



INTERVIEW SKILLS

Interviewing is a very common method of gathering information from survivors and other witnesses, and can be useful if done correctly, sensitively, and professionally.

As an Interviewer, you should always remember:

- 1-To seek truth and accept it even if it contradicts the theory of your investigation
- 2-To keep an objective mindset
- 3-To avoid agenda driven investigations
- 4- To be curious, but patient
- 5-That good people sometimes lie
- 6-Cooperative and helpful people can be mistaken
- 7-Innocent people may withhold information

Before conducting in interview, you should prepare by asking yourself questions, such as:

- What is your relationship to the investigation? Why are you doing the interview?
- Do you know background information about the incidents that you are going to interview the witness about?
- What are the points you want to prove or topics you want to raise during the interview?

Prior to the interview, create a written interview plan that includes:

- 1- Basic background questions, as well as specialized questions related to the investigation
- 2- Documents that a witness could help verify, or to aid in their recall of the incident
- 3- Visual aids such as maps, sketches, pictures of officials/badges, vehicles, or weapons related to the incident, if relevant

During the planning phase, the interviewer should work to ensure that the interview will be carried out to the highest possible legal standards and leave no room for ethical or legal criticism by public prosecutors, defense attorneys, or anyone with an interest in the investigation.

Do your best to create a controlled environment by:

- 1-Setting up of the interview space yourself (places tables and chairs in a triangle and away from open doors and windows)
- 2- Making sure the space is easily accessible for the interviewee
- 3- Ensuring the space is private and secure
- 4- Preparing necessary recording devices (audio, video, written)

Inform an interviewee that they can bring a support person to the interview

1-The support person should not be a witness to the same incident as the interviewee

2-The support person must be discreet and not divulge information about the interview

3- It is preferable that the support person should be present only during breaks and not during the interview itself, although they can be in the same room at the witness's request. When interviewing a minor, a parent or guardian should always be present in the same room

4- The presence of a support person does not negate the need for a witness to be psychologically prepared for the interview, and they should not act as stand-in for professional psychosocial support if the witness becomes distressed

Engage with the witness & explain the interview process:

- Remember that building rapport with an interviewee doesn't only happen during an interview. It starts from your very first introduction, and continues through the full relationship
- Introduce yourself and others in the room
- Advise the interviewee of the purpose of the interview and what will happen
- Advise them of any legal consideration
- Explain your organization's mission and objectives
- Reduce the subject's anxiety by answering questions regarding security, confidentiality, etc
- Collect informed consent before commencing the formal interview

- Explain the type of questions that will be asked
- Reassure the witness regarding safety within the interview location
- Record background info regarding the witness such as: full name, date of birth, sex, nationality, ethnicity, and method for long term contact

Set a good impression at the start of an interview:

- Exhibit signs of sincerity such as keeping an open posture, leaning forward, giving reactive touch (depends on the gender and culture)
- Maintain eye contact, nods, supportive sounds, but give silence when necessary
- Remember that body language and voice volume are most of communication

Questions and considerations during the interview:

- Encourage free narrative – obtain an uninterrupted account from the subject
- Follow-up with open ended questions: who, what, when, where, why & how
- Use phrases like: “tell me ...,” “explain to me...,” “describe to me ...”

Always pay special attention to:

- 1- The duration that the interviewee witnessed an event
- 2- How far they were from the event
- 3- How much visibility they had, and were there any obstructions to their view
- 4- Did they know any of the people involved in the incident?
- 5- How long ago did the events occur?
- 6- What factual errors did they make in their interview

Ask yourself, “how do they know what they know?”

- Check a witness’s level of expertise regarding a specific incident
- Ask questions related to the identification of people/equipment
- Don’t assume their concept of a specific object or incident is the same as your understanding of it. A different understanding of something does not make it false

Challenge inconsistencies, when appropriate:

- When you notice conflicting information that was collected from a previous interview
- When there is a difference between details provided during the current interview
- When there are gaps related to self-preservation or the protection of close friends and family

Always conduct a post-interview assessment:

- Assess what effect any new information has on the investigation and if the new information is consistent with what is already known.
- Evaluate how new interviews affect the investigation.
- Did your witness have any “specialist” knowledge? Did you fully collect that information?