Interview & Observation Top 10 Tips

1. **Interview and observe people who can teach you** about the institutional processes you seek to understand. You want to learn from people who can accurately and insightfully inform you about how their work is organized and coordinated.
2. **Avoid single interviews and observations** as your primary source of information on complex or key areas of inquiry. You want to gather enough information to accurately reflect how workers process cases.
3. **Consider the person to be interviewed or observed as a co-investigator** and not a data point. Tell the person what you are doing, looking for, and exploring. Treat him or her as an expert in something that you are not: their job, agency, and discipline.
4. **Provide a brief overview of the Safety Audit** to the practitioner and to any agency client who is present, as the circumstances permit. Act with respect and confidentiality and appreciate the degree to which any intervention can violate someone's privacy.
5. **Suspend what you think you know**. The biggest mistakes that Audit team members make in gathering information are to 1) use the process to prove what they think they already know; 2) make assumptions about something a practitioner alluded to but did not fully explain; and, 3) argue with interviewees rather than ask questions with the goal of fully understanding how they think about and act on cases.
6. **Prepare ahead of time**. If your interview rambled all over the map and left you with more questions than answers you probably weren't prepared. Most bad interviews are the result of the interviewer losing focus, not bad interview subjects. Make a list of the kinds of questions you want to be able to answer after the interview or observation, but don't limit your inquiry. Note where you felt the urge to go down a completely different path or to discuss an important aspect of the problem and come back to it. Keep the rules of interviewing in mind. Always remember that you are looking for something you didn't know or understand before.
7. **Avoid judging as you listen**. The more relaxed the person you are interviewing or observing, the better she or he will be at helping you understand how their work is organized and coordinated to process cases.
8. **Stay concrete**; move constantly from the abstract to the concrete. Ask for specific examples of what you are discussing. Use questions such as: *Can you think of the last two cases where you used this practice? That you felt this policy didn't work? That you sensed the procedure was inappropriate to the case?* You need to understand exactly how the processes are applied in real cases.
9. **Prepare and review your notes** as soon as possible. If you wait too long you will miss the flow of the interview and forget key insights to share in Audit Team debriefing sessions. If note taking is difficult for you, use a tape recorder right after the interview or observation to capture your ideas and a summary.
10. **Send a prompt thank-you** via mail, e-mail, or phone message, from either the Audit coordinator or the auditor. Remember that the person you interviewed was very likely drawn into your project in a way that made them want to know what you are finding and perhaps be of further assistance.

Worksheet: Work Practice Interview

Opening the Interview:

- Describe Institutional Analysis process. Thank them for participating in interviews. Tell worker you are going to be asking questions about how they are directed by the child welfare system to do their job. Tell worker you will be particularly interested in hearing about examples from their work with Native American/African American Families.

- Let the worker know that the interview is anonymous. Remind them how much time you have for the interview. Try to respect the time frame allotted.

Ask About/Listen For:

- How the worker is organized to THINK ABOUT and ACT ON cases.
- The thinking behind a particular concepts used in the interview. E.g., "unadoptable" older youth, "noncompliant"

Make sure to get details of the practitioner's job, as if you had to go in the next day and do that job.

Case "Steps"

1. Please help me understand what happens as you "work a case." Describe in detail what happens from when you get the case to when it leaves you. Provide an example from your last case involving a Native American/African American family?
    a. What is the purpose of each task?
    b. How does each task help you to know about the child/family: strengths, needs, etc – what do you learn from each task?
    c. What must you do to have accomplished the task properly?
    d. What do you use to accomplish each task and how do you use it (i.e. policies, screening devises, reporting forms, structured decision making tools etc… get copies of forms)
    e. How do you know you've has done a particular task right? Who oversees/supervisors your work? How?
    f. Which tasks are most important?
2. What have other practitioners done before you receive the case? How do their actions determine what you do? What do you need them to do to make you better able to assist families?
3. What decisions do you need to make during the "life of a case"
    a. What criteria are applied as you make decisions e.g. is the client cooperative?

Accountability and Collaboration

4. How do you collaborate with family members?
5. How are you accountable to each member of the family?
6. How are the resources you refer clients to, and the county/state pays for accountable for the quality of its work and its effectiveness in helping clients?
7. What is your role in helping your client understand information presented at court; information presented by other professionals; the direction of the case; etc.?
8. Who else do you collaborate with when you are "working" a case? How do you communicate with these individuals? How do they communicate with you?
9. Who are you documenting information for?
10. How will other workers/judges/lawyers use what you have done? What resources do you have access to for his/her own use? To offer the family? How is it determined which resources a family needs to be successful, to have their children returned, etc..?

Resources

11. How do you access resources; how do you decide if they are useful? What are you able to do when you know resources is not helpful to your client, or is, in general, a poor resource?
12. How are you able to adjust services based on culture, race, and identities of clients? What services have you found Native American/African American clients give the most positive feedback on, the least favorable feedback? Helpful or not helpful? (Provide SPECIFIC examples)
13. Are your clients able to get to the services—drive; public transportation, walk there? What are the operating hours of most services?
14. What resources do you wish you had to assist families? What do families ask for or need that you can't provide?

Training and Education

15. What type of training and education is required to do your job? What type of training do you currently receive? What type of training do you wish you could receive?
16. What training do you receive relevant to Native American/African American children and families and communities you interact with?

■ *No universal victim or batterer* ■ *Complexity of risk* ■ *Gaps in safety & accountability*

Worksheet 3.2: Work Practices Interview

Our Audit Question:

Person Interviewed:

Position & Agency:

Audit Team Member: ***Date:***

Ask About:	***Listen For:***
• The details of the practitioner's job, as if you had to go in the next day and do that job. • How specific tools, equipment, processes, policies, etc. work. • A specific case and what happens at each step: Describe in detail what happens from when you get the case to when it leaves you. • Listen for the Audit trails and ask follow-up questions to fully understand how each method coordinates workers' actions and thinking on cases.	The 8+ Audit Trails 1) Rules & Regulations 2) Administrative Practices 3) Resources 4) Concepts and Theories 5) Linkages 6) Mission, Purpose, & Function 7) Accountability 8) Education & Training 9) To be discovered …

Opening Questions:

1)

2)

Notes: (continued on reverse)

Worksheet: Work Practice Observation

Reminder: The observer is not looking to see if the worker is racially biased. The observer is watching the worker as s/he interacts on cases trying to understand how the case processes being used would impact people of color. The observer watches as the worker conducts case conferences, uses the screening tools to bring cases into the system or screen them out, consults with a supervisor, interviews parents during an initial investigation and so forth. The observer has a much better understanding of the workers actions by actually seeing him/her interact on cases. <u>The worker should be consulted in interviews about how these processes do or do not work when applied to African or Native American families.</u> The idea is not to treat the worker as a data point but as a co-investigator, someone with important insights about the processes that contribute to racial disparity in the child protection system.

Watch for: How the worker carries out his/her duties and how the worker has been organized to know children/families and act on the knowledge. Note what you need to ask during observations:

- What activities is this practitioner or client performing?
- Can you identify what seems to be the purpose of their intervention at this point in the case?
- Look for guiding rules or regulations.
- Watch for how administrative tools are used.
- Look for what resources are available to workers and clients.
- Look for assumptions that are operating in this exchange or intervention.
- Look for the skills it seems to take to do this work.
- Look for any signs of accountability—workers to other workers, to clients, between workers and supervisors, etc…: Does the worker ask about the results being achieved with the intervention? From whom? If results are unsatisfactory, what happens? Does worker have interaction with supervisor? Private agency? Foster parents?
- Consider how this interaction or intervention would specifically impact Native American/African American clients? How might it contribute to disparity or assure equity?
- How are emotions of clients attended to/managed?