

# **FAMILY ADVOCACY AND SUPPORT TOOL (FAST)**

## Glossary of Items

## **THE FAMILY TOGETHER**

This section of the FAST is designed to describe how the family functions. The first task of family assessment is to define family membership. In general, the family needs to define itself. Membership is decided by consensus among all individuals in a family. Professionals may need to have in-depth discussions with families to gain full understanding of the family constellation and dynamics. If, despite this work with the family, family members are unable to define who they consider their family, for purposes of completing the FAST consider the family as a collection of individuals who work together to raise one or more children.

Any family has a hierarchy of authority. Generally the parents and other caregivers have greater authority. Children earn more authority over themselves and younger children as they mature. The family system is the set of inter-relationships among the family members within the context of their roles and responsibilities in that family. The items in this section should be rated within the context of the family as a whole.

### **Parent/Caregiver Collaboration**

This item describes the working alliance among caregivers who are responsible for raising the children. In a two-parent family, this item assesses the degree to which the parents agree on parenting philosophies/strategies and work together to support each other in their parenting roles/responsibilities.

Families who do not have two parents can still have caregiving alliances. Any time there is more than one caregiver, the degree to which the caregivers work together is an important family characteristic. Divorced parents can collaborate well and co-parent their children positively despite living separate lives.

### **Relationships Among Siblings**

This item describes whether any actionable problems exist among the children within a family. Reference to siblings does not imply a requirement that the children in a family are related either biologically or legally as the result of a marriage. Thus, this item considers all possible relationships among all of the children in a family.

This item rates whether any existing problems require intervention. Thus a “2” could be used even in circumstances where the sibling problems only involve a relationship between two of the children in a larger sibship.

### **Extended Family Relations**

This item describes the nature of the relationships between the family and their extended family. Extended family includes related individuals such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc. Extended family may be a significant support or may be in conflict with/estranged from family members.

A family who recently migrated to the United States may be estranged from their extended family simply because of geographic distance. This estrangement might be stressful and would be considered in this item.

## **Family Conflict**

This item determines whether or not conflict is occurring within the family system. Domestic violence is the extreme; any domestic violence in the past 30 days would be rated with a “3” regardless of which family members are involved.

All families have conflict. Occasional arguments are not only normal but can also be healthy if resolved through communication and mutual respect. This level of conflict would be rated as “0”. Only when the conflict begins to create notable problems within the family system would a rating of “1” or higher be used.

## **Family Communication**

This item assesses the ability of family members to communicate with each other regarding their feelings, thoughts, needs, etc. The ability of family members to let each other know what is happening in their individual lives is generally important in the life of a family. Challenges with communication may interfere with a family’s ability to function.

The roots of communication problems can be quite varied. Families who have experienced trauma often avoid entire topics out of fear of mentioning a sensitive issue. Alternatively, problems may involve a failure to speak up about thoughts, feelings, or needs. For example, in some cultures, mothers are supposed to meet the needs of everyone else in the family. Some mothers feel that this expectation means that they cannot ever express their needs. However, if the mother fails to address her needs she may be prevented from successfully meeting the needs of others in the family.

Communication problems can be related to conflict. Family members who express feelings primarily through anger and who cannot work toward a satisfactory resolution can create communication problems.

## **Family Safety**

This item describes whether the family members live in a safe environment. This environment includes the home as well as the neighborhood and circumstances. For example, generally a family living in a shelter may be less safe than a family living in an apartment. A family living in an apartment in which gang members or drug abusers routinely come and go is less safe than a family living in an apartment with no such intrusions. In most cases, existence of domestic violence indicate an immediate/intensive level of need (i.e. “3”) on this item.

## **Financial Resources**

Poverty is one of the most common and overwhelming challenges that a family can face. The absence of financial resources can limit housing options, result in poor nutrition, and cause or exacerbate safety threats related to the environment. This item identifies the degree to which financial problems are a current challenge for the family.

Few families have as many financial resources as they would like and don’t sometimes struggle to meet all financial obligations. So, the “0” level is used to indicate a “good enough” level of financial resources. The family may not have all the financial freedom they would like but have enough to take care of basic needs. The family’s planning can impact this item. For example, the family may have sufficient resources but struggles to meet their needs because of insufficient planning.

## PARENT/CAREGIVER STATUS

This section identifies the individual strengths and needs of each of the parents and/or caregivers in the family. These are the adults in the family who have been identified as having some responsibility for raising the children. A single parent household with no other adults would have one caregiver. However, if two parents have separated and begun relationships with new partners and all individuals share caregiving responsibilities in two different households, then four caregivers would be rated. Adults in the family with no caregiving responsibilities are not rated here. For example, if a grandmother lives with the family but has no role in taking care of the children, she would not be included. Alternatively, in a family in which the grandmother babysits the children every weekend, the grandmother would be included as a caregiver.

Please note that in the process of certification (i.e., demonstrating reliability in the use of the FAST through the web-based system), *the order of the caregivers and children is **crucial***. Each vignette numbers both the caregivers and children and they need to be rated in the order they are numbered. For purposes outside of certification, generally order the caregivers and children by age, starting with the oldest.

### Natural Supports

These are unpaid individuals who help and support a family. The existing body of research in a system of care indicates that this is the single hardest aspect of wraparound philosophy to develop. However, it is also one of the most powerful aspects of intensive community-based intervention. The concept of natural supports comes from the African parable that “it takes a village” to raise a child. Paid individuals only count as natural supports if they would remain involved with the family even if they weren’t being paid.

### Advocacy Skills

Parents developing the capacity to successfully advocate for the family and child is an important achievement. This section describes the status of advocacy skills along with the family’s level of satisfaction with the status of their child(ren) in the system. The indicated advocacy skills may be generally characteristic of one person in the family rather than all family members or even all caregivers. The overall rating should reflect the lowest need. As such, if any family member is knowledgeable about service options, the indicator would be rated as a “0”.

# CAREGIVER STATUS

## Caregiver's Emotional Responsiveness

This item describes each individual caregiver's ability to be empathic with the children. Can they listen to and understand the children? Do the caregivers allow them to communicate openly without judgment or intimidation? Are they able to respond to the children's needs in an emotionally appropriate manner?

Examples of needs in this dimension include a caregiver who becomes angry when a young child cries or a parent who refuses to allow the child to talk about what she/he feels for the other parent.

## Caregiver's Boundaries

A family is a collection of individuals who work together toward common goals. However, successful collaboration involves maintaining one's individuality and developing boundaries.

A parent who confides his/her secrets to the children is violating boundaries. A parent who tells the children about how badly the other parent acts is violating boundaries. A parent who cannot stop a child from entering a bathroom in use is experiencing problems with boundaries. Parents may not think about establishing boundaries in a concrete way and this may work if everyone in the family understands the implicit rules, but other times parents may need to clearly define behavior that is or is not acceptable. Professionals can assist parents with developing and expressing boundaries.

## Caregiver's Involvement in Caregiving Functions

This item is similar to the item called Involvement with care in the family section but instead describes the degree to which the individual caregiver is involved in the life of the family. Some parents or caregivers are integral members of the family. They know everything going on with individual family members and play key roles in family decision-making. Other caregivers are more detached from the family and less involved. These caregivers may not be aware of the daily happenings, accomplishments, and challenges of individual family members and/or they may be relatively uninvolved in family decision-making.

## Caregiver's Supervision

*Note that this version of the FAST combines supervision and discipline under supervision.*

This item describes the caregiver's ability to monitor the activities of the children in the family. The level and type of supervision needed changes as children age. With very young children, supervision involves a physical presence. Parents need to closely watch small children to ensure that they stay safe and that their basic needs are met. As children age, the nature of supervision also changes. Supervising an adolescent is much more about communicating with them to monitor their activities and whom they spend their time with. Applying physical monitoring supervision to adolescents is likely to be inappropriate in most circumstances as they need privacy to develop individual identities. An exception might occur based on the child's developmental age.

## Caregiver's Discipline

*Rate discipline combined with supervision.*

This item refers to discipline broadly. It includes all of the things parents and caregivers can do to promote positive behavior in children. In other words, setting limits and redirecting is as much a discipline strategy as time-out is.

Excessive reliance on punishment is addressed in this area. Use of physical punishment as a primary source of discipline would be rated a “3” in most cases as would cases of extreme punishment consistent with abuse (e.g., locking a child in a closet or otherwise restraining them for extended periods).

A “0” on this item is a considerable strength. It indicates that the caregiver is adept at positive, developmentally-based strategies that encourage children in the family to behave acceptably and remain safe.

### **Caregiver’s Partner Relationship**

This item describes the caregiver’s relationship within his/her romantic/intimate partnership. Some caregivers have decided that they are not currently interested in a romantic or intimate relationship. If the individual is currently satisfied in these circumstances, then a rating of “0” on this item is appropriate. However, if a caregiver is currently alone but desires a relationship that he/she feels is currently unavailable to them, that might be a rating of “1”, “2”, or “3” depending on the circumstances and impact on the family.

### **Caregiver’s Vocational Functioning**

This item refers to the caregiver’s job status. As noted in the anchor definition, employment outside of the home is not required. A satisfied homemaker would be rated with a “0”. On the other hand, an unemployed parent who is interested in seeking employment would be rated higher. A rating of “3” would indicate a parent or caregiver who is either chronically unemployed or employed in illegal activities such as selling drugs or prostituting.

### **Caregiver’s Mental Health**

Any evidence of a mental health need, whether or not actively diagnosed and/or treated, would be rated here. In general, ratings of “2” or “3” would be reserved for a serious or pervasive mental health concern such as depressive disorder, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or a personality disorder. Concern that mental health needs are present but unrecognized could be rated as a “1”. A “1” could also indicate a well-managed mental health need (e.g., bipolar disorder well-managed on medication).

### **Caregiver’s Substance Abuse**

This item indicates whether the identified caregiver’s use of drugs and/or alcohol interferes with their parenting roles and responsibilities. Concern about a possible substance abuse problem would be rated as a “1”. For example, if the mother and the father disagree that the father’s drinking impacts the family, the rating might rate be a “1” until that time all parties can reach a shared vision. Of course, if the mother says that if the father doesn’t stop drinking, she is moving out, that would make Substance Use a “2” or a “3” depending on the circumstances.

## Caregiver's Knowledge

This item does not simply refer to knowledge of whether or not options exist, but also includes whether or not the options the family leadership is requesting are a good fit for the child's needs. For example, a family who is demanding residential placement of a child whose needs are not sufficiently complex and severe to warrant institutional treatment would be rated a "2" or "3".

## YOUTH STATUS

These items describe each of the children in the family. Sometimes circumstances exist that make it difficult to decide whether a family member is best rated as a caregiver or a child. In general, every family member under the age of 18 would be rated in the child section. Children in foster care until the age of 21 would probably be rated as children in most cases. Young adults could be rated as caregivers if their family roles are more congruent with that designation, e.g., they are a parent.

All of these items are rated using a developmental framework. All items except Educational Status should use *chronological age*. Educational Status should use *developmental age* as a reference to assess if the child's education status is congruent with his/her learning style and development.

### Relationship with Biological Mother

This item is exclusively about the current status of a child's relationship with his/her biological mother. If the biological mother is deceased, absent, or her parental rights are terminated and the child will have no contact, this item would be rated as a "0" as it will not impact the planning process. However, if parental rights are terminated, and the child maintains a relationship or seeks to restore a relationship with his/her biological mother, a higher rating would be used depending on the circumstances.

### Relationship with Biological Father

This item is exclusively about the current status of a child's relationship with his/her biological father. If the biological father is deceased, absent, or his parental rights are terminated and the child will have no contact, this item would be rated as a "0" as it will not impact the planning process. However, if parental rights are terminated and the child maintains a relationship or seeks to restore a relationship with his/her biological father, a higher rating would be used depending on the circumstances.

### Relationship with Primary Caregiver

This item describes the relationship the child has to his/her primary caregiver. If the primary caregiver is either the biological mother or father or both then the ratings would be the same as on those items. However, for children in foster care the primary caregiver would likely be the foster parents.

### Relationship with Other Family Adults

Sometimes children have poor relationships with their parents but have a positive relationship with other adults in the family. The reverse also can be true when children have significant conflict with

other adults but have a strong positive relationship with their parents. This item captures any strengths or challenges in these relationships.

### **Relationship with Siblings**

In the Family Together section it is possible to describe whether challenges exist among the children in the family. In this section, the focus is on the relationships the specific child has with siblings.

### **Physical/Medical Status**

This item is an indicator for any medical or physical challenges with the child. A “2” would be used to indicate a chronic health problem or physical challenge. A “3” would be used to indicate a life-threatening health problem or a physical challenge that prevents functioning in at least one life domain.

### **Mental Health Status**

This item is an indicator of any behavioral and emotional challenges the child exhibits. Any evidenced mental health need would be indicated here regardless of its specific symptom presentation. This item combines depression, anxiety, and/or disruptive behavior into a single indicator of the need to connect with specialty mental health treatment.

### **Intellectual/Developmental**

This item is used to identify intellectual or developmental challenges which may limit the child's cognitive functioning. In other words, challenges with cognitive skills requires both specific intervention and accommodation with other interventions to ensure that the learning style and developmental status of the child is understood and respected.

### **Self-Regulation Skills**

With small children self-regulation is often physiological. As children mature, self-regulation shifts to emotional regulation. Challenges with self-regulation are often effects of significant traumatic experiences, but other causes (such as developmental disorders) may be relevant. When a child struggles to self-regulate in a developmentally-appropriate manner, problems often occur with emotions or behavior.

### **Social Functioning**

This item describes whether the child experiences challenges in his/her relational world. Depending on the child's age, problems with misperception, empathy, interacting, making friends, or parallel play would be rated here.

### **School**

This item is a global indicator of whether the child's school experience fits his/her needs. Any challenges with education would be identified here, including problems with behavior, attendance, or achievement. Children are rated on this item using *developmental age* as the framework.