

**SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR EXPERTS**

**Clinical Psychologists**

Clinical psychologists work with people with mental or physical health problems which might include anxiety and depression, mental illness, adjustment to physical illness, neurological disorders, addictive behaviours, childhood behaviour disorders, personal and family relationships.

Clinical psychologists can advise on matters such as:

* Parental assessments
* Residence and contact
* Likelihood of recovery from psychological disorders
* Assessment of drug and alcohol dependency

For more information on clinical psychologists, see [www.bps.org.uk/](http://www.bps.org.uk/)

**Sample questions**

1. Please carry out a full cognitive assessment of XXX and advise on his/her overall level of functioning.
2. Please advise as to how information should be given to XXX, taking into account the findings of his/her cognitive assessment.
3. Please assess XXX’s likelihood of recovery from [psychological disorder].
4. Please explain the steps that XXX should take in order to recover from [psychological disorder/drug or alcohol addiction].
5. Please assess how likely it is that XXX will be able to perform his/her parenting duties following treatment for [psychological disorder/drug and alcohol abuse].

**Forensic Psychologists**

Forensic psychologists specialise in the psychology of offending behaviour. They carry out psychological evaluations, write reports setting out their findings and attend court to give expert testimony. Forensic psychologists will have experience in writing reports for and attending court.

A forensic psychologist can be trained in clinical, social, organisational or any other branch of psychology.

Issues on which forensic psychologists can advise include:

* Psychological assessments of parental fitness
* Family relationships and functioning
* Residence and contact
* Domestic violence

For more information on forensic psychologists, see [www.bps.org.uk/](http://www.bps.org.uk/)

**Sample questions**

1. Please assess XXX’s understanding, insight and acknowledgement of [specific harm/behaviour].
2. Please assess XXX’s parental capacity to keep the children safe from harm both in the past and in the future.
3. Please assess XXX’s parental ability to provide appropriate boundaries and supervision around the children, including sexual matters.
4. Please assess XXX’s insight into [specific harm/behaviour] and the impact that that has had upon the children.
5. Please advise on whether XXX can provide appropriate levels of care for all their children, and, if not, please give an indication as whether XXX could reasonably provide care for one or more children separately on a long term basis.
6. Please assess whether XXX is able to prioritise the needs of his/her children and whether he/she will be able to provide for their current and future needs.
7. Please assess whether XXX is likely to refrain from domestic violence within their relationship in future.

**Child Psychologists**

Child psychologists specialise in working with children up to the age of 18. Child psychologists work with children in a variety of settings including family, school and residential settings. Often they then go on to develop a particular area of practice or expertise for example, clinical child psychology or educational child psychology.

Child psychologists can advise on matters such as:

* Family relationships and functioning
* Domestic violence
* Contact and residence
* Sexual or other emotional abuse

For more information on child psychologists, see [www.bps.org.uk/](http://www.bps.org.uk/)

**Sample questions**

1. Please undertake a psychological assessment of the child focusing on his/her cognitive functioning, intellectual, educational, emotional, social and behavioural development and comment on any matters of concern.
2. Please comment on the child’s level of understanding of their situation.
3. Please comment upon any harm which the child may have suffered in respect of their psychological, intellectual, educational, emotional, social and behavioural development and assess what the cause of such harm may be.
4. Please assess the child’s understanding of domestic violence, and what the effect of witnessing such violence has had on him/her.
5. Please comment on the child’s attachments to the father/mother, to [other family member] and the children’s attachment to each other [if applicable].
6. Please comment on the quality of the relationship between child and parent.
7. Please assess the sexualised behaviour of the child.  Please advise on any work which may be required to resolve issues arising out of their sexualised behaviour.
8. Please advise on the most appropriate level of contact between the child and the parents.
9. In the event that the children are to be separated, please advise on the appropriate level of sibling contact.
10. Please advise on the support services which should be put in place to assist the child.

**Psychiatrists (drug and alcohol abuse)**

Drug and alcohol psychiatrists are concerned with the assessment and treatment of people with complex medical and social needs arising out of addiction to drugs, including, over the counter medication, solvents or alcohol.

A drug and alcohol psychiatrist’s knowledge covers all aspects of addiction including the effect of addiction on the family. Drug and alcohol psychiatrists are particularly useful in providing assessments of parenting abilities in light of substance abuse, the likelihood of recovery and the possible effects that substance abuse may have on children.

Issues on which drug and alcohol psychiatrists can advise include:

* Parenting and risk assessments
* Family relationships and functioning
* Residence and contact issues
* Assessment of drug and alcohol dependency

For more information on psychiatrists, see [www.rcpsych.ac.uk/](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/)

**Sample questions**

1. In your opinion, is the parent able to sustain an alcohol/drug free lifestyle over the long term?
2. In your opinion, is the parent likely to be able to control her alcohol and/or drug use to provide appropriate care for XXX?
3. Please assess the parent’s attitude in response to the local authority’s concerns and explore with them whether they accept those concerns and understand why they have been raised.
4. Please assess whether XXX will be at risk if he/she were to return to the care of the parent.
5. Please assess whether the parent has any other form of coping strategy other than by abuse of alcohol or drugs.
6. Please assess whether the parent can work cooperatively with relevant professionals.

**Child and Adolescent** **Psychiatrists**

Child and adolescent psychiatrists undertake the diagnosis, treatment and management of psychiatric disorders from infancy up to the age of 18. The main difference between a child psychologist and a child psychiatrist is that treatment provided by psychiatrist may be accompanied by the use of medication.

Issues on which child and adolescent psychiatrists can advise include:

* Assessment of family relationships and functioning
* Children’s psychiatric conditions

For more information on child and adolescent psychiatrists, see [www.rcpsych.ac.uk/](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/)

**Sample questions:**

1. Do you consider XXX to be suffering from any psychological or psychiatric condition?
2. Does XXX have - whether in his / her history or presentation - a mental illness / disorder (including substance abuse) or other psychological or emotional difficulty and, if so, what is the diagnosis?
3. If the answer to the above is yes, are there any features of either the mental illness or psychological / emotional difficulty or personality disorder which could be associated with risk to others, based on the available evidence base (whether published studies or evidence from clinical experience)?
4. What are the factors which would explain his / her difficulties, if any (taking into account any available evidence base or other clinical experience)?
5. Specifically is XXX suffering from or has XXX suffered in the past from [eg depression or post natal depression]? If so please set out any relevant history giving detail of past and present treatment.
6. If XXX is suffering from any psychological or psychiatric condition, please comment on the impact of this on their parenting abilities?
7. How do any / all of the above (and their current treatment if applicable) affect his / her functioning, including interpersonal relationships?
8. If you consider XXX to be suffering from any psychological or psychiatric condition, can you indicate what treatment, therapy or support might be indicated?  What is the likely duration of such treatment?
9. Can you provide any information about local resources from which treatment or other support could be sought?
10. Please advise as to the prognosis for recovery or relapse and what effect relapse would have on XXX's ability to parent.

**Adult psychiatrists**

Adult psychiatrists diagnose and treat individuals over the age of 18 over a wide range of psychiatric disorders.

Within adult psychiatry there are other areas of specialisation, including rehabilitation (or recovery) psychiatry, addictions, eating disorders and perinatal psychiatry. The main difference between a psychologist and a psychiatrist is that treatment provided by psychiatrists may be accompanied by the use of medication.

Adult psychiatrists are particularly useful in providing assessments of how psychiatric disorders will affect an individual’s abilities to parent, the effect this will have on the child and the long term prognosis for the adult.

Issues on which adult psychiatrists can advise include:

* Parenting and risk assessments
* Psychological assessment of parental fitness
* Family relationships and functioning assessment
* Residence and contact

For more information on adult psychiatrists, see [www.rcpsych.ac.uk/](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/)

**Sample questions**

1. Do you consider XXX to be suffering from any psychological or psychiatric condition?
2. Does XXX have - whether in his / her history or presentation - a mental illness / disorder (including substance abuse) or other psychological or emotional difficulty and, if so, what is the diagnosis?
3. If the answer to the above is yes, are there any features of either the mental illness or psychological/emotional difficulty or personality disorder which could be associated with risk to others, based on the available evidence base (whether published studies or evidence from clinical experience)?
4. What are the factors which would explain his/her difficulties, if any (taking into account any available evidence base or other clinical experience)?
5. Specifically is XXX suffering from or have they suffered in the past from [eg depression or post natal depression]? If so please set out any relevant history giving detail of past and present treatment.
6. If you consider XXX to be suffering from any psychological or psychiatric condition can you comment on the impact of this on their parenting abilities either currently or in the past?
7. How do any/all of the above (and their current treatment if applicable) affect his/ her functioning, including interpersonal relationships?
8. If you consider XXX to be suffering from any psychological or psychiatric condition can you indicate what treatment, therapy or support might be indicated?  What is the likely duration of such treatment?
9. What is the capacity of XXX to participate in therapy?
10. Can you provide any information about local resources from which treatment could be sought?
11. If possible please advise as to the prognosis for recovery or relapse and what effect relapse would have on XXX's ability to parent.
12. Are you able to indicate the prognosis for, timescales for achieving and likely durability of, change?
13. What other factors might indicate positive change?
14. Does the parent’s/adult’s history or presentation indicate any features of personality disorder?

**Radiologists**

Radiologists are medical specialists who employ the use of imaging to both diagnose and treat disease visualised within the human body. Radiologists are particularly useful in providing information on the causation of injuries in children and the likelihood of abuse.

Radiologists can advise on:

* Domestic violence
* Assessment of injuries/causation

For more information on radiologists, see [www.rcr.ac.uk](http://www.rcr.ac.uk)

**Sample questions:**

1. What is seen on radiological/CT/MRI examination?
2. What significance should be placed on this?
3. What injury (ies) did the child suffer? Is there any organic cause or other explanation for what is seen?
4. If injury was suffered, what was the cause of injury, its mechanism and likely timing?
5. What was the clinical course of the child’s presentation and how does this correspond with the appearances on the X-ray/CT/MRI scans?
6. The parents have described an incident as follows…… Could this account for any injuries identified?
7. Are the copies of the X rays of sufficiently good quality on which to base any conclusion about the timing of the [injury] and, if not, can anything be done to improve them?

**Ophthalmologists**

Ophthalmologists are surgical and medical specialists who deal with the anatomy, physiology and diseases of the eye. Ophthalmologists are particularly useful to provide information on the causation of injuries in children and the likelihood of abuse.

Issues on which ophthalmologists can advise on include:

* Domestic violence

For more information on ophthalmologists, see [www.rcophth.ac.uk](http://www.rcophth.ac.uk)

**Sample questions**

1. Has the child sustained any ophthalmologic injury?
2. Please comment as to the likely cause and timing of any injury sustained by the child.
3. Can you comment specifically on whether both retinal haemorrhages occurred at the same time and whether they occurred at the same time as the haematomas identified by expert Y?
4. Can you comment on the difficulty or ease with which it is possible to date retinal injuries and the factors which make it difficult or easy to do so in the case of this child’s injuries?

**Independent Social Workers**

Independent social workers are accredited social workers who have a minimum of between five to ten years post qualifying experience. They practise as freelance experts. Independent social workers are particularly useful in providing a perspective on the overall functioning of the family unit, the abilities of the parents and the behaviour of the child.

Issues on which independent social workers can advise include:

* Parenting and risk assessments in child care proceedings
* Family relationships and functioning assessment
* Domestic violence
* Residence and contact
* Assessment of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties

For more information on independent social workers, see [www.basw.co.uk](http://www.basw.co.uk)

**Sample questions**

1. Please comment on the relationships within the family between XXX and XXX.
2. Please assess the understanding, insight and acknowledgement of XXX, in respect of the [specific behaviour/harm] which has occurred in this family.
3. Please provide an opinion as to whether there are any issues in respect of failure to protect any of the children.
4. Please provide an opinion as to whether XXX can care adequately for all the children bearing in mind [specific circumstances]
5. In the event that your opinion is that XXX cannot provide care for all their children, please give a likely indication as whether XXX could reasonably provide care for each child separately, on a long term basis.
6. Please assess with XXX whether they understand and accept the local authority’s concerns in relation to the care of their children.
7. Please assess what assistance should be offered to XXX from the local authority should the children be placed in his/her care.
8. Please comment on the nature of the sibling relationships and the benefits and disadvantages of individual or joint placements.
9. If removed from parental care, do the individual needs of the children outweigh the need for placement together?

**Paediatricians**

Paediatricians deal with the care of infants, children and adolescents and a broad range of medical problems from the acute, for example meningitis, to chronic diseases such as childhood diabetes. Paediatricians may work in community-based services, for example to support children with disabilities.

Paediatricians are able to take a holistic view of the family unit and deal with the growth, development and the health of children, from birth to adolescence. They are able to advise the court on a range of issues from the general wellbeing of the child to the causation of specific conditions and diseases.

Issues on which paediatricians can advise include:

* Parenting and risk assessments in child care proceedings
* Family relationships and functioning assessment
* Domestic violence
* Residence and contact

For more information on paediatricians, see [www.rcpch.ac.uk/](http://www.rcpch.ac.uk/)

**Sample questions**

1. Has the child sustained any injury or harm?
2. Please comment as to the likely cause, mechanism or timing of any injury or harm sustained by the child.
3. Please comment on the difficulty or ease with which it is possible to date the injury or harm in this case.
4. Please advise as to whether there has been a parental failure to protect the child.

**General practitioners**

General practitioners provide a wide spectrum of care within the local community: dealing with problems that often combine physical, psychological and social elements.

General practitioners are able to advise on the wellbeing of the child, the functioning of the family unit and the causation of conditions and diseases.

Issues on which GPs can advise include:

* Parenting and risk assessments in child care proceedings
* Family relationships and functioning assessment
* Domestic violence
* Residence and contact
* Assessment of injuries and causation.
* Drug and alcohol dependency.

For more information on general practitioners, see [www.rcgp.org.uk/](http://www.rcgp.org.uk/)

**Sample questions:**

1. Has the child sustained any injury or harm?
2. Please comment as to the likely cause, mechanism or timing of any injury or harm sustained by the child.
3. Please comment on the difficulty or ease with which it is possible to date the injury or harm in the case of this child’s injuries?
4. Please provide an opinion on whether there has been any parental failure to protect the child.
5. Please comment on the relationship within the family between XXX and XXX.

