

**CHAPTER FOUR:
DEVELOPING SURVEYS**

TOPICS	Page
Guidelines for Developing Surveys.....	4-3
Framing Questions.....	4-7
Free-Response Questions.....	4-7
Fixed-Choice Questions.....	4-8
Checklists.....	4-8
Ordered Response Questions.....	4-9
Alternative Formats for Ordered Responses.....	4-11
Unordered Responses.....	4-13
Skip Questions.....	4-14
Ranking.....	4-15
Questions About Demographic Characteristics.....	4-16
Confidentiality and Informed Consent.....	4-20
Formatting Your Questionnaire.....	4-23
Pilot Testing.....	4-26

Chapter Four:

Developing Surveys

Once you have decided on a measurement method, your next task is to develop your data collection instruments. You may be able to use or adapt pre-tested instruments. But if appropriate measures are unavailable, you will need to develop your own.

This chapter provides guidelines for developing survey and interview questions. In the appendix, you will also find guidelines for developing record extraction forms and trained observer rating scales.

Guidelines for Developing Surveys

Questions are the key to any assessment effort. One of the most difficult tasks is wording questions so that you will get the information you need and all your respondents will interpret the questions in the same way.

Questions must be clear, concise, and specific to the information you need. Arlene Fink (1995) offers these guidelines for asking questions.

Ask purposeful questions

Know the reason for your questions. Refer to your logic model to identify the specific information you need to collect. Data on outcomes are essential. But you also may include other factors that can affect outcomes such as:

- Participant needs, knowledge, skills, behavior, or life situation
- Amount and type of service received
- Demographic and other information, such as age, sex, income, race/ethnicity

Omit any unnecessary questions. You will be tempted to include other questions because the information would be “nice to know” or “interesting.” But unless you have a clear purpose in mind for the question, it is best to limit what you ask to needed information.

Make every question count.

Collecting too much information is like planting too many zucchini . . .

Barbara Sawyer

Ask concrete questions

Being concrete means being as specific as possible. Suppose you asked about a parent's approach to discipline. Someone who had a generally positive approach but got into a power struggle with a child the previous week might answer differently from someone who has been physically abusive but is now doing better.

**USE TIME PERIODS TO
MAKE QUESTIONS
SPECIFIC**

Less specific: Mark the statement that best describes your discipline approach.

More specific: Mark the statement that best describes your discipline approach **in the past week.**

Adding a time period helps to make questions more concrete and more reliable. Make sure the time period is appropriate to the question.

Asking people to recall day-to-day behaviors over long periods of time contributes to guessing. On the other hand, if the period you specify is too short, the behavior may not have occurred. Detailed questions about specific issues are less open to interpretation and provide more reliable results. A question about "older youth" should identify what age or grade is considered "older."

Use standard language

Language should be simple and conventional. Adapt your questions to the vocabulary and reading skills of your participants, but don't talk down to them.

To get accurate information, questions should rely on standard grammar, punctuation and spelling. United Way of America (1996) recommends:

- Keep each question short.
- Use simple sentence structures.
- Use basic vocabulary.

**KEEP QUESTIONS
SIMPLE**

Use conventional language

Avoid abbreviations, slang, and colloquialisms

Use jargon and technical expressions sparingly

Slang and colloquialisms should be avoided because people may or may not understand them. An exception is writing questions for teenagers where you may gain understanding by using colloquial expressions or other words such as street names for illegal drugs.

Avoid abbreviations or jargon. You may know that OCCF stands for the Oregon Commission on Children and Families but many of your respondents will not. Questions using jargon such as “life skills,” or “enrichment activities” or “service delivery type” also will not be easily understood by respondents.

Adopt or adapt questions used successfully in other surveys

Before starting to write questions from scratch, review surveys others have written and tested to see what you can either adopt or adapt for your purposes. The appendix of this manual contains pre-tested questions that have already been used and shown to collect reliable information. Review of these instruments can save you considerable development time.

Avoid biasing words and phrases

Words that are emotionally charged affect people in ways that may have little to do with the issues in your survey. For example, some cultural groups may find a question about their ability to be a good parent, offensive. Using the phrase “dope addict” instead of “substance abuser” is likely to prejudice your results.

Bias can occur if questions suggest a “right” answer. Asking if someone agrees with a statement is biased in favor of the statement.

<i>POOR</i> <i>Biased toward agree</i>	<i>BETTER</i> <i>Unbiased question</i>
<i>Do you agree that children should always be spanked if they misbehave?</i>	<i>Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Children should always be spanked if they misbehave.</i>

Asking if someone agrees that children should always be spanked if they misbehave also sets up a “yes/no” response format. Yes/no questions will provide less useful information than a series of choices reflecting gradations, such as *totally agree, agree, not sure, disagree, totally disagree*.

Avoid asking double-barreled questions

One of the most common mistakes in writing questions is to put two ideas in a single question. Clearly, if the answer is to be meaningful, each question should focus on only one idea.

Developing Surveys

For example, in asking about a child's eating habits, if you include trying new foods and eating nutritious foods in the same question, you will not know what the answer means, regardless of the response. It would be better to ask two questions.

POOR Double-barreled question	BETTER Two separate questions
Is your child willing to try new things and eat nutritious foods?	Is your child willing to try new foods?
	Does your child eat nutritious meals?

Avoid negative questions

Questions that are phrased in negative terms are difficult to understand because one must stop and think about what is meant. Suppose a question asked parents if they agreed or disagreed with a statement about spoiling children.

POOR Embedded Negative	BETTER Explicit Negative
Parents do not spoil their children by picking them up and comforting them when they cry.	Parents do NOT spoil their children by picking them up and comforting them when they cry.

Some people will fail to notice the word "not." Others may think of the question as "Do I think parents spoil their children by picking them up and comforting them when they cry?" To avoid these mistakes, emphasize the negative word, if it is necessary to use that type of construction:

Ask others to review your questions

Try your questions out with people who are knowledgeable about surveys and writing questions. Most can tell you quickly if the questions are confusing, or are too complex to be answered easily.

It also helps to have people who are like your potential respondents review the questions. For example, if you are surveying teens, the reviewers should also be teenagers. Ask for their impressions about the readability and clarity of the questions. Also check their responses. Do the questions yield the information you need?

Framing Questions

There are two general ways to frame your questions: free-response or fixed choice:

- ***Free-response*** questions require a respondent to come up with an individual answer.
- ***Fixed choice*** questions ask the individual to check or circle the appropriate response from a set of answers you have provided.

Free-Response Questions

Free-response or open-ended questions can take your respondents considerable time, thought and effort to answer. But these questions can be useful in providing you with answers you may not have anticipated.

Some people appreciate having an opportunity to offer their own thoughts and evaluation. In addition, free-response questions often provide quotable material that you may use to amplify your quantitative findings.

<i>USING FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS</i>	
<i>PURPOSE</i>	<i>EXAMPLE</i>
<i>Stimulate thought</i>	What's the most important thing you've learned from this program?
<i>Solicit suggestions</i>	How could this service be improved?
<i>Elicit explanations</i>	Could you please give an example of what you mean?
<i>Recall information learned</i>	List three strategies you find useful for resolving conflict.

Tabulating and analyzing responses can be time-consuming but worth the effort, particularly if you use this type of question sparingly. To be effective and efficient, self-administered questionnaires should include no more than two or three free-response questions.

Developing Surveys

Fixed-Choice Questions

Most of your survey questions will be of the fixed-choice type. Question formats include simple direct questions that can be answered with a yes or no, questions with ordered responses, and ranking questions.

Yes or no questions. These are the most simple and direct questions you can ask. Each has a single idea or thought. Questions may be asked individually or in a checklist.

YES / NO QUESTION	Did you use food stamps during the last three months?
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't remember/ not applicable

Adding a category of “don’t know” or “not applicable” can increase the validity of your question.

Checklists

Use this type of question when you have multiple items you wish the respondent to address. Common categories are *yes*, *no*, and *don't know* or *not applicable*.

EXAMPLE OF CHECKLIST	
POOR	BETTER
Below is a list of discipline strategies. Which are you likely to use with your children who are under the age of three years? (Circle all that apply).	Below is a list of discipline strategies. Which are you likely to use with your children who are under the age of three years? (Circle the appropriate number for each question.)
1 Time-out	YES NO
2 Take away a privilege	1 2 Time-out
3 Slapping on the hand	1 2 Take away a privilege
4 Spanking with a hand	1 2 Slapping on the hand
5 Hitting with an object	1 2 Spanking with a hand
6 Other (please specify) _____	1 2 Hitting with an object
_____	Other (please specify): _____

Note that a free-response question has been included in the example to allow the parent to describe other discipline strategies not provided in the checklist. Giving an individual room to express their own thoughts or approaches increases the validity of the question.

Why not ask the individual to “circle all that apply?” Sawyer (1992) points out the following problems with questions that are formatted in that way:

- This new instruction can be missed if the person has been circling only a single response in the preceding questions.
- You don’t know whether the person has looked at EVERY item in the list.
- Each item is actually a yes or no so you create more coding work for yourself if the question is not already formatted in that way.

Ordered Response Questions

Fixed-choice questions that provide response categories ordered along a continuum such as low to high, little to big, always to never, or small to great are called ordered-response questions.

Depending on the objectives of your questionnaire, ordered responses can be written in a variety of ways. Arlene Fink (1995) suggests five types of response options: endorsement (agree to disagree), frequency (always to never), intensity (none to severe), influence (big problem to no problem), and comparison (much more than others to much less than others).

Here are some examples of the different response categories you can use for these questions.

EXAMPLES OF ORDERED RESPONSE CATEGORIES			
Completely satisfied	Strongly agree	Much better	Always
Very satisfied	Agree	Somewhat better	Usually
Somewhat satisfied	Not sure	About the same	Sometimes
Uncertain	Disagree	Somewhat worse	Seldom
Somewhat dissatisfied	Strongly disagree	Much worse	Never
Very dissatisfied			
Completely dissatisfied	Helped a lot	YES!	Excellent
	Helped a little	yes	Very good
Very important	Didn’t help much	no	Good
Somewhat important	Didn’t help at all	NO!	Fair
Not important	Don’t know		Poor
Don’t know		Big problem	
	To a great extent	Moderate problem	
Increased	To a fair extent	Small problem	True
Stayed the same	To a slight extent	Very small problem	Don’t know
Decreased	Not at all	Not a problem at all	False

Bias can occur if the ordered response categories are not *balanced*. Questions that provide five responses categories of which three are unfavorable, one is neutral, and one is favorable will bias the results in the unfavorable direction.

POOR Unbalanced Responses	BETTER Balanced Responses
Do you think the budget for the Commission on Children and Families should be:	Do you think the budget for the Commission on Children and Families should be:
1 Increased	1 Increased greatly
2 Stay the same	2 Increased slightly
3 Decreased a little	3 Stay about the same
4 Decreased somewhat	4 Decreased slightly
5 Decreased a great deal	5 Decreased a great deal

Choose an ordered response category that makes sense in terms of your survey's objectives. If you are measuring attitudes, questions about endorsement often make the most sense. If you are measuring behaviors, you may wish to consider frequency questions.

EXAMPLES OF ORDERED RESPONSE QUESTIONS	
ENDORSEMENT	<p>How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Parents who are sensitive to their children's feelings often spoil their children.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree</p>
FREQUENCY	<p>Example 1: How often do you read to your child?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> At least once a week <input type="checkbox"/> Once a month or less <input type="checkbox"/> At least twice a month <input type="checkbox"/> Never</p> <p>Example 2: Last week, how many days did you read a story to your child(ren)?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> None</p> <p>Example 3: How often do you read a story to your child at bedtime?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Almost always <input type="checkbox"/> Not often <input type="checkbox"/> Usually <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely, if at all <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes</p>

Other possibilities for ordered response questions are intensity and comparisons, as shown in the following examples:

INTENSITY	How much, if at all, has our program helped you to find positive ways to discipline your child?
	<input type="checkbox"/> Helped a lot <input type="checkbox"/> Helped a little <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> Didn't help much <input type="checkbox"/> Didn't help at all
COMPARISON	Compared to when your child was born, how would you rate your confidence that you know what is right for your child?
	1 Much worse 4 Somewhat better 2 Somewhat worse 5 Much better 3 About the same

Alternative Formats for Ordered Responses

Alternative formats for ordered responses use simple words, number lines, or visual images as the response choices. Alternative response formats are more informal and often appear more “friendly.”

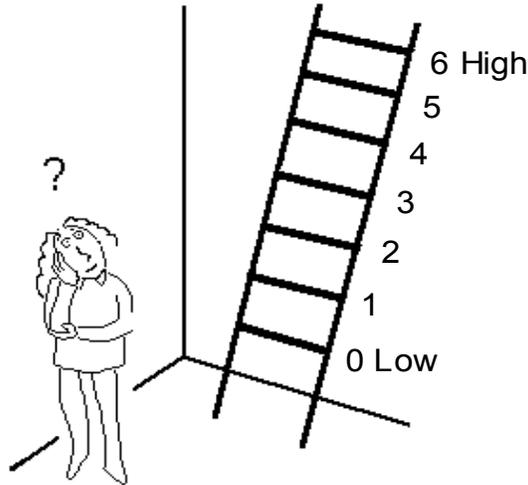
Alternative responses are especially useful with children, youth, or persons who may not have strong reading ability. For example, the Oregon Public School Drug Use survey (See appendix) uses the responses, “YES!, yes, no, NO!” rather than the “strongly agree to strongly disagree.”

THREE ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE FORMATS	
YES/ NO Alternatives	Happy/Sad Face Alternative
YES! yes no NO!	  
Number Line Alternative	
Place an “X” where you are on this line	
1 _____ 7	
strongly disagree/ or NEVER	strongly agree/or ALWAYS

Developing Surveys

Another example of an alternative response format is a ladder on which people “place” themselves as high or low. The following example, from the Oregon Healthy Start Evaluation’s Parent Survey, (see appendix) shows this alternative response format used in a retrospective pre-test.

RETROSPECTIVE PRE-POST LADDER



Where are you on the ladder?

Where are you on this ladder **NOW**?

	Low							High
1. Your knowledge of how children grow?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
2. Your ability to help your child learn?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
3. The amount of stress in your life right now?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
4. Your ability to cope with the stress in your life?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
5. Your resources, like money, food, and transportation?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	

Think back to when your baby was born. Where were you on the ladder **THEN**?

	Low							High
1. Your knowledge of how children grow?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
2. Your ability to help your child learn?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
3. The amount of stress in your life right now?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
4. Your ability to cope with the stress in your life?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
5. Your resources, like money, food, and transportation?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	

Unordered Responses

In this type of fixed-choice questions, respondents review a list of answers and check or circle the single answer they think is the best response.

Answer choices are independent of one another, rather than points on a continuum. Multiple choice questions offer unordered responses.

"True," "false," and "don't know" responses are often found in knowledge quizzes. Adding a response choice of "don't know" is helpful if you are trying to measure gains in knowledge over time. Individuals may mark "don't know" on a pre-test but have an appropriate answer on a post-test.

Another category to consider including is "none of the above." Some of the respondents may feel none of the offered choices are correct.

Be sure your response categories are independent and mutually exclusive. Items may be presented individually or they may be lined up in a series as in the example:

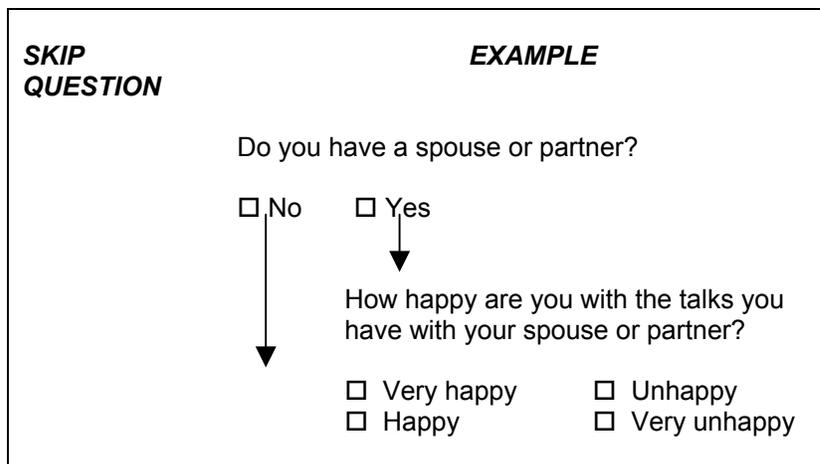
UNORDERED RESPONSE CHOICE
Which of the following discipline strategies are you MOST likely to use with your child(ren) under the age of 3 years?
<input type="checkbox"/> Time-out
<input type="checkbox"/> Take away a privilege
<input type="checkbox"/> Slap on the hand
<input type="checkbox"/> Spanking with hand
<input type="checkbox"/> Hitting with an object
<input type="checkbox"/> None of the above

UNORDERED RESPONSE CHOICES				
Some parents have a lot of help. Others do a lot on their own. Who does the following in your home? (Circle the appropriate number)	No one	I usually do it	Usually someone else does it	Someone else and I do it
Who fixes meals?	1	2	3	4
Who does the grocery shopping?	1	2	3	4
Who does the inside cleaning?	1	2	3	4
Who pays the bills?	1	2	3	4

Skip Questions

Skip or contingency questions allow for follow-up questions based on the answer given by the respondent. For example, a survey focusing on adults might include some specialized questions to those who are married. All other people would skip to the next topic area.

Questions should be written to make all your respondents feel included. If you knew that *everyone* taking the survey was a parent, it might be all right to ask “How many children do you have.” Otherwise, first ask if the individual has children. Next, ask those who answer yes, “how many children do you have?” Those who do not have any children can skip that question and any others that ask about children.



An alternate strategy is to add the response “Not applicable, no children” to every question about children. But this alternative requires more reading.

ALTERNATIVE TO SKIP QUESTIONS	
To every question that may not apply to some respondents, a response option should be included for these respondents. Some options include:	
Not applicable	Does NOT apply
I have never used this drug	I have no children

If there are several questions that are likely not to apply to several people, you should generally use skip questions. *HOWEVER, if a survey asks several very personal questions, you may NOT want to use “skip” questions –especially if the survey will be taken in a group setting.*

For example, the Oregon Youth Risk Behavior Survey asks all respondents to answer a long series of about sexual experiences and behaviors. One alternative for every question is “I have never had intercourse.”

If skip questions were used, then *only* students who had intercourse would answer most questions. This could identify the sexually experienced students to other students. Students who finished first would clearly be the ones who are not reporting sexual experiences.

For this same reason, the Oregon Public School Drug Use survey does NOT use skip questions. Rather, every student responds to every question. One response is “I have never used this drug.” (See appendix for the Oregon Public School Drug Use Survey and the Oregon Youth Health Risk Behavior Survey.)

Ranking

This type of question gives individuals a list of choices and asks them to rank them in order of preference, or indicate a “top three.”

Ranking Please rank the following discipline approaches according to how frequently you used them with your child last month.

The one you used most frequently should be ranked as 1 and the second most frequently used should be ranked 2. Fill in a rank for each discipline approach.

RANK

- _____ Time-out
- _____ Took away a privilege
- _____ Slapped on hand
- _____ Spanked with hand
- _____ Hit with object

Ranking is useful for setting goals. For example, people might be given a list of ten things that could happen in the program, such as learning new parenting skills or getting assistance with a serious problem, and asked to rate the importance of each.

Developing Surveys

After rating the items, a second question might ask, “Which are the three most important to you?” Rankings could be used in a pre-test post-test format to see if, after participation, the individual had met their goals.

Questions About Demographic Characteristics

Demographic characteristics include vital statistics and personal attributes such as:

- Age
- Gender
- Education
- Income
- Marital status
- Race/ethnicity
- Employment status
- Location

Standard ways of asking about these characteristics can be found in many surveys, including the U.S. Census. If you use standard formats, your data can be compared to already existing sources, such as state or county information. You can build a profile of your participants and assess the degree to which your target population is reached – who participated and who did not.

Put questions about demographics at the end of your survey.

People are hesitant to answer some demographic questions. It is always a good idea to put these questions at the end of your survey to increase the chances that the other questions will be answered. A brief explanation of why the information is needed can also help.

Be diplomatic, but direct.

AGE	
One way:	What is your age as of your most recent birthday? _____
Another way:	Circle the category that includes your age, as of your most recent birthday:
1	19 or younger
2	20 – 29 years
3	30 – 39 years
4	40 or older

Questions regarding names, addresses, zip codes, and telephone numbers can be asked directly. Be sure to leave an adequate amount of space for the answer. It also helps to ask respondents to print their name.

The best measure of age is to the individual’s precise date of birth. In many cases, that is what you will want, particularly for children and youth.

Asking adults “What is your age?” is a little softer than asking “How old are you?” Asking them to choose a category that contains their age is even more diplomatic. Avoid mentioning “your last birthday” since most people hope they have not celebrated their last birthday yet!

Avoid overlapping categories

When response categories overlap, everyone finds it hard to choose a category that best describes their age, education, or education. Watch your categories carefully. It's easy to make a mistake. Be sure that every category is completely different than all others!

POOR <i>Over-lapping categories</i>	BETTER <i>Distinct categories</i>
Please CIRCLE the highest grade in school you completed	Please CIRCLE the highest grade in school you completed
1 8 th grade or under	1 8 th grade or under
2 8 th – 12 th grade	2 9 th – 11 th grade
3 12 th grade or GED	3 12 th grade or GED
4 Some college	4 Some college
5 Bachelor's degree or higher	5 Bachelor's degree or higher

Choose categories that are appropriate for your population.

Make sure the level of detail will meet your needs, but will not be confusing for your respondents to answer. Fink (1995) recommends using no more than *four or five response categories* for a self-administered survey or telephone interview.

Consider the age and experiences of your respondents as you create your survey. If your survey is directed toward youth, your categories will be different than if your survey is directed to older adults. Age and education levels will be lower than for adults.

If you are serving recent immigrants who may not have had much schooling, you may wish to include a category for 6th grade or less in an education question. If your population is primarily college graduates, levels below high school might be omitted.

Employment categories require special attention to insure applicability to all your respondents. Issues around working outside the home vs. being a homemaker and part-time work vs. seasonal work all tend to complicate matters. Sawer (1992) suggests the following list of descriptive terms in order to be inclusive of employment categories.

ASKING ABOUT AGE IN A SURVEY WRITTEN FOR TEENS	
<i>CIRCLE the category that includes your age, as of your most recent birthday:</i>	
1	12 or younger
2	13 – 14 years
3	15 – 17 years
4	18 – 21 years
5	22 or older

EXAMPLES OF EMPLOYMENT CATEGORIES

Employed full-time in the work force	Unemployed and seeking work
Employed part-time in the work force	Unemployed and not seeking work
Employed full-time as a homemaker	Student, employed part-time
Employed as a homemaker and part-time in the work force	Student and not seeking work
Employed seasonally	Retired, employed part-time
	Retired and not seeking work

You can always include “*other, please specify*” as an option. Remember that if several respondents have to use this category, however, it will take longer to score or code these responses.

Recognize the diversity in your population

Today, the racial and ethnic background of America’s population is more diverse than ever. Bi-racial individuals add to the complexity. The question for you to consider is *how much* detail you need for analysis and reporting functions. If detailed information is important, major racial or ethnic groups can be sub-divided as in the example below.

EXAMPLES OF RACE/ETHNICITY QUESTIONS

General Categories:

What is your race or ethnicity?
CHECK one only.

- [] White, non-Latino
- [] White, Latino (or Hispanic)
- [] Black, African American
- [] Asian American
- [] Native American/Pacific Islander
- [] Other (please specify):

More Specific Categories

What is your race or ethnicity?
CHECK one only.

- [] **White**, non-Latino
- [] **White, Latino** (or Hispanic)
- [] **Black, African American**
- [] **Asian**: Chinese, Japanese
- [] **Southeast Asian**: Vietnamese, Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, Chinese Vietnamese
- [] **Other Asian**: (not Chinese, Japanese, or Southeast Asian)
- [] **Pacific Islanders** (Hawaiian, Filipino, Samoan)
- [] **Native American**
- [] **Other** (please specify)

Marital status is another demographic characteristic with many complexities in modern society. Words such as “spouse” or “partner” are more inclusive than the words “husband” and “wife.”

How much you ask about the individual's personal situation will depend on your information needs. If actual marital status is less important to your analysis than whether the individual is living with another adult, include cohabitation (the technical term for living together without being married) in your response choices:

EXAMPLES OF MARITAL STATUS QUESTIONS	
General Categories:	More Specific Categories:
What is your marital status? CHECK one only.	What is your marital status? CHECK one only.
<input type="checkbox"/> Married	<input type="checkbox"/> Married
<input type="checkbox"/> Separated	<input type="checkbox"/> Separated, cohabiting
<input type="checkbox"/> Divorced	<input type="checkbox"/> Separated, not cohabiting
<input type="checkbox"/> Widowed	<input type="checkbox"/> Divorced, cohabiting
<input type="checkbox"/> Never married	<input type="checkbox"/> Divorced, not cohabiting
	<input type="checkbox"/> Widowed, cohabiting
	<input type="checkbox"/> Widowed, not cohabiting
	<input type="checkbox"/> Never married, cohabiting
	<input type="checkbox"/> Never married, not cohabiting

Be sensitive when asking about income

Income is a private matter for most, if not all, individuals. Be sure you actually need income information before asking for it. If income is important to your assessment, follow these guidelines:

- Provide assurance that the information will be handled respectfully and confidentially.
- Use categories of income rather than ask for specific amounts.
- Use categories that are appropriate for your target audience.

Think about what income information will be most useful to you. There are a variety of ways to ask about income. Annual income? Monthly income? After taxes? Before taxes? Income for the respondent? Income for the household?

Also consider if there are any statistics you will use to compare with your participant's income level. If so, use the same values in your questionnaire.

EXAMPLES OF INCOME CATEGORIES	
ANNUAL INCOME	MONTHLY INCOME
Which income category best describes your total annual household income for 1997? CIRCLE one only.	Which income category best describes your household's total monthly income last month? CIRCLE one only.
1 Below \$10,000	1 Below \$500
2 Between \$10,000 and \$20,000	2 Between \$501 and \$1,000
3 Between \$20,001 and \$30,000	3 Between \$1,001 and \$2,000
4 Between \$30,001 and \$40,000	4 Between \$2,001 and \$3,000
5 Over \$40,000	5 Over \$3,000

Confidentiality and Informed Consent

Ethical considerations should protect the privacy rights of your respondents. These rights include the right to confidentiality and the right to give 'informed consent.' The federal government has specified the legal dimensions of informed consent. These include:

- A fair explanation of the procedures to be followed and their purposes
- A description of any risks and benefits
- An offer to answer any inquiries
- An assurance of confidentiality and identification of any situation in which confidentiality will NOT be maintained.
- Assurance that the person is free to withdraw consent and not complete survey instruments without affecting their participation in the program.

Signed Informed Consent

Ongoing programs or those that access confidential information in order to serve participants should include "informed consent" for evaluation as part of standard consent or confidentiality forms

Generally, informed consent to participate in assessment or evaluation should be gathered the same time people enter an ongoing program. This would include childcare programs, in-home visitation, health and social services, or other similar programs. *Include informed consent for evaluation in the standard consent or confidentiality policy forms that are signed when participants register for or enter a program.*

This form would be appropriate for a long-term program that, in order to serve families, gathers personal information. This may include information on health and health care, financial status and resources, family relationships, or other personal issues.

Our Confidentiality Policy

To support you and your family, we sometimes need personal information about you and your family. **This information is kept confidential.**

How do we keep information confidential?

- Your records are kept in a locked file and must be signed out for a specific purpose. After use, records are returned to the locked file.
- Information is shared only on a “need to know” basis with our staff or with other agencies or professionals, such as doctors. This information is shared in order to serve you and your family. You will be asked to sign a consent form before information is shared with other agencies or professionals.
- You may see your own records, but not those of others.

How do we use your confidential information?

- To assess and serve your needs and the needs of your children in the areas of health, social services, education, training, or other services
- **To evaluate our program and to make reports. Your name is not used in these reports. At any time, you may refuse to answer evaluation questions. This will NOT stop you from receiving our services.*

Could confidential information be shared without your consent?

- If we have reason to believe that any child is being abused or neglected, we are required by law to report it to Services for Children and Families.
- You will be informed before any such report is made, except in a life-threatening emergency.
- Such reports are made so that families can receive the assistance they need to keep their children healthy and safe.

If you have questions about this policy now or in the future, please ask your family advocate, Ms. Jill Smith, or the program director, Ms. Jane Doe, (541) 777-7777. Thank you.

Parent or Guardian _____ Date _____

Staff _____ Date _____

**** NOTE: This italicized information is the informed consent statement for evaluation or program assessment.***

Many programs do not require formal registration or written consent before participation. For example, Child Care Resource and Referral hotlines, most parent education classes, and other programs that have limited personal contact with people, generally do not gather signed consent for participation. In such programs, signed informed consent is generally NOT needed when participants are asked to assess the program.

NO WRITTEN CONSENT

If a program does not require written consent to participate, then it probably does NOT need signed informed consent for evaluation surveys.

If a program does not require written consent to participate, then it probably does NOT need to obtain signed informed consent for the evaluation. In these situations, the program assessment forms, such as satisfaction surveys or retrospective pre-post tests, or other measures, should briefly state:

- Answers will be confidential.
- How the information will be used (usually to “improve the program”).
- The fact participants may refuse to answer any question, and that this refusal will NOT affect participation in the program. (It is acceptable to encourage people to complete assessments by stating that the information they can provide is very important.)

IMPLIED INFORMED CONSENT

Now that you have finished this parent education course, we want to know how the course has influenced you and your ideas for improving the course in the future.

Your answers will not be seen by anyone except the program staff who evaluate the program. Your name will not appear anywhere in our reports.

You don't have to answer any question, but your ideas are very important and we hope you will share them with us.

When people complete voluntary surveys or other assessments that include these statements, they have given their *implied informed consent*.

In all informed consent statements, it is important to distinguish between confidentiality and anonymity. **Anonymity** means that it is *impossible* to identify any respondent. Surveys that are mailed to a large sample with no tracking information for follow-up are anonymous surveys. Most often, calling assessments "confidential" is more accurate than calling them "anonymous "

Confidentiality means that the identities of respondents' may be known, but that this information will NOT be shared in such a way as to identify any individual or his/her responses. To maintain confidentiality, it is important that

- all staff understand what confidentiality means and maintain confidential practices at all times,
- confidential information is shared only with those who have a legitimate "need to know"
- identification numbers, NOT names or other identifying information, are used if confidential information must be shared with others, such as external evaluators
- records, including assessment and evaluation forms, are kept safe at all times, and
- circumstances under which confidential information would be shared are clearly stated.

Formatting Your Questionnaire

Once your questions are written, the next step is organize and format your questionnaire. Consider the appearance, the order of the questions, and the ease of use. A survey that has an attractive appearance can motivate the respondents to participate. Here are some guidelines for format and style.

**FORMATTING
CONSIDERATIONS**

Appearance
Order of questions
Motivation
Ease of use
Readability

Begin with a short introduction

You should briefly describe *why* you are conducting the survey and *what* individuals can expect. People are more likely to complete a survey if they understand why their responses are important to you and the success of your evaluation.

Put any information about the *confidentiality* of responses in the introduction.

Developing Surveys

The introduction sets the stage. Barbara Sawyer (1992) notes that introductions can communicate the following important messages:

- The purpose of the survey
- Who is conducting the survey
- How the information will benefit the respondent, future program participants, or perhaps the community and/or society in general)
- What will be expected (fill out a questionnaire or participate in an interview, for example)
- The importance of the respondent to the success of the overall evaluation effort
- How or why the respondent was selected
- A promise of confidentiality (NOT anonymity, unless you mean it)
- An offer to share the results (ONLY if you are prepared to do so)

Include enough information in the introduction to inform and motivate the respondent, and still be brief and succinct. Here are several examples of introductions.

INTRODUCTION

Example 1:

This survey is about you, your child, and your family. Your answers are important and will help us improve the program in the future. Some of the questions may seem a little personal, but they will help us plan better programs for you and other parents. When your child is older, we will ask you to answer these questions again.

Example 2:

Listed below are the topics and materials that were presented in this workshop. Your answers are important and will help us improve the program in the future. Please CIRCLE the number that best indicates how useful, *if at all*, each was to you.

Keep instructions short and explicit

Provide directions on how to answer the questions. Directions and other key words are often capitalized to set them apart from the actual questions:

- CIRCLE the number that best describes
- CHECK the box that best describes

POOR DIRECTIONS	BETTER DIRECTIONS
This questionnaire is designed to measure how often your child exhibits certain social skills and how important those skills are to your child's development. Ratings of problem behaviors are also requested.	Think about the qualities listed below. First, CIRCLE the number that describes HOW OFTEN your child acts this way. Then, CIRCLE the number that describes HOW IMPORTANT you think the quality is for a child.

Use the same marking system for answering all the questions if possible. If you use numbers for the response choices, you can type them directly into a spreadsheet program on a computer. Time is saved if you do not have to recode your information before entering data.

Organize your questions by topic

Topics should flow naturally from one question to another. Group questions together into topics that follow a line of thought. Provide a short introduction whenever you change thoughts, such as “now, we’d like to ask you about -- .” If you are asking sensitive questions, it’s a good idea to “normalize” the negative aspects by recognizing that everyone had problems:

POOR	BETTER
For each of the following questions, CIRCLE the number that comes closest to how you feel. There are no right or wrong answers. If you’re not sure, CIRCLE number 3.	Being a parent is sometimes hard for all of us. What is hard for you right now? CIRCLE the number that comes closest to how you feel. There are no right or wrong answers. If you’re not sure, CIRCLE number 3.

Make your survey attractive and easy to read

An attractive questionnaire is more likely to be completed.

- Clip art adds interest if it is appropriate to the content of the survey.
- If you use colored paper be sure it is easy to read *and* to photocopy.
- The typeface should be plain and large enough to be read easily.

Do not cram too many questions on a single sheet. You should also avoid having the individual turn the page in the middle of a question.

Pilot Testing

Pilot-testing and Revising

Clarifies content, questions and instructions

Refines response choices

Increases reliability and validity

Conducting a trial run or “pilot-test” of your survey can save you (and your respondents) grief later on. Even the most experienced survey designer tests a questionnaire before using it to collect important information.

Indeed, most surveys go through *several revisions*, as language and response choices are refined.

Pilot-testing has many advantages. It offers you an opportunity to:

- Make sure the directions are clear and understandable
- Find out how long it takes to complete the questionnaire
- Judge the adequacy of the formatting and spacing
- See if any questions are confusing, misleading, or misinterpreted
- Determine if the response choices are adequate and sufficient
- Review the content to insure all needed information is collected

Pilot testing should be done with volunteers who are *similar* in age and education to your program participants. Six to ten people is usually an adequate sample for a pilot test. Ask the people to respond to the questions, and to tell you about any difficulties they may have experienced understanding questions or instructions.

Once you have collected data in your pilot test, score and analyze it just as you will the “real thing.” This will help you find and fix any inconsistencies or problems that are present in the measure.

To increase the validity and reliability of your survey, focus on the clarity of the questions. Warning signs that your questions are not clear are failure to answer a question, giving several answers to the same question, and comments that may have been written in the margins (Fink & Kosecoff, 1985).

Revisions should be based on feedback from pilot-testing. No survey is ever perfect, but careful planning, pilot-testing, and revising can produce more valid, reliable measures.