

Interviewing Victims/Survivors of Sexualized Violence

Drawing the line between interviewing & interrogation.

1 Ensure Safety

- This should be your **number one** priority.
- Express **empathy & compassion**.
- Be aware of **cultural needs**.

2 Verbal Language

- Use **open-ended** questions.
- Avoid **"WHY"** questions.
- Provide an explanation for asking difficult questions.
- Assure the individual it is okay to respond with **"I don't know"** or **"I don't remember"**.
- Use the language the individual uses.
- Never interrupt the person telling their story.

3 Body Language

- Use a calm voice.
- If possible, wear plain clothes.
- Sit down and always keep 1-2 arm lengths between you and the victim/survivor.
- **NEVER** physically touch the person.
- Avoid evaluative feedback ("right" or "good").
- Maintain appropriate eye contact.
- Call for a break when signs of distress are present.

"What do you need to be comfortable during this statement?"

"You are safe now"

"What were you thinking/feeling when that happened?"

"Tell me more about that"

"What are you able to tell me about that?"

Reflective comments

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Engage in "active listening", both verbal and non-verbal.

Nodding along

Wait 2 sleep cycles before conducting an in-depth interview.

- Provide opportunity for **choice** whenever possible.
- Allow for victim/survivor to interrupt and call for breaks.
- Ask where they would like to give their statement.

5 Restore Control

- Involve victim/survivor in the decision.
- Avoid hospital or police station, if possible.
- Location should be safe, accessible and free from distractions.

6 Choosing Location

- Asking questions about feelings, sensations, smells, and tastes, will elicit more detailed information than who, what, when, where, how questions.
- This information will also help others to understand victim/survivor responses to assault.

7 Elicit Sensory Details

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Inconsistent, Incomplete & Untrue Statements are Different than False Reports

- Minimize victim/survivor retelling their story by reducing the number of unnecessary professional contacts.
- Create a safe and non-judgmental environment.

- Document and explain changes in victim statement over time.
- Assure the victim/survivor they will not be arrested or judged for illegal or "risky" activity.

- Reflect on biases you may hold and how they may relate to "real rape" stereotypes in our society.
- Ask yourself how your own biases may affect the way you interview a victim/survivor.

Remember that Victims/Survivors are Central Team Members in the Investigation.