

Interview Preparation Guidance – Children’s Residential Care

Understanding the Role, Expectations and How to Respond in Interview

Working in children’s residential care requires emotional resilience, curiosity, patience and a values-led approach. This guidance is designed to help you prepare for interview by understanding the expectations of the role, the challenges you may face, and the attitudes and behaviours that help children feel safe, understood and supported.

This is not a test. It is an opportunity to reflect on how you think, how you respond emotionally, and how you approach children who have experienced trauma, instability or significant adversity.

Understanding Children’s Experiences and Behaviours

Children in residential care often arrive with complex histories. Many have experienced trauma, loss, rejection, abuse or repeated instability. Their behaviour is rarely “random” — it is usually a communication of unmet needs, fear, confusion or past experiences.

What this means for you

- Avoid assuming children “deserve” the difficulties they face.
- Understand that behaviour is shaped by experiences, not character.
- Approach children with empathy, curiosity and patience.
- Focus on what the child *needs*, not what they “should” be doing.

Example interview question:

“How do you view the behaviour of children who have experienced trauma?”

Strong example answer:

“I understand that behaviour is often a response to past experiences. Instead of seeing it as ‘naughty’, I try to understand what the child is communicating. Trauma can shape how a child reacts, so I stay curious, patient and supportive.”

Responding to Behaviour Safely and Calmly

You will encounter distressed behaviour, verbal aggression, emotional dysregulation and moments where a child is overwhelmed. The expectation is that adults:

- regulate themselves first
- remain calm, measured and predictable
- avoid escalating situations
- use curiosity rather than control

- focus on safety, connection and understanding

Example interview question:

“How do you stay calm when a child is verbally aggressive?”

Strong example answer:

“I focus on regulating myself first — slowing my breathing, keeping my tone calm and reminding myself that the behaviour isn’t personal. When I stay regulated, I can help the child regulate too.”

Consequences, Boundaries and Learning

Residential care does not rely on punishment or harsh consequences. Instead, it focuses on:

- natural consequences
- reflective conversations
- helping children understand the impact of their actions
- supporting them to make safer choices

Example interview question:

“How do you help a child learn from their actions without punishing them?”

Strong example answer:

“I use calm, reflective conversations and natural consequences. I help the child understand what happened, how it affected others, and what they can do differently next time. The aim is learning, not punishment.”

Trauma Awareness and Emotional Impact

You will work with children who have experienced trauma through no fault of their own. This reality can be emotionally challenging.

What interviewers want to see

- You can hold difficult information without becoming overwhelmed.
- You remain compassionate and stable.
- You understand trauma without excusing harmful behaviour.

Example interview question:

“How do you emotionally manage knowing a child has experienced trauma?”

Strong example answer:

“I acknowledge the emotional impact, but I stay focused on being a stable, supportive adult. I use supervision, reflection and team support to process my feelings so I can remain consistent for the child.”

Acceptance, Empathy and Building Relationships

Children need to feel accepted as individuals, even when their behaviour is difficult. Acceptance does not mean approving harmful behaviour — it means:

- separating the child from the behaviour
- showing warmth, consistency and respect
- helping them feel valued even when they are struggling

Example interview question:

“How do you show acceptance of a child while challenging their behaviour?”

Strong example answer:

“I make it clear that I care about them and want them to succeed. I challenge the behaviour calmly, but I reassure them that they are still valued and supported.”

Curiosity Over Control

A core value in residential care is staying curious. Instead of asking “How do I stop this behaviour?”, we ask:

- “What is this behaviour telling me?”
- “What does the child need right now?”
- “What might be underneath this reaction?”

Example interview question:

“Why is curiosity important when responding to distressed behaviour?”

Strong example answer:

“Curiosity helps me understand the need behind the behaviour. When I’m curious, I can respond supportively rather than reactively, which helps the child feel safe.”

Reflective Practice and Professional Growth

Residential care requires ongoing reflection. Interviewers want to see that you:

- reflect on your own emotional responses
- learn from challenging situations
- remain open to feedback
- adapt your practice
- stay open to having your beliefs challenged

Example interview question:

“How do you reflect on your practice?”

Strong example answer:

“I reflect after incidents, use supervision to explore my responses, and think about what I could do differently next time. Reflection helps me grow and support children more effectively.”

Playfulness, Fun and Positive Experiences

Children need joy, humour and fun in their lives. Interviews may explore how you:

- bring playfulness into your work
- help children feel relaxed and safe
- create positive memories
- use humour appropriately

Example interview question:

“What does playfulness look like in residential care?”

Strong example answer:

“Playfulness is about creating moments of joy — games, humour, shared activities. It helps children feel safe, connected and able to trust the adults around them.”

Managing Personal Emotions and Rejection

Children may push adults away, test boundaries or reject support. Interviewers want to know how you manage your own emotions.

Example interview question:

“How do you respond when you feel personally attacked or rejected?”

Strong example answer:

“I remind myself that the child is expressing distress, not targeting me personally. I stay calm, use team support if needed, and respond professionally.”

Aspirations for Children

Interviewers want to see that you believe children can grow, heal and thrive — even when they have experienced significant adversity.

Example interview question:

“What are your aspirations for the children you work with?”

Strong example answer:

“I want them to feel safe, valued and capable. My aim is to help them build confidence, develop skills and believe in their future.”

SCN Recruitment – Interview Technique Advice

To help you perform at your best, here is additional guidance based on what SCN Recruitment sees in successful candidates:

1. Slow down your answers

Rushing makes you sound unsure. Take a breath, think, then respond calmly.

2. Use real examples

Homes want to hear *how you acted*, not just what you believe. Use phrases like:

- “In my last role...”
- “A situation I handled was...”
- “I supported a child by...”

3. Show emotional awareness

Explain how you manage your own feelings, not just the child’s behaviour.

4. Avoid blaming language

Replace “They cause problems” with “They communicate distress through behaviour.”

5. Show curiosity, not judgement

Use phrases like:

- “I would want to understand what’s underneath the behaviour.”
- “I’d explore what the child needs in that moment.”

6. Demonstrate calmness

Explain how you regulate yourself:

- breathing
- stepping back
- using team support
- keeping your tone steady

7. Show you value teamwork

Residential care is never done alone. Mention:

- communication
- handovers
- supporting colleagues
- asking for help when needed

8. Be child-centred in every answer

Always bring your response back to:

- safety
- connection
- understanding
- emotional support

9. Avoid “fixing” language

You are not there to “fix” children — you are there to support them.

10. End answers with hope, Homes want staff who believe children can grow. Use phrases like:

- “I want them to feel safe and valued.”
- “I believe every child can progress with the right support.”

Final Advice for Interview

- Be honest, reflective and open.
- Show that you understand trauma-informed practice.
- Demonstrate emotional resilience and self-awareness.
- Focus on safety, connection and curiosity.
- Highlight your ability to stay calm under pressure.
- Show compassion, patience and a child-centred mindset.
- Explain how you learn, reflect and grow professionally.

This guidance is designed to help you enter the interview with clarity, confidence and an understanding of the values that underpin high-quality residential childcare.