Interviewing Children

Introduction

A number of issues arise when evaluators interview children to determine the parenting arrangement that best meets the children's needs. This section focuses on the uniqueness of interviewing children for these evaluations, emphasizing the important developmental considerations in planning the child interview, and delineating some age-appropriate interviewing techniques.

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When working with children, most clinicians use a play setting because it is recognized that play allows children to more clearly express what they know and feel. Most children are not able to use language to communicate their feelings as effectively as adults.

Interviewing Children Overview

This section presents methods to help you prepare for your first interview with the child. It also gives some important reminders about how you interpret what you have heard and seen during the interview.

Determining Purpose of Interview

The first step in interviewing children is getting clarity about your purpose. It is recommended that you make a list of any possible biases that you may have regarding the issues involved in the child's life. By being aware of what you "know and feel" about the situation prior to starting interviews, you can make an effort to keep the biases from tainting your judgment. Then determine what you need to learn from individuals so that you can begin a framework for your questions.

Parental interviews should provide information about the child's history as well as clarify each parent's view of the child. It is best to view children within a framework of total life experience. If possible, it helps to know the social, physical, and cultural aspects of the child's life. This information will assist you in planning an interview for this particular child and in setting your goals as an evaluator. It is important to structure the interview to obtain the necessary information and provide a situation in which the child can most comfortably be self-revealing. There can be a feeling of "free play," combined with your suggestions for structured play. You can begin the interview by asking specific questions to which the child already knows the answers. This will reduce the child's anxiety level. Beginning questions can be in regards to the child's school, age, etc. As the child begins exploring, you can then begin to ask the child to tell you some things about the child's life.

Interview Setting

Some evaluators always conduct children's interviews in their home. A home visit allows you an opportunity to enter that particular child's world and learn about the child's home and play environment. When doing a home visit, you may want to take certain items to use in the interview. The items depend on the age of the child and on the information you are trying to elicit. Try to include drawing paper (large and small), felt pens, crayons, puppets, games, and a deck of cards. After the initial greetings with the family, you may ask the child to show you the child's bedroom and play area and then proceed with the interview in a room that is separate from the rest of the family. Before leaving the home, observe the child with the family and engage them in some interactive family activity.

In the interview, it is preferable to have a setting that draws the child's interest. Play materials need to be selected which the child can relate to and bring forth fantasies, dialogues, and material relevant to the evaluation. Too many toys can over-stimulate a child or distract the child from engaging in any structured play.

Young children are most apt to think logically in situations that contain materials, behaviors, and motivations that are familiar and meaningful to them. It often helps to bring items that are currently popular with kids.

Interviewing Using Art

During the initial part of the interview, focus on helping the child feel comfortable and relaxed, and explain to the child why the interview is taking place. You can let the child explore and move towards getting the child to share something about the child's self. Then share with the child your role in the process using drawings or pictures. You can depict meeting with the child's parents and to explain the importance of getting to know the child. Encourage the child to ask any questions the child may have. As a way of reducing anxiety and engaging the child, you may introduce the "squiggle game," ask the child to "draw yourself," play a game of hangman (latency-aged children), or play the card toss. (Game details to follow.)

Children and Art

Drawings can provide another cue to the child's developmental level. Universal developmental sequences are observable in children's drawings. All children draw what they know (their "idea" of the object), rather than what they see. Younger children's drawings do not usually reflect reality, but are more abstract. Children tend to draw what is important to them and what they remember, for example figures representing people, animals, houses, or trees. In one book about child custody, the author writes that she believes a child's drawing of rainbows represents a wish for peace and harmony in their family. It is also possible that rainbows, which are very popular in children's stories, advertisements, toys, stickers, etc., are something that children easily remember and, therefore, enjoy drawing. You must use caution in making interpretations about children's drawings. Drawings are a nonverbal clue to help us understand the child.

Some deviations in children's drawings that require particular attention are: scattered body parts, the absence of persons in a scene, striking incongruities, the defacing of a just-drawn figure, and rigid robot-like figures. The following are considered clues of neurotic behavior or feelings of inadequacy: drawing very small figures or very large parent figures; excessive shading, hiding, or emphasizing genitalia; sex role confusion; emphasis or omission of limbs; and darkened clouds and sun.

Games and Art Activities

Squiggle Game

This game was introduced by D.W. Winnicott. Winnicott describes squiggles as a way to loosen a child's defenses and to begin communication with the child. In this game, the child and interviewer each take a turn making a "squiggle" on a blank sheet of paper. A squiggle is a continuous line drawn in circles or any other shapes. The child creates a drawing from the squiggle and describes what they've drawn. Some children will color in each shape and others will make the shape look like some animal. Use it as a safe, non-threatening way to engage children of many ages.

Draw Yourself

Use this task to provide an indicator of the child's developmental level and to get a sense of the child's perception of self. Ask the child to draw a picture of himself or herself. After the child completes the drawing, ask the child to give you some words that tell you what this child is like, thinking, or feeling. If this is a young child, write the words on the child's picture. If the child is older, ask the child to write the words: this would give you an idea of writing and spelling skills.

Hangman

Most children eight and older know how to play hangman. Use paper and ask the child to draw a hanging platform and pick a word for you to guess. If the child seems very relaxed during the interview, ask the child to pick a word that will tell you how the child feels about being in this interview. If the child is not sure how to spell the word, get someone to write it on a piece of paper for them. The child then draws blank lines to represent each letter of the word below the hanging platform. Begin guessing letters; if they are not part of the word, the child writes the letters along the side of the board and begins to "hang you" by putting a part of the body on the noose for each letter that is guessed incorrectly. If you guess the correct letter, it is written on the appropriate blank line. The objective is for you to either guess all of the correct letters or guess the word. If you have not guessed the word by the time an entire body is drawn, then you are "hung" and the child reveals the word, and wins the game.

Card Toss

Place an empty wastebasket on the far side of the room. Using a deck of cards, you and the child take turns tossing a card into the basket. Keep score as to how many cards are successfully tossed in the wastebasket. If it is a small child, make sure the child is standing closer to the basket than you. This also works well when you are meeting siblings together, because it provides a good opportunity to observe sibling interaction.

Confidentiality

What the child talks about with you is important for you to learn what his or her personal needs are. As a Court Appointed Special Advocate, the court is the only party to whom you are required to report what the child tells you. This is done within your court report as you give the facts supporting your decisions. You are not required to talk to anyone else about what the child says. If it involves illegal activities or things detrimental to the child's well-being, you should report it to Child Protective Services (CPS). CASAs should inform their coordinators about the possible criminal activity.

Synthesizing Information

After compiling data about the child you are evaluating, the painstaking task of putting together what you've learned from others and your own interviews begins. The more clues you have, the better you will understand the child. It is like putting together a jigsaw puzzle. You have these pieces and you have to put them together to create a picture that is clear enough to allow you to formulate a recommendation. Sometimes, however, there are contradictory clues--pieces that don't fit. It is very important not to reach a conclusion prematurely or to allow any one piece of information to influence your thinking before you corroborate it through other sources. As an evaluator, you need to carefully sift through the information with an awareness of your own biases or counter transference issues. It is possible to have a certain reaction to a parent that could prompt you to interpret the child's play in a way that is favorable or not favorable to one parent or the other. You need to question what you see, hear, and experience in the interviews with the child.

Before summarizing your conclusions, think about the jigsaw puzzle again. Ask yourself if the pieces really fit or if you might be trying to make certain pieces fit. Consider the many possible reasons for the behavior you have observed. Sometimes all the pieces do not fit and you need more information. Your task, as an evaluator, is to put together a picture that is as accurate as possible, using the resources which are most helpful to you.

Developmental Assessment

At the beginning of the interview, it is important for you to assess the child's developmental level and to frame the interview so that age-appropriate interview techniques are used. It is important not to confuse chronological age with normal developmental stages. A child's developmental age may not match what may be expected for the child's chronological age. You need to integrate your knowledge of child development with your knowledge of the child's sense of time, temperament, and language abilities. Some of this information may be obtained through interviews with the parents, consultations with school

teachers, or your own observations. Once you have a sense of the child, it becomes easier to understand the child's thinking. What the child says and does can best be interpreted by understanding the child's developing cognitive abilities and emotional state of mind.

When formulating questions to ask a child, it is important that the questions be appropriate for the child's developmental level. The following developmental stages address some of the developmental considerations which can be useful in planning an interview with a child.

Infants

Learning to trust is a primary task for infants. This task is achieved differently by each infant, depending on the infant's temperament, experience with caretakers, and level of security. There are several research studies that address differences in infants. The Chess/Thomas study found that a high percentage of infants fell into three major types (within normal range):

1. "easy" infants: have regular feeding/sleeping habits, a positive affect, and cry with reason most of the time.
2. "slow to warm-up" infants: take a while to adapt to new situations and do not adjust as easily to changes, but are able to adjust.
3. "difficult" infants: irritable, cry a lot, no regular patterns, no clear signals as to what they need, may get angry easily, may seem demanding, and may have skin sensitivities.

Toddlers

Toddlers At this age, children begin to test out the world, asserting their will power to try and be autonomous. Yet, toddlers still need the security that they can hold on when they don't want to let go. It is more difficult to structure play with this age group. Some children may have difficulty leaving their parent and may need a parent in the interview room with them. Their need for security should be respected.

Preschool and Early School

By using fantasy, children can "mimic" other people and events in their lives. They are able to distance themselves from their parents in order to pursue their own explorations, but cannot yet think logically about certain situations. Preschool children reason better when in familiar contexts that are known to them. They perform well on memory tasks that depend on recognition, but perform poorly on tasks that require deliberate recall. Young children are more likely to use magical thinking or to give inaccurate information when they do not know much about what they are being asked, feel confused, or want to avoid telling what they do know. The child may also tell the adults only what they believe the adults wish to hear.

Early School

At this age, children are moving towards mastery and competence, and need to create and compete. This age is more receptive to games or building things. They are developing their self-esteem and use their peers to measure their skills and worth. These children have better recall memory than preschoolers and logical thinking is more evident. They are able to look at problems and consider varied solutions and alternatives.

These children need to feel a sense of control over what they will be doing in the interview and how they might play out their thoughts or feelings. Sometimes children will play out a situation that they are trying to master. Play and storytelling can emerge from their drawings or building models.

Middle School

The developmental tasks for this group are similar to early school age. However, their feelings of competence are more evident as they move towards developing a stronger sense of self. Their logical

thinking is advanced, and they enjoy being challenged. Often, however, they see the world from a good/bad dichotomy, and fairness becomes an issue of importance.

Teenage

Teens are struggling to formulate their own identity, and attempt to be less connected to their parents and more independent than during their middle school years. Parental separation can interfere with this process. As they move from childhood to adulthood, teenagers continue to need some structure within flexible boundaries; this is a time when clarification of their own values is important. Teens have the cognitive abilities to understand the realities of their life situation.

Appropriate Questions

It is difficult to do an entire interview without asking any questions. It is more effective to use open-ended or indirect questions. Research shows that children provide more accurate information when they are freely narrating, rather than when they are being asked direct questions. Open-ended questions allow children to expand on their ideas and give us a better sense of their thinking. Asking children to describe their home, their parents, or what they enjoy doing, allows them the freedom to elaborate as they choose. Indirect questions provide a margin of safety for the child. If children are asked questions such as, "Some kids believe all boys should live with their Dads, what do you think?" or "Why would it be a good idea if the judge decided ...", then they have an opportunity to comment without feeling that they are directly revealing their choice. If a child avoids an issue, then it may be necessary to try another approach. You should encourage children to ask questions, and ask them to share whatever they would like about themselves or their family. Children enjoy having a sense of control over what they will be doing and saying.

When interviewing children, it is important to remember that what we observe may raise questions about the child and the child's life, but we must be cautious not to misinterpret their play or take their words literally. We do not want to reach a conclusion based on any one piece of information; it is best to use play to assist in formulating a hypothesis, which can then be further explored. Information that emerges in play needs to be corroborated by other sources, such as further observation of the child during play techniques, teacher consults, or parental, sibling, and other relative interviews. Observe the affective tone of the play and the context in which the affect occurs.

Below are age categories listed to give you an idea about how each age group may react.

Infants

Since we cannot "interview" infants you may try the following process.

Direct observation of the child.

Watch the child while playing, or generally relating to the parent, in order to gain a sense of the child's temperament. Observe the infant's development, and view the infant's reactions to a stranger (yourself). Note whether or not the baby makes eye contact (some are gaze avoidant). Ask yourself: What is this baby's affect? Is the baby dour? Does the baby show apathy? Does the baby seem comfortable with the parent? Is this a baby with whom anyone could be happy?

Assessing the parent-child interaction.

It is important to note how the parent relates to the child. Note whether the parent appears to be calm, gentle, relaxed, and confident about parenting, or if the parent is anxious, easily frustrated, inattentive, indifferent, or detached. Note what the parent does with the baby and what the parent communicates to the child through looks, touches, and gestures. One diagnostic tool you might use is a colorful object (for example, a red unsharpened pencil) placed between you and the parent holding the child. Observe the child's and parent's responses. Does the baby move towards the object? Does the parent restrain the child, or move the object away or towards the child? After the observation, ask the parent for their view of

the observation. Was this typical behavior for the child, or was it atypical (Has the child been sick? Did the child have a difficult night?).

This "interview" with the infant and parent will hopefully provide you with a sense of how secure this child feels, and whether or not the baby is wary, not very responsive, not very flexible, and, therefore, not very adaptable, to changing situations. You may also get a sense of whether the parent provides the child with appropriate stimuli, enhances the security of the child, and meets the child's needs.

2 to 5 Year Olds

With this age group, it often works best to simply have a table with play figures (small people and animals, small houses, cars, etc.) and invite the child to play.

This can be done with the child alone and then with each parent to see if certain themes emerge in the child's play or if these themes differ in each situation. Dialogue with the child needs to fit the child's developmental level. The following are some suggestions which have been found to be effective:

1. When possible, use short and simple sentences that incorporate the child's terms. If you are unfamiliar with the child's terms, ask the child: "What do you call _?" or "Tell me about ..."
2. Use names rather then pronouns (for example, "Uncle Sam", rather than "he").
3. Rephrase a question that a child does not understand rather than repeating it (if you repeat the question the child may think a wrong answer was given the first time and change the answer).
4. Avoid asking questions involving time.

Although some 2 and 3 year olds may not have very good verbal skills, recreating a situation or event often helps to stimulate their memory. The following are examples of structured play that can bring forth important information about who is central to the child's life as well as the child's feelings about a particular person.

Tea Parties

Tea parties can create an opportunity to see who children invite or don't invite. The child can be asked to pick a stuffed animal to represent each invitee. Ask the child to pick an animal who reminds the child of that person. Place the animal at the "tea party," and then have the child continue with the play. If the child does not include the parents, then you may ask if they would like to do so. You may also be invited to have tea and then will have an opportunity to see how the child relates to new people.

Play Figures

Young children can often be engaged in dollhouse play and play with animals (stuffed or puppets) where specific situations can be played out. Even if they are not very verbal, the children can be asked to place the play figure where they think they belong. Children enjoy putting play figures into cars or airplanes and then going places. These scenes can be suggested such as, "Who will go in the car? or Where will you go?" The child can be asked questions about the car ride such as, "What is fun about driving or going in the car with Mom/Dad?"

I Feel Game

This game is very non-threatening and familiar to some children, so they feel comfortable playing. It may pave the way for exploring the child's feelings. Use a paper bag with several objects in it, such as a piece of yarn, an eraser, a rock, a pencil with a sharp point, or a small ball, etc. Invite the child to feel one object and describe to you what it's like: "Is it small, big, soft, hard, long, short?" After pulling all the objects out of the bag, invite the child to draw, or help draw, some faces that show how the child feels, for example a sad or happy face (some will draw other faces).

Each face needs to be on a separate piece of paper near the child. Next, show the child appropriate pictures (cut out of magazines) and ask how the child would feel if what was happening in the picture

happened to them. Or, ask the child, "Show me the face that shows how you feel when ____ happens." (Describe an event that has happened or might have happened to the child.) Mix difficult happenings with safe ones ("How do you feel when you get to sleep with Mom?" or "When you go to the park to play?"). It helps to prepare your questions in advance.

Book Reading

Read to the child an appropriate book about separation, and as you are reading ask, "Did this happen in your family?" "Do you ever feel like this?" "What did you do when your Mom/Dad _____ ?"

Telephone Game

Two telephones are needed or other items that can serve as objects to represent telephones (for example, two blocks). Different make-believe phone calls are presented to the child and you can observe how the child handles each call.

6 to 9 Year Olds

The younger children in this age group respond well to some of the 2 to 5 year old techniques: doll house play, puppet shows, tea parties, car/airplane scenes, telephone game, and reading books. With this age group try to determine if the child has understood the question by asking the child to repeat what you have said, rather than asking, "Do you understand?" Try not to follow every answer with another question. Instead, either comment, ask the child to elaborate, or simply acknowledge the child's response. Learning about a child's routine affords you an opportunity to refer to certain activities that may help a child recall particular events that you may need to learn more about.

The following are common techniques used to elicit information about the child's family situation, the child's feelings, and/or feelings about the family.

Magic Wand

"If you had a magic wand (it is nice if you actually have a magic wand!) and could change anything you wanted, what would you change about a) your family, b) your Mom or Dad, c) where you live, and d) yourself?" Since these children need a sense of control over their lives, they enjoy getting to "change" the parents. Some will say, "I'd make them stop yelling at me" or "I'd make Dad be more fun" or "I'd make Mom not be so tired all the time."

Three Wishes

"If you had three wishes about your family, what would they be?" Common responses are "That Mom and Dad live together", "that they stop fighting", or "that we all live in the same house."

Animal Projection

Ask the child about having animals at home or what the child's favorite animals are then ask "What animal reminds you of your Mom/Dad? Why?" Or, ask the child to draw the animal that reminds them of Mom/Dad. "If you could change yourself into an animal, what animal would you be? Why?"

Life Story

"Let's write a short story about your life..." This can be done either on butcher paper taped on the wall or on a large piece of paper. Either the child or you can do the writing. Prompt the child with "Let's start with where you were born. Do you know who was there when you were born? Joey was born in___ . He lived with___ at ___."

Road of Life

Ask the child to draw a road and mark important happenings in their life. At the beginning of the road, make a notation of the child's birth date and birthplace. Ask the child to make bumps, potholes, rocks, or other obstacles in the road to represent illnesses or difficult times that have happened; note these on the road as they are shared. At the end of the road, ask what the child sees ahead (for example, What will he be doing? Where will she live?, etc.).

Draw Your Family

Often this will give you the child's idealized version of the family. You might want to ask the child, "Tell me about your family" or "Tell me something about your Mom/Dad." Ask the child to draw his or her family with everyone doing something active. You might ask, "How is ___ feeling in this drawing?" If the child draws a picture with only one parent, ask the child, "Draw me a picture of the family at home."

Draw Your Mom/Dad

After the drawing is complete, tell the child, "Well, this gives me an idea of what your Mom and Dad look like. Now can you tell me some words that will give me an idea of what your Mom and Dad are like and I'll write the words next to their picture as you tell me." Some children are quick to use phrases such as grumpy, yells a lot, fun, and takes me places. Other children are reticent. If the child struggles with providing the adjectives, you may try to guess and ask: "Is Mom fun, sad a lot, quiet, or boring?" Sometimes you get nothing but positive comments about one parent and nothing but negative comments about the other. You may also get the same adjectives for each parent. Often this technique gives an idea of the child's view of each parent.

Draw Mom/Dad's Homes

Ask the child to list the members of the child's home and then to list next to each home what they like best and least about being there. You can also ask how the child feels about the other people living in the home. This can inform you about the child's relationships with siblings and significant others in the home.

Projective Storytelling

Propose to tell a story with the child. Tell the child that you will tell a part of the story, and then stop so the child can add to the story. Go on taking turns adding to the story until one of you wants to end the story. You can begin with: "Once upon a time Annie lived with her Mom and Dad in a ___ (child adds on). Annie, Mom, and Dad liked to go together to ____ (child adds on). Then one day," etc. The story can give you more information about the child's perception of the child's life history, or of the child's capacity for fantasizing! Nonetheless, children have the opportunity to tell you about themselves.

How Do You Feel When ...

Prepare a list of applicable situations for the child, mixing the situations, such as, "How do you feel when you get good grades? How do you feel when your Mom/Dad sees you've gotten bad grades? How do you feel when you get to stay up as late as you want?" Kids tend to be more responsive to these questions when you have a piece of large paper with a horizontal line that is marked "Great" on one end, "Awful" at the other end, and "OK" in the middle. Ask the child to mark a perpendicular line on the horizontal one to indicate the child's response. Be sure to put the number of the question you have asked next to the child's perpendicular line. Having lines to mark, rather than responding verbally, sometimes makes it safer for children to express their feelings.

Favorite Things in Life

Take three sheets of paper and title them Mom, Dad, and Me. Ask the child to list each person's favorite things (for example, TV program, ice cream flavor, sport, activity, etc.) and have the child list each item on the appropriate sheet. Each response is an opportunity to ask the child to share more about themselves. After the three lists are done, you may have a sense of the areas in which the child identifies with a parent. Again, we must remember how sensitive these children are about comparing Mom and Dad with

the above techniques. It helps to ask about an activity with only one parent, and then ask about another activity with another parent. When asking about Mom and Dad, alternate between asking about Mom first and then about Dad first. It is best if you select which activity you want to use with this child, and avoid using more than two activities that involve comparison.

Draw an Island

There are several different variations on the "Island Fantasy." One variation tells the child to fantasize about living on an island where you have everything you need, but where you are lonely because no one else lives there. A magic fairy gives the child the chance to have anyone the child wants on the island. The fantasy ends with everyone going back to the land where they live, and everyone living happily ever after. You may get a sense of who is most important to the child through this fantasy.

In another version of the island fantasy, ask the child to draw an island and to put on the island only what the child wants on the island. When finished, ask the child to put the persons they want on the island with them. Older kids may put only their friends, in which case, then ask, "If your parents need to be on the island, where would you put them?" In one example of this game, a child put one parent on the island and the other far out at sea. The child had a boat, but only she could take the parents from one place to the other. She had control of whether the parents could get near each other!

Building Toys

Lego's, Lincoln Logs, Connect, blocks, Tinkertoys, etc., can often provide an opportunity for the child to tell a story about what they have built.

Sentence Completion

Prepare sentences for the child to complete. Formulate sentences that are relative to the child's situation.

10 to 13 Year Olds

Many of the activities mentioned for the 6 to 9 year olds are suitable for this age group. The most useful games are the drawing of the island. How do you feel when...?, Road of Life, and a variation of Hangman. For the latter, ask the child to think of a word that tells you how they feel about ... (for example, living with Dad, the way their parents get along, the amount of time they spend with Mom/Dad). The logical thinking for this group is advanced, so try to challenge them in some way. The following are some techniques:

Guessing Games

After familiarizing yourself with the child, engage them in the following: "I'm going to guess a few things about your life. I hope you'll tell me when I've guessed right or wrong." Then proceed with something such as "I'm going to guess that you like to go over to your Dad's because you don't get along with your stepbrother. Am I right?" You may try to say something that you know is wrong, so that the child will elaborate and correct you. They may enjoy proving you wrong.

The Debate

Take a situation and explain to the child that you are going to present some reasons why the situation should be a certain way. If the child thinks your reason has merit, then you get a point. The situation being debated, as well as the points gained, is written down on a piece of paper. If the child disagrees with your statement, then ask the child to present the reasons why the situation should be another way. Decide if the child's reason has enough merit to warrant a point and either give or don't give the point. Sometimes purposely withhold a point so that the child continues to advocate for the validity of their reason. This game has worked well in situations involving a child moving out of the area. You can ask the child to take the position they may not want to advocate (if you have a sense they do want to move, ask the child to argue on behalf of not moving).

Talk Show

Tell the child to pretend they are being interviewed or is appearing on a TV talk show. Ask the child, "What is your opinion about what children (in California) find difficult about being separated from their parent's?" Then ask the child to "give advice to the TV viewers about some things that might help kids whose parents no longer live with them."

Teenage

The needs and conflicts of the teen are very important. Some adolescents withdraw from the family to protect themselves from pain, and may be very resistant to any questioning. In most cases, the first part of the interview should focus on encouraging the teen to talk about issues central to the child's life which is separate from the court action, such as dating, friends, classes, sports, and extra-curricular activities. These are a few other questions that may elicit discussion with a teen:

- Ask them about what they think is going on with their family.
- You might say, "I heard _____ happened. What was that like for you?"
- "Your Mom/Dad already told me that you want _____. Will you tell me how he/she knows this?"
- Ask them to tell you about their earliest memory.
- Ask what has changed for them since being separated from their parents.

A few teens have responded to drawing when asked to draw their family, but instead of figures, ask them to use symbols (fruits, animals, etc.) to represent something about that parent. One teen drew a potato on a couch to represent his stepfather, a computer for his Mom, a musical instrument for his brother, and a boom box for one of his sisters. The drawing stimulated interesting conversation about his family. Sometimes teens like to be given paper and a pencil to doodle during the interview; sometimes the doodles can reveal some of their conflict.

Evaluate teens carefully; try to distinguish between normal adolescent independence and withdrawal, and what may be depression or intense anger related to the separation.