

# Praesidium's Interpretive Guide for Personal References

## Reference Questions

## Interpretive Guidelines

1. How long have you known the applicant?

This question may be used to assess the applicant's level of the risk factor: Social isolation. Has the applicant given you the name of a person whom he/she has only known for a short period of time (for example, six weeks)? Has the reference known the applicant long enough to provide useful information about the applicant?

2. What is your relationship to the applicant?

This question may be used to assess the applicant's level of the risk factor: Social isolation. Has the applicant given you the name of an acquaintance? This could be because he/she has few friends or because close friends may reveal too much about the applicant. Note if the reference's relationship to the applicant is different than the applicant's description (for example, the applicant told you he was a friend, but he is actually a brother-in-law).

3. How would you rate the applicant's ability to work with and relate to children?

Can you give me an example of how the applicant relates to children?

These questions may be used to assess the applicant's level of the Performance Skill: Patience.

These questions may be used to assess an applicant's levels of the risk factors: Failure to set limits and use mature judgment with children or Failure to assume the adult role with children.

**High-risk responses** would include the reference indicating that the applicant "lets kids get away with anything," acts more like a child, doesn't seem to worry about the kids at all, does not closely supervise, or doesn't like to be an authority figure.

4. We are looking for someone who can stay calm and control frustration even under very frustrating conditions with children and/or vulnerable adults. How would you rate the applicant's ability to be patient and stay calm?

This question may be used to assess the applicant's level of the Performance Skill: Patience.

This question may also be used to assess an applicant's level of the risk factors: Immaturity, Inability to handle stress, and Uses harsh forms of discipline.

**High-risk responses** could describe the applicant as high-strung, hot-tempered, quick-tempered, impatient, irrational or easily upset.

5. Have you ever known the applicant to use harsh or abusive discipline with a child?

This question may also be used to assess an applicant's level of the risk factor: Uses harsh forms of discipline.

**High-risk responses** could be the reference describing the applicant degrading children verbally, humiliating children or using inappropriate physical punishment.

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**6. Would you be comfortable placing one of your own children in the care of the applicant?**

This question may be used to identify any specific concerns of the reference that should be investigated prior to the applicant working with children.

Probe any affirmative answers for details and specific examples of the applicant's behavior that the reference found disturbing. If the reference is unable to be specific, then any concerns should still be noted and followed up on.

**7. What are the applicant's hobbies and recreational activities?**

This question may be used to assess an applicant's level of the risk factor: Social isolation.

**High-risk responses** may be the reference indicating that the applicant has few interests and spends most time alone.

This question may be used to assess a male applicant's level of the risk factor: Excessively interested and involved with children. Note any hobbies, activities or volunteer work that is not identified by the applicant.

**High-risk response** could be that the applicant is involved with the boy's baseball team, the young men's karate league, the Boy Scouts, and the children's youth group at church, with no similar activities involving adults.

This question may also be used to assess a female applicant's level of the risk factor: Extremely lonely and emotionally impoverished. A red flag answer could be that the applicant doesn't seem to have many recreational activities or hobbies and that she is a "loner."

**8. How would you rate the applicant's ability to relate to other adults?**

This question may be used to assess a male applicant's level of the risk factors: Difficulty interacting with adults, Difficulty working as a team player or working with authority figures.

**Can you give me an example of how the applicant related to adults?**

**High-risk responses** for a male applicant could include the reference indicating the applicant has difficulty relating to or working with women, trouble accepting authority, low impulse control, difficulty asking for help when he needs it, a need for power and control, and general emotional and social immaturity when relating to other adults. The reference may also report that the applicant seems to relate better to children than adults.

This question may be used to assess a female applicant's level of the risk factor: Difficulty interacting with adults. The reference may describe the applicant as, "needy," "clingy," "annoying," or "lonely." She may be described as less socially competent or generally less competent than co-workers. She may have been rejected by male and female peers.

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**9. We need a person who can be**

This question may be used to assess the applicant's level

**supportive and understanding to a person in need. How would you rate the applicant's ability to be genuinely supportive and understanding to a person in need?** of the Performance Skills: Supportiveness and Boundaries.

**10. Think of a time when the applicant was able to show genuine concern for another person who needed comfort. Tell me about that time.**

**1. How would you rate the applicant's ability to maintain appropriate boundaries with children?**

These questions may be used to assess the applicant's level of the Performance Skill: Boundaries.

**12. Do you have any additional comments or questions?**

Give the reference ample time to consider if there is anything else he/she would like to say about the applicant. Allow the reference to answer before wrapping up the interview. If he/she has been withholding information and considering whether or not to provide the information, a moment of silence allows the reference to collect his/her thoughts.

# Praesidium’s Interpretive Guide for Professional References

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<p>1. <b>How long have you known the applicant?</b></p> <p>2. <b>How do you know the applicant?</b></p>	<p>These items may be used to assess the applicant’s general risk level.</p> <p><b>High-risk responses</b> to these questions could be the reference indicating that he/she has only known the applicant for a short time (for example, less than six months), knew the applicant some time ago (for example, hasn’t seen the applicant in more than a year), or only knew the applicant briefly years ago.</p> <p>Other high-risk responses could be if the reference indicates that he/she knew the applicant in a capacity different than has been represented by the applicant (for example, the applicant claims that Charles White was a supervisor, but Charles White reports he was a co-worker or friend).</p>
<p>3. <b>How would you rate the applicant’s ability to learn new information and use new skills? Can you give me an example of a time when the applicant was able to learn something new?</b></p>	<p>This question may be used to assess the applicant’s level of the Performance Skill: <u>Trainability</u>.</p>
<p>4. <b>We are looking for someone who will adhere to the standard policies of our organization. How would you rate the applicant’s ability to follow policies and procedures?</b></p>	<p>This question may be used to assess the applicant’s level of the Performance Skill: <u>Policy adherence</u>.</p>
<p>5. <b>How would you rate the applicant’s ability to work with and relate to other adults? Can you tell me about a time when the applicant had to work closely with other adults?</b></p>	<p>This question may be used to assess a male applicant’s level of the risk factors: <u>Difficulty interacting with adults</u>, <u>Difficulty working as a team player or working with authority figures</u>.</p> <p><b>High-risk responses</b> for a male applicant could include the reference indicating the applicant has difficulty relating to or working with women, trouble accepting authority, low impulse control, difficulty asking for help when he needs it, a need for power and control, and general emotional and social immaturity when relating to other adults. The reference may also report that the applicant seems to relate better to children than adults.</p> <p>This question may be used to assess a female applicant’s level of the risk factor: <u>Difficulty interacting with adults</u>. The reference may describe the applicant as, “needy,” “clingy,” “annoying,” or “lonely.” She may be described as <u>less socially competent</u> or <u>generally less competent</u> than co-workers. She may have been rejected by male and female peers.</p>

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### 6. Have you have observed the applicant working with children?

How would you rate the applicant's ability to work with children? Can you give me an example of how the applicant relates to children?

With what types of children have you observed the applicant working well (enjoying the work, being effective)?

With what types of children have you observed the applicant not working well (becoming frustrated, angry, resentful or non-productive)?

These questions may be used to assess an applicant's levels of the risk factors: Failure to set limits and use mature judgment with children or Failure to assume the adult role with children.

**High-risk responses** would include the reference indicating that the applicant "lets kids get away with anything," acts more like a child, doesn't seem to worry about the kids at all, does not closely supervise, or doesn't like to be an authority figure.

These questions may also be used to assess the applicant's level of the Performance Skill: Patience.

These questions may also be used to evaluate the applicant's interactions with children and identify any signs of physical or emotional abuse. Is the applicant easily agitated by children? Does the applicant openly demonstrate anger when he/she is frustrated? Does the applicant become punitive and shaming toward children when they misbehave or do not progress?

These questions may be used to assess a male applicant's levels of the risk factors: Having numerous positions which relate to children (particularly the same type of children), Highly skilled at gaining the trust and confidence of children, Having positions for which the applicant is overqualified and Having a series of low responsibility positions.

### 6. (continued)

**High-risk responses** may include the reference describing additional job positions, education or volunteer work by the applicant, which he has not previously disclosed. Other high-risk responses could indicate that the applicant has a defined preference for working with a particular age and gender child without an identifiable reason, that he seems to have an uncanny ability to engage children, or that he could conceivably be working in positions with higher salaries and more desirable conditions, yet he is inexplicably choosing not to do so.

These questions may also be used to assess a female applicant's levels of the risk factors: Job history contains a long history of failures.

**High-risk responses** may be the reference describing several situations in which the applicant was unsuccessful in her work or unable to fulfill the obligations of the position. This is particularly high-risk if failure is a recurring theme for the applicant.

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7. Are you aware of any reason why we should not allow this applicant to work with children?

This question provides the reference with the opportunity to disclose information in areas that are not addressed in the standard interview. If the reference has general concerns or suspicions, he/she may reveal these in a general comment at this time.

8. How would you rate the applicant's ability to use good judgment in normal conditions?

This question may be used to assess the applicant's level of the Performance Skill: Judgment.

9. How would you rate the applicant's ability to use good judgment in unusual/stressful conditions? Can you give me an example of when the applicant used good judgment?

This question may also be used to assess an applicant's level of the risk factors: Poor judgment and Difficulty handling stress or managing stressful situations. Does the reference struggle to find an example of good judgment or does the example involve the applicant choosing an ineffective or harmful option?

**High-risk responses** could be the reference describing the applicant as a) having good judgment only when someone else is involved, b) having poor or immature judgment, c) not considering consequences before making decisions, or d) not using good judgment in stressful or difficult situations.

Other high-risk responses may be if the reference describes the applicant as hot tempered, high strung, or often "stressed out."

10. Do you have any additional comments or questions?

Give the reference ample time to consider if there is anything else he/she would like to say about the applicant. Allow the reference to answer before wrapping up the interview. If he/she has been withholding information and considering whether or not to provide the information, moment of silence allows the reference to collect his/her thoughts.

## High-Risk Indicators for References

- ⌘ **References were reluctant.**
- ⌘ **References did not know the applicant well.**
- ⌘ **References have short term relationships with the applicant.**
- ⌘ **References refused to answer particular questions.**
- ⌘ **Reference information differed from the applicant's account.**
- ⌘ **References described applicant as having high-risk characteristics.**
- ⌘ **References provided evasive responses.**
- ⌘ **References reported specific concerns about the applicant.**