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Credential Program Sample Structured Behavioral Interview Tool

Questions and Score Guide

DirectCourse
ONLINE CURRICULA FOR LIFE IN COMMUNITY

The Value of Structured Behavioral Interviews in a Selection Process

Human service providers face many workforce challenges. This is especially true in direct support roles, where vacancies are high, turnover is frequent, and the available pool of workers is diminished due to demographic shifts, among other reasons. When selecting candidates for direct support professional (DSP) or frontline supervisor (FLS) roles, there can be pressure to hire candidates to fill vacancies without taking the time to fully understand their qualifications, experiences, and attitudes toward supporting people with disabilities.

Avoiding the use of intentional selection strategies in the hiring process can make problems related to turnover much worse. For example, new hires who are unprepared or poorly matched to the work are more likely to leave soon after being hired. Employees who stay but are not well-suited for their roles will not perform well. Chronic and early turnover, unskilled coworkers, or coworkers with poor attitudes can also affect longer term DSPs or FLSs who have previously been successful and committed employees. These employees may leave or struggle to stay engaged in their roles when faced with ongoing challenges with coworkers who are not well-suited for their direct support positions.

What is Structured Behavioral Interviewing?

Structured behavioral interviewing is a specific strategy used in interviewing that asks questions designed to seek behavioral responses. It is a key part of an effective selection process that is more likely to lead to finding employees who stay and perform well. A candidate's past behaviors are the best predictors of their future behaviors in similar situations. Structured behavioral interviews ask candidates to share past experiences that demonstrate the use of competencies that are most important to the role. This type of interview can help employers better explore a candidate's knowledge, skills, and attitudes (that is, their competencies). It can help to assess how well a candidate's competencies align with specific position needs. Structured behavioral interview questions are open-ended. Best practice is that interviews are conducted by an individual or by a team of interviewers together. Candidates' responses are rated using a standardized scoring protocol.

Another approach that may be useful during interviews for some job roles includes asking open-ended questions about a generic scenario that the candidate has not experienced. These are called situational questions. They may be useful for comparing how different candidates think they would apply competencies when faced with the same situation. However, because they are not based on past behavior, they may be less likely to predict future behavior in the role. Situational questions may still be useful in a selection process when used with other measures of competence (e.g., demonstrations, work samples, language proficiency testing, and so on). It is important to note that the questions in this guide are structured behavioral interview questions (based on past behavior) and do not include situational questions. If situational questions seem more appropriate, contact dswsolutions@umn.edu for assistance with the development of these questions.

Important Considerations in Using this Tool

Structured behavioral interviews are an element of the selection process that can help improve employee retention. They can support service quality. When using this guide, please keep the following best practices in mind:

Structured behavioral interviews should be integrated with other human resources and workforce development processes.

To have the largest effect, structured behavioral interviews should be part of a consistent and legal hiring process, guided by data, best practices, and the law. This requires working with human resource professionals to make sure that those involved in selecting new employees follow applicable laws, regulations, and organizational policies. They also need to be part of an overall plan to find, train, and keep competent employees once hired.

An interview process that includes structured behavioral interview questions should be developed and implemented by key stakeholders (e.g., human resource team or outside advisor, association, supervisors, managers, and seasoned DSPs) as part of an overall data-driven workforce development plan. This guide provides specific questions that focus on the most important competencies that align with the sample competency-based job descriptions and credential levels in the Credentialing Program toolkit. It is also important to consider any employer-specific elements you may want to include.

Structured behavioral interviews should be implemented in the context of best practices related to interviewing.

The use of selection teams (two or more people) in hiring is a best practice for interviewing. If it is difficult to schedule a selection team, consider using a video conferencing software to include team members. Using a selection team can reduce the effects of bias. It can provide a broader understanding of an applicant's responses. A designated team leader should manage the overall process. The same team members should conduct interviews when hiring for a given position. They can be drawn from people with various roles in the organization. This includes DSPs, people supported, and their families. Team members need to be supported so that they understand the value of structured behavioral interviews. They may need training to effectively engage in these processes. All team members need to have anti-bias training. They also need support to make sure they observe legal boundaries and organizational policies for interview processes.

Team members may use open-ended prompts when needed to fully explore the candidate's perspectives. (An example of an open-ended prompt is: "Tell me more about that, what did you do when that happened?") Teams need to plan time for candidates to have their questions answered in the interview, as well.

The use of score guides provides more consistency when evaluating candidates. It is a way for selection teams to discuss and compare candidates' attributes more fairly. Team members record key responses during each interview. Their notes should include specific candidate statements that influence how they rated each response. After the interview, team

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members use their initial scores and notes to come to a consensus on a final score for each question. Then the team decides whether they recommend the candidate for hire or not. Final hiring decisions should include more than the interview ranking, but the scores should be a central part of making these decisions.

Structured behavioral interviews should be implemented as part of a hiring process that is responsive to today's hiring environment.

Structured behavioral interviews are part of a selection process that can lead to improved retention and better quality in services. It is important that employers plan and use these processes consistently. However, to stay competitive in today's environment, hiring processes should be completed as quickly as possible while remaining fair, consistent, and useful. To do this, employers need to carefully consider what matters the most for each position. Interviews should focus on only what is most relevant and exclude things that are not essential to the role.

Other tools and resources

Additional tools or consultation from the Direct Support Workforce Solutions team can support best practices in recruitment, selection, retention, and quality. In addition, the DirectCourse College of Frontline Supervision, Management, and Leadership (CFSM) offers many lessons that may be beneficial for those engaged in the selection process. This includes support for using structured behavioral interview processes and related workforce development strategies. You can request more information about this curriculum at https://directcourseonline.com/.

Customizing this Structured Behavioral Interviewing Tool and Score Guide

It is recommended that no more than six questions are used when conducting structured behavioral interviews. Each question must be clearly tied to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for a specific position. This might include questions tied to the characteristics that are likely to help employees be successful in the role. They could be connected to the overall mission, vision, and values of the employer. Each question should be open-ended and ask for a description of a real-life situation, the candidates' actions, and an evaluation or reflection on their past approach, based on the outcomes. Follow-up prompts should be used when needed to get clarity about specific questions. The structured behavioral interview questions may be adjusted based on trends and input you receive from your employees through feedback and tools such as the Stay Interview/Retention Survey (available from the Direct Support Workforce Solutions consultants at dswsolutions@umn.edu). Be consistent and document the reason for changing your questions, but make modifications as you learn more and your needs evolve.

A list of three to five competency-based structured behavioral interview questions for each credential level has been provided below to support the development of your interviewing tool and score guide. These questions are connected to the competencies included in the sample job description for each credential level in the DirectCourse Credentialing Program toolkit. You can use some or all of these questions in your Structured Behavioral Interviewing Tool and Score Guide, either as they are or customized to better align with your direct support positions. You may also choose to add questions and scoring protocols that reflect unique aspects of specific positions. The last two pages of this tool include directions, a sample score guide and scoring protocols, and space for you to enter up to six questions.

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Structured Behavioral Interview Questions

Questions for both direct support professional and frontline supervisor candidates are listed below. If employers use a career ladder or credentialing program, there are also sets of questions that align with a credentialing program or career ladder. Contact dswsolutions@umn.edu for the other list of questions.

Direct Support Professional Candidate Questions that Align with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) — Direct Service Workforce Competency Set and the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) Competency Set

These questions align with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) — Direct Service Workforce Competency Set and the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) Competency Set. Employers can choose questions from this list that align with prioritized competencies for the open position.

1. Describe a time when you had trouble understanding someone, or what they were trying to tell you. What was the situation, what did you do, and what happened? Would you handle it differently today? If so, how? (CMS DSW competency area 1. Communication & NADSP DSP competency area 2. Communication)
2. Consider a time you had to work with a group or team to develop a plan. What did you contribute to the plan? Describe how you worked with other members of the group or team to find out what they could contribute. Describe what happened and what the outcome was. (CMS DSW competency area 2. Person-Centered Practices & NADSP DSP competency area 5. Facilitation of Services)
3. Describe a time you supported someone by educating a community or family member about their wishes and goals. What went well with this situation? What could have gone better? Explain what you would do differently now, if anything. (CMS DSW competency area 2. Person-Centered Practices & NADSP DSP competency area 14. Provide Person-Centered Supports)
4. Describe a time when someone in your life was shy about telling you what they liked to do or preferred to do or they didn't communicate their preferences verbally. How did you approach finding out this information? (CMS DSW competency area 3. Evaluation and Observation & NADSP DSP competency area 3. Assessment)
5. Consider a time when you found yourself in an emergency. Describe the situation. How did you react, and what was the outcome? If this happened today, how would you handle it differently? (CMS DSW competency area 4. Crisis Prevention and Intervention & NADSP DSP competency area 10. Crisis Prevention and Intervention)
6. Describe a time when you felt someone you supported, or someone in your life was in a risky situation and you were concerned for their safety. Describe the situation and how you approached it. What did you do? What was the outcome? What would you do differently if that same situation occurred today? (CMS DSW competency area 5. Safety & NADSP DSP competency area 10. Crisis Prevention and Intervention)
7. Describe your greatest contribution to a team, employer, or the development of a coworker, friend, or family member in the last year. Which of your skills, knowledge, and attitudes does this example demonstrate? (CMS DSW competency area 6. Professionalism and Ethics & NADSP DSP competency area 11. Organizational Participation)
8. Describe a time you needed to keep information about someone or yourself confidential. Describe the situation and why confidentiality was necessary. What did you do and what was the outcome. (CMS DSW competency area 6. Professionalism and Ethics & NADSP DSP competency area 12. Documentation)
9. Consider a time when a person you supported, or a person in your life had desires that were not supported by someone who had the power to be a barrier. Describe the situation and what was going on. What did you decide to do in this situation and why? Would you change anything about your approach if you were in this situation today? Why or why not? (CMS DSW competency area 7. Empowerment & Advocacy & NADSP DSP competency area 8. Advocacy)

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10. Describe a time when you helped someone do something on their own. This could be a friend, a person in your family, a colleague or person you supported. Describe the situation and how you approached assisting them. What was the outcome? (CMS DSW competency area 7. Empowerment & Advocacy & NADSP DSP competency area 1. Participant Empowerment)
11. Describe a time you needed to help someone else with personal care such as getting dressed, groomed, changing a bandage, or walking. Maybe it was a time that you needed this type of assistance. Describe the situation. If you provided assistance, how did you approach the situation? If you received assistance, how did you feel? (CMS DSW competency area 8. Health and Wellness & NADSP DSP competency area 15. Supporting Health and Wellness)
12. Describe a situation where someone in your life was having trouble learning something new. Describe the situation, how you approached the situation, and the outcome. (CMS DSW competency area 9. Community Living Skills and Supports & NADSP DSP competency area 6. Community Living Skills & Supports)
13. Describe a time when you were new to an area, employer, or school. Maybe it was a time that you helped someone who was new, or a person you supported in this situation. How did you approach the situation? How did you meet people, and get to know your surroundings or help the other person do this? What was the outcome? (CMS DSW competency area 9. Community Living Skills and Supports & NADSP DSP competency area 13. Building and Maintaining Friendships and Relationships)
14. Think of a time when you helped or supported someone to try something new, make new friends or join a new community. Describe this situation and tell us what worked well and what could have been better. (CMS DSW competency area 10. Community Inclusion and Networking & NADSP DSP competency area 4. Community and Service Networking)
15. Describe a time you assisted someone in searching for a job. This could be a friend, colleague, family-member, a person you supported or even you. Describe the situation and what you did. What did you decide to do and why? What would you change about your approach, or have you changed today? (CMS DSW competency area 10. Community Inclusion and Networking & NADSP DSP competency area 9. Vocational, Educational & Career Support)
16. Describe a situation that shows your ability to consider a person's physical, mental, or emotional needs based on their cultural background. Tell us about the situation and what you did to understand and communicate what was happening with the person. What was the outcome of your assessment? Is there anything you would change about how you approached this situation if you faced it today? Explain this. (CMS DSW competency area 11. Cultural Competency & NADSP DSP competency area 15. Supporting Health and Wellness)
17. Think of a time where you did not know how to complete a task. What did you do to get the information you needed to complete the task? What challenges did you experience? Would you do anything differently? (CMS DSW competency area 12. Education, Training and Self-Development & NADSP DSP competency area 7. Education, Training & Self-Development)

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Frontline Supervisor Candidate Questions that Align with the National Frontline Supervisor Competency Set

These questions align with the National Frontline Supervisor (NFS) Competency Set. Employers can choose questions from this list that align with prioritized competencies for the open position. Some of these questions may overlap with DSP candidate questions. For those questions, interviewers should be looking for a more advanced response than what would be expected from a DSP.

1. Describe a time when you helped someone do something on their own. This could be a friend, a person in your family, a colleague or person you supported. Describe the situation and how you approached assisting them. What was the outcome? (NFS competency area 1. Direct support)
2. Describe a time when you felt someone you supported, or someone in your life was in a risky situation and you were concerned for their safety. Describe the situation and how you approached it. What did you do? What was the outcome? What would you do differently if that same situation occurred today? (NFS competency area 2. Health, wellness, and safety)
3. Describe a time when someone in your life was shy about telling you what they liked to do or preferred to do, or they didn't communicate their preferences verbally. How did you approach finding out this information? (NFS competency area 3. Participant support plan development, monitoring and assessment)
4. Think of a time when you supported someone to try something new, make new friends or join a new community. Describe this situation and tell us what worked well and what could have been better. (NFS competency area 4. Facilitating community inclusion across the lifespan)
5. Share your definition of listening and then provide a work-based example where you used this skill. Describe the situation, how you used this skill, and the outcome of the interaction. Looking back on this example, is there anything you would change about it, given what you know today? Why or why not? (NFS competency area 5. Promoting professional relations and teamwork)
6. Consider a time that you were involved in hiring an employee. Describe your responsibility in the process, how you decided on who to hire, and what the outcome was. What would you change about the process? (NFS competency area 6. Staff recruitment, selection, and hiring)
7. Describe a time when you needed to give feedback to a colleague or coworker who was not performing well. What was the situation, what did you do, and what happened? Would this represent your best skills today? Why or why not? (NFS competency area 7. Staff supervision, training, and development)
8. Describe a time when you had many competing demands in your work role, and you were not able to achieve everything you were expected to. What was the situation, what did you do, and what was the outcome? What would you do differently today, if anything? (NFS competency area 8. Service management and quality assurance)
9. Think about a time when you supported someone you supervised, someone you supported, or a coworker to advocate for themselves. Describe your role in the process, what you did, and what the outcome was. What would you do differently, if anything? (NFS competency area 9. Advocacy and public relations)
10. Think of a time where you did not know how to complete a task. What did you do to get the information you needed to complete the task? What challenges did you experience? Would you do anything differently? (NFS competency area 10. Leadership, professionalism and self-development)
11. Describe a time when you supported someone from a cultural or linguistic background that you were unfamiliar with in a person-centered way. What was the situation? How did you gain the skills and knowledge that you needed to support them? What was the outcome? Is there anything you would change about your approach in the future, based on this situation? (NFS competency area 11. Cultural awareness and responsiveness)

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Structured Behavioral Interviewing

Score Guide Form

Position: **Date:**

Candidate Name: **Interviewer:**

Directions: Score each question, using a competency-based job description for this position and the employer's mission, vision, and values as sources. Record specific examples and responses provided by the candidate that support your scoring decisions. Use the following scale, from 1–5.

- **5 = Excellent:** Demonstrated broad knowledge and skills, included specific and relevant examples, showed person- and family-centered focus and attitudes
- **3 = Satisfactory:** Demonstrated basic knowledge or skill needed for position, included some specific examples, showed ability to reflect and to respond in person- or family-centered ways
- **1 = Poor:** Demonstrated little or no knowledge or experience, and/or included no specific examples, and/or some responses indicated undesirable attitudes or behaviors for the position

Question 1:

Rating (check one): ① ② ③ ④ ●

Question 2:

Rating (check one): ● ② ③ ④ ⑤

Question 3:

Rating (check one): ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Question 4:

Rating (check one): ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Question 5:

Rating (check one): ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Question 6:

Rating (check one): ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Other Notes:

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Ongoing oppression and discrimination in the United States has led to significant trauma for many people of color, immigrants, people with disabilities and other oppressed persons. At ICI, we affirm our commitment to address systemic racism, ableism and all other inequalities and forms of oppression to ensure inclusive communities.

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