

Family Support Worker interview questions

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What to expect

Family Support Worker interviews are usually panel based and mix conversation with structured questions. Panels commonly include a team leader or coordinator plus a practitioner, and sometimes someone from a partner agency. Expect the panel to probe your judgement with families, your understanding of child safety obligations and your record keeping, because those are the parts of the role that carry the most risk.

- **Role and motivation:** Why family support work, why this service, and what you understand the job to involve day to day.
- **Process:** How you move a family through intake, assessment, planning, referral and closure, including timeframes and decision points.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of engaging a reluctant family, managing a disagreement with another agency, or handling a setback.
- **Scenario and judgement:** A situation is described and the panel wants to hear your reasoning, what you would do first and who you would consult.
- **Safety and compliance:** Mandatory reporting, confidentiality and information sharing, case notes that may be reviewed or subpoenaed, and working within state or territory child safety frameworks.
- **Reflective practice and wellbeing:** How you manage the emotional weight of the work, use supervision and recognise your own limits.

Most interviews run for about 45 to 60 minutes. The panel usually opens with introductions and a brief outline of the service, then works through a set list of questions, allowing time for follow-up probes. Some services give you a scenario or a short written task before or during the interview. You will normally get a few minutes at the end to ask questions, and panels often ask about your availability, driving licence and screening checks at that point. Second interviews, where they happen, tend to focus on a practice scenario with a team leader.

1. Walk us through how you would take a new referral from first contact through to case closure.

Why they ask

The panel wants to see that you understand the mechanics of casework in a funded service, not just that you are good with people. It also reveals whether you know where the decision points and sign offs sit.

How to structure your answer

Give a step-by-step walkthrough in order, naming the decision point at each stage and the timeframe you would work to. Finish with how you know the case is ready to close.

Example answer

"When a referral comes in, I read it properly first and check what has already been tried, including whether there has been any child protection involvement. Then I make contact within the service's expected window, usually by phone, and introduce myself and what the service can and cannot offer. The first visit is about hearing the family's version of events and what they want to change. From there I complete a strengths and risk assessment, which covers housing, income, health, schooling, supports around the family and any safety concerns. I write the support plan with the parent, not for them, and we agree on actions, who is doing what and a review date. Referrals to other services go out early, because waitlists are the main thing that slows progress. Reviews happen at the agreed date and I adjust the plan if something is not working. Along the way I keep notes current and flag

anything that meets mandatory reporting thresholds. When the family is meeting its own goals and has supports in place that do not depend on me, I do a closing conversation, confirm what happens if things change and leave the door open for re-referral."

2. Tell me about a time you worked with a family who was reluctant to engage with your service.

Why they ask

Resistance is the norm rather than the exception in this work. The panel is testing your persistence, your ability to separate the person from the behaviour and whether you understand why families often distrust services.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR. Keep the situation short, put the weight on what you actually did over time and finish with what changed and what you learned.

Example answer

"I had a mother referred after a school wellbeing concern. She did not answer the first two calls and told me at the door on my first visit that she had nothing to say to another service. I did not push for the assessment that day. I asked what was hardest at the moment, which was the cost of the school run and a housing issue, and I came back the following week with information on a transport concession and a housing appointment booked. That was the turning point, because I had done something useful before asking her for anything. Over the next couple of months she started to talk about her own history and we built a plan she actually owned. By the end of our work together she was the one ringing me to check review dates. What I took from it is that engagement usually follows a practical win, not a good explanation of my role."

3. A parent tells you they are worried about their own behaviour toward their child and asks you not to tell anyone. What do you do?

Why they ask

This is a direct test of how you hold a disclosure. The panel is watching for a calm, honest response and for whether you can be clear about limits without shutting the parent down.

How to structure your answer

Show your immediate response, then your reasoning, then the action, then how you manage the relationship afterwards. Name the framework and the person you would consult.

Example answer

"First, I would stay calm and not react with alarm, because the parent has just taken a real risk in telling me. I would acknowledge that it took courage to say it and ask what has been happening. Then I would be honest that I cannot keep it entirely to myself. I would explain in plain language what my obligations are under the relevant state or territory child safety framework, what I would need to record and who I would speak to, and I would not promise confidentiality I cannot deliver. After the conversation I would document it the same day, consult my supervisor promptly and follow the service's process for reporting or assessing risk, which might mean a report to child protection or a safety plan that involves another adult in the household. I would make sure the parent heard from me what I was doing and why, rather than finding out later, because that is what keeps the relationship workable. I would also link them to counselling or a parenting program so the disclosure leads somewhere useful, not just into a file."

4. How do you keep case notes that would hold up if they were reviewed or subpoenaed?

Why they ask

Poor records cause real problems in this sector, both for families and for workers. The panel wants to know you write contemporaneously, separate fact from opinion and understand information sharing

rules.

How to structure your answer

Answer with your habits and principles, then give a short example where your notes made a difference. Note the systems you have used.

Example answer

"I write notes the same day while the detail is fresh, and I keep to what was said and observed, with the source named, rather than my impression of what someone meant. Where I do record a professional judgement, I set out the facts it is based on, so anyone reading it later can follow the reasoning. I record the family's own words where those matter, note who else was present and record decisions and actions with dates. I keep information sharing within the rules, which means confirming consent where I can and following the service's policy when I cannot, and I do not drop confidential detail into a general file or an email chain that does not need it. I record in Penelope and CIMS and keep track of any paper records that still need to be uploaded. In one case, a decision I had documented about escalating a concern was reviewed six months later, and because the notes set out what I had observed, who I had consulted and when, the reasoning was clear to everyone reading it."

5. How do you work with a family whose cultural background is different from your own?

Why they ask

This role serves families from many backgrounds, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. The panel is checking for humility and for practical habits, not a rehearsed statement about diversity.

How to structure your answer

Give your approach, then a concrete example of putting it into practice, then what you do when you get it wrong.

Example answer

"I start by assuming the family knows their own situation better than I do, and I ask about who makes decisions, who else needs to be involved and what has made services unhelpful in the past. Where a family speaks a language other than English, I book an interpreter through the proper service rather than using a relative, and I allow more time than a standard appointment so the conversation is not rushed. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families I would work with the local Aboriginal community controlled organisation and follow their lead rather than turning up with my own plan. In one case I was working with a family where an aunt was effectively the primary carer but was not on any of the paperwork. I asked who the family considered responsible for the children, adjusted the support plan and made sure the aunt was invited to the care team meeting, which changed how much the family engaged. If I say or do something culturally clumsy, I name it, apologise and take it to supervision rather than letting it sit."

6. This work carries a lot of second hand distress. How do you look after yourself and how do you notice when you are struggling?

Why they ask

Employers want to know you will stay in the role and use support rather than carrying everything alone. It is also a fair question given the emotional load of family support work.

How to structure your answer

Be honest and specific about routines and about your early warning signs, then say what you do when you spot them. Avoid answers that suggest you never struggle.

Example answer

"I use supervision properly rather than saving everything for a crisis. I bring cases that are sitting with me emotionally, not just the practical ones, and I am specific about what I need, whether that is debriefing, a second opinion or a caseload conversation. Day to day I keep a firm end to the working day, I do not read case notes at night and I get out for a walk or a run most days. I know my early signs. For me it is losing patience with small administrative tasks and rehearsing conversations at home. When that starts, I flag it to my team leader early rather than after a few weeks of poor sleep. I have also learned to notice when a particular case is echoing something of my own, and to say so in supervision so it does not shape my decisions."