

Interview Checklist for Volunteer GALs

Purpose

To guide VGALs in preparing, conducting, and documenting interviews with children, caregivers, and other stakeholders in a trauma-informed, culturally sensitive, and neutral manner.

Before the Interview

Checklist

Notes

- ☐ Review the court order and case assignment to confirm authority to interview.
 - ☐ Gather background: child's age, developmental stage, cultural context, and any safety concerns.
 - ☐ Prepare neutral, open-ended questions (e.g., "Tell me about your school day..." vs. "Do you like living here?").
 - ☐ Arrange interpreter if language/communication support is needed.
 - ☐ Set up a private, safe, and comfortable location.
 - ☐ Bring note-taking template (quotes vs. observations grid).
 - ☐ Remind yourself of bias interrupters: avoid leading questions, avoid judgmental tone.
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During the Interview

Checklist

Notes

- ☐ Introduce yourself, role, and purpose in plain language (“I am here to listen and share what you think with the judge”).
 - ☐ Build rapport: begin with small talk appropriate to age/culture.
 - ☐ Ask open-ended questions first; follow with clarifying probes.
 - ☐ Observe nonverbal cues (body language, affect, comfort level).
 - ☐ Respect cultural norms (eye contact, food offered, seating arrangements).
 - ☐ Offer breaks, especially with children or when emotions rise.
 - ☐ Keep tone neutral; do not promise outcomes (“I can’t decide where you will live, but I will share your thoughts with the judge”).
 - ☐ Take direct quotes when possible; clearly separate observations from interpretation.
 - ☐ Thank the interviewee; explain what will happen next.
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After the Interview

Checklist

Notes

- ☐ Complete notes immediately: fill in gaps while memory is fresh.
 - ☐ Label observations vs. statements clearly.
 - ☐ Flag potential safety or compliance issues for supervisor review.
 - ☐ Store notes securely (confidentiality under RCW 13.50.100).
 - ☐ Log interview in case timeline.
 - ☐ Draft a short neutral summary for potential court report inclusion.
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Safeguards

Checklist

Notes

- ☐ Never share interview notes outside authorized parties.
 - ☐ Do not disclose unfounded allegations or personal identifiers beyond what RCW permits.
 - ☐ If interview raises immediate safety concerns, follow escalation protocol immediately.
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Pro Tips

Checklist

Notes

- ☐ Silence is powerful — give time for answers.
- ☐ Mirror language when appropriate (“You said it was scary — can you tell me more about that?”).
- ☐ Use age-appropriate tools (drawings, toys, play prompts) for younger children.
- ☐ Self-check bias after each interview: “Did I interpret fairly? Did I write observations, not assumptions?”

