



## **TIPS on using Environmental Risk Assessment Tool**

1. Build rapport & alliance with parents:
  - Tone of assessment is very important....non-judgmental, curious, want to know....”I wonder”
  - Tell them about the purpose of the program, why you are here, your purpose etc.
  - Assure confidentiality at all times
  - Begin with safe and least threatening issues...talk about what you see in environment (photos, household items, etc).
  - Observe both verbal and non verbal cues and respond appropriately in directing the flow of information being gathered.
  - It is best not to label, confront, nor give advice.
2. Use a conversational approach in asking questions, obtaining information, as part of regular intake.
  - Weave questions on ERA tool into what you are already doing at intake: Routines Based Interview (RBI), family mapping, gathering information on family’s concern priorities & resources, etc.
  - Remember this tool is not a checklist nor does it have to be completed at one setting.
  - It is recommended to become familiar with the items on the tool and cover them over a few visits.
3. Actively listen.....show genuine interest by really listening. Goal is to engage parent into meaningful conversation, not just to see if they are eligible under the environmental risk category.
4. Ask open-ended questions.
  - Explore comments that parent may say, such as, “ I had a difficult pregnancy, but now I’m ok”. or “this baby is different from my others”
  - You may want to ask....”in what ways was your pregnancy difficult? Can you tell me in what ways your baby is different?”
  - No need to probe too much, but just asking may reveal some new information. Know when things are becoming too sensitive and move on
5. Acknowledge feelings, but refrain from naming how parent feels? i.e., “were you happy when your baby was born? Were you upset when you found out baby had downs syndrome? Rather ask: “how did you feel.....what was that like for you?”
6. Use baby or baby’s behavior to help parent start talking.  
“What have you learned about your baby so far? I see your baby is listening to you speak.....she really knows your voice”.

7. As strengths & needs are expressed by the family, acknowledge these...”yes I see, tell me more....what is that like for you”....avoid making verbal & non-verbal judgments on the information, including positive comments. This allows the family to share freely without feeling the need to withhold negative information or feelings.
8. Ask a question and then wait (at least 10 seconds). S-l-o-o-o-w down, try not to be in a rush....Refrain from asking 2 or more questions at once.
9. Remember that it is common to feel uncomfortable asking personal questions (criminal HX, drug usage, domestic violence, basics for baby).
  - Everyone using the ERA tool needs a safe place to process their feelings and practice.
  - Most families are willing to share their lives with someone who is caring and sensitive,
  - Let the family know in the beginning that they can share only what they want us to know.
10. When asking questions about domestic violence, try and read the mood of the room and who is present. This issue could potentially put the parent or baby at risk
11. Take a few notes or none at all. Let the parent know that you may write some things that you may forget, such as what to bring on next home visit, make a call to a specific community organization, etc.
12. Do not offer assistance that cannot be carried out by the program or other service provider to which family is referred.
13. When ending the assessment, always thank the parent for sharing and let them know the information is confidential and will only be shared with the assessment team.