

Interview with parents about their family's culture and context

An assessment tool based on the Cultural Formulation Interview (CFI) in DSM-5



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ABOUT THE INTERVIEW

A person's cultural background influences how that person explains and manages illness, what they seek help for and from whom. The focus of this parent interview is on culture and context and is intended for use in child and adolescent psychiatry, and other areas. SANKS-BUP (SANKS-Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Outpatient Clinic), Sámi Clinic, Finnmark Hospital Trust has specifically prepared this for the purpose of assessing Sámi patients and other patients from ethnic minorities. The interview is based on the *cultural formulation interview (CFI)* in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5). This interview guide has also been published in Sámi and Norwegian.

The interview can be held during a single parent consultation or it can be divided for several consultations. At SANKS-BUP, for example, some questions are asked during the first consultation, others are asked when taking the child's case history, while questions about family relationships are documented in a third consultation.

Please note that this is a semi-structured interview and not a questionnaire. This means that the conversation should be as natural as possible. When asking the questions, the therapist does not necessarily have to follow the suggested order. The questions serve as a guide so that the therapist can adapt them to the individual family. Follow-up questions should be asked where they are considered necessary.

It is important that the therapist informs the parents about the purpose of the interview before the actual interview starts. Also explain about the theme before each chapter. A suggestion regarding information is provided below. In addition, there is a guide for the therapist for each chapter, with a short description of the purpose and background to the theme.

(**Note:** The consultation with the parents may take place with both parents present, or with just one of the parents. Feel free to replace the term THE PROBLEMS, which is frequently repeated in the questions, with words that describe the child's problems or the reason for referral).

Suggestion for presentation of the interview to the parents:

Today, we are going to have a conversation specifically about your child's cultural background. As therapists, we need to understand our patients' culture and how the environment affects any problems or issues they are experiencing. The conversation will revolve around how you as a family describe and explain your child's problems, whether you have previously sought help, how you have tried to manage these problems and whether your cultural background and environment may have had an influence.

CHAPTER 1: THE FAMILY'S DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEMS

Guide for the therapist

The purpose of this module is to elicit how the parents themselves describe the problems, their experience of the degree of severity, their views on receiving help from BUP and how they explain the problems to members of their social network. The reason behind these questions is that patients and referring bodies may often have different opinions about the problems and the importance of referral. It is particularly important to get the parents' description when the family comes from a minority culture that differs from the majority culture.

Questions for the parents:

- As a start, I would like you to describe the problems as you perceive them.
- There are often different opinions about a problem, for example about how serious it is. Does this apply to your family?
If yes, please give more details about this.
- Was everyone in the family in agreement about getting help from BUP?
If no, please give more details about this.
- Do the problems affect the rest of the family? If yes, how?
- What is bothering you the most with regard to these problems?
- How does the kindergarten/school describe the problems, and how serious do they think they are?
- Parents often explain such problems somewhat differently to others in the family and to friends. How do you usually explain your child's problems to others?

CHAPTER 2: THE FAMILY'S EXPLANATION OF THE PROBLEMS

Guide for the therapist

The purpose of this module is to elicit the parents' explanation of the problems. This could be different to how others in the family, school and local community perceive them. Note that the parents may give multiple reasons. Some people may feel that the problems are the result of something bad that has happened in their lives, that the problems have been inflicted by others, that they are due to a physical disorder, that they run in the family or that there is a spiritual/existential reason etc.

Explanations concerning reasons may have a cultural basis and may differ from the explanation provided by the referring body in the referral letter. It is important to elicit the parental and environmental explanations because they can contribute to a better understanding of the problem and to a stronger therapeutic alliance.

Questions for the parents:

- What do you think could be the explanation for the problems?
- What does your child and others in the family think is the explanation for the problems?
- What do friends and others in your local community think?
- What does the kindergarten/school think is the explanation for the problems?

CHAPTER 3: SUPPORT AND STRESSORS

Guide for the therapist

The purpose of this module is to examine the social/cultural context in which the family is living, how their local community are supporting them and any stress that they are under. This information will make it possible to frame the problems in a broader social/cultural context.

Questions for the parents:

- Is there anything in the kindergarten/school or in your child's circle of friends which affects the problems? If yes, in what way?
- Is there any stress in the family or in your environment that is making these problems more difficult to manage (e. g. marital or relationship problems, financial difficulties or discrimination)? If yes, what is it?
- Have you had help from others in the family or from friends or others that has made the situation easier? If yes, what type of help and from whom?

CHAPTER 4: COPING ALONE AND SEEKING HELP

Guide for the therapist

The purpose of this module is to elicit the parents' methods of coping with the problems. Different cultures have different coping mechanisms. These questions explore previous as well as current attempts to get help, their access to health services, cultural and language barriers related to their contact with the health services, attitudes towards and expectations of the health services, any perceived benefits, and the use of traditional healers or religious leaders (e.g. a pastor in a Laestadian church).

Questions for the parents:

- How have you tried to deal with these problems?
- Have you previously tried to get help? If yes, what type of help or advice did you get?
- Has it been difficult to get the help that you needed (e.g. because of language issues or a lack of cultural expertise in the treatment service)?
If yes, please describe.
- Have you contacted other persons outside of the health services, e.g. healers, a priest or others? If yes, what type of help did you get?
- Is religion or faith important to you and the family? If yes, please describe.
- What type of help or treatment did you find most useful? What was not useful?
- Now that you are here, what are your expectations of the type of help you can get?
- Are there any other types of help that you or others (family, friends, others) believe will be useful for you in the current situation?
If yes, please describe.

CHAPTER 5: THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY

We can gain a better insight here by using a genogram as a tool

Guide for the therapist

The purpose of this module is to examine the family structure, power relations within the family, the family's livelihood and the family's social network. Furthermore: openness/taboo around mental health problems, the child's relationships with and attachment to others in the family, and the family's resources. The questions about child-rearing are essential in gaining an understanding of the family's cultural norms and values. The module includes questions about rules and routines, behavioral control methods and care/closeness. Finally, the parents are asked to reflect on their own upbringing compared with how they are raising their child; this can provide information about the aspects of their culture's traditional methods of child-rearing that are still practised and the extent to which new attitudes and practices have taken over.

Regarding indirect control methods: In some cultures, e.g. in the Sámi culture, indirect methods of communication are often used. Instead of telling a child directly what they should or should not do, parents might use indirect methods of regulating their child's behavior. One example of an indirect method that the Sámi have used in their child-rearing is 'narrideapmi', which can be translated as 'good-natured teasing'; this enables the child to understand what they should or should not do without telling them directly.

Questions for the parents:

- How many family members do you have in your family? (single parent/nuclear family/extended family/relatives) (Remember to ask about godparents, male or female namesakes).
- Do you think that your child's ways of behaving resemble those of anyone else in the family?
- Is your family involved in primary sectors such as reindeer herding, agriculture, fishing or a combination of these? If yes, how does this affect your way of life/everyday life? Could this way of life have a positive or negative impact on the problems?
- How would you describe the family's social network (relatives, acquaintances and friends)?

Family relationships and sense of belonging within the family

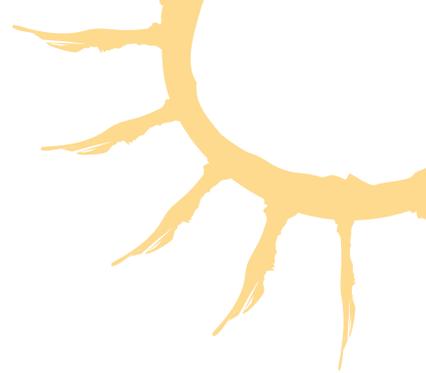
- Have you been able to talk to anyone in the family about these problems? If yes, to whom?
- How would you describe the relationship you have with your child? What about the relationship between your child and other members of the family?
- At present, what person(s) in the family is your child most closely attached to?

The family's resources

- What are the family's strong points?
- What are the child's strong points?

Child-rearing

- Who in the family takes part in child-rearing (e.g. grandparents, godparents, others in the family or the extended family) and how?
- Who has the most say in the child's upbringing—is there someone in the family who makes more decisions than others?
- Are there any conflicts or disagreements in the family as to child-rearing (e.g. parental disagreement, or disagreement between mother's and father's family)?
- What kind of rules and routines do you have for your child (e.g. relating to mealtimes, bedtime, time spent indoors, screen time, homework)?
- Many parents sleep in the same bed as their children. What do you do in your family?
- Does your child have any set tasks to do in the house (e. g. tidying their room, emptying the dishwasher), and do you think that your child should have tasks to do at home?
- As part of child-rearing in your family, do you have different norms and rules for girls and boys, and if so, what are they?
- How do you get your child to do what you would like him / her to do (direct or indirect control of child behavior such as teasing (in Sámi: 'narrideapmi')? Remember also to ask if there are other methods that grandparents and other adults in the family use).
- What do you do to stop your child if his / her behavior is unacceptable (e.g. explain, speak firmly to them, isolate them/give them a 'time out', physical punishment)?
- What do you do to comfort your child when he / she is sad?
- What do you do with your child when you want to enjoy and have fun?
- The way children are raised often changes from one generation to the next. Have the ways in which you, yourselves, were raised had any impact on how you raise your own child? If yes, please give more details about this.
- What do you emphasise the most in your child-rearing, and what would you say is your goals?



CHAPTER 6:

LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL AFFILIATION

Guide for the therapist

This module focuses on the parents' and the child's cultural identity and particularly emphasises documentation of the family's language and cultural affiliation. It is also important to find out whether any past history of "Norwegianization" and possible historical trauma may have affected the parents in their role as parents. Also be aware of any current experiences of cultural discrimination and -bullying and the subsequent impact on the family and the child's problems.

Questions for the parents:

The family's language and cultural affiliation

- What language do you speak within the family?
(Maybe draw a "lingogram"/language map)
- Do you, the parents, come from the same or from different cultural backgrounds? If your cultural backgrounds are different, does this have any impact on your child (e.g. with regard to the language you choose to speak, customs and traditions, family activities)?
- How would you describe your affiliation with your own (original) culture?
- Have you experienced cultural discrimination, or have you had other negative experiences because of your family's cultural background? Positive experiences? Is it possible that such experiences could have had a bearing on the problems?

The child's language and identity (apply to Sámi families, but may be adapted to other minority groups)

- Is the language spoken in your child's kindergarten/school Sámi or Norwegian?
- How is your child's Sámi background catered for in the school/kindergarten?
- Do you do anything in particular to improve your child's Sámi language skills, and if so, what?
- Are there other things you do to strengthen your child's sense of belonging to the Sámi culture (e. g. traditional Sámi food, nature trips, hunting, fishing, Sámi clothes/crafts)?
- Has your child experienced bullying or exclusion because of its Sámi background?

Historical trauma and discrimination (apply to Sámi families, but may be adapted to other minority groups)

- When you look back at your family history, has the "Norwegianization" policy affected your family (e. g. previous boarding school experiences and ethnic discrimination)?
- If yes, has it affected your own lives (e. g. boarding school, relationships with parents, siblings or others close to you who you have been separated from)?
- Has your family been affected by trauma after the war?
- If yes, do you think that this has had any impact on your self-esteem or mental health?

CHAPTER 7: THE PATIENT-THERAPIST RELATIONSHIP

Guide for the therapist

The purpose of this module is to elicit possible concerns that the parents have about language barriers or cultural differences during the sessions, which could undermine their trust and communication. The conversation should end with the parents being allowed to evaluate its benefits.

Questions for the parents:

- If the patient and the therapist come from different cultural backgrounds or have different expectations of treatment, misunderstandings may sometimes occur. Were you concerned about this, and is there anything we can do to provide the sort of treatment that you feel your child needs?
- And finally, could you please describe how you have experienced this conversation? Was there anything you found difficult or not very helpful? What in your opinion was most helpful?



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