

A Guide to HOPEful Intakes in Home Visiting: Exploring Strengths and Access to the Four Building Blocks of HOPE



Intake forms are often designed to identify needs, risks, or eligibility criteria. While this information is important, it can unintentionally focus only on challenges and overlook the strengths families bring. A HOPE informed approach helps professionals see the whole family (strengths, interests, relationships, and goals) while still gathering the information needed for services.

A HOPE informed intake intentionally highlights Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) and the Four Building Blocks of HOPE:

- Supportive Relationships
- Safe, Stable, and Equitable Environments
- Social and Civic Engagement
- Emotional Growth

Throughout the intake process, home visitors can explore PCEs in ways that center strengths, build rapport, and identify opportunities to strengthen positive experiences for families.

1. Preparing for a HOPE Informed Intake

Before beginning the conversation:

- Send benign/neutral questions (like name, address, date of birth) over for the caregiver to complete ahead of time. Hold the sensitive questions for an in-person meeting.
- Celebrate important milestones (for example welcoming a new baby).
- Explain the purpose of the intake and the kinds of questions that will be asked.
- Let families know participation is optional and they may choose not to answer any question.
- Create a comfortable and respectful space for conversation.
- Whenever possible, schedule the intake at a time when caregivers feel prepared to talk.

Beginning with transparency, curiosity, and respect helps families feel safe sharing information.

2. Conducting a HOPE Informed Intake

A HOPE informed intake is not just about completing a form. It is an opportunity to learn about the family's strengths, relationships, goals, and challenges while identifying areas where support may be helpful.

Using open-ended, conversational questions allows home visitors to gather information about families' access to the Building Blocks while building connection and trust. When possible:

- Begin with strengths.
- Use open-ended conversation to gather required information.
- Celebrate the Building Blocks when you hear them come up as families respond to your questions.
- Do not feel obligated to collect all of the information in one session. Some of the information will be best gathered over time.

Practical Tips for HOPEful Intake Conversations

- Use Open-Ended Questions When Completing Required Forms:
 - When required forms are not fully HOPE-informed, open-ended questions can help create space for families to share their story while still gathering the information needed for documentation. Open-ended questions often lead to answers that address multiple required questions.
- Bring Strengths-Based Conversation Before and After Forms:
 - Sometimes programs must use forms that focus heavily on needs or challenges. When this happens, take time before and after completing the form to return to strengths-based conversation. This helps balance the discussion and ensures families are not defined only by the challenges captured in the form.
- Buffer Questions About Challenges:
 - When asking direct questions about challenges such as stress or mental health, it can be helpful to buffer the conversation with support and connection. If a caregiver shares that they are struggling, provide appropriate referrals or linkages to services while also exploring existing supports in their life. For example, you might ask about people they trust or activities that help them feel better and how they might reconnect with those supports.
- Use Accessible Language:
 - Adjust language to match the needs of each family. Simple sentences can support people across different literacy levels, languages, and ages. Using plain language and a conversational tone can make intake discussions feel more comfortable and easier to understand.

3. Closing the Intake

Before ending the intake conversation:

- Reflect back strengths you heard from the family
- Acknowledge the positive experiences they are already creating
- Identify areas where additional support may be helpful
- Ask about the family's priorities and goals
- Discuss next steps and available resources

Ending the intake with encouragement reinforces the family's strengths and builds a foundation for ongoing partnership.