The Environment Questions to Ask

Four Point Response Format

Shelly E. Weaverdyck, Ph.D.

Here are some **questions** to ask yourself to better understand how well the physical environment uses the strengths and meets the needs of a person and their cognitive abilities. These questions are based on **brain** functioning and specific cognitive skills. However, you do not need to know anything about the brain or cognition to ask them. These are a few of **many possible** questions.

These questions are organized under nine general **intervention concepts** that address needs a person might frequently experience in most environments.

The questions should be answered with a **particular person** in mind, since each person has different needs, strengths, and desires, and therefore, different requirements of their environment. They should also be answered **frequently** enough to accommodate changes in this person's needs, strengths, and desires or changes in their environment.

Your answers to these questions can suggest effective **intervention** and support **strategies** that modify the environment to help this person more easily think, understand and respond to their environment and other people, feel comfortable, and successfully perform a task. These strategies can meet this person's **cognitive needs**, as well as rely on and build on this person's **cognitive strengths**.

These questions apply to **any room** in **any setting** and to any task (for example, daily housekeeping chores, hygiene, leisure activities, or a visit with a friend).

Note that in addition to features in the environment that address cognitive abilities, the environment also needs to be carefully evaluated for safety. The **questions here focu**s primarily **on cognitive abilities** and do not address all aspects of safety.

The instructions here are likely sufficient for you to understand how to use this "CAIS Environment Questions to Ask-Four Point Response Format". However, if you would like to see rationale for these questions and to quantify your responses more specifically and with more detail, see the "CAIS Environment Questions to Ask- **Additional Instructions** for Response". It has more specific instructions and an elaboration of each of these questions with details, examples, and rationale.

The "*CAIS Environment Questions to Ask: Yes/No Response Format*" is an alternative format for answering these questions.

Suggestions of intervention strategies (that is, support strategies) tailored to your responses to these questions can be found in the *Cognitive Abilities and Intervention Strategies (CAIS): Environmental Intervention Strategies*.

The **complete** *CAIS Questions to Ask* and the *CAIS Intervention Strategies* including all **four parts** (with the titles: 1. *Cognitive Abilities*; 2. *Environment*; 3. *Communication*; and 4. *Task and Daily Routines*) with more **detailed instructions**, **resources**, and other information about the CAIS and related topics are on the Improving MI Practices website at **https://www.improvingmipractices.org**

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Observe** the **entire room** where this person is involved with a task such as getting dressed, eating, taking a bath or shower, resting, visiting, or sitting quietly.

2. **Ask YOURSELF** the following questions. DO NOT ask the questions to the person you are observing.

3. Answer each question by selecting a **response** number from 1- 4 in this "Four Point Response Format". Select the response number (from 1- 4) that most closely matches your observations regarding the room(s) where this person is involved with a task. **If you don't know the answer** to a question, then read the rationale and instructions for that question in the "CAIS Environment Questions to Ask- **Additional Instructions** for Response", or try using the intervention strategies identified for that question in the "CAIS Environmental **Intervention Strategies**". They can help you better understand the question. The intervention strategies suggest ways you can modify the environment to help this person even if this person is already doing well.

   A response number of "**3**" or "**4**" suggests this environment may meet, or nearly meet, the needs and desires of this person and accommodate this person's cognitive strengths and needs with respect to this question.

A response number of "**1**" or "**2**" suggests this environment may not adequately support this person's cognitive abilities or meet their needs. A response number of "1" or "2" directs you to the "CAIS Environmental **Intervention Strategies**" where options of specific practical intervention strategies are identified for each question in this "CAIS Environment Questions to Ask-Four Point Response Format". These strategies suggest ways you can modify the environment to help this person understand and respond to their environment, communicate, perform a task more easily and successfully, and feel more comfortable.

4. **Record** where indicated your **comments** or specific details about your observations (for example, elaboration, explanations, illustrations, or your thoughts).

5. Provide the **information** requested here. The name of the **observer** is **your name**, since you are answering these questions based on your own observations.

Name of observer:＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿Name of person being observed:＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿

Task performed:＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿Room person is in:＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿

Place of observation:＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿Other people present and their roles:＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿

Date of observation:＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿Time of observation: *Begin:*＿＿＿＿＿＿ AM/PM *End:*＿＿＿＿＿ AM/PM

I. CONTRAST: Look for contrasts in:
- Color intensities (dark against light)
- Amount of lighting (dim versus bright)
- Busyness (patterns versus plain solids, or commotion versus quiet)

A. Are there contrasts that draw attention to the areas of the room this person might need or want to use? (For example, are the room decorations in safe areas more visibly engaging than decorations near dangerous or unused exit doors?)	1. **None or few** areas are appropriately contrasted	2. **Some** areas are appropriately contrasted	3. **Many** areas are appropriately contrasted	4. **Most or all** areas are appropriately contrasted
B. Are there contrasts that highlight objects this person might need or want to use? (For example, is there enough difference between the toilet seat and floor, the closet door and surrounding wall, the towel and the wall, the shower nozzle and shower wall?)	1. **None or few** of the important objects are appropriately contrasted	2. **Some** of the important objects are appropriately contrasted	3. **Many** of the important objects are appropriately contrasted	4. **Most or all** of the important objects are appropriately contrasted
C. Are edges of surfaces, including changes in floor height, highlighted with contrasts so this person can see how high to lift their feet or avoid dropping or bumping into objects? (For example, highlighted edges of tables, stair steps, bathtubs, and shower thresholds?)	1. **None or few** of the edges are appropriately contrasted	2. **Some** of the edges are appropriately contrasted	3. **Many** of the edges are appropriately contrasted	4. **Most or all** of the edges are appropriately contrasted
D. Do objects this person needs to avoid look similar to the surrounding area? (For example, do electrical outlets and dangerous door exits look similar to the surrounding wall?)	1. **None or few** of such objects look similar	2. **Some** of such objects look similar	3. **Many** of such objects look similar	4. **Most or all** of such objects look similar
E. Is there a variety of moods created by various spaces, so this person can be drawn or led to an area that accommodates (by either matching or changing) their mood at the moment? (For example, are there both a busy high-energy living room and a quiet cozy den?)	1. **No** spaces are a different mood from each other	2. **Two** types of moods	3. **Three** types of moods	4. **Four or more** types of moods
Comments:				

II. PATTERNS: Look to ensure there are no visual patterns that could:
- Be distracting
- Be misinterpreted
- Cause nausea or dizziness

- Camouflage an object

A. Are the floor and all other surfaces free of patterns that seem to "move" when this person looks at them or when this person moves? (For example, free of alternating squares or blocks on floors, plaids, geometric, or repetitive patterns on floors, chairs, and shirts?)	1. **None or few** of the surfaces are free of such patterns	2. **Some** of the surfaces are free of such patterns	3. **Many** of the surfaces are free of such patterns	4. **Most or all** of the surfaces are free of such patterns
B. Are all surfaces free of patterns, stripes, borders, or figures that look like changes in height or depth, or like bugs, specks, or pieces of paper to pick up? (Note for example, floors, walls, curtains, counter tops, clothing.)	1. **None or few** of the surfaces are free of such patterns	2. **Some** of the surfaces are free of such patterns	3. **Many** of the surfaces are free of such patterns	4. **Most or all** of the surfaces are free of such patterns
C. Are all objects easy to see because they are not in front of or beside a patterned surface or object? (For example, a pill or comb is not held in front of a patterned shirt?)	1. **None or few** of the objects are easy to see	2. **Some** of the objects are easy to see	3. **Many** of the objects are easy to see	4. **Most or all** of the objects are easy to see
Comments:				

III. CLUTTER: Look to ensure there are not:

- Too many objects in the environment
- Objects and information that are recognized or useful only to other people, and not to this person
- Objects that are too distracting or confusing
- Objects, people, sounds, or unusual lighting that are inappropriate; that is they are overwhelming, confusing, or tiring, rather than appropriate for this person at this time. Appropriate here means they are limited and selected to be helpful, useful, interesting, inspiring, and to offer choices to this person.

A. Is there an appropriate amount of clothing in the closet and drawers? (Record the number of items present here. _____) (Record the appropriate number of items for this person here._____)	1. **Too few** items	2. **Far too many** items	3. **Too many** items	4. **Close** to the appropriate number of items
B. Is there an appropriate number of items served at a meal or placed on the table? (Record the number of items present here. _____) (Record the appropriate number of items for this person here._____)	1. **Too few** items	2. **Far too many** items	3. **Too many** items	4. **Close** to the appropriate number of items
C. Is there an appropriate limit to the variety, frequency, duration, and volume of sounds?	1. **Too little** sound	2. **Far too much** sound	3. **Too much** sound	4. **Close** to the appropriate amount of sound
D. Are all sounds recognizable?	1. **None or few** of the sounds	2. **Some** of the sounds	3. **Many** of the sounds	4. **Most or all** of the sounds
E. Is there an appropriate limit to the number of people? (Record the number of people usually present here. _____) (Record the appropriate number here. _____)	1. **Too few** people	2. **Far too many** people	3. **Too many** people	4. **Close** to the appropriate number of people
F. Are all people familiar to this person? (Record the number of familiar people usually present here. _____) (Record the number of unfamiliar people usually present here. ____)	1. **None or few** of the people here	2. **Some** of the people here	3. **Many** of the people here	4. **Most or all** of the people here
G. Are all notes, instructions, and equipment for other people out of sight? (For example, are notes and equipment for care partners (caregivers) and medical professionals inside drawers or behind cupboard doors?)	1. **None or few** of such items	2. **Some** of such items	3. **Many** of such items	4. **Most or all** of such items
H. Is the environment free of distracting sounds that might unintentionally elicit a response from this person? (For example, is it free of sounds that are not intended for this person, including doorbells, phones, televisions, radios, irrelevant conversations, intercom, public address systems?)	1. **Never or rarely** is it free of such sounds	2. **Some of the time** it is free of such sounds	3. **Often** it is free of such sounds	4. **Most of the time or always** it is free of such sounds
I. Is the environment free of objects that might attract unnecessary attention and prevent other objects or spaces from being noticed?	1. **All or most** of the objects are such objects	2. **Many** of the objects are such objects	3. **Some** of the objects are such objects	4. **Few or none** of the objects are such objects
J. Is the environment free of objects that are dangerous for this person at this time? (For example, is it free of small rugs on the	1. **All or many** of the objects are dangerous	2. **Some** of the objects are dangerous	3. **Few** of the objects are dangerous	4. **None** of the objects are dangerous

floor and sharp corners on tables?) (Record the number of dangerous objects here. _____)				
Comments:				

IV. CUEING: Look for information that this person:

- Can understand
- Can see easily without searching
- Can see without moving too much
- Recognizes through various senses of hearing, seeing, touching, smelling, and tasting
- Can use and trust
- Is stimulated by

A. Does the environment provide cues to tell this person what they need to know? (For example, a note that says lunch is at 12:00, a clock (to say when the time is 12:00), a name or photo by the bedroom door, a sign identifying an object, room, or directions to another room?) (Record the total number of cues here. _____) (Record the appropriate number of cues here._____)	1. **Too many** cues	2. **Too few** cues	3. **Almost enough** cues	4. **Appropriate number** of cues
B. Does the environment say what is expected of this person, and what options are available? (For example, are there cues in the environment, such as a basket of clean laundry ready to fold, a jigsaw puzzle to put together, spiritual symbols to suggest it's time to worship, a warm homey atmosphere to invite this person to relax and feel at home here, or highly visible options for food choices?)	1. **Too many** of such cues	2. **Too few** of such cues	3. **Almost enough** of such cues	4. **Appropriate number** of such cues
C. Are all cues recognizable? (For example, do signs use written words only if this person can read and understand the words, or three-dimensional objects when two-dimensional drawings are no longer recognized? Do cues attract emotionally and not just inform cognitively? Are multiple senses addressed to increase recognition?)	1. **None or few** of the cues	2. **Some** of the cues	3. **Many** of the cues	4. **Most or all** of the cues
D. Are all cues accessible through at least one of the five senses? (For example, are they visible, audible, textured? Are they in a location or high or low enough for this person to notice them? Are they obvious enough and adapted to this person's ability to see, hear, feel, taste, or smell at this moment?)	1. **None or few** of the cues	2. **Some** of the cues	3. **Many** of the cues	4. **Most or all** of the cues
E. Are the cues frequent enough so this person doesn't have to remember? (For example, multiple signs to direct them to the bathroom?)	1. **Too many** repetitions	2. **Too few** repetitions	3. **Almost enough** repetitions	4. **Appropriate number** of repetitions
F. Are other people in the room performing the same task as this person (so this person can better understand the expectation and imitate people)?	1. **None or few** of the people	2. **Some** of the people	3. **Many** of the people	4. **Most or all** of the people
G. Is the environment free of unintentional and inappropriate cues that give this person inaccurate or inappropriate information? (For example, is it free of inaccurate clocks or artificial fruit?)	1. **Many** inappropriate cues	2. **Some** inappropriate cues	3. **Several** inappropriate cues	4. **Very few or no** inappropriate cues
H. Are there cues that stimulate this person to have the ability, energy, or desire to do something? (For example, notes about activity options, smells of bread baking, or a child's laughter?) (Record the number of cues that stimulate here. _____) (Record the appropriate number of stimulating cues here. _____)	1. **Too many** such cues	2. **Too few** such cues	3. **Almost enough** such cues	4. **Appropriate number** of such cues
Comments:				

V. NORMAL: Look for objects and spaces that:

- Are familiar and recognizable to this person
- Match this person's history, preferences, expectations, culture
- Are in the normal, expected place for this person

A. Does the room look like a room this person would recognize or expect? (For example, does the bathroom look normal and like this person's bathroom in the past?)	1. **Not at all or minimally** normal	2. **A little** normal	3. **Somewhat** normal	4. **Mostly or very** normal
B. Do objects look normal? (For example, the bathtub, dishes, toilet?)	1. **None or few** of the objects	2. **Some** of the objects	3. **Many** of the objects	4. **Most or all** of the objects
C. Are tasks performed in the room where that task is normally performed? (For example, hair combed in the bedroom rather than the living room?)	1. **None or few** of the tasks	2. **Some** of the tasks	3. **Many** of the tasks	4. **Most or all** of the tasks
D. Are objects in normal, expected places?	1. **None or few** of the objects	2. **Some** of the objects	3. **Many** of the objects	4. **Most or all** of the objects
E. When an object doesn't look normal, is it because it is dangerous or distressing and has been disguised? (For example, does the door lock or an elevator button look like the center of a flower in a picture?)	1. **None or few** of such objects	2. **Some** of such objects	3. **Many** of such objects	4. **Most or all** of such objects
Comments:				

VI. HOMEY: Look for spaces and decor that:
- Feel cozy
- Help this person feel comfortable and relaxed
- Look and feel like home
- Look and feel safe

A. Are all spaces (rooms and smaller areas within rooms) cozy and emotionally comforting? Do all spaces, including the objects, feel safe to this person?	1. **None or few** of the spaces	2. **Some** of the spaces	3. **Many** of the spaces	4. **Most or all** of the spaces
B. Do all spaces have warm and bright colors?	1. **None or few** of the spaces	2. **Some** of the spaces	3. **Many** of the spaces	4. **Most or all** of the spaces
C. Are all objects recognizable and comforting?	1. **None or few** of the objects	2. **Some** of the objects	3. **Many** of the objects	4. **Most or all** of the objects
D. Would everything that is visible, normally be in this person's home?	1. **None or few** of the objects and decor	2. **Some** of the objects and decor	3. **Many** of the objects and decor	4. **Most or all** of the objects and decor
E. Would all sounds normally be in this person's home? (For example, there is no intercom or public address system, and all bed and chair alarms sound like music or are not audible or visible to this person?)	1. **None or few** of the sounds	2. **Some** of the sounds	3. **Many** of the sounds	4. **Most or all** of the sounds
F. Is the temperature warm or cool enough? (Record the room temperature as "Too cool" or "Too warm" here. _____) (Record how often the temperature needs to be changed for this person to feel comfortable here. _____)	1. **Too cool or warm to function**	2. **Somewhat** too cool or warm	3. **A little too** cool or warm	4. **Appropriate** temperature
Comments:				

VII. LIGHTING: Look to ensure there are no areas where:
- This person has to work hard to see well
- This person's eyes are required to adjust because this person moves from light to dark areas or vice versa
- This person can easily misinterpret shapes and movement

A. Is the lighting bright enough to read and see well?	1. **Too dark to see much at all**	2. **Quite** dark	3. **A little too** dark	4. **Appropriate** amount of light
B. Are floors, walls, and other surfaces free of all shadows?	1. **None or few** of the surfaces	2. **Some** of the surfaces	3. **Many** of the surfaces	4. **Most or all** of the surfaces

C. Do all areas of the room have the same amount of light, with the exception of reading lamps?	1. **Too much** variation to see well	2. **A few** areas	3. **Some** areas	4. **Most or all** areas
D. Are stairways as bright as or brighter than other spaces? (Record the number of stairways in the environment here. _____)	1. **None or few** of the stairways	2. **Some** of the stairways	3. **Many** of the stairways	4. **Most or all** of the stairways
E. Are all objects easy to see and recognize? (For example, are there no objects in front of bright windows or down long hallways that look like frightening or confusing shadows and dark shapes?)	1. **None or few** of the objects	2. **Some** of the objects	3. **Many** of the objects	4. **Most or all** of the objects
Comments:				

VIII. TEXTURE: Look for varied textures that:

- Reduce noise
- Reduce glare
- Identify objects
- Are stimulating to touch

A. Do the floors, walls, ceilings, objects, and other surface areas absorb sound?	1. **None or few** of the surface areas	2. **Some** of the surface areas	3. **Many** of surface areas	4. **Most or all** of the surface areas
B. Are objects, the floor, wall pictures, and other surfaces free of glare (that is, they do not reflect too much light)? (Glare can make objects and surfaces look wet or difficult to see.)	1. **None or few** are free of glare	2. **Some** are free of glare	3. **Many** are free of glare	4. **Most or all** are free of glare
C. Are there interesting surfaces or objects to feel?	1. **None or few** are interesting	2. **Some** are interesting	3. **Many** are interesting	4. **Most or all** are interesting
D. Are floor areas non-slippery, even when wet?	1. **None or few** of the floor areas	2. **Some** of the floor areas	3. **Many** of the floor areas	4. **Most or all** of the floor areas
E. Are hard surfaces covered to be safer, more interesting, easier to see and identify, and more light and sound absorbent?	1. **None or few** of the hard surfaces	2. **Some** of the hard surfaces	3. **Many** of the hard surfaces	4. **Most or all** of the hard surfaces
Comments:				

IX. PRIVACY: Look for ways this person can:

- Be alone, but able to see and get company or help when desired
- Keep personal items away from others, but readily accessible when this person needs or wants them

A. Is there space that belongs only to this person? (Record the number of private spaces available to this person here. ____) (Record the appropriate number of private spaces for this person here.__)	1. **None or very little** of the entire floor space	2. **Some** of the entire floor space	3. **Much** of the entire floor space	4. **Most or all** of the entire floor space
B. Do rooms have doors and curtains on windows that prevent other people from seeing in or entering without permission?	1. **None or few** of the rooms	2. **Some** of the rooms	3. **Many** of the rooms	4. **Most or all** of the rooms
C. Are there drawers and cupboards that belong only to this person? (Record the number of drawers and cupboards here. _____)	1. **None or few** of the drawers and cupboards	2. **Some** of the drawers and cupboards	3. **Many** of the drawers and cupboards	4. **Most or all** of the drawers and cupboards
D. Are there objects that belong only to this person? (Record the number of objects that this person owns here. _____)	1. **None or few** of the objects	2. **Some** of the objects	3. **Many** of the objects	4. **Most or all** of the objects
E. Does this person always have access to their own private space and possessions? (Record the number of spaces and objects that are not accessible here. __)	1. **None** or few are always accessible	2. **Some** are always accessible	3. **Many** are always accessible	4. **Most or all** are always accessible
Comments:				