

Trauma-Informed Interviewing: Interviewer and Interviewee Well-Being

Interviewing people who have witnessed or survived human rights violations is one of the core activities for human rights monitors and defenders. It is therefore crucial for human rights monitors to be skilled in conducting interviews in order to gather accurate information using trauma-informed techniques that protect the wellbeing of the interviewee and the interviewer, and, if present, the interpreter.





The Personal Approach

Interviewing is a conversation with a purpose. Like all conversations, it involves a relationship between two people. Research has shown that interviewers who use a personal approach, rather than a formal approach, are more successful in creating a safe and trusting relationship with the interviewee. A personal approach encourages the interviewee to share experiences that may be painful or difficult to talk about.

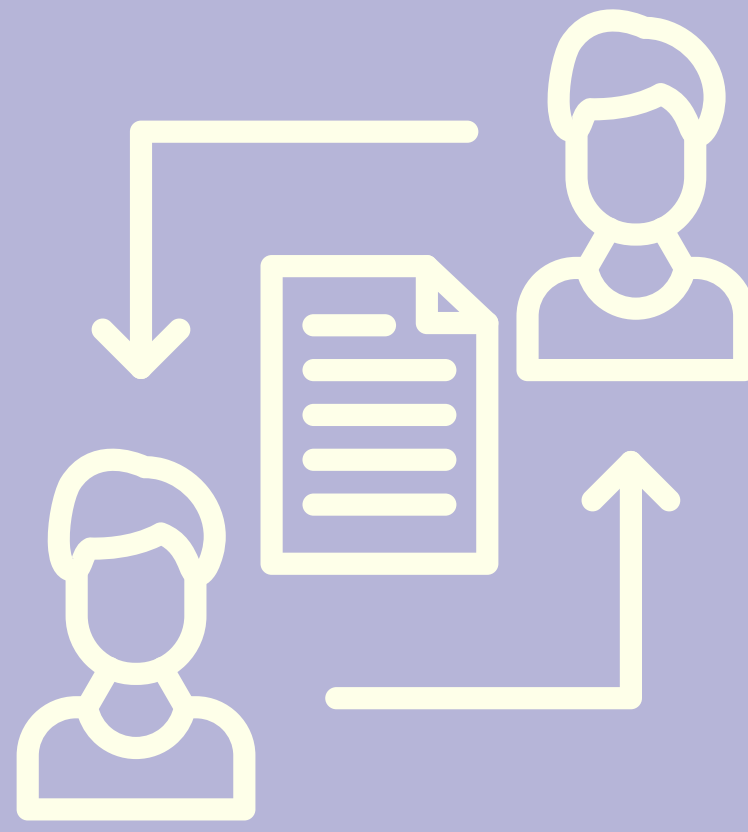
Show a friendly
interest in the
interviewee

Engage in small talk

Share some light
information about
yourself too

Don't overreach or
insist on exchanging
overly personal
information

Inquire about the
interviewee's physical
comfort



Transfer of Control

The role of the interviewer is to act as a facilitator, to help the interviewee share an interrupted account as they recall it. The best way to do this is to transfer control of the information flow to the interviewee: after all, it is the interviewee who has the relevant information.

Explicitly inform the interviewee that they are in control

Let the interviewee know that they can stop the interview at any time

Encourage the interviewee to speak openly and freely

Convey to the interviewee that they are not obligated to answer any questions

Use silence and encouragement during the Account phase

Refrain from asking a series of closed questions



Trauma-Informed Interviewing

People who have witnessed or experienced traumatic events/human rights violations may be affected by them in ways that should be taken into account by interviewers to ensure that the information gathered is accurate and reliable, and the interview process does not further traumatize the interviewee. Interviewers should be prepared for interviewees who have shown resilience in the face of trauma, who are in the process of recovering from their experiences, or those who are still struggling to cope.

Adapt your
interview strategies
to the person

Create a safe
environment for the
interviewee

Only help the
interviewees recall their
experiences to the extent
that they want to

Be sensitive to the risk
of causing harm
through intrusive
interviewing

Be aware of the phrasing of
the questions, especially on
highly stigmatized kinds of
trauma



Protecting Well-Being

Interviewing people about human rights violations can be emotionally draining, for the person being interviewed, for the interviewer, and for the interpreter (if there is one). There are steps you can take as an interviewer to help protect the wellbeing of all involved and help everyone leave the interview feeling emotionally balanced.

Here are three strategies you can use to help balance yourself, the interviewee or the interpreter.

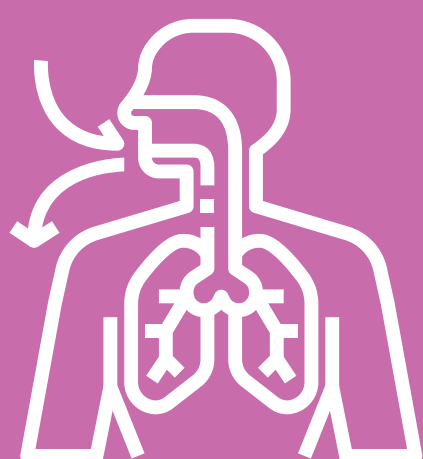


Grounding

In a relaxed position, name:
5 things you can see
4 things you can hear
3 things you can feel
2 things you can smell
1 thing you can taste

Butterfly Hug

Wrap your arms around yourself, so each hand touches the opposite arm or shoulder. Move your hands like the wings of a butterfly, tapping your arms/shoulders in an alternating rhythm



Physiological Sigh

Inhale as deeply as you can, then take a second short inhalation. Let the air out with a long, slow and audible exhale.