

# Interviewing

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## The Four Stages of Interviews

### 1. Rapport building and opening information

- **Thank the witness for attending the interview.**

Thank you for coming today and speaking to us/me. I imagine it was difficult to fit this into your full schedule. I understand that today is your day off. How long have you worked for the organisation? Is it a good job?

### Outline the pre-interview information:

- **Introduce yourself**

Explain who you are, offer your card with contact details and introduce any other investigators, observers or interpreters present.

- **Honesty and accuracy**

Staff members have a duty to cooperate and obligation to tell the truth. For witnesses who are not staff members, simply thank them for their time and explain it is important for them to be accurate.

- **Confidentiality**

Staff members have an obligation to refrain from communicating with other persons interviewed in the framework of the same investigation. Explain that the investigation process is confidential for both witnesses and investigators alike. Describe who you, as the investigator, and who you may have to share information with and why. If they are a staff witness, explain that breaching confidentiality can result in disciplinary measures.

Non staff witnesses cannot be obliged to maintain confidentiality but investigator should explain the importance of confidentiality to a fair process.

- **Purpose of note-taking**

Explain who will be taking the notes i.e. the interviewer or the second interviewer. Explain the purpose of taking notes is to ensure accuracy when the investigation report is written up and to offer the witness a chance to verify the accuracy of what is written in the statement.

- **Acceptable to state when answer not known**

Clarify to witness that it is ok if they cannot remember or do not know a particular piece of information.

- **Right to ask for short break**

Tell the witness where the bathroom facilities are; offer them water and explain that they can ask for a short break if they need it. You should also ask if there are any other problems you can help with that might interfere with the interview i.e. if the driver has to drive the representative to an appointment in half an hour's time, offer to ask to have the interview rescheduled or to find an alternative solution.

*Lack of cooperation, fraud, malicious reports and concealment of facts or evidence can lead to disciplinary measures for staff witnesses.*

### 2. Free narrative

- "Do you know why we are here today?"
- "I understand that there have been some problems in the office. Have you encountered anything like this?"
- "Tell me about that..."
- "I wasn't there and I'm not allowed to assume or guess anything so tell me about it in your own

words.”

- “If you could tell me about that and try not to leave anything out.”
- “I understand that this might be difficult but it is important because...”

**Remember:**

Avoid interrupting or clarifying ambiguities. Have an “active listener” posture. Elicit more information by repeating key phrases used by the witness. Offer prompts that relate to the witness’ account only – not to other witnesses’ evidence. Work at the pace of the interviewee. Do not give positive or negative feedback. Beware of unintentionally communicating approval or disapproval through facial expressions and voice inflections.

### 3. Questions

- Open questions (designed to elicit further information)
  - “Describe for me the exact events surrounding... (for example, collecting the girls and taking them to the guest house)”?
  - “Please tell me the full names and give physical descriptions of the individuals involved”.
  - “Tell me what was said”.
  - “Who saw this”? [this question reads like a closed question, but it likely to elicit further information so can be considered an open question]
  - “Whom did you talk to about this”? [this question reads like a closed question, but it likely to elicit further information so can be considered an open question]
- Closed questions (designed to clarify something you already know or to specify some earlier information – usually involves a “yes” or “no” answer or one piece of information)
  - “What is that person’s name”?
  - “Did you personally witness these events”?
  - “Were you in the car at the time”?
  - “Do you have this instruction in writing”?
  - “Did anyone else see this?”

### 4. Summary and closure

- “I am going to sum up now, please tell me if I get anything wrong”.
- “I have summarised what I think I heard you say. Did I leave anything out? Would you like to correct anything”?
- “Do you have any questions for me”?
- “Explain what will be done with the information”.
- “Thank you for your time”.

**Remember:**

Check with second interviewer (recorder) if there are any outstanding matters before you summarise. Summarise what the interviewee has stated in his/her words. Answer any questions s/he may have.

## Witnesses with Special Needs

### *Witnesses with fear of authority*

- Fear of authority may result in phobias, panic attacks or fears of persecution. It will be important to consider how this may impact upon questioning in terms of style, rapport, information giving etc.
- If a witness has a fear of authority, s/he may require support from trusted individuals to enable them to participate effectively.
- Also, such witnesses may wish to please the interviewer by giving information they think the interviewer wants to hear. It is important to reassure the witness that they should feel free to say if they don't know or are unsure of something.

### *Witnesses with learning or intellectual disabilities*

- Early assessment of needs is required and professional advice should be sought when possible. For example, people with learning difficulties may have difficulties with language skills relative to other skills or they may have a shorter attention span.
- Support prior to, during and post interview must be considered.
- The issue of consent should also be considered given that the witness must understand why they are being interviewed and give their consent to participate.
- Remain calm as the witness may become concerned by emotion or shouting.
- Be aware that unfamiliar sights, sounds and people may make the witness afraid.
- Do not sit with your back to the light and minimise any background noise.
- Close physical contact may cause stress to the witness.
- Direct eye contact may not be comfortable for the witness.
- A familiar environment may be the best place for the interview.
- Witnesses may be afraid of authority figures.
- If the witness has language difficulties, s/he may require assistance to understand your questions.
- Consider using alternative materials such as pictures.
- Words which sound similar may become confused.
- Keep sentences short. Do not include more than one concept in a sentence.
- The witness may be more vulnerable to leading questions.

### *Witnesses with physical disability*

- Consider access requirements and how the witness will be able to get to and from the interview site.
- A carer may be required to attend for physical assistance or an interpreter/intermediary if they have speech impairment and/or hearing loss.
- If the witness needs a supporter to assist, explain the role of the supporter to both witness and supporter.
- Build in additional rest and refreshment periods.

## Interviewing Children

**When interviewing a child, whenever possible, take a verbatim record of the interview rather than making a summary of the most important points.**

### *Preparation of children for interview*

- Explain role of interviewer to the child.
- Explain purpose of interview (without detailing the nature of complaint).
- Seek permission for child's information to be included in report.
- Explain the concept of confidentiality and who will see the information in a way a child understands.
- Explain "ground rules" of interview.
- Brief any supporter about his/her role.

### *Engage and explain/rapport*

- State day, time and place of interview for the record.
- Introduce everyone present and explain what everyone is doing (e.g. the supporter).
- Explain why the child is being interviewed without specifying the nature of the complaint (e.g. the interviewer has been told that something has happened to the child and it is the interviewer's job to find out what happened).
- Discuss neutral topics and reassure the child that they have not done anything wrong.
- Use open questions.
- Assess the child's ability to participate in the interview and their ability to understand.
- Inform the child that:
  - the interviewer was not there at the time of the incident and therefore needs the child to tell him/her what happened\
  - if the interviewer asks questions the child does not understand the child should feel free to say so
  - if the child does not know the answer to a question it is ok to say that s/he does not know the answer
  - if the interviewer summarises the child's account incorrectly, the child should say so
- Explore the child's understanding of what is the truth and what is not the truth

### *Account/free narrative*

- Ask the child to describe what happened in their own words.
- Use active listening skills.
- If appropriate, use other mediums such as drawing, figures, modelling clay etc.

### *Clarification/questions*

- Remind the child of the ground rules (in explain/rapport section).
- Keep questions short and simple.
- Use child's vocabulary.
- Begin with open ended questions.
- Move on to specific questions (use "who", "what", "where" or "when" and avoid use of "why" questions).
- Stay focused (e.g. gather all the information you need on one topic before moving on to another, do not move from incident to incident and back again).
- Try not to repeat questions.
- Don't ask about things that the child does not understand (e.g. time, height, weight, age etc).
- If you need to use a closed question, clearly re-state to the child that if s/he do not know the answer or is unsure s/he should say so.

- Do not ask a leading question unless it is absolutely necessary (i.e., if you do not to ask it, the child's safety or the integrity of the investigation may be compromised).
- Where a child responds to a leading question with information not previously known or referred to, revert to open or specific questions.
- Be aware that if you give child two options in a question, they will often repeat the last option. For example, if you ask "Was the car black or blue?", they will answer "blue".

### *Closure*

- Check that any second interviewer does not think that any more questions need to be asked.
- Summarise the information given by the child using the child's words.
- Answer any questions from the child.
- Thank the child for their time and effort.
- Tell the child whom they can speak to if they have any problems.
- Return to the rapport phase.
- State time of end of interview.

### *Evaluation*

- Do not interpret the child's behaviour as a reliable indicator of the accuracy or otherwise of what they have said. Instead, consider:
  - what information has been obtained
  - how the account fits with the other information/evidence
  - whether any action needs to be taken and, if so, what
  - what further enquiries need to be undertaken
  - your performance (including how you can develop your skills)
  - the fact that children are vulnerable and easily intimidated