

Child and Family Services Reviews OSRI Quality Assurance Guide

This quality assurance (QA) guide is recommended for use by QA staff to ensure that Onsite Review Instrument (OSRI) data are accurate, complete, and consistent. It contains information regarding general and item-specific issues to consider when conducting QA on an OSRI. The guide also describes an approach to conducting QA that encourages discussions with reviewers prior to completion of the OSRI instrument in addition to a final QA review of the instrument once it is completed.

BEGINNING THE QA DISCUSSION

Once reviewers have conducted their case record review and interviews, and have completed the face sheet of the instrument, QA staff should meet with reviewers to discuss the case before they begin to work on the OSRI item ratings. The purpose of this discussion is to allow QA staff to get a basic understanding of what is happening in the case and ensure that (1) reviewers are taking the right approach to rating the case based on the case circumstances and correctly recording the practice observed in the proper location within the instrument, (2) reviewers understand the key practice concerns that will need to be analyzed within the OSRI and (3) reviewers have had the opportunity to obtain any needed clarification on the rating process/criteria and applicability of items in the OSRI. There may be instances where reviewers will need assistance on how to reconcile inconsistencies in information gathered from interviews and case documentation and this should also be discussed during this initial QA conversation.

Obtaining relevant background and contextual information for a case is a critical step in providing QA. Begin the discussion by reviewing the face sheet and discussing the following with the reviewers:

What type of case is it?

- In-Home (make sure there were no foster care episodes during the PUR)
- Differential/Alternative Response (make sure the state has this program and that the case is accurately identified as DR/AR)
- Foster Care (check to see if it is a short-term FC case, as such cases have unique rating instructions throughout the OSRI)

Case Status:

- Is the case currently open or closed? How long was the case open?
- Why is the agency involved with the family? Ask reviewers to describe the risk and safety concerns that existed during the PUR.

Case Participants - Children

- For IH and FC cases, which children were in the family home during the PUR? Note ages of children. Were there specific children in the home who were the focus of services?
- For FC cases, note the target child's age and ask whether any siblings are in foster care. Note the length of time the child has been in foster care and ask reviewers what the child's current permanency goal(s) is/are.

Identifying Parents/Caregivers

- Review the case participant table in the face sheet and discuss who the parents/caregivers are who will be rated in the case considering that these terms are designed to be inclusive of the various familial and fictive kin circumstances encountered in child welfare cases.

- Biological and legal parents should be included in the table, regardless of their involvement with the child/ren at the time of the review, in order to ensure that a parent is not inappropriately left out of consideration in the review. If biological parents are not listed, reviewers should explain why. Ensure that reviewers have considered all appropriate case participants including same sex parents, paramours, and members of intergenerational households, as applicable.
- Based on case circumstances, paramours who have contact with children should be considered in the provision of safety-related services (item 2), and assessments of risk and safety (item 3). Paramours typically should be assessed in the context of their relationship with the primary caregiver(s) who will be caring for the children. For example, if the biological mother is the caregiver that the child(ren) will be reunified with and her boyfriend needs services to ensure he can appropriately care for the child(ren) because he lives in the home, the agency may need to assess and provide services to him, but that would be captured under “mother” in item 12 because it impacts the assessment of her protective capacity in caring for her children. If he doesn’t comply with services, that could necessitate a change in assessment and service provision to the mother.
- If the whereabouts of a parent are unknown, discuss whether concerted efforts to locate the parent were made and how this will impact ratings.
- Review the definitions of parents for items 8 and 11, and for items 12, 13, and 15 with reviewers to ensure that they will capture the right caregivers in each item based on the case circumstances.

Once you have a general overview of the case, discuss whether the reviewers have adequate information from the case record and case-related interviews to rate the case or whether additional interviews may be necessary. Discuss any conflicts reviewers may have noticed in the information gathered. Move into a discussion with the reviewers that begins broadly at the outcome level, but also allows reviewers to explain strengths/concerns as they relate to particular items. QA staff should ask appropriate follow-up questions that will help trigger the reviewers to consider whether the case achieved the best practice standards that are presented in the OSRI. The following questions can be used to guide the initial QA discussion:

Safety Questions — What strong case practice was in place related to safety and what were key concerns?

- What were the key risk and safety concerns during the PUR? (Make sure reviewers are correctly differentiating between risk and safety issues.)
- Did the agency appropriately assess and address risk and safety concerns?
- Were children maintained in their homes when possible/appropriate?

Permanency Questions — What strong case practice was in place related to permanency and what were key concerns?

- Will permanency be achieved timely based on the length of time the child has been in foster care?
- How did the agency work with the courts in moving the case forward toward permanency?
- Did the child have permanency and stability in his/her living situation?
- Were the child’s family relationships and connections preserved?

Well-Being Questions — What strong case practice was in place related to well-being and what were key concerns?

- Did the agency adequately engage the family, conduct appropriate assessments, and provide needed services so that parents could provide for their child(ren)’s needs?
- For FC cases: Were the child’s educational, physical, and mental-health needs adequately assessed and addressed?

- For IH cases: discuss which children will be assessed in items 12, 13, and 14 and discuss which items (16–18) may be applicable based on case dynamics. Discuss whether any applicable needs were assessed and addressed.
- How did the agency work with other system partners to ensure the family’s needs were assessed and addressed?

GENERAL QA ISSUES

Once you have discussed the case and any unique case dynamics with the reviewers in the initial QA discussion, reviewers should then complete the item ratings in the OSRI. Reviewers should conduct their own review of the completed instrument before submitting it for final QA review.

Some of the general issues to review for once the case has been submitted for QA include:

- Ensure that documentation in item questions provides appropriate rationale for “no” responses. If not, discuss with reviewers to determine whether the rationale can be strengthened or they should reconsider their response to the question.
- Ensure that any item rated NA has adequate rationale to support that rating (be sure to inspect items that do not have any non-applicability criteria checked yet are rated NA).
- Ensure that the right case participants (children and parents) are assessed in appropriate items.

ITEM-SPECIFIC QA QUESTIONS

Depending on the level of detail reviewers were able to provide in the initial QA discussion, QA staff may not need to ask reviewers all of the questions below. These questions are provided as a guide to ensure that reviewers accurately rated the case based on the practice standards outlined in the OSRI. Since reviewers do not need to provide justification to support item ratings, the questions are intended to help QA staff understand the rationale behind reviewer responses.

Item 1: Timeliness of Initiating Investigations of Reports of Child Maltreatment

- Confirm with reviewers that they included all reports received during the PUR, including any reports that came in after the case was closed (if applicable).
- Review the policies on state-specific priority response timeframes to ensure accuracy.

Item 2: Services to Family to Protect Children in the Home and Prevent Removal or Re-Entry Into Foster Care

- Carefully review the item applicability criteria that reviewers selected. For foster care cases, ensure that all foster care entries and all reunifications during the period under review were considered when responding to the criteria.
- If question A is answered Yes, ask the reviewers to describe which services were provided to the family, to ensure that they were safety-related. Services that were offered to the family that were not safety-related should be captured in item 12B.
- If question B is answered Yes, ask the reviewers to explain the circumstances that warranted immediate removal.

Item 3: Risk and Safety Assessment and Management

- For foster care cases, if the child entered foster care during the period under review but reviewers selected NA for item 2, ask the reviewers about the circumstances for removal to determine if any concerns should be noted in item 3.

- Ensure that reviewers are only considering safety concerns when responding to questions C-F and are not considering risk issues in those questions.
- If question B is rated NA, ask the reviewers to explain their rationale and ensure that it is consistent with the instructions provided.
- Discuss the quality of the risk/safety assessments that the agency conducted. Ensure that the frequency and quality of worker visits with the child(ren) and/or parents (in items 14 and 15) was adequate to appropriately assess risk and safety throughout the PUR.
- If any of the concerns in A1 are checked Yes, and reviewers answered A or B Yes, ask the reviewers to explain their rationale.
- If question C is answered Yes, ask reviewers to describe the safety plan and how it was monitored.
- If question C and/or D is rated NA and the question is applicable for assessment, ask the reviewers how they determined that there were no apparent safety concerns during the PUR.

Item 4: Stability of Foster Care Placement

- Ensure that the reviewers have considered all time periods that the child was in care during the PUR. If you notice that the placement dates do not account for all time periods, ask reviewers if the child was in a placement that is not considered a “placement setting” during those periods.
- Discuss all the “reasons for change in placement” with reviewers to determine whether question B is answered appropriately. Ensure that any moves up to higher levels of care because of increased mental health/ behavioral needs have been evaluated carefully.
- If a child’s placement was disrupted during the PUR or is/was not stable, reviewers should assess whether the agency provided any services to the foster parent/caretaker to stabilize or support the placement. This should be captured in item 12, section 12C.

Item 5: Permanency Goal for Child

- Review the table to determine whether question B is answered accurately. Ensure that reviewers completed the table by noting dates that goals were *established*, not achieved.
- Discuss the response to question C and ensure that reviewers considered the child’s age, needs, and the circumstances of the case (length of time in foster care, status of caretakers in resolving safety concerns, etc.). In cases in which the appropriateness of the goal is based on a child/youth’s “age of consent” for adoption, did reviewers assess the agency’s efforts to work with the child around these issues? (e.g., what was the level of work done with the child to determine whether he/she really does not want to be adopted?)
- Ensure that reviewers accurately calculated the child’s time in foster care in question D.
- If question E is answered Yes, ask reviewers which ASFA TPR criteria the child met.
- If any exception in question G1 is checked, discuss the specifics with reviewers to confirm accuracy. Placement information in item 4 should be reviewed to assess whether the child was placed with relatives at the 15/22 month timeframe. Compelling reasons must be documented in the case file to count as an exception.

Item 6: Achieving Reunification, Guardianship, Adoption, or Other Planned Permanent Living Arrangement

- If concurrent goals were in place, ensure that reviewers responded to questions B and C appropriately.
- If Question B is answered Yes but the child has been in foster care for more than the suggested timeframe (12, 18, or 24 months, depending on the goal) and the goal has not yet been achieved,

ask reviewers to describe the circumstances to ensure that a delay is justified (see examples in instructions).

- If question B is answered Yes and the child has not been in foster care for more than the suggested timeframe but has not yet been discharged from foster care, ask reviewers when the goal is projected to be achieved to ensure that it meets the recommended timeframes in the instructions. Also ask reviewers to describe the concerted efforts that have been made to ensure timely achievement of the goal.
- If question C is answered Yes but question C2 is answered “no date,” ask reviewers why they believe the child’s living arrangement can be considered permanent.

Item 7: Placement With Siblings

- Ask reviewers to describe the placement arrangements of siblings placed separately. If question B is answered Yes, what were the reasons for separate placement? If a valid reason existed, was the separation re-assessed by the agency over time during the PUR?
- Ensure that only siblings as defined in the instructions are included in the item assessment. Issues related to preserving connections between children who grew up in the same household but are not related biologically or through adoption and/or marriage should be addressed in item 9.

Item 8: Visiting With Parents and Siblings in Foster Care

- Ensure that case participants selected as Mother and Father are accurate based on instructions and case circumstances.
- If visitation frequency for A, B, and E are anything less than “more than once per week”, and the question is answered Yes, discuss with reviewers how the frequency was sufficient for the child and whether efforts for more frequent visits were made.
- Ask reviewers to describe the visitation arrangement (location, length, supervision, etc.) when discussing their responses to questions C, D, and F.

Item 9: Preserving Connections

- Ensure the item was not rated on connections the child formed while in foster care. The focus is on maintaining connections the child had at the time he or she entered care.
- If, prior to removal, the child had contact and a relationship with biological parents who are not the caregivers the child was removed from or is being returned to, ask whether those relationships should be preserved and were addressed in this item.
- Ask the reviewers to describe the child’s connections and how they were/were not maintained. If the child was not maintained in the same school setting, ask for the reasons and how that decision was made.

Item 10: Relative Placement

- If B and/or C are answered Yes, ask the reviewers to describe the quality of efforts that were made throughout the PUR and at critical points in the case.
- If B and/or C are answered NA, ask about the rationale to ensure it is consistent with the instructions.

Item 11: Relationship of Child in Care With Parents

- Ensure that case participants selected as Mother and Father are accurate based on instructions and case circumstances. The same participants should be selected in items 8 and 11.

Item 12: Needs and Services of Child, Parents, and Foster Parents

Sub-Item 12A: Needs and Services of Child

- Ask reviewers to explain what the child(ren)'s needs were during the PUR. Were all of these needs accurately assessed by the agency? Consider the circumstances of the case, age(s) of the child(ren) etc. as you discuss needs. Also ask about how needs were assessed. Did the worker visit with the child(ren) frequently enough to allow for ongoing assessment? Did the worker ask about the child(ren)'s needs with the child(ren)'s caretakers and/or foster parents? Ensure that reviewers answered question A1 based on the adequacy of the assessment(s).
- Ask the reviewers to describe the services that the child(ren) received during the PUR. Discuss whether the services addressed all of the child(ren)'s needs.
- Ensure that assessment and services related to education, physical health, and mental health were not considered for this item.
- For foster care cases, if the target child is an adolescent, ensure that independent living services were addressed.

Sub-Item 12B: Needs and Services of Parents

- Ensure that the right case participants were selected as Mother and Father based on instructions and case circumstances. Ensure that the same participants were rated in items 12B, 13, and 15.
- If the whereabouts of a parent were unknown during the PUR and the agency did **not** make concerted efforts to locate them, the applicable item questions for that parent should be answered No, resulting in an Area Needing Improvement rating for sub-item 12B as well as item 12. This parent should **not** be assessed in items 13 and 15. Questions for that parent in those items should be answered NA. In Well-Being Outcome 1, concerns about efforts to locate a parent should only be reflected in item 12.
- Ask reviewers to explain what the mother's and father's needs were during the PUR. Were all of these needs accurately assessed by the agency? Consider the circumstances of the case, reason for the agency's involvement, length of time case has been open, case plan progress, etc. as you discuss the parents' needs. Also ask about how needs were assessed: did the worker visit with the parent frequently enough to allow for ongoing assessment? Ensure that reviewers answered question B1 based on the adequacy of the assessment(s).
- Ensure that paramours have been appropriately assessed in this item, as applicable. Paramours typically should not be included in the definition of "mother" or "father" but instead should be considered through their relationship with the primary caregiver(s) who will be caring for the children. For example, if the biological mother is the caregiver that the child(ren) will be reunified with and her boyfriend needs services to ensure he is safe with the child(ren) because he has a lot of access to them, the agency should assess and work with him, but that would be captured under "mother" in item 12 because it affects the assessment of her protective capacity. If he doesn't comply with services, that could necessitate a change in assessment and service provision to the mother.
- For foster care cases, if biological parents did not have an established relationship with the child prior to removal, the agency should assess whether developing a relationship with biological parents would be in the child's best interests and determine whether anything should be done to support that goal. Services in support of such needs (e.g., providing for visits, phone contact, arranging for therapy) should also be captured in this item.
- Ask the reviewers to describe the services that the mother and the father received during the PUR. Discuss whether and how these services addressed all of his/her needs and whether the services enhanced the parents' ability to provide appropriate care/supervision of their child(ren) and ensure their safety and well-being. Were there any barriers to accessing services? Were services matched to the parent's needs? Were they culturally appropriate?

Sub-Item 12C: Needs and Services of Foster Parents

- If there are multiple foster parents during the PUR, ensure that reviewers included all of them in the assessment of the item.
- In some cases, foster parents may be a potential permanent placement for the child and if so their needs related to permanency achievement should also be assessed in this item.
- Ask reviewers to describe how the foster parents' needs were assessed. Were there any concerns about their ability to care for the child that were not assessed and addressed? (Refer to item 4 to assess the child's stability in the placement)
- Ask reviewers to describe any services that the foster parents received during the PUR. Did services meet the identified needs?

Item 13: Child and Family Involvement in Case Planning

- If reviewers answered Yes to A, B, or C, ask them to describe how the agency actively involved each person in case planning.

Item 14: Caseworker Visits With Child

- In situations in which secondary worker visits are accepted in addition to primary worker visits, the frequency and quality of BOTH types of visits should be considered in the assessment.
- If visitation frequency is less than once per month, question A should be answered No unless reviewers have substantial justification for answering Yes.
- Discuss with reviewers how visitation frequency met the needs of the child in ensuring safety, permanency, and well-being.
- If question B is answered Yes, ask reviewers to describe the quality of the visits (location, length, etc.). Ensure that the child(ren) was/were visited alone for at least part of each visit and that conversations focused on the child(ren)'s needs, services, and case goals.
- For FC cases, if the child is non-verbal, ensure that reviewers visited the child in the foster home, assessed the child's living arrangements, and assessed the child's interactions with caregivers when determining the quality of visitation.

Item 15: Caseworker Visits With Parents

- In situations in which secondary worker visits are accepted in addition to primary worker visits, the frequency and quality of BOTH types of visits should be considered in the assessment.
- If visit frequency is less than once per month, questions A2 and B2 should be answered No unless reviewers have substantial justification for answering Yes.
- Discuss with reviewers how visitation frequency did or did not support achievement of case goals and effectively address the child's safety, permanency, and well-being.
- If question C and/or D is Yes, ask reviewers to describe the quality of the visits (location, length, content, etc.)

Item 16: Educational Needs of the Child

- If there were "services needed but not provided" in the table but question B is answered Yes, discuss what concerted efforts were made to advocate for services.

Item 17: Physical Health of the Child

- If there were "services needed but not provided" in the table but question B is answered Yes, discuss the circumstances with reviewers to ensure item instructions were followed.

- If question B1 is answered Yes or No, discuss with reviewers which medication was prescribed and how it was monitored. Review any state protocols for medication monitoring to ensure reviewers appropriately considered compliance with any protocols in place.

Item 18: Mental/Behavioral Health of the Child

- If there were “services needed but not provided” in the table but question B is answered Yes, discuss the circumstances with reviewers to ensure item instructions were followed.
- If question B is answered Yes or No, discuss with reviewers which medication was prescribed and how it was monitored. Review any state protocols for medication monitoring to ensure reviewers appropriately considered compliance with any protocols in place.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR SHORT TERM FOSTER CARE CASES

Apply the following guidance when rating foster care cases in which the child has been in foster care fewer than 45 days:

Items 1–7, 10, 14, and 16–18: There is no difference in rating/applying the instrument for these items.

Item 8: A Not Applicable rating for this item should be based on the length of time the case is open, the case circumstances, and how reasonable it is to expect visits to have been arranged with the target child and parents/siblings. Typically, a child should have visits arranged within 1–2 weeks of being placed in foster care.

Item 9: Reviewers should rate this item as Not Applicable if the child is not of Native American heritage, and not yet school-aged.

Item 11: A Not Applicable rating for this item should be based on the length of time the case is open, the case circumstances, and how reasonable it is to expect the agency to have made efforts to strengthen the parent-child bond while the child is in care through activities other than visitation.

Item 12: Because reunification is assumed to be the goal in short-term foster care cases unless there is evidence another goal is in place, this item should be rated based on the assessment and services necessary, while the case is open, to achieve reunification (or another goal). If the parents’ whereabouts are unknown, reviewers should clarify with QA staff what is reasonable to expect, based on the case circumstances, regarding efforts to locate the parents in the short period of time that the case was open, in order to determine whether this item is applicable for parents (sub-item 12B).

Item 13: Because reunification is assumed to be the goal in short-term foster care cases unless there is evidence another goal is in place, this item should be rated based on the planning that occurs regarding case direction while the case is open, given that a formal case plan may not be expected in short-term cases. If the parents’ whereabouts are unknown, reviewers should clarify with QA staff what is reasonable to expect, based on the case circumstances, regarding efforts to locate the parents in the short period of time that the case was open, in order to determine whether this item is applicable for parents.

Item 15: There is no difference in rating/applying the instrument for this item unless the parents’ whereabouts are unknown. If the parents’ whereabouts are unknown, reviewers should clarify with QA staff what is reasonable to expect, based on the case circumstances, regarding efforts to locate the parents in the short period of time that the case was opened, in order to determine whether this item is applicable for parents.