



Resources for Child Safety

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INTERVIEW GUIDANCE - VICTIM/SURVIVORS & WITNESSES

This is general guidance and does not constitute legal advice. This guidance is most applicable when interviewing potential adolescent- adult victim/survivors and witnesses. For guidance on interviewing alleged perpetrators, please see [Interview Guidance - Alleged Perpetrator](#).

SUGGESTED CHECKLIST

- Ensure their physical and/or psychological comfort.
- Would they like someone specific present for support?
- Review confidentiality.
- Thank them for sharing/for their honesty.
- Would they like a drink (water, tea)?
- Tissues for in-person meetings.
- Pen/paper for notes if in person, laptop/computer for notes if meeting electronically.

BEST PRACTICES

- **Check local mandated reporting laws before conducting any interviews with minors.**
- Stay calm/warm/respectful - tone of voice, body language, and facial expressions.
- Be non-judgemental, do not discuss your personal thoughts/feelings.
- Be open-minded, consider all possible explanations, and do not dismiss the interviewee.
- Don't make any promises.
- Attempt to de-emphasize your authority when interviewing a victim/survivor or witness.
- Be patient and comfortable with silences.
- Let the interviewee do most of the talking; utilize self-disclosure sparingly if at all.
- Actively listen; paraphrase back to them every so often.
 - Ex: "I just want to make sure I understand, what happened was...." or "I'm hearing that....., is that right?"
- Allow the interviewee's responses to guide the interview, use their words in follow-up questions whenever possible.
- Use open-ended questions to encourage more detailed answers beyond yes/no.
- If the interviewee refuses to answer a question, assure them that it's ok. If they are ready to share in the future, you will be here to hear them.
- At the end, ask if there is anyone else that you should speak to - someone who may be a witness, have experienced the same or similar, or someone they confided in.

SAMPLE OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS

1. Can you tell me more about [paraphrase interviewee]?
2. How long has this been going on?
3. What happened when [paraphrase interviewee]?
4. How did you figure that out?
5. What makes you think that?
6. What happened first/right before/next/after/etc ?
7. How did it start?
8. What else was happening?
9. Where did it happen?
10. How did you know when it was over?
11. How did it feel when [paraphrase interviewee]?
12. Who else was present or may have seen what happened?
13. Who else is aware of this and when did they become aware?
14. What else do you think I should know?

