Worksheet 1-D, Family Conversation Guide

FAMILY CONVERSATION GUIDE

We hope you will use this document as a guide to a natural and relaxed conversation with families. If you follow our guide, trying to move away from interviewing families and toward conversing with them instead, you will want to use as much spontaneity as possible—just as you do with your friends or family when you have conversations with them.

Conversations are more enlightening when questions or issues are open-ended. That means that you will not follow a strict order of questions; rather, you will be sensitive to the family’s lead, following the issues that they are most interested in addressing. Just as you read in chapter 9, families do not organize their conversations to be consistent with the family systems framework. Rather, they might talk first about the family function of recreation and then immediately go to a discussion about siblings. We hope you will go with their flow rather than with the order of questions/probes that you find here.

FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristics of Family as a Whole

• Who are the members of your family? Who lives together in your home? Who is interested in supporting _____’s education?

• We all have certain cultural characteristics that especially influence our families. These might be related to the part of the country where we grew up or to our jobs, religion, race, or financial resources. How do you characterize your family’s culture?

• What are the most important things that parents should teach their children? What are the most important things that schools should teach children?

• Has any particular advice about how people ought to live their lives been handed down through the generations of your family? What is it, and do you think it has implications for _____’s educational program?

• Are there issues related to your family’s financial resources that are important for the school to take into account?

• What is one of the major strengths of your family?

• Is there a particular challenge or struggle that your family is having now that might influence _____’s educational program?
**Personal Characteristics**

- I'm eager to get to know _____ . Tell me about _____ ’s typical day and especially about the things that _____ most likes and dislikes about the day.
- What are things that seem to be going especially well for _____ ?
- What are some of the particular challenges that _____ is facing now?
- So much of _____ ’s day is spent in school. What’s your view of how things are going at school?
- How do _____ ’s strengths and needs influence schoolwork? How do _____ ’s strengths and needs influence _____ ’s relationships with classmates?
- What is the nature of _____ ’s exceptionality? What have others told you about it? Do you agree or disagree about what you have been told? Why?
- What do you most enjoy about _____ ?
- How does _____ contribute to the family in a positive way?
- What issues about _____ ’s exceptionality pose the greatest challenges to your family?
- We all have different ways of dealing with problems when they arise. As you think back over the last 6 to 12 months and the problems that various members of your family have faced, what are some of the things that you and other family members do that particularly help you meet these challenges?
- What are some of the less effective ways that you have tried to meet the challenges?
- Do any particular health concerns of family members influence your daily and weekly routines? What do you want to tell me about them?
- Who are the people most available to participate in school activities and to help _____ with homework?

**Special Challenges**

- All families face times when things seem to be a bit easier and other times when things seem to be more difficult. Is your family now facing any particular challenges that impact the time, energy, and resources that you can invest in _____ ’s educational program? What do you want to tell me about them?
- On a long-term basis, are there family issues or circumstances that make life more challenging? Do you feel comfortable sharing these with me?
FAMILY INTERACTION

Marital or Partner Interactions

• What is your current marital status?
• How would you describe _____’s impact on your marriage or relationship?
• Has there been a time in the past when _____’s educational program somehow caused stress on your marriage or relationship? How could we work together to make sure to avoid such situations in the future?
• Are there any custody issues associated with your separation or divorce about which the school needs to be aware?
• If you have joint custody of _____ with another person, what does the court decree provide about communication and participation in conferences? What are your preferences about who should receive communication from the school and participate in conferences?

Parental Interactions

• How do you and your spouse or partner share parental roles? Given this pattern, what are your preferences for how you participate this year in _____’s educational program?
• Sometimes in families there are adults who take on some parental responsibilities even though they are not actually parents. Are there people like that involved with _____? Who are they? What do they do? How might we best involve them in his or her educational program?
• What do you find to be the most and least enjoyable aspects of interacting with _____? Given those aspects, how can we best ensure that we respect your preferences as we offer educational activities for you and _____ to do in your home?
• Over time, has there been a fairly consistent pattern for your parental responsibilities or has this changed because of some kind of special circumstances? If it has changed, what is the change and why did it occur?

Sibling Interactions

• What are the most and least enjoyable ways that your other children interact with _____?
• In what ways might _____’s brothers or sisters provide educational support to _____?
• What challenges are your other children experiencing that are taking a large amount of your family’s time, energy, and resources right now?
• What approach is right in terms of spreading your time and attention across all your children’s interests? Do you think any of your children feel that _____’s exceptionality has taken undue time and attention from
them? Are there ways the school staff can be helpful?

• What do you think about the idea of having _____’s brothers and sisters attend conferences to plan his or her educational program? What would _____’s brothers or sisters think about attending those conferences?

**Extended Family Interactions**

• Who is in your extended family? How often do you see them?
• In what ways have extended-family members provided you with support and assistance in raising _____?
• Do you think your extended-family members would be interested in having additional information about how they might best support _____? What information would be helpful, and how do you want to share it with them?
• Would you like us to extend an invitation to your extended family to participate in educational conferences or school events?

**FAMILY FUNCTIONS**

**Affection**

• In what ways does _____ particularly like to have affection expressed by family members toward him or her?
• How important do you think it is to express affection to _____ and your other children?
• Are there other people outside of the family on whom _____ depends for affection?

**Self-Esteem**

• Standing in _____’s shoes, how do you think _____ sees himself or herself in terms of personal strengths and weaknesses?
• What are your family beliefs about how best to help your family members feel good about themselves?
• What have been some school experiences in the past that have particularly helped _____ feel good about himself or herself?
• What have been some school experiences in the past that have had a negative impact on _____’s self-esteem?
• What do you think are the most significant ways that we can work together to support _____ to develop a stronger self-esteem?

**Economics**

• To what extent do family economics influence the kind of support that you can provide to _____?
• Has _____ required more or fewer economic resources than other family members?
• Are you interested in _____’s learning job skills so that he or she might get a part-time job after school or
during the summer to contribute to family income?

• Because of _____’s exceptionality, have there been special family responsibilities for dealing with insurance or other reimbursement programs?

**Spiritual**

• Is it important to your family to participate in a spiritual or religious community? If so, are there any special issues to address to ensure that _____ is able to participate, consistent with his or her preferences and your own?

• When we get together to plan _____’s IFSP/IEP, we could invite anyone from your religious community that might benefit from knowing more about how to best support _____ . Do you have any interest in considering this?

• Are there any special celebrations associated with your religion that are important for us to consider as part of _____’s educational program?

**Daily Care**

• What is a typical day like in your family?

• What are the most challenging aspects of the day?

• Do you have time built in throughout the day for relaxation and rest?

• As a family, how do you divide the daily tasks related to meeting each individual’s needs?

• What (if any) tasks does _____ assume, and how can we work together to teach him or her skills that make the family’s daily routine easier?

**Recreation**

• As a family, what do you do for fun?

• In what way does _____’s exceptionality influence family recreation and leisure?

• What recreation or leisure skills might _____ learn at school that would make family recreation and leisure more enjoyable?

**Socialization**

• Whom does _____ hang out with when he or she is not at school?

• What are your perspectives on _____’s friendship network? What would be an ideal friendship network for _____?

• How has _____’s exceptionality influenced his or her opportunities for friends?
• How do you characterize the extent to which your family friends support _____?

**Education/Vocation**

• Of all the teachers who have worked with _____, who had an especially good relationship with him or her and you? What can we learn from that situation that we can incorporate into the school year?

• Now, don’t give me a name, but please just describe a situation that was really difficult when a teacher was not especially helpful at all to _____ and your family. What can we learn from that situation to make sure that we don’t repeat any of it?

• What do you see _____ doing after graduating from high school in terms of where he or she works and lives? Does _____ have the same vision for himself or herself?

• In what ways do you most enjoy participating with _____ in his or her educational program?

• There are many different ways that we could communicate throughout the school year, such as through home visits, school conferences, telephone calls, notes, e-mail, or a notebook. What are your preferences for communication? What do you think will work best for you and your family?

• In terms of _____’s vocational development, are there family members or friends who might be especially good resources in helping to create job opportunities? How might we best capitalize upon their contributions?

**FAMILY CYCLE**

**Early Childhood**

• Tell me about _____’s early years. What stands out in terms of some of your happiest memories? What about your most troublesome memories?

• Did you find out during the early years that _____ has an exceptionality? If so, how did you find out? Looking back, in what ways would you like to have improved the manner in which it was communicated to you?

• Did _____ participate in an early childhood program? What did you think of the program?

**School-Age**

• What have been the highs and lows of _____’s educational experiences?

• If you found out about _____’s exceptionality during school years, what was that process like? Looking back, how would you have improved it?

• How do you think _____ is (or has been) best prepared for his or her future by school experiences?

• Try to create a picture in your mind of an ideal situation for _____ when he or she is an adult. Describe that
situation to me. What are your great expectations for his or her future?

Adolescence

• As you look ahead to adolescence, what do you anticipate to be the easiest and most difficult aspects?
• Now that _____ is a teenager, how would you describe the highs and lows of adolescence?
• How does _____’s adolescence compare with the adolescence of his or her brothers and/or sisters?
• When you look to the future, what are your great expectations for _____’s life? What are your greatest concerns?

Adulthood

• What do you see as the priorities that need to be addressed in school to best prepare _____ for life as an adult?
• How are _____’s great expectations for adult life similar and different to yours?