Guidelines for Opening Questions:

Introducing the Bridge

Introduction

The Bridge to Child and Family Self-Reliance[1] is a tool designed to help families set individualized goals that are informed by their cultural values. When introducing the Bridge to a family, it is helpful to explain each pillar and highlight how the pillars are interconnected.

After presenting each pillar, you can use follow-up questions to encourage meaningful conversation. You are not required to ask every question, and the list provided is not exhaustive. Instead, select the questions that are most relevant to the individual family. This guide will help you:

- Understand the" why" behind each pillar
- Gather information that supports individualized planning.
- Facilitate goal-setting conversations with families.

Mobility Mentoring© is a relationship-based coaching approach designed to strengthen adult capacities and support families in achieving economic mobility.

1. www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/EL_0020.pdf

Harvard's Center on the Developing child recommends the following to build adult capacities[2].

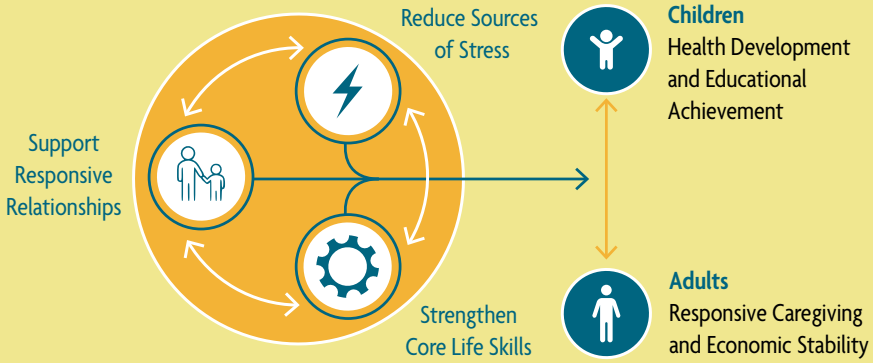
- Adopt coaching models that help individuals identify, plan for and meet their goals.
- Focus on small, incremental steps with frequent feedback; for example, break down the goal "find housing" into steps like finding out what's available, what neighborhoods are best, contacting landlords, visiting, asking questions, etc., with opportunities for responsive feedback along the way.
- Create regular opportunities to learn and practice new skills in age-appropriate, meaningful contexts, such as play-based approaches in early childhood, planning long-term school projects in adolescence and role-playing a difficult conversation with a boss in adulthood.
- Scaffold skill development with tools such as goal-setting templates, text reminders, timelines and planners.

2. https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/deep-dives/adult-capabilities/

Science to Policy and Practice

Three Principles to Improve Outcomes for Children and Families

These principles, ground in science, can guide policymakers and program developers as they design and adapt policies and programs to improve outcomes for children and families.



Washington State Department of
CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

Stability: **Housing**

Introductory Statement:

Having a stable, safe, and affordable place to live creates a strong foundation for everything else in life. When your housing needs are met, it becomes easier to focus on your goals, whether it's finding a better job, continuing your education, or simply creating a more secure future for your family. A stable home gives you the peace of mind and stability needed to move forward toward economic independence.

Open-Ended Questions:

- "What is it like for you living where you are right now?"
- What thoughts have you had, if any, about moving or changing your living situation?"
- "When you imagine your ideal home or living space, what comes to mind?"
- "What ideas or hopes do you have for your future housing situation?".
- "How have you been managing your rent or housing costs lately?"

Notes:

Stability: Family Well-Being

Introductory Statement:

As parents, you do everything you can to meet your children's needs, and that takes a lot of love, time, and energy. This pillar isn't about judging your parenting or whether you're doing a "good job." It's about recognizing how much of your time and energy goes into caring for your family, and how that might affect your ability to focus on your own goals, like work, school, or personal growth.

It's okay to acknowledge that doing it all can be hard. This pillar helps shine a light on the balance between supporting your family and taking steps toward your own future.

Open-Ended Questions

- "What are some needs your family is experiencing right now, and how do those impact your day-to-day life?"?
- "When you think about quality time with your family, what kinds of things would you love to do more of together?"
- "When you think about the next year, what are some things you hope for your child and for yourself?"
- "When do you feel like you have the most energy for your family? When do you feel the most worn out?"
- "What changes would make life feel a little easier or less stressful for your family?"

Notes:

Stability: **Parenting**

Introductory Statement:

Parenting is one of the most important influences on a child's growth and development. The love, time, and energy you give your child every day shapes their learning, health, and future success. In Mobility Mentoring© and the Bridge to Child and Family Self-Reliance, we talk about parenting because your role as a parent is at the heart of your child's outcomes and it also affects your own goals.

By reflecting together on your parenting experiences, we can celebrate your strengths, recognize the incredible effort it takes to raise a family, and explore ways to support both your child's success and your personal goals. This is not about judging your parenting it's about partnering with you to create a path that helps your whole family thrive.

Open-Ended Questions:

- "When you're feeling overwhelmed or stressed, what have you found helps you regain your calm or feel more grounded?"
- "What are some of the more challenging moments you experience as a parent, and how do you usually respond to them?
- "How much time do you spend doing activities (in or out of the home) with your children?
- "What are some things you enjoy most about being a parent?"
- "How do you find time to take care of yourself while taking care of your family?"

Notes:

Connection to Self and Others: **Well-Being**

Introductory Statement:

Your health and well-being are the foundation for reaching your goals and supporting your family. When we take care of our physical and emotional health, it's easier to have the energy, focus, and motivation to move forward.

Life can bring stress, fatigue, or health challenges, and those moments don't mean you aren't trying; they simply remind us that our bodies and minds need care, too. This pillar is about recognizing the importance of your well-being and exploring ways to build routines, supports, and resources that help you and your family thrive.

Open-Ended Questions:

- How do you feel about your current physical and mental health?
- In what ways do your health or mental health experiences influence your ability to focus on things that matter to you, like work, school, or family?
- Can you tell me about how you've managed health or mental health challenges in the past?
- "Are there places, activities, or people that give you a sense of peace or relief?"
- "Have you found anything that really helps you manage stress or take care of yourself?"

Notes:

Connection to Self and Others: **Sense of Belonging**

Introductory Statement:

A strong sense of belonging, feeling connected, supported, and part of a community, is one of the most powerful factors in a family's well-being. When families feel they truly belong, they are more likely to access resources, build supportive relationships, and feel confident in reaching their goals.

Research shows that a parent's sense of belonging can also have a significant impact on children. Children thrive when their parents feel connected and supported. This sense of security helps kids learn, build friendships, and succeed in school. By talking about belonging, we can celebrate the connections your family already has and explore ways to strengthen your support network, because belonging is a foundation for both family stability and positive child outcomes.

Open-Ended Questions:

- "What are some ways your family is currently connected to your community?"
- "Who are the people or groups you feel most connected to right now?"
- "Are there supports or connections you wish you had but don't right now?"
- "Are there activities, groups, or events you would like to be more involved in?"
- "Are there times when you have felt isolated or disconnected?"

Notes:

Connection to Self and Others:
Personal and Professional Supports

Introductory Statement:

The people and relationships in our lives can play a powerful role in helping us reach our goals. Supportive friends, family, coworkers, and mentors can encourage us, share helpful resources, and celebrate our successes along the way.

By taking time to think about your personal and professional support system, we can highlight the connections that give you strength and identify any areas where building new support might help you move forward. These supports are like stepping stones that make it easier to focus on your goals and create the future you want for your family.

Open-Ended Questions:

- "How would you describe your networks, both personal and professional?"
- "Who are some people in your life you turn to for support, advice, or guidance whether it's about school, work, or reaching personal goals?"
- "Are there groups, organizations, or programs that have been especially helpful to your family?"
- "Are there new connections or relationships you would like to build this year?"
- "If you could add one person or type of support to your circle, what would that look like?"

Notes:

Money Management: **Expenses**

Introductory Statement:

Money and expenses can be a stressful topic for many families, and we understand that talking about finances can sometimes feel uncomfortable. We start these conversations not to judge or to focus on what's hard, but because your financial well-being has a big impact on your overall stress, your ability to reach your goals, and even your child's opportunities for the future.

By looking at this pillar together, we can better understand your current situation, celebrate the steps you're already taking to manage your finances, and connect you with resources or strategies that can make things a little easier. Our goal is to partner with you to strengthen your financial stability, which supports your family's well-being and helps your child thrive.

Open-Ended Questions:

- "When you think about your expenses each month, what feels most manageable and what feels most challenging?"
- "Are there times when you feel like your expenses make it hard to focus on your goals?"
- "Are there certain expenses that cause the most stress or are hardest to plan for?"
- "When you think about the future, what are your financial goals or hopes for your family?"
- "How would feeling more financially secure impact your family and your child's opportunities?"

Notes:

Money Management: **Planning**

Introductory Statement:

Planning and preparing for the future helps families feel more secure and confident in reaching their goals. Saving for the future doesn't always mean having a lot of money in a bank account it can also mean having a plan, building resources, and knowing what you can rely on in case of an unexpected expense or opportunity.

This pillar is about looking ahead and thinking about the tools, assets, and strategies that can help your family be ready for both challenges and new possibilities. By planning for the future in ways that work for you, we can help create a stronger foundation for your family and open more doors for your child's success.

Open Ended Questions:

- "When you think about the future, what are some things you want to be prepared for?"
- "What helps you feel secure or ready if unexpected expenses come up?"
- "Besides money, what resources or items do you have that give you a sense of security?"
- "If you could take one step to feel more prepared for the future, what would it be?"
- "How would reaching your planning or saving goals affect your family's sense of security?"
- "What is a small change you could start with that would help you feel ready for future opportunities or challenges?"
- "If you found yourself without your current income for a while, how might you manage your expenses, considering the other supports you have?
- "What are some of your previous experiences with saving money?
- Savings doesn't allow mean setting aside money in the bank. What are some ways in the past you were able to find savings?
- What are some of your personal assets? (Personal assets are things of present or future value owned by an individual or household.)

Notes:

Education and Training Planning: **Learning**

Introductory Statement:

Learning opens doors to new opportunities and can be an essential step toward reaching your goals and creating long-term stability for your family. While many people think of college first, learning can happen in many ways through apprenticeships, on-the-job training, community classes, certifications, mentorships, or even starting your own business.

This pillar is about exploring the learning paths that work best for you and your family. Gaining knowledge and skills no matter where or how can increase your confidence, expand your opportunities, and help you build the future you want.

Open-Ended Questions:

- "What are some skills or knowledge you already have that you're proud of?"
- "Can you tell me about a time you learned something new that really helped you or your family?"
- "Are there things you've taught yourself or learned outside of school that have been useful?"
- "Have you ever thought about learning through a program like an apprenticeship, certification, or community class?"
- "Are there people in your life you've learned skills from, like family, friends, or mentors?"
- "Would starting your own business or side project be something you'd ever want to learn about?"

Notes:

Employment and Career Management:
Earnings Levels

Introductory Statement:

Understanding your earning level is an important step in planning for your family's future. The amount you earn affects your ability to meet your family's needs, reduce stress, and create opportunities for your child. Even small steps toward higher earnings can make a meaningful difference in reducing stress, opening doors for your child, and helping your family thrive. Even if you're not working for pay at the moment, we can still look at your overall resources and what might help you feel secure as you plan for the future.

Open-Ended Questions:

- "Can you discuss your current employment? Are there opportunities for growth in your current job?"
- "What did you learn from previous jobs about what you enjoyed most or were good at?"
- "What strengths, skills, or experiences do you feel you could bring to a job or career that's important to you?"
- "When you think about your future, what kind of work or career feels meaningful or exciting to you?"
- "If you wanted to bring in more income or support, what would that look like for your family?"
- "Are there any programs, benefits, or opportunities you'd like to learn more about that could help with financial stability?"

Notes:

*If you would like copies of this document in an alternative format or language, please contact DCYF Constituent Relations (1-800-723-4831 | 360-902-8060, **ConstRelations@dcyf.wa.gov**).*

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