

Performance Skills – Definitions to Help Interviewer

The following are skills that would be considered critical for adults working with children. Use the definitions to help you listen to the applicant's examples of previous work with children. Specific examples of previous situations will help you evaluate the applicant's skills.

Trainability. Able to comprehend and behaviorally incorporate new information and skills; willing to utilize training and supervision to modify and improve known techniques.

Tell me about a time in your life when you had to quickly learn how to do something. What did you have to learn? How did you learn it? Did you use the new information?

Policy adherence. Able to conform to established policies and procedures and to address issues in a manner that is consistent with existing procedures for the organization.

Often in school or work, we're expected to adhere to policies that don't really make sense to us. Tell me about a time when you had to stick to a rule, even though it didn't seem reasonable. How did you handle that situation?

Patience. Able to maintain a mature, problem-solving demeanor when faced with interpersonal conflict, personal rejection, hostility, or other stressful circumstances, control anger, control frustration, and demonstrate patience.

Give me an example of a time when a child, teen, or adult really tried your patience. Specifically, tell me about an instance in which this person seemed to want to make you angry. How did you respond to that situation?

Supportiveness. Able to show genuine concern for others, determine when a person needs comfort, and provide appropriate comfort in a manner that is helpful.

Describe a time when you were personally supportive and reassuring to a person who needed a friend. How did you know the person was in need? How did you show your support?

Judgment. Able to generate useful, effective solutions. Exhibits a realistic understanding of issues and uses reason, even when dealing with emotional or sensitive topics.

Tell me about a time when someone commended you for your good judgment and common sense. What was the situation, and how did you handle the situation?

Boundaries. Able to understand and abide by organizational policies as well as maintain appropriate, professional contacts with children. Exhibits a clear understanding that children are not peers.

Tell me about a time when you were able to make a difference in a child's life. What did you do, and how did it influence the child? Where is the child now?

Praesidium's Interpretive Guide for Interviews

The Interpretive Guide for Interviews provides information about how to interpret applicant responses, and includes sample responses. For questions designed to assess risk, the guidelines describe a low-risk and a high-risk response, with an example of each. For questions designed to assess skills, the guidelines describe what would constitute a positive and a negative response.

1. Tell me why you are interested in this position.

This question may be used to assess the extent to which an applicant desires to work with clients to fulfill his or her own needs, rather than the needs of the child.

Low-risk response: The applicant describes what he/she has to offer and the qualities he/she has that will make him/her good with children.

For example: "I believe that if you give young people a solid foundation, that it can sustain them throughout their lives. I've always been really good at listening to kids and making them feel understood. I think I can use this skill to help them make good choices about life."

High-risk response: 1) The applicant describes how children fulfill his/her needs or validate his/her sense of competence or well being. 2) The applicant is unconcerned about what the duties of the position are, as long as it involves working with children.

For example: "When I'm surrounded by children, I know I am right where I belong. With adults you never know what their motives are, but with kids, their motives are pure. They are so loving they just make me feel good."

2. With what group of children would you prefer to work? Why?

This question may be used to assess the extent to which an applicant has an age, gender, or disability preference.

Low-risk response: The applicant is not concerned with the gender, age, or other particular traits, or the applicant prefers a specific gender or age because of practical reasons.

For example: "I would like to work with non-ambulatory clients because my grandmother is non-ambulatory and I know lots of ways to work with her." Or "I've learned how few people really know how to care for someone like my grandmother. With what I've learned from caring for her, I think I can help others."

High-risk response: The applicant prefers a specific gender, age, or other particular traits.

For example: "I really want to work with non-ambulatory clients. I'm not sure why. It just seems like that would be interesting." Or "Those people are just so helpless; they really need me."

3. Tell me about some of your hobbies or volunteer work.

This question may be used to assess whether an applicant might be excessively interested and involved with children. Note any hobbies, activities, or volunteer work that was not identified on the application.

Low-risk response: The applicant describes involvement with adult peers and shows interest in activities with friends or family members.

For example: “I like ceramics and pottery. About two years ago my sister and I took a crafts class together and we just really enjoyed it. So we found a community workshop where you can bring your own clay and use their wheels and ovens to make your own pots. There are six of us now that meet every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon.” Or “In my last job, I really didn’t have much time for hobbies, but about four friends and I did meet for lunch about once a month. We used to laugh that eating lunch was our hobby.”

High-risk response: The applicant doesn’t seem to have many recreational activities or hobbies and indicates that he or she is a bit of a “loner.” Another high-risk response would be if the applicant is involved in numerous activities involving children, particularly one-to-one activities with little monitoring.

For example: “Well, I like to work out...so I’ve got a couple of kids I’m training on the weight machines at the gym downtown two nights a week. I think its real good for them. I also coach a youth team two nights a week, volunteer as a big brother with two youths, and teach fourth grade Sunday school at my church.”

4. Tell me about a time in your life when you had to quickly learn how to do something. What did you have to learn? How did you learn it? Did you use the new information?

This question may be used to assess the applicant’s level of the Performance Skill: **Trainability**.

Positive: Was the applicant motivated to learn quickly and willing to work hard to make changes?

For example: “In my last job, I had to learn how to run a new computer program, so I attended the training classes they offered, and then I worked at home in the evenings to try to sharpen my skills. Now I can do just about anything with that program.”

Negative: Did the applicant have trouble understanding the new material or was the applicant unwilling to make extra effort to learn quickly?

For example: “Well, I have a way of sort of knowing things naturally. I don’t need a lot of training or teaching. I usually just figure things out on my own.”

5. Often in school or work, we're expected to adhere to policies that don't really make sense to us. Tell me about a time when you had to stick to a rule, even though it didn't seem reasonable. How did you handle that situation?

This question may be used to assess the applicant's level of the Performance Skill: **Policy Adherence**.

Positive: Was the applicant open to understanding the policy and willing to adhere to a policy that was inconvenient? Did the applicant work to get a truly unreasonable policy changed by working through the system, rather than simply ignoring or disregarding it?

For example: "I worked in a school program for kids with disabilities. We had this one boy who wore a leg brace, and the teacher always wanted me to walk with him when he was going to lunch. I didn't see the point in that because he was so capable of walking by himself, and other children needed more help. The teacher kept telling me that this boy would be in danger of breaking his leg, because of the kind of brace he wore, if he fell or were pushed or something. Sure enough, in an accident at his home, he fell and broke his leg. I was really glad that we had watched him so closely at school."

Negative: Was the applicant unwilling to learn the rationale for the rule? Did the applicant disregard the policy without attempting to get it modified?

For example: "You know it seems to me that every situation is different. Instead of having a lot of silly rules, we ought to just handle the kids individually. This one place I worked insisted that we not tickle the kids, not even when we were just playing with them. That is so ridiculous to me because kids need a lot of love and attention that they don't always get at home."

6. Give me an example of a time when a child or vulnerable adult really tried your patience. Specifically, tell me what happened. How did you respond to that situation?

This question may be used to assess the applicant's level of the Performance Skill: **Patience**.

Positive: Does the applicant maintain his/her composure even when others attempt to provoke him/her into anger? Is the applicant able to maintain boundaries with children or clients and recognize that the situation is not personal?

For example: "My mother-in-law has Alzheimer's Disease, and she gets things on her mind and just won't let them go. She asks the same questions over and over, and no amount of explaining satisfies her; she just becomes more and more agitated. So we've learned just to agree with her and assure her that we're doing as she asked. We just say, 'Yes, yes, you're right. I know; we'll do that right away.' This doesn't always satisfy her completely, but it does help her calm down somewhat."

Negative: Is the applicant easily provoked into an emotional display of frustration or anger? Does the applicant take interactions with children personally and deal with them on a child-like or immature level?

For example: "Oh, yeah. I've worked with difficult kids before. With those really tough guy types, you've just got to show them that you're tougher than they are to keep them in their place. Otherwise, they'll just run all over you. This one kid had made up a nickname for me to make fun of me. Well, I just came right back with a nickname for him and got all the other kids to call him that, which settled him down quite a bit."

7. Describe the two most frustrating situations you have ever had to deal with involving children and how you handled them.

This question may be used to assess the applicant's ability to handle stress and work with children or vulnerable adults in a non-abusive manner, despite frustration. This question is also a useful to evaluate the extent of the applicant's experience with children or vulnerable adults. Individuals with extensive experience with children or vulnerable adults are easily able to identify frustrating situations and admit to the stress of the work.

Low-risk response: The applicant is able to continue problem-solving despite frustrating circumstances. The applicant seeks help from others, stays calm, and eventually finds solutions.

For example: "Well, I know one for sure. It was "The Biter." When I worked for the childcare center I told you about, there was this one kid who would literally bite someone every time our backs were turned. Oh, it was just awful! We tried everything to get him to stop, but eventually we had to tell the parents that he needed more supervision than we could provide. The other situation was this kid who screamed whenever he got frustrated. He could just about bust your eardrums screaming. We used time out with him and taught him how to calm himself down. Eventually, he would just put himself in time out to feel calmer without screaming. I think he was as relieved as we were when the screaming stopped."

High-risk response: The applicant either denies ever encountering a frustrating situation or describes an incident in which he or she quickly lost patience and used poor judgment.

For example: "Frustrating? Gosh I can't really say that I can think of a situation I found particularly frustrating. I guess some people do get a little put out with kids, but I can't say that's ever happened to me." Or "Well now, you know I love kids, but we had this one girl on the soccer team who kicked me one time. She was a mean one, and I'd just about had it with her. I just kicked her right back. I probably wouldn't do that again, but she made me so mad, I just couldn't help it. Anyway, I'll bet she thought twice before kicking someone again."

8. Have you ever abused or molested a child or vulnerable adult? Have you ever been accused of abusing or molesting a child or vulnerable adult?

This question may be used to evaluate the applicant's history of abusing or molesting children and adults. A direct question is an extremely useful tool if you look closely at the responses.

Low-risk response: The applicant may be surprised by the question, but is not indignant. The applicant provides a direct, non-evasive response. For example: "No, I haven't."

High-risk response: The applicant is angered by the question, indignant at being asked, and/or evasive in the response. For example: "I can't believe you would ask me such a thing! What kind of a person do you think I am? I really don't appreciate your implication!"

9. Describe a time when you were personally supportive and reassuring to a person who needed a friend. How did you know that person was in need? How did you show your support?

This question may be used to assess the applicant's level of the Performance Skill:

Supportiveness.

Positive: Did the applicant demonstrate warmth, compassion, confidentiality, and concern?

For example: "I worked with this woman one time that nobody liked. She was sort of rude and short with everybody. I didn't like her, either, but I found myself sitting next to her at lunch one day, and I just decided I'd try to talk with her. When she talked with me, I realized how stressed out she was at work. She was relatively new there, and she didn't feel that she knew all she needed to know, and she could tell that people didn't like her. She just didn't know what to do. Once I understood all of that, I helped her learn some of the information she needed for her work, and when others saw that I was friendly with her, they started visiting with her, too. Then she actually became nicer, I think, and everyone got along ok."

Negative: Was the applicant reluctant to become involved and somewhat disinterested in the person's real feelings?

For example: "I try to be nice to everybody, but there was this one guy I just couldn't get along with. He was all the time whining about what a hard time his family was having. I just don't have the time for that, you know? I mean, take a number. Everybody's got it rough."

10. Tell me about a time when someone commended you for your good judgment and common sense. What was the situation and how did you handle it?

This question may be used to assess the applicant's level of the Performance Skill: **Judgment.**

Positive: Did the applicant receive praise for coping with and resolving a genuinely difficult situation? Did he/she use careful analysis and sound judgment?

For example: "One time when I worked in a nursing home, one of our patients became really belligerent one day before lunch. The other assistant thought that we should restrain her in bed until she calmed down, but I remembered that the patient had diabetes. I thought she might just need to eat something. Sure enough, we were able to get her to drink some orange juice, and within minutes she calmed down. Then we realized that she hadn't even known what she was doing because her blood sugar level was too low. My supervisor was impressed that I thought about the causes of her behavior instead of just reacting to it."

Negative: Was the applicant praised for merely completing the solutions generated by others and following through with directions?

For example: "A couple of years ago, a kid fell on the playground and cut his knee. It scared me to see how badly he was hurt, but I kept my head about me and got him to the nursing assistant the way I was supposed to. My boss was impressed that I did such a good job under stress."

High-Risk Indicators for Interviews

- ⌘ Applicant gave high-risk responses from Praesidium's Interpretive Guide.**
- ⌘ Applicant gave defensive/angry responses.**
- ⌘ Applicant gave evasive responses.**
- ⌘ Applicant described patterns or themes of gaining access to children.**
- ⌘ Applicant described patterns or themes of preferences for a particular age range of children or client population, with no reasonable explanation for the preference.**
- ⌘ Applicant described patterns or themes of problems with authority.**
- ⌘ Applicant is not applying for a specific position and is willing to accept positions which vary significantly in pay and/or responsibilities.**