

Preparing for Your Licensing Investigation Interview and Observation

This resource was developed to assist **Child Placing Agency (CPA)** and **Regional Licensing (RL)** staff in completing thorough, timely and accurate investigations on CPA foster homes. It includes information on planning and preparing, interviewing and interviewing techniques, observation tips, using critical thinking, being aware of bias, as well as analyzing information gathered to make a finding of valid or not valid.

Plan and Prepare

When investigating a complaint, it is important to organize your thoughts and develop a strategy for completing your investigation. This will help ensure that the interview or observation is effective and complete. Here are some ways that you can prepare:

1. Review the [Child Placing Agency Foster Home Licensing Investigation \(DCYF 23-036\)](#) form, provided from the RL, and any other instructions the RL might have provided.
2. Identify the WAC(s) alleged to have been violated to help stay focused on relevant information.
3. Prepare a list of individuals that need to be interviewed. When referent information is available, contact them first to verify the complaint information is accurate.
4. Review relevant material as it relates to alleged WAC violation, if available. This could include:
 - a. Medical records
 - b. School records
 - c. Therapist notes
 - d. Supervision plans
 - e. Other resources
5. Identify potential observations to make. Think about where additional information might be obtained. Is there an allegation about an object and where it is stored that you could ask to see? Is there a certain room in the home that may provide relevant information?
6. Contact the RL for technical assistance immediately with any questions about the information provided or what needs to be investigated. Your RL is a resource to you, and you can reach out during the investigation to staff any questions or concerns along the way.



7. Conduct your investigation as soon as possible, this includes your home visit and observations, all interviews, and your documentation. The completed investigation needs to be submitted within 40 days of being notified of the intake.

Home Visit and Observation

A home visit, interviews, and observations are key elements to completing a thorough investigation. Here are some suggestions to get your investigation started:

1. Schedule a home visit as soon as possible. If the intake contains environmental concerns (i.e. unsanitary home, unsafe premises, access to alcohol, marijuana, weapons among other things), an unannounced visit is necessary and allows the worker to see the children and family without preparation that might have occurred when expecting a visitor.
2. Notify the foster parent of the complaint investigation at the initial point of contact, if it does not jeopardize the safety and protection of the child or the integrity of the investigation process. Provide the caregiver with information about the [FIRST Program](#) (Foster Intervention and Retention Support Team).
3. You may need to explain or clarify the complaint investigation process to the foster parent, especially when a caregiver is new and has not been through the process previously. It's extremely important for you to be familiar with the process, and be able to walk the family through the complaint process.
4. Conduct an inspection of any areas of concern specifically mentioned in the Intake, while also observing and paying close attention to other areas of the home.

The Observation

While completing your investigation and interviews, be engaged and alert. Observe the home environment and its premises. Challenge your biases. Be open to receive and accept new information that may conflict with information you have already gathered. Practice using active listening, so you don't miss any information. Lastly, when interviewing children, use the child's language and have them help the interviewer understand what they are trying to say by asking them to clarify what they mean.

Interviewing People in the Intake

All persons listed in the intake should be interviewed separately and in private. If a person is not able to be interviewed, active efforts should be made and clearly documented on the investigation form (DCYF 23-036). Below are other things that are important to remember when interviewing people:

1. The CPA licensor must interview all children referenced in the allegation reported, and the foster parent(s) alleged to have violated WAC.
2. When interviewing:
 - a. Explain who you are and what your role is

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- b. Help them identify a location where others cannot overhear, they feel comfortable, and can speak freely
 - c. Offer to allow a neutral 3rd party to be present for the interview if they are not comfortable speaking with you alone
 - d. Let them know that it's okay to end the interview at any time
- 3. If two parent foster home, interview each foster parent separately.
- 4. Children or adults in the home who were not directly involved in the allegation do not need to be interviewed unless specifically mentioned as potentially having relevant information.
- 5. Parental permission is not required before speaking to children in out-of-home care, however, for any child not in DCYF's custody, parental or guardian consent is always required before they can be interviewed.
 - a. What happens when consent to interview a child in the home is not granted? Just like it is important to interview children in out of home care, it's equally important to be able to interview bio children to get their perspective on what may or may not have happened. A situation where permission to speak with a child is declined would require further discussion with the RL to determine the next steps.

Interviewing Techniques

Maintaining neutrality throughout the interview process is vital. The role of the interviewer is not to believe or disbelieve the person being interviewed, but to get at the facts in the most open-ended way, without leading questions. Questions should obtain accurate and impartial information. Below are different "Types of Questions" that can be used when interviewing:

1. **Neutral questions:** Do not carry an underlying agenda. They generally come from genuine curiosity and do not imply that there is a right or wrong answer.
 - a. **How long have you been a foster parent?**
 - b. **Tell me why you became a foster parent?**
2. **Open-ended:** Open ended questions are facilitative questions. They encourage the interviewee to communicate a free response, using their own knowledge, feeling, or experience. Open-ended questions usually begin with "who", "what", "when", "where", and "how".
 - a. **Who lives in the home with you?**
 - b. **How did you feel about the interaction with the child?**
3. **Focused:** A form of "open" questions. Focused questions narrow the range of the information requested, so they are used when specific information is desired.
 - a. **What concerns you about the situation?**
 - b. **Who would the child say they could speak to if they had a worry?**

Original Date: May 29, 2024

4. **Closed or Direct:** A closed ended question is a question that can be answered with one or two words. Closed or direct questions shift the communication power to the questioner.
 - a. **Did you call in a run report?**
 - b. **Where were you when the incident occurred?**

5. **Clarification:** By probing for clarification, you invite the other person to share more information so you can fully understand their message.
 - a. **I am a bit confused about this point, could you clarify it for me?**
 - b. **Could you please give me an example?**

6. **Completeness:** These types of questions can help you ensure you have the full, true story. Having all the facts, in turn, can protect you from assuming and jumping to conclusions.
 - a. **What other factors should be considered?**
 - b. **What else happened after that?**

Interview Closure

As you are wrapping up your interviews, please remember that this may be a stressful process for the people going through the interview process. Make sure you check in with them to see how they are doing. In concluding your interview, these are also important:

1. Provide information on next steps if you know them
2. Summarize all information gathered from the interviews
3. Practice discretion and confidentiality regarding the interview

Review and Analyze

In reviewing and analyzing the original intake and the information gathered through the interviews, it is important to remember that the scope of the licensing investigation is to determine compliance with WAC. It is also important to:

1. Compare information obtained through:
 - a. Interviews
 - b. Observations
 - c. Records reviews
2. Verify information by addressing any discrepancies
3. Cross reference information that needs to be corroborated
4. Identify the specific information and evidence that leads you to your conclusion and be prepared to document and justify that conclusion
5. Analyze evidence with a standard of “reasonable cause to believe” that a violation did or did not occur
6. All information gathered must make sense

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Take advantage of the team around you. Look for peer consultation; review your plan with coworkers or your supervisor and even your RL for additional ideas and guidance.

Cognitive Bias

“Cognitive bias can be defined as a set of predictable mental errors that arise from our limited ability to process information objectively. It can result in illogical and irrational decisions, and it can cause you to misjudge risks and threats.” (Bias, n.d.) To hold-oneself accountable, an individual must always be aware of the bias they have and how that can influence the decisions that are made.

As a CPA Licenser, you may have an established relationship with a provider, so it is very important to be open, impartial, and aware of your biases.

Addressing bias while interviewing:

1. Commit to serving foster parents with respect, concern, courtesy, and responsiveness, while keeping child safety at the forefront
2. Be open and impartial during the investigation.
3. Be aware of expectations and assumptions based on the relationship with the caregiver.
4. If assumptions are made this can create uncertainty or inaccurate outcomes.
5. Be aware of cultural norms and how that can contribute to the outcome of the investigation.
6. Actively listening and having the ability to review and accept information that may conflict with what you might already know about a family will ensure the investigation is based on accurate facts.

Critical Thinking

Critical Thinking is the ability to think clearly and rationally about what to do or what to believe. Critical Thinking helps analyze the facts gathered to assist in forming a decision for an investigation while not allowing personal bias to influence decision making. According to Indeed Career Guide, the top five critical thinking skills are: (Herrity, 2023)

1. Observation - Clear, rational, and informed by evidence

Taking notice of and predicting opportunities, problems, and solutions. Slowing one’s pace of processing information and learning to pay closer attention to surroundings without ignoring information.

2. Analysis - An analysis of facts to form a judgement

Gathering, understanding, and interpreting of information or data, ensuring accuracy and objectivity, and may require deep thinking.

Original Date: May 29, 2024

3. Inference - Reasonable and reflective thinking

Drawing careful conclusions about the information collected, sometimes based on limited information. One might make an educated guess based on the information available to them at the time.

4. Communication - Self-directed, disciplined, monitored, and self-corrective

The ability to share information by explaining how you reached that conclusion or discussing issues and solutions with others. One should be able to listen actively and be respectful and open to hearing other points of view.

5. Problem-solving - Questions and challenges

Carrying out your solution to the identified problem, challenges one to think about whether or not the solution is working as it relates to the goal or problem that needed solving.

Compliance Agreements

At the end of an investigation, it may be determined that a Compliance Agreement is needed to address the WAC violations, and to get a provider back in compliance.

If WAC violations are identified, the RL will collaborate with the CPA on a Compliance Agreement.

- 1. Compliance Agreements must be completed within 30 days** of the foster parent signature date.
- 2. A Compliance Agreement is not required for WAC violations that have already been corrected prior to the development of the Compliance Agreement, unless there is a pattern of non-compliance for the same violation multiple times.**

If a Compliance Agreement needs to be extended beyond 30 days due to reasons that do not allow the foster parent to complete the Compliance Agreement within the required timeframe, consult with your supervisor and notify the RL to discuss further.

Closing

This resource was created to offer guidance to staff while preparing for and completing licensing complaint investigations. Licensors should help caregivers understand that follow up on complaints help to meet the common goal of child safety, and put allegations to rest. If questions arise throughout the investigation and interview process, please reach out to your RL for further technical assistance and collaboration.