The Maternal Interview: Community Voice

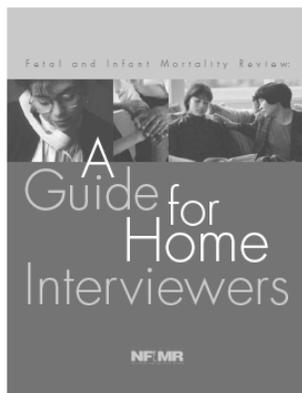**Patt Young**
FIMR Project Coordinator
Contra Costa County, CA

Community Advantage

"Maternal interviews give a voice to the disenfranchised in my community, those without clout or power. FIMR provides a rare opportunity for the 'providers' in a community to hear from the 'consumers.'"

– Patt Young, FIMR Interviewer, Alameda/Contra Costa Counties, CA

Fetal and Infant Mortality Review:
A Guide for Home Interviewers
NFIMR

Interviewer Should Know How To

- Track, contact, & engage mothers
- Review & explain consent form
- Prepare to conduct interview
- Provide culturally sensitive bereavement support during the interview
- Listen and record, not interpret

Interviewer Should Know How To

- Conduct interview
- Maintain confidentiality
- Comply with public health & safety codes including reporting requirements
- Handle difficult encounters & maintain personal safety

Interviewer Should Know How To

- Screen for mental health concerns
- Avoid implications of mismanagement & liability
- Refer to needed services when appropriate

Purpose of FIMR Maternal Interview

- To learn about mother's experiences
- To identify community assets & deficits
- To convey mother's story to FIMR team
- To assess family's needs & referrals
- To facilitate bereavement process

Building Referral Network

- Perinatal service providers
- Delivery hospitals
- Case management programs
- Community based organizations
- Mortuaries
- Coroners
- Social Services
- Pregnant and parenting teen programs

Qualities of a Successful Interviewer

- Culturally sensitive
- Supportive listener
- Believes in the FIMR methodology
- Comprehends FIMR's role in changing and improving the community

Interview Preparation

- Maintaining confidentiality
- When interviewing is not recommended
- Reporting child abuse
- Interview consent form
- Locating mothers

The Art of Being Prepared

- Mental preparation
- Professional preparation
- Hints before and after

Why Is It So Hard?
Challenges of the First Call & Home Visit

Mother's want to talk…. and tell the story of their child's life and death.

Understanding the Grief Experience

- Factors affecting grief experience
- Expressions of grief
- Health care provider responses at time of death

Tasks for Bereaved

- Understand components of grief
- Grieve
- Commemorate

All Fetal and Infant Deaths Can Be Considered Sudden and Unexpected

- Pregnancies are supposed to be carried to term
- Children are not supposed to die before their parents

Factors Affecting a Families' Grief Response

- Age of deceased and survivors
- Relationship to survivors
- Prior experience with death
- Faith foundation
- Family traditions and customs

Factors Affecting a Families' Grief Response
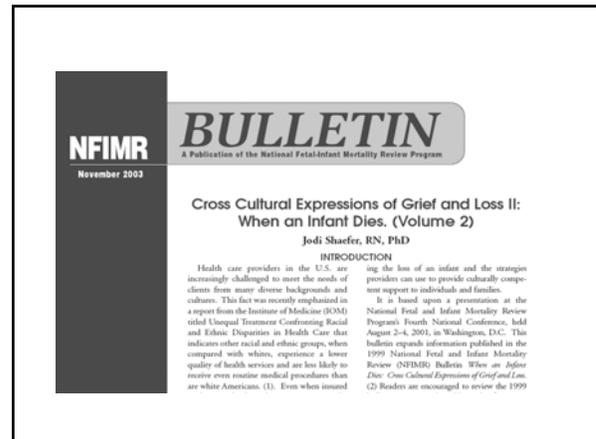
- Historical background of cultural group
- Education
- Economic status
- Geographic region

Normal Grief Response

- Hostility and anger
- Depression
- Guilt
- Anxiety and fear
- Sadness and crying
- Mood swings

Normal Grief Response

- **Physical symptoms**
- **Disorganization, difficulties making decisions**
- **Anniversary reactions**

Cross Cultural Expressions of Grief and Loss

- **When an infant dies**
  - **FIMR Educational Bulletins include information on**
    - **American Indian**
    - **Chinese**
    - **Muslim Families**
    - **African American**
    - **Latino**

Questions Providers Can Ask to Assist the Bereaved

- **I am so sorry for your loss. How can I help you?**
- **What are your traditions when an infant dies?**
- **Is there someone I can call for you?**

Questions Providers Can Ask to Assist the Bereaved

- **Has your family ever had this experience before? How did they handle it?**
- **Did you have a funeral service? Was it helpful?**

Support

- **Offer words of comfort and compassion in the family's own language**
  - **Translators may be needed**
- **Refer parents to support systems, such as faith community**

Support

- **Maintain clear communication with all family members, respect family communication pattern**
- **Reassure parents that their expressions of grief and the intense feelings are accepted**

Words From Compassionate Friends

- **The do's and don'ts of working with bereaved families**
  - **Don't try to find magic words that will take away the pain**
  - **There aren't any**

Words From Compassionate Friends

- **The do's and don'ts of working with bereaved families**
  - **A hug, a touch, and a simple *"I'm so sorry"* offer real comfort and support**
  - **The easy/hard job of listening to the bereaved**

Phrases to Avoid

- **Avoid saying, "I know how you feel."**
  - **Appropriate only if you also have had a child die**
- **Avoid saying "It was God's will" and using other clichés that attempt to minimize or explain the death**

Phrases to Avoid

- **Don't try to find something positive in the child's death, such as, "At least you have other children."**
  - **There are no words that make it all right that a child has died**

Words From Compassionate Friends

- **The do's and don'ts in working with bereaved families**
  - **Parents with religious convictions may struggle with God's role in this event**

Words From Compassionate Friends

- **The do's and don'ts in working with bereaved families**
  - **Listen! Let mom express the anger, questions, pain, disbelief, and guilt they may be experiencing**
  - **There is no standard timetable for recovery**

Summarizing the Home Interview

- **Methods are specific to your program**
- **Remember this is the voice of the mother, a community member and a consumer**

Take Care of Yourself

- **Support each other as FIMR home interviewers**
- **Know your strengths and limitations**
- **Be aware of your reactions**
- **Take responsibility for your own needs**
- **Learn to receive as well as give**

"May you be strengthened by yesterday's rain, walk straight in tomorrow's wind and cherish each moment of the sun today."

–Ojibiwa Prayer