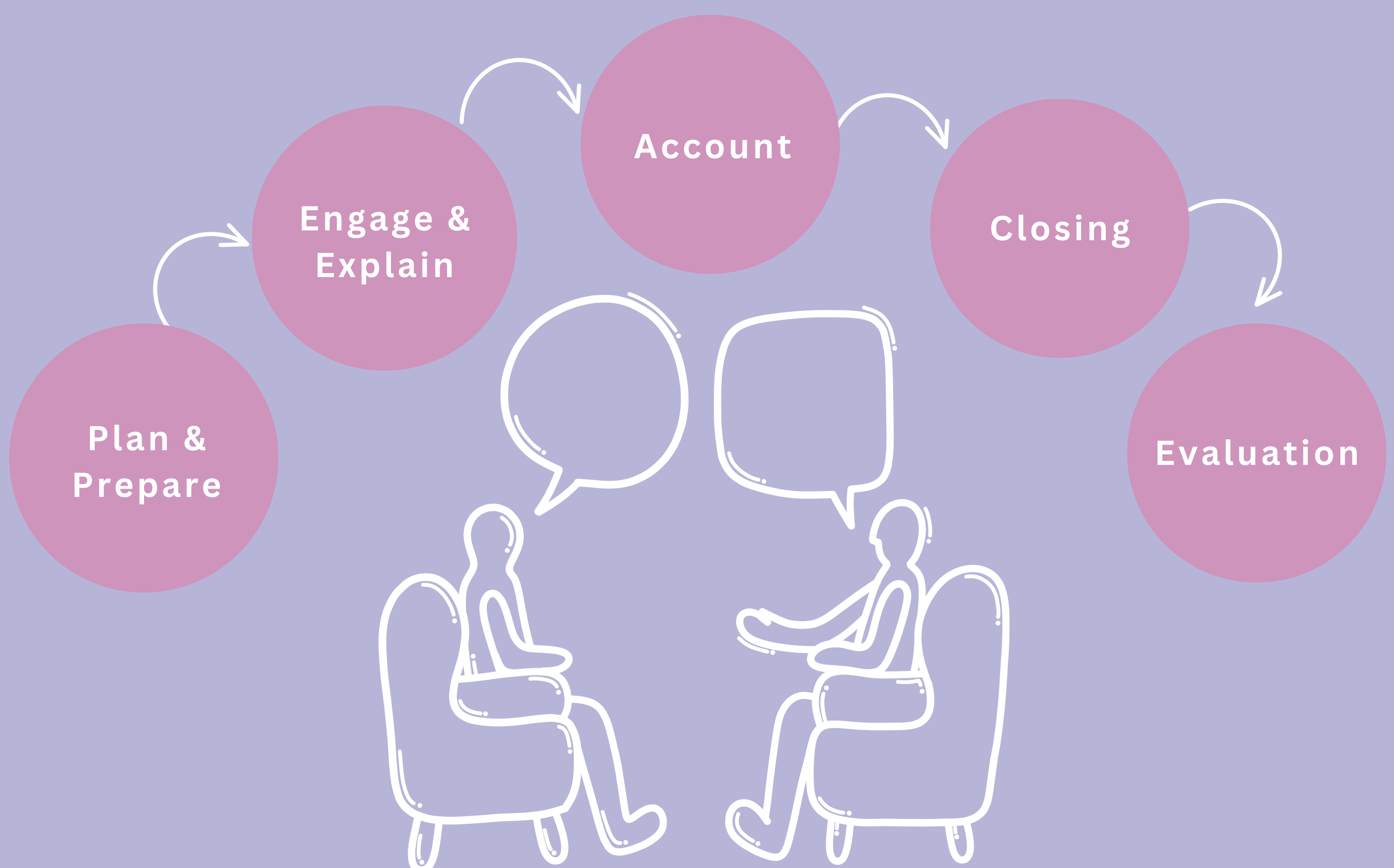


# Trauma-Informed Interviewing: Do's and Don'ts

When conducting a trauma-informed interview, you have a responsibility as the interviewer to protect as much as possible the emotional security of everyone involved. Following the PEACE model of interviewing, this factsheet takes you through specific Do's and Don'ts of trauma-informed interviewing.



# Plan & Prepare

- Identify interview objectives
- Find information about the interviewee
- Make logistical arrangements
- Map out the interview route
- Prepare psychologically

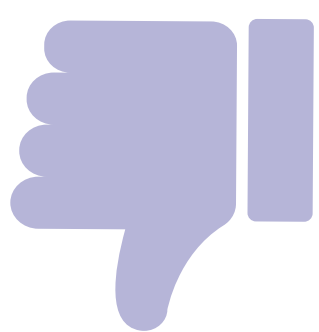
## DO:

- Clearly define the interview objectives alongside the objectives of the larger mission
- Consider and accommodate for how the interviewee's personal characteristics (e.g., age, gender, religion, culture, languages spoken, disabilities, mental health status) may influence the interview
- Map referrals
- Develop an interview roadmap that outlines the topics to be discussed, opening questions, and possible follow-up questions
- Ensure the interpreter is fully prepared to contribute verbatim, first-person translation to the interview
- Assess your own psychological readiness to conduct the interview, taking into account the nature of the investigation



## DON'T:

- Interview without a clear purpose
- Ignore diverse voices
- Interview someone who has already been interviewed by other monitoring missions
- Forget to assess potential conflicts of interest within the interviewing team
- Prepare a rigid, inflexible interview roadmap with many closed questions
- Conduct an interview when you are vulnerable



# Engage & Explain

- Engage the interviewee in conversation
- Build a positive rapport with the interviewee
- Explain the ground rules of the interview
- Explain how information gathered during the interview will be used
- Give control of the interview to the interviewee



## DO:

- Introduce yourself by name and greet the interviewee by name
- Treat the interviewee as an individual with a unique set of needs, as opposed to just another witness
- Ask neutral questions not related to the interview topics that can be answered casually, to engage and build trust with the interviewee
- When explaining the interview process, ask the interviewee questions and engage them in a discussion
- Explain in detail how the information gathered at the interview will be used and who has access to it; making sure you respect confidentiality and privacy considerations
- Ask the interviewee to explain the interview process, so you can be sure they have truly understood the interview explanation and are giving informed consent
- Acknowledge the potentially difficult nature of the interview topics, and ensure that the interviewee understands that they have control over the interview
- Make sure the interviewee can understand and is comfortable with the interpreter before proceeding
- Discuss different options for recording the interview



## DON'T:

- Use very formal language or a very formal approach
- Move straight into the interview explanation without engaging with them personally
- Ask only closed questions
- Monopolise the conversation
- Read or recite the interview explanation from a script or in a rote manner
- Ask the interviewee if they understood the interview explanation without exploring their level of understanding
- Move ahead with the interview before establishing rapport
- Move ahead with the interview without the interviewee's full consent
- Assume that the interviewee is always fine with you recording the interview

# Account

- Obtain an uninterrupted narrative account of a specific topic
- Probe for more detail as needed
- Clarify details as needed
- Challenge only if necessary

## DO:

- Allow the interviewee to decide which topic to start with (if there are multiple topics to be discussed)
- Open each topic with a narrative question that encourages the interviewee to speak freely about their experience
- Allow the interviewee to share their experience uninterrupted as they recall it
- Use active listening skills
- Adjust the sequence of questioning to the interviewee as they share
- If it is necessary to probe for more information, use open questions (Tell, Explain, Describe)
- Move to closed questions (Who, What, Where, When, How) after exhausting the open questions
- Be sensitive to the interviewee's experience and recognize their memory may be impacted by trauma
- Use sensory-based questions to help interviewees who may be struggling to remember certain details
- Frame questions in a way that reflects the experience of trauma, e.g., "What can you remember about what happened?" instead of "What happened?"
- Accept that the interviewee may not be able to provide all of the information you are hoping for



## DON'T:

- Impose control on the interviewee
- Start with narrow or closed questions
- Direct the interviewee to recount specific details or memories before they have finished their narrative
- Insist that the interviewee recall their experience in chronological order
- Insist on details or information that the interviewee cannot recall
- Insist on details or information that is not relevant to your investigation
- Interrupt the interviewee
- Move too quickly into closed questions
- Expect the interviewee to recall specific details about traumatic events they have not recovered from
- Push the interviewee to relive the experience in order to get details about it
- Ask questions that in any way imply blame or disbelief, e.g., "Why did you go there alone?"



- Review the information that has been shared
- Assess the interviewee's need for further support
- Make sure you still have the interviewee's consent
- Explain next steps

# Closing

## DO:

- Indicate that the interview is coming to a close
- Briefly summarize what the interviewee has said, using their words
- Allow the interviewee to correct mistakes or misunderstandings
- Help the interviewee to re-balance their emotions
- Check whether the interviewee would like further support and make a referral as appropriate (with their consent)
- Answer any questions the interviewee has
- Revisit the interviewee's consent, and discuss whether they are still comfortable with their information being used
- Remind the interviewee of what will happen next
- Provide the interviewee with a way to contact your organization in the future
- Debrief with the interpreter following the interview to assess their state of mind

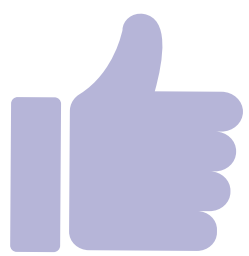
## DON'T:

- Abruptly end the interview
- Disagree with the interviewee about the interview record
- Ignore the emotional state of the interviewee
- Assume or insist that the interviewee needs psychosocial or other support
- Leave the interview without providing details on the next steps and your contact details



# Evaluation

- Evaluate the interview against the interview objectives
- Evaluate your performance as an interviewer



## DO:

- Compare the information gathered during the interview with your objectives
- Use every interview as an opportunity to improve your skills as an interviewer
- Plan for a post-interview debrief with the other interviewers (if any) and the interpreter (if any)
- Ask yourself the following questions:
  - What did you do well?
  - What could you have done better?
  - What areas can you develop?
  - How can I acquire these skills?

## DON'T:

- Assume that your interviewing skills need no improvement
- Overwhelm yourself with self-criticism
- Rely on your interviewee to provide an evaluation of your performance

