



A SELECTION OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS & SCORING GUIDELINES SPECIFICALLY FOR CHILDREN'S RESIDENTIAL CARE SERVICES

I have been involved in the recruitment and selection of staff for children's care services for nearly 40 years. A key and difficult part of this process is the interview. Not only the interview questions, but many other aspects, such as the time made available, the panel, how many questions, and how the interview is scored.

Below is a selection of questions. Some of the questions are more relevant for entry-level candidates, some for managers and/or senior managers. Many of the questions could be used for any type of children's service and some for any kind of work.

The answer guide highlights some of the key points that are being looked for in the candidate's response to the question. There is always judgment involved, and it is not an exact science. However, clarity on the process can help improve the quality of the evaluation and bring some objectivity to it.

Often, interviews are carried out by a panel without a clear idea of what constitutes a high-quality response. Therefore, the score given will depend on each panel member's perspective and their own limitations. It is helpful to agree on what we are looking for in the response to each question.

Scoring Guideline Example

4 = Excellent

3 = Good

2 = Average

1 = Poor

0 = Unacceptable (e.g., serious discriminatory attitudes, other concerns that would potentially be unprofessional & unsafe)

For a full explanation, see,

Staff Selection Interview Questions & Process Guidelines - Patrick Tomlinson (2026)

You are welcome to use any of the information included here if you find it helpful.

ADAPTABLE FOR JOBS IN SOCIAL CARE AND OTHER OCCUPATIONS
(6-8 QUESTIONS explored fully may be sufficient. For any round of interviews for a specific role, ensure that all candidates are asked the same questions.)

Candidate Name:

Panel Names:

Position:

Date:

Q		Score 0-4
1	What has led you to pursue a career as a Manager in Residential Childcare?	
	Answer Guide: • Passion. • Learning & developing. • Commitment & Perseverance. • Achieving good outcomes with young people. • Building a great team.	
	Notes:	
2	What critical factors enable children & young people to achieve positive outcomes in a residential care service?	
	Answer Guide: • Feeling loved & cared for. • Good quality education. • Clear boundaries are maintained consistently. • Structure & reliable daily routines. • Feeling safe. • The care team & all adults involved are dependable & reliable. • Feeling listened to & empathy. • Having individual needs understood & met. • Responsibilities & expectations are clear, as are consequences. • Opportunities to contribute & influence the day-to-day routine & life in the home. • The appropriate Involvement of the young person's family. • The opportunity to pursue interests & have new enjoyable experiences. • Planning for the young person's next phase of life after leaving the care home. • Positive peer relationships.	
	Notes:	
3	What are the most important features of a care home to support children to feel safe?	
	Answer Guide: • Consistent high-quality care & attention to small details. • Structure/Boundaries/Predictable Routines. • Being listened to & adults taking young people's concerns seriously.	

	• Daily support & attention from caring adults. • Open & transparent culture. • Adults manage boundaries of confidentiality.	
	Notes:	
4	What do you do when you feel worried or more anxious than usual?	
	Answer Guide: • How does the person notice their anxiety, i.e., anxious thoughts, &/or feelings in the body? • Shows self-awareness, reflectiveness, & insight. • Self-regulation – calming, mindfulness. • Exercise, hobbies, walking, swimming, sports, and doing activities that help keep perspective. • Timeout – taking breaks to recover, recuperate, & refresh. • Talk to people who are helpful in & out of work. • Observe the situations where anxiety arises - consider if there are any patterns. • Talk about patterns in supervision & other reflective spaces. • Seeks feedback from others.	
	Notes:	
5	Describe the main ways you manage & develop yourself.	
	Answer Guide: • Sets clear daily routines & healthy living habits. • Observes & monitors stress levels & adapts accordingly. • Plans & uses positive ways for talking about & reflecting on work. • Life issues(work-related & personal). • Seeks development opportunities - Training/Reading/Researching/Reflective diary. • Uses supervision/mentoring/therapy, etc. • Understands the National Standards and regulatory framework.	
	Notes:	
6	How do you involve families & caregivers in the care of children in the residential service?	
	Answer Guide: • Make the family part of things – include in planning, decision-making, & regular updates. • Understands the difficulties for families whose children are taken into care. • Where appropriate, spend time with family members thinking about their child together, to improve understanding & family relationships. • Invitation to meetings & events. • Ensure safe family time. • Resolve conflicts.	
	Notes:	
7	How do you maintain positive teamwork & performance?	
	Answer Guide: • Role model good leadership in line with the Organization's values, child-centredness, care & respect.	

	• Manage oneself well to offer the best kind of presence at work. • Be clear about expectations. • Be responsive & non-reactive. • Be approachable & fair. • Pay attention & listen carefully. • Recognize achievements, positive efforts, and contributions. Encourage this among team members. • Always be reliable. • Work on team difficulties openly in a task-related, non-judgmental way. • Hold oneself & others accountable. • Take ownership of problems to find solutions. • Focus on team development.	
	Notes:	
8	What are the essential ingredients for good teamwork?	
	Answer Guide: • Good leadership. • Clear purpose & task orientation. • Communication. • Role clarity/Clear expectations & accountability. • Building trusting relationships. • Clear & reliable processes such as team meetings & supervision. • Including everyone in open discussions. • Clear decision-making processes.	
	Notes:	
9	What kind of psychological and emotional presence do you think is needed for this role/job? And how would you achieve it?	
	Answer Guide: • The nature of one's presence at work is vital to working effectively. • In a trauma service, a calming, regulating presence is very helpful. • It is necessary to be attuned but not reactive. Responding quickly when needed is helpful. • An attentive and thoughtful presence is important. • Children who have suffered trauma tend to be hypervigilant to the nature of one's presence, as it can signify safety or danger to the child. • The right kind of presence is achieved by healthy routines, such as sleep, exercise, nutrition, and careful thought about how one manages oneself. • Communicating with others when under stress and using supervision effectively can help. • Reflecting on the nature of one's feelings and presence is helpful.	
	Notes:	
10	What theories inform your practice with young people & staff? (Pick out one that you find especially helpful in the work with young people & explain why)	
	Answer Guide: • Trauma-informed. • Child development theory. • Attachment theory. • Neuroscience.	

	• Strengths-based approaches. • Psychodynamic. • Systems theories (family, organizational). • Reflective Practice. • Leadership approaches.	
	Notes:	
11	What are your views on what works well in change management? (How would you respond to change resistance?)	
	Answer Guide: • Recognize that many proposed change plans fail or do not work as well as anticipated. • Involve people as far as possible in discussing the proposed change. • Where possible, consider people's views before making the final decision. • Involve as many stakeholders & perspectives as possible. As far as possible, help people to feel included in the process of change and to have some influence on the way it is done. • Be clear about what is going to happen, what the change means, & the reason for it. • Respect differences in opinions as all offer a potentially helpful perspective. • Do not equate being resistant with being negative - recognize that it is often normal. • Understand that when resistance is expressed, it may represent an important view held by others & not just the person expressing the resistance. • Encourage the range of views to be expressed – how the change could work, how it might not work, & what could be improved to give it a better chance. • Consider reasons for & reasons against. • Give authority to the people who will need to implement the change.	
	Notes:	
12	Explain the qualities that are involved in listening. (What do you think can make listening difficult? What do you think can help a carer to listen to a child in residential care?)	
	Answer Guide: • Understand that listening requires a high level of attention. • Asking questions for clarification. • Reflecting on what the listener has heard. • Not jumping to conclusions or making assumptions. • Listening involves listening to the words that are being said, the body language, the feelings beneath the words, & how one feels as the listener – i.e., sad, angry, scared, etc. • It can be difficult to listen if one is distracted by other issues & worries. • If one is anxious or afraid, listening can be difficult at a conscious & unconscious level, as we may not want to hear communication that is disturbing, shocking, and distressing.	

	• This can be especially difficult if we are ‘triggered’ by something in the situation. • Listening can be difficult if we don’t have good quality & reliable support where we can go & talk about what we hear & feel. • Listening is a skill that can be improved with practice, training, & support. • Where carers feel well-supported & safe, they will be more able to listen well.	
	Notes:	
13	What could be some of the reasons why a young person is brought into care?	
	Answer Guide: • Unsafe in the family environment. • Other basic needs not being met – i.e., for nurture (food, care, hygiene, stimulation, relationships). • Seriously unpredictable parenting, possibly due to mental health illness, domestic violence, addictions, chaotic lifestyles, & unsafe people/Lack of support for the parents.	
	Notes:	
14	Why do you think a child in care might be aggressive? For example, try to physically hurt another child or adult. (What kind of approaches might help reduce aggressive behaviour?)	
	Answer Guide: • May have experienced a lot of aggression & thinks it is normal. • May never have been socialized & shown that hurting others is not ok. • Aggression may even be confused with care or love. • It may be a defence against feeling vulnerable - a way of being powerful, being in control, not being a victim. • Frustrated & unable to manage emotions. • The child’s developmental age may be much younger than chronological age – acts more like a young child, struggling with sharing, competition, jealousy, & limits. • Difficulties with boundaries & limits – testing boundaries, seeing if they can be managed safely, & not rejected or punished.	
	Notes:	
15	Tell us about something you have done or been part of that you feel especially proud of.	
	Answer Guide: • Demonstrates a strong vision backed up by qualities such as determination, perseverance, & commitment. • Overcame significant obstacles & challenges. • Had setbacks but learned from them & moved on. • Strong values beneath the vision. • Was able to use support when needed. • Was able to adapt the strategy/approach. • Able to recognize the contribution of others.	
	Notes:	
16	Can you describe how you anticipate your typical working week and the attention you would give to the different aspects of the manager role?	

	Answer Guide: • Demonstrates a balanced awareness of different aspects of the role, e.g., being present in the home and generally attentive to staff and young people; safeguarding issues; maintaining regulatory standards and procedures; reporting and communication to external stakeholders and internal management; staff supervision and team meetings; planning and development of the home; personal and professional development. • Has a clear idea of how much time is needed to be committed to various aspects of the role, per week, month, etc. • Understands the need to re-prioritize and adapt to circumstances. • Demonstrates a proactive approach in highlighting when things need to be rearranged, won't get done on time, rescheduling, etc	
	Notes:	
17	What are the core values that you live by? Please explain what they mean to you and how they might be relevant to this job.	
	Answer Guide: • Provides 4 or 5 meaningful values. • Can clearly explain what each value means to them. • Can explain how each value is relevant to the job. • Can see and explain how some values are complex, in practice. For example, if honesty is a value, what does this mean in practice?	
	Notes:	
18	General ability to hold attention, engage the interviewer, professional presentation, etc. This is scored only, not asked.	
	Answer Guide: • Engaged the interviewer well. • Was well-presented & behaved professionally & respectfully. • Managed themselves well. • If nervous, was able to acknowledge that & adapt accordingly, for example, pausing to think. • Asked questions to clarify what was meant by a question. • Question responses seemed natural & authentic.	
	Notes:	
	Total Score	/