

However, if you would like someone to follow up with your regarding your answers to this survey or any other questions about the center, please let me know and I will make a note for the appropriate person to call you back.

Please remember that there are no correct answers. We value your opinion, and it will help us improve our service.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

**Possible questions and responses:**

**How long will this take?**

Approximately 10-15 minutes.

**Haven’t I already filled out a survey?**

You may have filled out an Initial Survey. Now that it has been several weeks since your first visit and you have had a chance to use some of the services or programs we offered to you and your child, we would like to follow up on your experience.

**Why do you need this information?**

This information will help us to more effectively serve you and your child along with other families in the future.

**Will this information affect my child’s case?**

No. This information will be used to help us serve our clients better. Your answers will not be used in any legal proceedings nor will your answers in any way affect the services you receive from us now or in the future.

**Possible reasons for refusal and suggested responses:**

**I’m not interested.**

The results of this survey will have a direct impact on the services provided by our center. Your opinions and insights are very important to us. It will only take about 10 minutes of your time.

**I don’t have time for this.**

The survey only takes about 10 minutes and I can assure you that your responses are valuable to us and will impact the services provided by our center. I can also call back at a time that is more convenient for you or I can send you the survey by email. *[If they select this option, collect the email address and give them an approximate timeframe for when to expect the email – preferably within 24 hours.]*

**I don’t like answering questions over the phone.**

I understand your concern but we’re actually just looking for general opinions. Why don’t I try reading you a few questions and we’ll see how it goes? Of course, if there are any questions you don’t want to answer, just let me know and we can skip those.

I can also send a link to the survey to your email address. Would you prefer to do the survey online? *[If so, collect the email address and give them an approximate timeframe for when to expect the email – preferably within 24 hours.]*

**I only do surveys through the mail, just send it to me.**

The reason we do surveys over the phone is because it’s much faster and more accurate, and because I will be available to answer any questions you many have about the survey itself. It only takes about 10 minutes.

I can also send a link to the survey to your email address. Would you prefer to do the survey online? *[If so, collect the email address and give them an approximate timeframe for when to expect the email – preferably within 24 hours.]*

*[If the caregiver still requests the survey to be mailed, mail it to them along with a self-addressed, stamped envelope.]*

**I’m satisfied with things the way they are / I don’t have any complaints.**

We’re very interested in speaking to people who are satisfied as well as dissatisfied, so that we can identify what types of programs and services should be continued or expanded as well as those that should be discontinued or changed.

**I wouldn’t know anything about that / I don’t use those services.**

Most of the questions are just about your general experience, not specific services. If you did not receive a particular service, we can skip that question. It’s still very important that we get your opinion, because we are interested in knowing what people should be informed of as well as what they already know. “Don’t know” is a valid answer to any of the questions.

**Just put me down as being happy with everything.**

I’m sorry, but I need to ask the questions individually. We have questions on many different aspects of our services, some of which are Yes or No questions about your particular experience that I don’t have the answers to. It is important that we record all your opinions accurately.