



Guidelines for opening up conversations about the bridge to self-sufficiency pillars

In addition to introducing to the overall Bridge to Self-Sufficiency, it is helpful to introduce each individual pillar. Once each pillar has been introduced, you can follow up with a variety of questions to stimulate additional conversation. You do not have to ask all of the questions below, and this is not an exhaustive list. Select questions that you think will be most relevant to the individual, the program s/he is part of, and the program's goals. Plan to follow up on these questions with additional open-ended questions to elicit more information.

Family Stability: Housing

Introductory Statement: It is easier to move forward toward economic independence when you have a stable, safe, affordable living situation. This pillar ranges from not being permanently housed to living in an unsubsidized apartment or home, where you pay less than 30% for rent and mortgage. How could you describe your living situation?

- Sample Follow-Up Questions:
- What type of housing do you live in (e.g. shelter, Section 8, public housing, transitional housing?)
- How long have you been in the current living situation? What is your previous housing history?
- What type of housing would you like to live in?
- If housed:
 - How is this housing arrangement working for you?
 - Is your housing at risk for any reason? If so, what are you doing to prevent not being permanently housed?
 - Have there been any problems with your tenancy (difficulty paying rent, issues with the landlord, condition of your apartment, etc.)?
 - What percentage of your income is paid toward housing? How much do you pay?
- If not permanently housed:
 - How did you become not permanently housed?
 - What steps have you taken so far to get housing?
 - Who is helping your with your housing search?
 - How are you feeling about the likelihood that you will find housing?
 - Are there any barriers that might make it more difficult for you to obtain housing (e.g. CORI, credit, rental arrearages, etc.)?
 - How do you feel about living in shelter? What has been helpful/not helpful?

Family Stability: Family

Introductory Statement: Individuals work hard to meet their children and family members' needs. The following pillar is not about whether you are a good parent, grandparent, family member or not. The pillar asks about how much time and energy you have to devote to meeting your children or family members' needs, and how much that effort takes away from the time and energy you can devote to working on your own goals (especially work and school). Examples of needs that might prevent you from moving forward include: a child who gets sick often, not being able to find consistent, appropriate childcare, a child who has difficulty following the rules at school, or a child who had learning challenges that s/he is not getting help for or a family member who is dealing with mental health, addictions or health complications that causes stress and anxiety in your everyday life. How would you describe your children or family members' needs, and the effects that those needs have on you and your family?

Sample Follow-Up Questions:

- How many children do you have? How old are they?
- Do you have childcare? Is the childcare accommodating your family's needs (hours, location, etc.)?
- How are you paying for childcare (DTA-funded vouchers, sliding scale, out-of-pocket, etc.)?
- How is your communication with your childcare provider?
- Is your child enrolled in school? Does s/he attend regularly? How is s/he doing in school?
- Does your child have any special needs? How do those needs affect your child's ability to learn? Are those needs being met? Does your child have an IEP?
- Is your child enrolled in an after-school and/or summer programs, if needed?
- How does your child get along with peers and other adults?
- Does your child have any health or behavioral health issues that require attention? If so, are there services in place to address these? How much time and attention do health and/or behavioral issues take away from your ability to focus on your own goals?
- If there is a non-custodial parent, what is your child's relationship like with her/him?
- Does your child have other positive adults in here/his life (parent, grandparent(s), aunts, uncles, etc.)?
- Are there people who can babysit or provide short-term care when needed?
- Who can care for your child if s/he is sick?
- Does your family member have mental health needs? If so, are they seeking treatment or on medication?
- Does your family member have an addiction? If so, are they seeking help?
- Does a family member have health complications. If so, how does it affect your everyday life?

Well-Being: Physical & Mental Health - Personal

Introductory Statement: Physical and mental health issues can make it more difficult to make progress toward our self-sufficiency goals. How would you describe your physical and emotional/mental health? What impact do your physical and emotional/mental health issues have on your ability to focus on yourself, hobbies, interests, or your family in the way that you would like to?

Sample Follow-Up Questions:

- How would you describe your current physical health and/or emotional/mental health?
- Are there any health issues that you are particularly concerned about?
- Do physical and/or mental health issues impact your ability to attend school, care for your children, meet your household needs etc.? If yes, what type of impact?
- Do you have a long term-disability or medical condition? If so, how does it affect your daily functioning?
- How have you managed physical and/or mental health issues in the past? Are you using these same strategies now?
- Have you experienced any traumatic events such as divorce, family violence, abuse?
- Do you see a therapist? If so, how has that experience been?
- Are you on medication to manage a physical and/or mental health condition? If so, how is that medication working? Are there any side effects that affect how you function?

Well-Being: Physical & Mental Health - Work

Introductory Statement: Physical and mental health issues can make it more difficult to make progress toward your self-sufficiency goals. We recognize that your physical and emotional/mental health is influenced by the roles that we have in life. When you think about your employment, how would you describe your physical and emotional/mental health? What impact do physical and emotional/mental health issues within your work setting have on your ability in meeting your goals of self sufficiency for your education, family or financial management?

Sample Follow-Up Questions:

- Do physical and/or mental health issues impact your ability to work or attend school?
- If yes, what type of impact? Are you confident with the expectations and your responsibilities that you have at work?
- Are there any health issues at work that you are particularly concerned about?
- Do you have any health or dental insurance?
If yes, are they provided as a benefit through your employer?
- Do you have a long term-disability or medical condition that affects your employment?
If so, how does it affect your daily work?
- Are you taking any medication that would affect your ability to work?
If yes, what medication is that?
- How have you managed physical and/or mental health issues in the past with work? Are you using these same strategies now?

Well-Being: Networks

Introductory Statement: Your ability to make progress toward your goals can be affected by your support system, including whether you have access to a phone to communicate effectively with the people in your life. When evaluating this area consider whether people in your life are draining or supportive, or whether the people around you think your goals are important and can share resources to help you make progress. We think about networks in two different ways: people who offer you personal support, and people who provide a “leveraging” network. Leveraging networks are those that can connect you to resources, information, opportunities, etc. Examples might include your case manager, your mentor, a friend who can tell you about job openings, or people who can connect you to supportive social services. How would you describe your networks?

Sample Follow-Up Questions

- Do you have family in the area?
- What about friends?
- When you think about the important relationships in your life, which ones are supportive and which ones are draining?
- Are you in a relationship with a significant other? If so, what is that relationship like?
- Are you involved with any religious organizations, community organizations, etc.?
- Who could you turn to for support in an emergency?
- Are there people in your life who can help you make progress toward your goals (e.g. give you advice about school, provide job leads, serve as a mentor, give you other information or resources that would be helpful to you)?

Financial Management: Debts

Introductory Statement: Owing money can cause stress, and can prevent you from moving forward economically. The debt pillar ranges from debts that aren’t currently being paid to having no debt at all. How would you describe your debt?

Sample Follow-Up Questions:

- Do you have outstanding rental, utility, or other housing-related debts?
- Do you have credit card debt?
- Do you have a student loan debt?
- Do you have outstanding car payment?
- Do you have any other type of outstanding debt?
- For any of the debts above, do you know how much you currently owe?
- Are there structured payment plans in place for any of the debts?
- Are you making regular payments on any debts? Which ones, and how much are you paying? Are you able to meet the minimum payment requirements?
- Have you recently reviewed your credit report?
- Would you like help in understanding and/or managing your debt?

Financial Management: Savings

Introductory Statement: It is easier to cope with changes or crises if you have money saved to pay for the things you need and want. Think about the amount of money that you have saved. If your income stopped today (but all other benefits-such as subsidized housing or childcare – continued) how long would you be able to pay for your expenses with the savings you have now?

Sample Follow-Up Questions:

- Do you have a bank account? If so, do you have savings, checking, or both?
- If you have a bank account, how much do you have saved?
- If you don't have a bank account, are there barriers to opening an account?
- If you don't have a bank account, do you save money in other ways?
- If you are not saving now, have there been times in the past when you have been able to save?
- If you are not saving now, what factors make it difficult to save?
Would you like to be able to save? If so, are there specific ways that you would use your savings?
- Do you have a balanced spending plan or budget?
- Does anyone help you financially on a regular basis?
- In case of an emergency, would anyone be able to help you financially?

Education & Training

Introductory Statement: Education and training can position you to get a job that pays a family-sustaining wage. What is your highest level of education or what job experience/training? Have you completed any certifications?

Sample Follow-Up Questions:

- What is your highest level of education?
- Do you have a high school diploma/GED/HiSET? If not, what have you done to try to earn one?
- Have you ever participated in a job training program? If so, what type? Did you earn a certificate?
- Are you currently enrolled in any type of education or training? If so, what type of program?
- If you are enrolled in college, are you taking developmental courses (which usually have 090 course numbers) or college-level classes (generally 100 level or above)?
- Are you interested in continuing your education? If so, what areas interest you?
- What has school been like for you?
- Do you have special learning needs? If so, did you receive extra support in school for those needs? How was that experience?
- Have you ever taken out student loans? If so, are you making payments, and are the payments manageable?

Employment & Career Management

Introductory Statement: At CCP, economic self-sufficiency means being able to support your family without getting any government assistance (such as Forward Health, food stamps, subsidized housing or childcare, etc.) To look at your household earning and how much it may take to support your family, we use Area Median Income (AMI). We use AMI because it matches up with the metrics used for public benefit eligibility. The numbers you see may seem very high. Our goal in showing you this isn't to discourage you, but to help you figure out pathways that would move you closer to your living wage and how you define economic self-sufficiency for your family. How do you feel about your current employment/career as being able to provide a self-sufficiency income for your family?

Sample Follow-Up Questions:

- Are you currently employed? If yes, what is your employment status (full-time, part-time, temporary, permanent)?
- Is your employment stable? (steady hours, year-round)?
- If you are employed, are there opportunities for growth in your current job?
- If you are not currently working, have you worked in the past? What types of jobs? What did you learn from previous jobs about what you enjoyed most or were good at?
- Are you looking for a job? If so, what type of job and what have you tried?
- What skills or knowledge would you bring to a job?
- What type of career interests you? Would you like information about different career paths?

Mobility

Introductory Statement: At EMPATH, economic self-sufficiency means being able to have reliable transportation to assist you in getting to work and appointments as necessary. If you own a car, having a valid driver's license, car insurance and the means to maintain your own car are important to stability. We have created benchmarks to help you set goals within the transportation pillar to help you move closer to independence and self-sufficiency for you and your family.

Sample Follow-Up Questions:

- Are you currently employed? If yes, how do you get to work?
- Outside of travel to work, what is your current means of transportation?
- Do you have a valid driver's license?
- Is your current means of transportation reliable at all times?
- Are you able to operate a motor vehicle free of all fines, etc?