# chapter 3


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# Interviewing Psychology

## Basic Interviewing Concepts

Unit 6: Interviewing Awareness
Unit 7: Assessing Content and Behavior
Unit 8: The Investigative Interview

The stress and anxiety associated with death scene investigation multiplies when the decedent is an infant. Multiple witnesses, multiple agencies, scenes, and caretakers make for a confusing situation. This chapter covers the psychological considerations associated with interviewing witnesses as well as the significant differences between interviewing and interrogation, which are two entirely different methods of data gathering.

## OVERVIEW

This chapter highlights the basic tasks associated with conducting investigative interviews with parents, caregivers, and other witnesses. This includes all interactions between the investigator and individuals identified as the person who last placed the infant (placer), the person who last knew the infant was alive (LKA), and the person who discovered the infant dead or unresponsive (finder). Additional emphasis is placed on data-collection methods and instruments.

## SUPPORT MATERIALS

The following support materials are suggested:

1. Ekman P. Emotion in the Human Face. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2005.
2. Fleisher WL, Gordon NJ. Effective Interviewing and Interrogation Techniques. San Diego: Academic Press; 2002.
3. Wilson C, Powell M. A Guide to Interviewing Children. New York: Routledge Press; 2001.
4. Schafer JR, Navarro J. Advanced Interviewing Techniques: Proven Strategies for Law Enforcement, Military and Security Personnel. Springfield, Ill: Charles C. Thomas; 2004.
5. Rabon D. Interviewing and Interrogation. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press; 1992.
6. Esposito, L. SIDS Center of New Jersey (various educational materials developed). 2005.
7. Bronheim S. Infusing Cultural and Linguistic Competence into the Multiple Systems Encountered by Families Following the Sudden, Unexpected Death of an Infant. Washington, DC: National Center for Cultural Competence; 2003.
8. Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf. (703) 838-0030 Voice, (703) 838-0459 TTY. http://www.rid.org.

## CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter, students will be able to:

1. Differentiate between interviewing and interrogation.
2. Explain how cultural differences may affect an interview.
3. Assess content and behavior.
4. Plan an interview.
5. Perform an interview.

Each task must be performed in a professional and sensitive manner, consistent with local laws, statutes, and customs.


unit

# 6 Interviewing Awareness

## INTRODUCTION

As stressed earlier, the sudden and unexplained death of an infant is a tragic family event. Families and caregivers experiencing such grief deserve and have the right to receive a thorough investigation that is sensitive to their grieving state. An investigation that is accusatory or insensitive to the emotions that they are feeling, such as an interrogation, is inappropriate.

The most effective tools for the investigator are curiosity and a desire to learn the truth. This portion of the training deals with the process of the interview and how to use interpersonal interaction to gain the data needed and evaluate the quality of the information obtained. Culture is a key part of how we interact with others and how we assess their behaviors. Understanding how cultural factors impinge on the interviewing process is vital to making appropriate and informed conclusions about the process and data obtained.

## INTERVIEWING AND INTERROGATION

The terms interviewing and interrogating are not interchangeable. Periodically, concerns are voiced that the concept of interrogation carries with it the specter of the so-called third-degree or some other mode of abusive conduct that is unreasonable and inappropriate when questioning an individual. These uniquely different processes have particular relevance when there is recognition of cultural differences between the interviewee and the investigator.

In an interview, information is garnered from a person who generally has no interest or motive in providing inaccurate information. An interview is a planned conversation with a specific goal in mind. The purpose of an interrogation is to obtain information from an individual to determine whether he or she was responsible for, or involved in, the matter under investigation. Unlike an interview, it is a controlled conversation that is designed to elicit information from individuals who may have an interest in being untruthful.

## CROSS-CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

Culture is an integrated pattern of human behavior that includes, but is not limited to, thought, communication, languages, beliefs, values, practices, customs, courtesies, rituals, manners of interacting, roles, relationships, and expected behaviors of a racial, ethnic, religious, spiritual, social, or political group; the ability to transmit the above to succeeding generations; and dynamic in nature (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989). Cultural factors that reflect diversity among individuals and groups involve much more than race and ethnicity. Such factors include, but are not limited to, language, national origin, tribal or clan affiliation, sex, age, education, literacy, socioeconomic status or class, sexual orientation and sexual identity, religious or spiritual beliefs, geographic or regional patterns, legal status, acculturation, and assimilation. Thus, for example, a middle-aged man interviewing a teen mother is engaging in a potentially cross-cultural communication process.

To be effective as an interviewer in cross-cultural situations takes an awareness and knowledge of both one's own cultural beliefs, values, behaviors, and assumptions and those of persons from other cultures. Without this awareness, the interviewer runs the risk of viewing the behaviors and ways of interacting of others through a lens of incorrect assumptions about their meaning and imposing biases on the interview process that lead to inaccurate data and conclusions. In addition, the interviewer's ignorance about others' customs and practices may lead to serious cross-cultural faux pas that may seriously jeopardize the rapport needed for a good interview. Behaving in ways that are seen as insensitive or insulting, due to lack of knowledge about other cultures, can compromise the interview process.

### How to Understand One's Own Cultural Lens

It is often difficult to recognize one's own cultural beliefs, values, and practices because they are so automatic and seem natural—"that's how it is." Typically, one only begins to sense one's own culture when one encounters another culture. Thus, creating opportunities to experience other cultural groups is part of preparing to be an effective interviewer. Good interviewers also take time to examine their own beliefs, values, and practices. The following questions (not an exhaustive list) could help an interviewer identify their own cultural issues that might impinge on the interview process:

**What Do I Believe about...**

1. How people should act when experiencing grief?
2. Death from my own religious and cultural perspective?
3. What constitutes an appropriate family structure (married/single parent, etc.)
4. What constitutes "good parenting"?
5. How a well-ordered household looks?
6. How people should react to strangers, authority figures, or members of the opposite sex?

7. People who are at a different socioeconomic level (richer or poorer) than I am?
8. How people act when telling the truth?
9. Roles for men, women, and children in a family?
10. People of different ages (elders, children, teens, etc.)?
11. People who do not speak English?

**How to Learn about Other Cultures**

Part of preparation for interviewing is learning about the cultural beliefs, values, and practices of groups that live in the area served. The most effective strategy is to identify individuals or organizations from the diverse community and seek out knowledge. It is also helpful to develop a relationship with a cultural broker who can provide ongoing input on the cross-cultural issues involved in working with a particular population.

> **Cultural brokering** is defined as the act of bridging, linking, or mediating between groups or persons of differing cultural backgrounds for the purpose of reducing conflict or producing change (Jezewski, 1990).
>
> The cultural broker needs an awareness of his or her own culture and the culture and systems of those involved in the death scene investigation. This person can help the interviewer learn about beliefs, values, practices, and customs that impact the interviewing process. Cultural brokers can help interviewers avoid cultural missteps that can compromise rapport and cooperation of witnesses and key informants.

An effective interviewer will also learn about health practices of other cultural groups in the area, religious beliefs related to how the dead are treated (autopsies, who may touch the body, etc.), and their history of bias and discrimination with health, child welfare, and law enforcement agencies that may impact their comfort and willingness to cooperate in interviews.

The goal for the interviewer is to check one's own cultural assumptions and assumptions about the interviewee based on cross-cultural issues at the door. At the same time, the interviewer still needs to evaluate behaviors and the interaction as part of the process. It is a delicate dance between avoiding the intrusion of inappropriate cross-cultural interpretations and using the important information gained through the interactions of the interview to inform the conclusions of the report and to evaluate the information gained. Organizations that employ death scene investigators should provide the resources and opportunities for cross-cultural learning and make it part of structures and practices of the organization.

**Interviewing Preschool Children (up to Five Years of Age)**

Young children's accounts of events tend to be rambling and disjointed as they may have difficulty making distinctions between relevant and irrelevant data. They tend to have short attention spans and focus on one issue at a time. They have difficulty combining their thoughts into an integrated whole. The child's ability to recall information and events, whether short-term, long-term, or sensory, is underdeveloped.

Very young children have underdeveloped perceptual abilities, which tend to result in occasional problems in differentiating between what they have heard, what they have seen, and what others (e.g., parents, siblings, adults) have told them. They may have difficulty distinguishing fact from fantasy. Investigators must understand that even young children are capable of lying. However, they generally are incapable of supporting the lie.

**Interviewing School-Age Children (5 to 17 Years of Age)**

As children advance in age, their verbal ability improves with increased vocabulary, which is strongly influenced by peer groups, parents, and others interacting with the child/adolescent.

Young children's ability to work with and develop abstract concepts improves with age; however, these concepts tend to be simple and perfunctory. Their ability to recall ideas and events improves with maturity but tends to complement male/female-oriented criteria.

Deception is often aligned toward "separation" from adults or establishing an "identity." Children in this age bracket tend to be more aligned to the concept of "right" versus "wrong," not "moral" versus "immoral" or "just" versus "unjust."

## A Closer Look at Bereavement and Grieving

When a child dies, the grief that enfolds parents is characterized by feelings of intense loss, sadness, emptiness, and failure. Parents often perceive themselves as having failed in some way to protect their child from death. It is important that the investigator begins the delicate process of counseling the parents of the deceased infant during the investigative process.

The loss may be the parents' first experience with death. It may elicit parental guilt, magnification of minor omissions, and anger and it may have a profound effect on family function for an indeterminate length of time. The hopes, plans, and dreams for this baby are shattered (McClain & Mandell, 1994). Death becomes the ultimate separation as parents are not able to fill their emptiness, even with another child or children born before or after the deceased.

Skilled counseling can have an enormous impact on parents' ability to cope with grief successfully. This intervention offers multiple benefits for parents themselves and for their families and communities, now and in the future. Like grief itself, counseling has numerous dimensions and should take place over time. The healthcare professional should prepare in advance, using the following steps as a guide.

**Counseling Bereaved Parents: Basic Skills**

1. Listen and attend to the story of the baby's life and death; pay attention to parents' expressions of grief within their cultural context.
2. Convey a sense of empathy.
3. Gain knowledge about cause of death, family development, and family dynamics.
4. Assess the following:
   a) Grief response of family members, including suicide ideation, and risk.
   b) Availability and appropriateness of social support networks.
   c) Parental knowledge and understanding of cause of death.
5. Provide anticipatory guidance for grief process, explaining how grief is expressed and what to expect in the days and weeks ahead.
6. Make appropriate referrals for grief therapy (community health, social service programs, etc.).

Depending on the circumstances of the death, parents may be in contact with medical professionals, police investigators, medical examiners, and coroners. Their reactions will be influenced by the circumstances of the death as well as the sensitivity and intrusiveness of the professionals involved (Longchamp, Hall, & Arnold, 2003). As such, it is important that the investigator, as the first on-scene professional, give the family members a sense of comfort and privacy through dialogues and actions during the investigation.

Adapted from McClain M, Arnold J, Longchamp E, Shaefer J. Bereavement Counseling for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and Infant Mortality: Core Competencies for the Health Care Professional. McLean, V: Association of SIDS and Infant Mortality Programs; 2004: 13–18.


unit 7

# Assessing Content and Behavior

## INTRODUCTION

The process of verbal communication is based on a basic structure of language and interpretations that we begin learning in childhood. Although this structure is firmly imprinted during childhood, it is in a state of constant modification. As an example of the modification of language, significant changes in syntax and words can be seen as teenagers mature into young adults. Even in adults, modification of verbal language occurs as a consequence of reinterpretation based on how we respond to the messages of others and how others respond to the messages we send to them. All investigators who interview witnesses need to understand the basic concepts of content and behavior assessment.

## INTRODUCTION TO CONTENT AND BEHAVIOR

The vocal characteristics of speech, or **paralanguage,** may often reveal the emotional state of the witness and can carry more meaning than the words the witness chooses to use. Paralanguage may include such aspects as (1) the witness's tone of voice (e.g., a high or low pitch); (2) the volume of speech; (3) the rapidity of speech; (4) the frequency and duration of pauses and silence; and (5) the frequency of nonfluencies, including non-pathological stuttering and stammering.

The words used by the witness that may communicate distress and possibly deception can include such things as (1) odd or unusual syntax (the ways words are put together), (2) imprecise choice of words, and (3) words that are nonresponsive to a posed question. Occasionally, an investigator may misinterpret or mischaracterize a witness's observations and believe that the witness is being deceptive when, in fact, the person's observations may have been influenced by various elements of perceptual distortion. Body language is probably the oldest form of communication. Witnesses may use a wide spectrum of nonverbal gestures involving facial expressions, body movements, eye contact, hand gestures, clothing, hair styles, personal space, and even positioning of furniture to send messages to others.

Nonverbal behavior is a significant mechanism that can aid in the evaluation of honesty, trustworthiness, and sincerity. Although we are taught to prefer words over gestures, research has indicated that we trust our interpretation of nonverbal messages more than we do verbal messages. The majority of the information from a face-to-face communication is gleaned from facial gestures.

## ASSESS VERBAL CONTENT

**Paralanguage and Clues to Distress:**

- Tone of voice.
- Volume of speech.
- Rapidity of speech.
- Pauses and silence.
- Nonfluencies.

**Elements of Perceptual Distortion**

This area pertains to the need for interviewers to be alert to those factors that can compromise eyewitness acuity. Among these elements are (1) selectivity; (2) expectation; (3) prejudices, biases, and personal needs; (4) psychological stress; (5) physiological distress; (6) environmental conditions; and (7) limitations of human memory.

**Selectivity:** Human beings can perceive only a limited amount of data at a time. Investigators often require witnesses to describe events that, at the time of their occurrence, were afforded little or no significance concerning the infant's death.

**Expectation:** Witnesses should be able to describe how the infant looked, smelled, or felt and apply this knowledge in their perception of the events.

**Prejudices and biases:** This multifaceted area deals with the predisposition that some individuals may have in their perceptions of another's activities. The proclamation, "They all look alike to me" may have some basis in fact if the witness has had only limited exposure to the group in question. Some witnesses may tend to correlate certain physical characteristics (e.g., thickness of lips, distance between eyes, width of nose, height, weight, length and style of hair, type of clothing, etc.) with social acceptance. Mainstream appearance and average-sized proportions tend to suggest reliability and worth. The death scene investigator should be aware of his or her

own perceptions of prejudices and biases when conducting an investigation. Professionalism must be maintained at all times. Information must be gathered using a nonjudgmental attitude to ensure all possibilities of the infant's death are taken into consideration.

**Psychological stress:** Individuals tend to project their own feelings onto their perceptions of others. Recent studies have illustrated that an individual who experiences severe stress will report details less accurately than another individual reporting the same event under less stressful circumstances.

**Physiological conditions:** These conditions are manifested by (1) fatigue, (2) visual problems, (3) auditory disturbances, and (4) other sensory problems.

Fatigue: Perceptual data from individuals who have gone without sleep for 24 hours should be viewed with caution. Perceptual data from individuals who have not slept for 36 hours are unreliable.

Visual problems: Interpretation/organization—retinal images are fundamentally ambiguous. Ambiguity results because the world is three dimensional and the retina is two dimensional.

- Negative aftereffect is an impression that remains after a fixed gaze.
- Multistability is seen in pictures and figures that spontaneously change in appearance.
- Visual distortion may be the result of near/farsightedness, impaired night vision, monocular vision, and color distortion.

Auditory disturbances: Such disturbances may affect a witness's ability to distinguish speed, distance, and directionality of sound. Other disturbances may include acuity notches, tinnitus, and loss of hearing due to aging.

Other sensory problems: These problems include (1) gustation (taste), which includes four basic stimuli (sweet, salty, sour, and bitter); (2) olfaction (smell), which includes six primary odors (fragrant, ethereal, spicy, putrid, resinous, and burned); and (3) touch, which includes sensitivities to pressure, pain, cold, and warmth.

**Environmental conditions:** These conditions may result in mistaken perception due to (1) the duration of the observation; (2) lighting conditions; and (3) other distracting influences.

Duration of the observation: The length of time that an incident was under observation is directly related to the accuracy of its perception.

Lighting conditions: Perception may be limited due to the amount of visual information stimulating the retina of the eye. In addition, ambient lighting may influence the acuity of color perception.

Distracting influence: Collateral noise (peripheral events) may generate misinformation.

## ASSESS NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR

### Nonverbal Clues of Possible Distress and/or Deception

The context of the message is **verbal** (7% of the message). The **vocal** aspect (38% of the message) refers to the speaker's tone of voice (e.g., a high or low pitch), the loudness or softness at which someone is speaking, the rapidity of the individual's speech, the frequency and duration of pauses and silence, and the frequency of nonfluencies. **Facial** data (55% of the message) pertain to (1) eye contact and movements, (2) asymmetrical facial gestures, (3) mouth and lip movements, and (4) nasal reactions (Mehrabian, 1971).

**Eye contact and movements:** Reactions to stress may include excessive blinking, eye fixation, and/or failure to maintain eye contact.

**Asymmetrical facial gestures:** An asymmetrical facial gesture is seen in facial expressions that do not appear balanced. In these instances, the expression on one side of the face does not match the expression on the other side of the face. This happens because the muscles on one side of the face are stronger than those on the other, and when the individual, while under stress, tries to fake an emotion (e.g., indifference), they tend to over-flex those muscles that control this emotion. As a consequence, the muscles on one side of the face may be over-tensed, which results in an asymmetrical facial expression.

**Mouth and lip movements:** Reactions to stress may include bruxing (grinding of the teeth), clenching of the teeth, frowning, biting the inside of the mouth or lips, pursing the lips, or chewing on objects.

**Nasal reactions:** Reactions to stress may include flaring of the nostrils and touching or pinching the nose.

### Autonomic Reactions to Stress

Autonomic reactions are those behaviors that are either difficult or beyond the ability of most human beings to control. Examples of these reactions are seen in pupillary dilation and micro-gestures.

**Pupillary dilation:** Research has confirmed that, when one is under stress, the pupils of the eyes may dilate. Pupillary dilation is a part of the fight-or-flight reaction or General Adaption Syndrome (Selye, 1956). However, in an interview/interrogation scenario, this phenomenon has been linked to both positive stress and negative stress. Therefore, it is difficult to interpret the meaning of the reaction.

**Micro-gestures:** According to research by Paul Ekman (1985), micro-gestures are autonomic reactions that last less than one-quarter of a second and signal (1) distress, (2) fear, or (3) anger.

Distress: This reaction may be linked to feelings of shame, humiliation, guilt, embarrassment, and so on, and is manifested by a lifting of just the inner portion of the eyebrows. Less than 15% of the population can duplicate this movement.

Fear: This reaction is manifested by a lifting and then pulling together of the eyebrows.

Anger: This reaction is manifested by a narrowing and tightening of just the red margin of the lips.

### Problems Associated with the Interpretation of Nonverbal Behavior

Body language gestures and actions that can be consciously controlled are unreliable as an indicator of stress. Cultures vary greatly in the use and meaning of aspects of body language. For example, direct eye contact may mean engagement or honesty in some cultures and may be perceived as a hostile threat in others.

There may be very little uniformity of body language gestures and actions even among individuals of common background and lineage. Within-group cultural differences may be as great as between-group differences. For example, individuals living in different parts of the United States who were born and raised in the same community in their native country may have entirely different body language gestures.

## ASSESSING THE ACCURACY OF WITNESSES' STATEMENTS

Assessing the testimonies of surviving family members and witnesses is not an easy task. An interviewer might easily overlook some of the basic signs of deception or misinterpret nervousness, shock, disbelief, and other crisis-related emotions as deception. Dealing with the death of an infant is difficult for interviewers as well. Interviewers should be sure to take time to assess their own reactions and biases that may impact the interview process.

It is absolutely essential to recognize that a parent may verbalize feelings of anger and self-blame through emotional rather than factual statements. The interviewer should be aware that it is common for a mother or father to say such things as, "It's all my fault!" or even to go so far as to state, "I killed my baby!" The response must be carefully assessed, and interviewers should be careful not to jump to conclusions. Guilt is expected and common for cases involving deaths of infants and young children. These utterances should be documented; however, the investigator should save his or her judgment for later in the interview and during further analysis.

That said, the investigator still must be able to detect deception when it occurs. One of the best ways to assess statements is by using what Joe Navarro (Schafer & Navarro, 2004) referred to as the Four Domain Model of Detecting Deception. This model simplifies the process of detecting deception by describing domains or clusters of behaviors rather than attaching a specific meaning to a single nonverbal or verbal display. The four categories:

1. **Comfort/discomfort**: Assessing a witness's comfort zone while being interviewed is an important step in measuring the genuineness of his or her responses. Determinants of comfort include, but are not limited to, posture; barriers placed between you and the informant, such as cans, desk items, and furniture; nervous twitching; and fidgeting or doodling. When using an interpreter, part of the pre-planning and debriefing should address this issue.

2. **Emphasis**: Multiple actions occur when one is being interviewed, and it is important to recognize and assess how much emphasis is placed on words, tone, and statements.

3. **Synchrony**: Due to the complexity of cultural factors and the differences among individuals, it is important to identify whether the interviewer and the informant are seeing eye to eye and how this relationship is affecting the flow of the interview. It is important not to misinterpret cultural behaviors, such as eye contact and body language, as lying, discomfort, and/or deception.

4. **Perception management**: It is necessary to determine which witnesses are likely to be lying and which are actually telling the truth under crisis conditions. Perception management includes paying particular attention to body language and semantics. Poor performance in two of the four domains of this model is not unusual. However, if there are negative responses in each of the categories, the witness should be "flagged" for further follow-up.

### Consider Individual Components of the Witness's Statements

The interviewer should not take any statement made by the witness for granted. The witness may very well change what he or she said a few moments earlier, but that is acceptable, as this can be part of what you are gauging for assessment. The interviewer should take note of the time of day. Answers vary based on how long you have been interviewing, as well as natural mood swings during mornings, afternoons, and evenings.

It is important to select key components from the statement and not make rash judgments about the witness's character or manner or about the witness in general. This is not to say that the investigator should shut off his or her observational skills, but rather keep them in check.

**Review Each Element of the Statement in Context of Other Sources**
It is important to compare statements made by the primary witness and another witness or informant. Ask similar and appropriate questions, comparing the responses.

**Truth-telling style:** This pertains to the caregiver's responsiveness to questions, tone of voice, rapidity of speech, eye contact, body language, nonfluencies, and the frequency and duration of pauses in answering questions. There may be cultural variations in body language, so the investigator must become familiar with such differences for the populations served. If the interviewer is unsure of the cultural meaning of body language for a given subject, then these doubts should be noted in the record, and follow-up to learn more about interpreting them should be done for the final reporting of data. Factors such as immigration status should also be taken into account. An interviewee might be concerned that being interviewed might impact immigration status, and thus responses might be impacted by a desire to hide such information as where one works, social security number, etc. In addition, speech cues in some languages may be difficult to judge for nonspeakers. For example, tonal languages, where word meaning is set not only by the sounds, but also by tonal inflection, can make judgments about speech difficult. The expertise of the interpreter will be invaluable in understanding speech-related cues.

## USE PROXEMICS (DISTANCE FACTORS), BODY LANGUAGE, AND CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

Proxemics and body language are tools for helping to assess whom to interview, determining how to approach them, and listening to assess their statements. Proxemics refers to intimate, personal, social, and public distances at which people stand or sit in relation to another person(s) (Schafer & Navarro, 2004, p. 73). Body language refers to the way a person holds his or her body and the physical stance taken, for example, arms folded across chest, making eye contact or not.

The investigator must be open minded when taking cultural factors into consideration. Often an interviewer will misread an informant because of a lack of knowledge of the informant's cultural background. Cultural and ethnic background may affect proxemics and body language, so it is important to know the background of the people involved and assess any cultural and/or special needs of informants. For example, a Latina may not use direct eye contact because in her culture this could be perceived as rude. A Middle Eastern man might choose not to be interviewed in the same room as a woman due to his cultural beliefs and values regarding sex. The investigator should test the waters and assess the reactions that he or she gets by infomants' body language when he or she stands or sits near them before the interview.


unit 8

# The Investigative Interview

## INTRODUCTION

The interviewer should encourage free narrative responses by interviewees and ask clarifying questions after the interviewee completes his or her account of the event under investigation. It is reasonable and appropriate for the interviewer to be assertive, without being aggressive, and to impose control over the interview while giving it guidance and structure. By structuring an interview so that the caregiver describes events that occurred within the following phases of involvement, there is a greater likelihood of obtaining more relevant data from the interview. This unit covers the three basic investigative interviewing phases.

The **entry phase** concerns those events that brought the witnesses and/or victim(s) into contact with the event that resulted in their injuries. In reference to a SUID, it pertains to the details of what Placers and Finders were doing leading up to their respective actions, when these actions were taking place, and where and why these actions were taking place.

The **event phase** is unfortunately where most interviews begin and end. This aspect of the interview concerns exactly what Placers and Finders did at the time of their respective actions, precisely when and where these actions took place, and why these particular Placers and Finders were the individuals so involved.

The **escape phase** is the point at which the witness decided to disengage from the matter under investigation, depart and/or flee from the scene, and call for assistance.

## PLANNING THE INTERVIEW

People who have never conducted an SUID interview often take the skills involved for granted. Experienced forensic death scene investigators agree that planning the interview in advance contributes to its success. Having a plan comprised of realistic goals and objectives will assist you tremendously with infant death scene investigation (DSI).

### Review and Understand Local Medical Examiner/Coroner Statutes

The United States is made up of some 2,285 county- or parish-level medical examiner or coroner jurisdictions. States are typically said to be "medical examiner states" or "coroner states," but some states are mixed with both medical examiners and coroners operating on a county by county basis. The requirements to be a medical examiner or coroner also vary widely across the country. Some states require an M.D. forensic pathologist, while others fill the constitutional office of the coroner by a vote of the people in that jurisdiction.

Infant death investigators should know and understand the type of medicolegal system they work in and the state death investigator statutes that govern their work. Although state statutes vary with regards to the types of deaths that must be investigated and autopsied, most require that SUID be investigated by the medical examiner or coroner office, and some require autopsies in these types of cases.

Regardless, infant death investigators must share responsibility for interviewing witnesses at the scene with law enforcement and often defer to one another based on the laws and statutes that govern a specific jurisdiction. The goal remains the same: to conduct a complete and professional infant death investigation.

### Determine the Need for Cross-Cultural Information and Interpretation

Before beginning any interview, it is essential to determine if there may be cultural and language considerations that could impact the effectiveness and accuracy of the interview. If the investigator and the interviewee are from different cultural backgrounds, the interviewer will need to learn about possible cultural conflicts or misunderstandings that might arise. In addition, it is important to learn about issues, such as culturally based norms related to body language, emotional displays and mourning customs, and verbal expressions (direct answers or stories to answer questions); perceptions of health and law enforcement agencies; and roles and modesty issues related to interacting with members of the opposite sex. Investigators should learn this information about the populations in the areas they serve before any interviews are done. Engaging local racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse communities is a key to gaining this cross-cultural knowledge. Working with local community organizations or cultural brokers are key approaches. It is also vital to determine whether an interpreter will be needed for the interview and to work with the interpreter in the preparation phase.

### Review Available Case Information

Reviewing all available case information before conducting an interview will provide a general snapshot of the situation. Case information such as the caregiver's relationship to the infant, involvement in the placement and/or discovery of the infant, who called for emergency assistance, and a critical review of specific language used may prove essential to the interview's success or failure. Having accurate information before your interview will make the process easier.

### Develop an Interview Plan

An interview plan allows you to use your time on the scene efficiently. A plan allows you to adjust the time of the interview according to the person interviewed, choose the appropriate location for each interview, remain sensitive to the family members/care providers, and preserve the death scene. A plan also provides an opportunity for appropriate follow-up.

To develop your plans, decide who will be interviewed, what their roles were, and what information you would like to obtain from them. Determine the appropriate official to conduct the interview.

**Standardize the Interview**
Interview standardization allows you to measure the effectiveness of the interview protocol. Standardized interviews increase efficiency, enhance communication and work flow, and ensure consistent evaluation of information.

## PERFORMING THE INTERVIEW'S ENTRY PHASE

**NOTE:** If at any time the investigator determines the possibility of criminal intent, the interview should end, and interrogation, according to the protocol of your local jurisdiction, should begin.

**Present an Atmosphere of Professionalism**
Introducing yourself to any potential witness in a positive, controlled manner sets a tone of professionalism for all future communication. Simply explaining who you are, why you are there, and how you hope to help can pay untold dividends for you as an investigator.

You must be authoritative (in control of your emotions), yet sympathetic at the same time. Although the interviewer must be authoritative, displaying too much dominance might cause the witness to perceive the official as insensitive and arrogant, creating significant communication barriers. Treat informant(s) with respect and **do not assume** they are guilty of anything before the interview takes place. This type of prejudice greatly influences the communication process and outcome. Introduce the interpreter if using one.

**Direct Witness into Position**
Ask the witness where he or she would be most comfortable and assess the appropriateness of this area for the interview. Lead your witness to the area by asking (not ordering) him or her to go to that part of the room with you right behind. In this way, you are being respectful by asking, but at the same time you are sending the message that you have control of the situation.

**Make the Witness as Comfortable as Possible**
Even though you have chosen an interview location you think is comfortable, be prepared to move to an alternate location if necessary. Ask the witness where he or she spends the most time and find out why that location is comfortable; for instance, is it a location where the person watches television, relaxes, or works out? Once you have selected a comfortable location, be aware of your eye contact. It is important not to show dominance at a SIDS-related scene. **Express a "death scene" rather than a "crime scene" mentality.**

**Determine the Appropriate Vocabulary Level**
Knowing your audience is vital to a successful interview. As such, it is important to speak the appropriate language and use the appropriate vocabulary. Begin by talking to the witness in a general manner on basic conversational topics. You may get a good sense of the person's education by quickly scanning the walls for any degrees or certificates of recognition. In addition, you can directly ask about educational level, although such a query should be woven into the interview rather than being a focal point.

Be careful not to assume that your witness is uneducated or has poor verbal skills based on his or her emotional responses. At these types of scenes, it is not uncommon to observe broken speech and stuttering by someone who is in a crisis situation.

In addition, it is essential to determine whether English is the witness's first language. If it is not, you may need assistance from an interpreter before you even begin the interview process. Do not assume that a lack of English proficiency means a low educational level in the native language.

### Rapport-Building

The process of developing rapport begins with

1. Identifying yourself.
2. Introducing the interpreter if one is present, and explaining the process of interpretaion.
3. Providing a very brief explanation of what you need to accomplish.
4. Making a request for permission to talk to the interviewee.
5. Obtaining relevant background information from the individual being questioned.

The primary subject of the interview is temporarily abandoned during the rapport-developing phase of the interview process. The rapport-building phase is multifaceted and is intended to develop a comfort level between the interviewee and the interviewer. It is also intended to afford the interviewer an opportunity to assess the interviewee's cognitive level, recall ability, ability to orient, ability to reconstruct, emotive triggers, and truth-telling style. When working with an interpreter, this phase provides an opportunity to adjust to the process and make any changes if needed.

### Acknowledge the Victim's Plight

It is important to recognize and appreciate what the surviving family members and anyone else who may have been involved are currently feeling. The interviewer should acknowledge the crisis and empathize with the informant. Use the child's name and avoid using pronouns such as he, she, him, or her.

Be careful not to appear too suspicious on a death scene investigation for infants and young children. If family members or care providers sense that you are pointing the finger at them before you begin the interview, your job will become even more challenging because you have erected a wall by displaying initial mistrust.

### Use Forms and Notepads

The types of forms and notepads used in interviews may greatly affect informants' reactions and attitudes during their interactions with officials. Avoid using materials that are commonly linked to legal or law enforcement appearances. For example, do not use yellow legal pads as they are often associated with lawyers and courtrooms (Schafer & Navarro, 2004, p. 9). Carry an extra set of nondescript notepads in your vehicle. Be careful not to write down too much information as this may be distracting to the individual whom you are attempting to interview.

## PERFORMING THE INTERVIEW'S EVENT PHASE

The event phase of an interview differs from the entry phase. Whereas the goal of the entry phase is to make the informant comfortable and gain his or her trust, the goal of the event phase is to gather more detailed information. You might need to direct the line of questioning by using the three techniques described below.

### Basic Investigative Questioning Techniques

The three key investigative techniques are

- Active and passive listening.
- Using open-ended questions.
- Using nonjudgmental questions.

**Active listening:** Active listening is the most effective communication strategy for interviewing. When you conduct an interview, it is important to show obvious signs of attentiveness and caring by actively listening to what your informant is disclosing. It is essential that you interject a remark every couple of minutes to reflect and acknowledge what is being said. For instance, after the mother of the infant explains what time she last witnessed her daughter breathing, then you would say, "So, if I understand you correctly, the last time you saw Samantha breathing was at 3:30 a.m., when you last checked on her." This type of feedback ensures you have heard

the informant correctly and assures the informant that you are listening, thereby building trust. When using an interpreter, there may be a greater proportion of this type of interaction to assure that the accuracy of the information is not being affected by the interpretation process.

**Passive listening:** Passive listening requires no specific feedback. When an interviewer uses passive listening, it is usually because he or she feels rushed, is disinterested in what is being said, or is inexperienced. In some cases, passive listening is not considered to be negative. Using body language is another method of active listening and can be used during yes/no questions or when gathering basic facts.

**Open-ended questions:** During any interview, the investigator should never tell the story for the witness or talk over him or her. By asking the witness to describe the situation and explain his or her responses, the investigator will gain more complete information and can identify any inconsistencies that need to be resolved. Asking open-ended questions allows for a free flow of information, creates great opportunities for active listening, and depicts trust and respect to the witness.

**Nonjudgmental questions:** The tone for an interview is dictated by the questions asked. During a death scene investigation, it is vital that the investigator chooses his or her wording carefully, making sure to be nonjudgmental. The following lists illustrate the difference between judgmental and appropriate questions. The goal of each appropriate communication is to display active listening and compassion and to establish trust, respect, and rapport.

Judgmental questions:

- Did you spank the baby?
- Did you drop the baby?
- Don't you check on the baby?
- Are you sure the baby was not sick?
- Why didn't you take him to the doctor?
- Didn't you do CPR?
- Didn't you do anything?

Appropriate questions:

- Has Amy suffered any injury?
- How was John when you last checked him?
- Did you notice anything different about Bobby?
- Has Mike been to a doctor recently?
- When you found Ely, what did you do?

Have the witness tell you the story, and be patient with the person. After all, these cases usually involve innocent witnesses who are experiencing a host of emotions and reactions that may be misread as something different from what the person may actually be telling you.

### Gathering Information from Witnesses

The following tips may help in gathering information from witnesses:

- Use the child's name; identify any nickname(s), if this is acceptable to the family.
- Show empathy.
- Ask questions in a nonjudgmental manner.
- Never become hostile or angry.
- Use a calm and directive voice.
- Be clear with instructions and answers to questions.
- Provide explanations to caregivers about treatment and transport.
- Repeat yourself when necessary.

- Allow the caregiver to accompany the baby if the situation permits.
- Avoid asking questions in a checklist format. The questions do not have to be asked in the same order as they appear on the form.

### The Guided-Conversation Principle

Although you should allow the witness to tell the story in his or her own words, sometimes it is necessary to lead or guide the conversation in order to obtain needed information. Forms such as the SUIDI Reporting Form and other similar, jurisdictionally approved documents set the parameters for asking questions that will guide the conversation in an organized and thorough manner. However, be careful not to be consumed by the content of the form. Even the most experienced interviewers may depend more on the precise words on the form, rather than infusing them into natural conversation. Relying too heavily on the form itself risks losing the rapport established during the entry phase. Use the form as a guide and periodically rehearse how you would ask the questions from the form in a conversational way.

### Record Information while Interviewing

Gathering data and recording information are the basic purposes of conducting an interview. Make sure that your form does not appear intimidating or too closely identified with legal agencies or organizations. It is best to have the forms printed without any attention-getting logos or descriptive features that could distract the informant. When starting to use the form, be sure to refer to it only when you need to gather specific information, rather than when you are asking a witness to explain anything emotional or personal. It is important to emphasize that you must display attentiveness and compassion during investigations involving the death of an infant or young child. Use common sense; appear as genuine as possible during the interview.

## PERFORMING THE INTERVIEW'S ESCAPE PHASE

No matter what the outcome, an informant or witness reaches a point at which enough information has been collected. At that point, the witness begins anticipating a termination point or escape phase of the interview.

### Ask a Final Question

Asking a final question sends a clear message that the interview is officially over. The final question should summarize the interview and end it on a positive note. This will leave the witness with a positive feeling and encourage subsequent contact. You might end by asking the witness to retell his or her version of what happened, but avoid being too repetitive.

It is always beneficial to ask an interviewee the following two questions at the conclusion of an interview:

- Is there anything else you think I should know about this incident that maybe I do not know about?
- Can you think of any other questions I should ask you that I haven't asked you yet?

These two questions often elicit new information. The questions also allow people to feel that they have played an active role in their own interview. These questions also reduce the opportunities for individuals to modify their statements later if incriminating evidence is found.

### Thank the Witness

It is important to terminate the interview with a simple expression of gratitude. Simply say, "Thank you for your time and information; we will do everything possible to find out why Johnny died. I know this must have been extremely difficult for you and your family."

Never stand over a witness when saying thank you. Always establish eye contact at eye level. If you must stand while the witness remains seated, bend down to his or her level and respect that the person might be too emotionally drained to stand or move due to shock and disbelief.

Don't make your expressions of gratitude sound so final that it seems you are not interested in returning. Also, if you are at the immediate scene, be sure to emphasize that there will be subsequent interviews and follow-up as necessary. Try to frame your statement in a supportive rather than factual manner.

End the interview on a positive note, encouraging future contact and expressing your sorrow and willingness to do everything in your power to help the family find support and obtain the final results of the autopsy, if applicable. (Not all states and jurisdictions have mandatory autopsies on infants and young children.) Smile and be upbeat; indicate to the informant that the interview went well, regardless of how you personally feel about the process and the outcome.

Providing hope does not mean that you will definitely be able to solve family members' problems and obtain answers to all of their questions. Be positive but don't be unrealistic, and certainly don't mislead them into false hope.

### Provide Opportunity for Further Contact

Make a plan for subsequent contact after the initial visit. Once again, reiterate to the witness that future contact will be made, and try to frame it in supportive and compassionate language, so he or she is encouraged to hear back from you rather than dreading the contact.

Talk about other families who may have benefited from follow-ups in the past. This is a good time to mention locally available resources as well. Be cautious about referring the witness for assistance if you are dealing with a highly complex death scene investigation. If it is a complex case, say you will help find support in a general manner, not specifying any particular organization or agency.

### Exiting

Exiting is the last step of the interview process and provides closure on a proper and productive interview. This step is done while you thank the person and direct yourself to the exit. This is the time to bring the family member with you in your vehicle (depending on manner of death) or to assess whether the witness is emotionally stable enough to be alone or should be in the company of others. As you are walking toward the exit, speak with the witness about his or her feelings and emotional state after the interview. Be aware of emotional flooding and what those in the mental health field refer to as "doorknob therapy." It is common to see a witness who has been in a crisis that same day express a host of emotions and thoughts as you begin to make your exit. Do not misjudge this reaction as deception or think the person may have lied to you. If using an interpreter, plan how to choreograph this portion of the interview.

## POTENTIAL PROBLEM AREAS

There are four types of problems involving the interviewing process. These are shortening interviews, failure to accurately record data (e.g., an interviewee's statement), mischaracterization or misinterpretation of data, and difficulties using an interpreter.

Shortening Interviews

Problems in this area occur when the interviewer terminates the interview prematurely. Exacerbating circumstances may involve such aspects as (1) having difficulty in comprehending the individual being questioned (e.g., mental disorder, intoxication, foreign languages, etc.); (2) fatigue on the part of the investigator; and (3) assuming that it is not necessary to continue the interview because the investigator has already obtained the information from another source.

Failure to Accurately Record Data

A significant problem that contributes to this concern is sloppy note-taking or using a tape recorder that is not functioning properly.

Mischaracterization/Misinterpretation of Data

This problem is a consequence of failing to ask for clarification when ambiguous information is received from an interviewee.

Difficulties with Using an Interpreter

Nuances of word meanings can differ from language to language, and interviewers must double check with interpreters that the data is accurate.

## TAKE-HOME MESSAGE

It is essential that the infant death investigator recognize that:

1. The infant death investigation is the one case type that is **not** treated as a homicide from the onset of the investigation.
2. The interview is the **best** opportunity the get the type of information that leads to accurate establishment of the cause of death.
3. Cultural differences must be recognized and accommodated for accurate information gathering.
4. Interviewing is a skill that requires planning, focus, and practice.
5. Interviews are conducted by death investigators from various agencies.
6. Interrogations are conducted by sworn law enforcement officers.

Summary

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe the difference between a death scene and a crime scene.
2. Discuss why it is important to role play before interviewing.
3. Describe the main things to know before an interview.
4. Discuss the potential difficulties associated with interviewing children and what can be done to alleviate such difficulties.
5. Discuss various methods of establishing rapport with an individual being questioned.
6. Describe how bereavement affects the interviewing process at the scene.
7. Why do people handle death differently?
8. What is the most important thing grieving parents need to understand about the interviewing process?
9. Describe the six skills associated with working with bereaved parents.
10. How does your attitude toward other cultures affect your ability to interview?

## SAMPLE QUESTIONS

1. The most important part of interviewing is
   A. Parting.
   B. Planning.
   C Polarizing.
   D. Parturient.

2. Which of the following is NOT one of the phases for interviewing?
   A. Escape.
   B. Entry.
   C. Evolution.
   D. Event.

3. Establishing rapport is important to
   A. Get through the interview as quickly as possible.
   B. Build trust and openness between the interviewer and the informant.
   C. Gain insight from witnesses.
   D. Assess the dynamics of lying.

4. Which of the following is NOT a good interview venue option?
   A. Living room with other family members.
   B. Official vehicle such as a police car.
   C. Quiet space on porch in backyard.
   D. Kitchen table without others in room.

5. All but one of the following is a measurable cue for comfort:
   A. Tone of voice.
   B. Fidgeting.
   C. Singing to self.
   D. Breathing.

6. Which of the following is NOT a primary consideration in a pre-interview phase?
    A. Choosing a proper environment for the interview.
    B. Organizing and prioritizing individuals to be interviewed.
    C. Determining the amount of time to devote to the interview.
    D. Establishing the parameters for the interview.