

# Effective Interviewing skills

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# Participants

- Who is in the room?

# Interviewing

- Advocates: How is interviewing different from counseling?
- Law enforcement/Prosecution: goals of interviews?

# Goals of interviewing for legal proceedings

- Detailed understanding of individual incidents in question
- What evidence might be available
- What significance the incident had for the survivor
- Any other factors that might affect the outcome of the case

# Goals of interviewing for legal advocacy

- General understanding of the relationship
- The survivor's needs and desires
- History of abuse

# Environment

- Quiet, private and safe
- Problem-solving for less desirable locations

# Introduction

- Introduce yourself
- Explain your role
  - Need for detailed information

# Confidentiality

- Before asking the first question or hearing any of her story, explain whatever confidentiality exists for the interview
- Remember, policy is different than law

# Confidentiality

- Explain exceptions to victim confidentiality
  - Child abuse
  - Elder abuse, in some cases
  - Duty to warn
- Explain exceptions applying to law enforcement/prosecution
  - Information sharing between law enforcement and prosecution
  - What will the defense receive?
    - Exculpatory evidence

# Initial questions

- Easy questions
- ?
- ?
- ?

# Open-ended questions

- Helps to establish trust, reduces editing
- Remember best when telling their story in narrative form and in context
- Traumatic memory
- Emotional impact of story/”outrage factor”
- Truth, and credibility, is in the details

# Open-ended questions

- Ask only clarifying questions
- Ability to truly listen is a vital skill that can only be learned by purposeful practice
- Be comfortable with silence
- Listen to what is said, but also for what isn't being said

# Follow up with specific questions

- See the incident as though seeing a movie
  - When, where, how
    - Diagrams, demonstrations
  - What happened just before, just after?
  - What size are the victim and offender
  - What witnesses are available
    - Eye and ear witnesses
    - Circumstantial

# Specific questions

- What physical evidence is available?
  - Pictures of injuries
  - Torn or bloody clothing
  - Damaged property
  - Phone damage
- Who called the police?
- What might be heard on 911 recording?
- If she didn't call the police, who might have?

# Specific questions

- How did the police respond?
- Any important details she didn't tell the police or they seemed to ignore?
- Who is the first person she talked to after the incident?
- What did the abuser say to the police or anyone else about the incident?

# Specific questions

- What did this mean to you?
  - Understand context
- What is the worst thing the abuser will say about you relating to this incident?  
Generally?

# Cognitive interviewing techniques

- Ask victim to:
  - concentrate on physical surroundings, smells, touch
  - close eyes and visualize
  - Tell story in variety of chronological sequences
  - Tell story from a different perspective

# Questions about sexual violence

- Direct questions about whether a person was a victim of sexual abuse will usually be answered negatively.
- Why would a survivor withhold information?
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# Questions about sexual violence

- Ask about behaviors and avoid loaded terms.
- Use survivor's terms for body parts or sex acts

# Questions about sexual violence

- What happens when he wants to have sex and you don't?
- Have you felt forced to do anything sexual that you didn't want to do or made you uncomfortable?

# Explore inconsistencies

- MOTTO: What appears to be an inconsistency can often be explained. What isn't explained will affect her credibility
- You can't explain what YOU don't understand
- Explain why you are asking

# Exploring past abuse

- Tell me about the first time you were abused?
- Tell me about the worst incident and why it was the worst for you?
- Tell me about the incident where you received the worse injury?
- Was there an incident that was witnessed by someone outside of your household?

# Exploring past abuse

- When was the first time your family or friends became aware that you were being abused?
- Was there an incident that occurred at a special time for you, like a holiday, your birthday or Mother's Day?

# Explain options

- Explain options available to the client
- Ask her what she thinks of these options and how she will be affected by them
- What works for one woman may be disastrous for another
- Each woman is entitled to problem-solving that reflects her own situation and not a cookie cutter response

## Maria's story

- My name is Maria. Last Tuesday, I had a fight with my husband. I was wearing his boxers and shirt. He tore the shirt, then he tore the boxers. He pushed me a few times and then he pushed me out the door. I live in the same building as my mother, so I went upstairs to her apartment. Thank God she was home.

# Before and after

- How much different is the story after you've asked questions?
- Are the stories inconsistent with each other?
- What assumptions did you make?
- What information did you miss by making those assumptions?

# Contact information

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