

Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management Institute

Advanced Interview Skills

When conducting an interview, the central goal is to obtain accurate and credible information in order to decide how to proceed. This applies in counseling intakes to determine a diagnosis, law enforcement and campus safety interviews needed to process a crime, threat assessment and suicide assessment interviews conducted by BIT and CARE teams, and any similar interviewing circumstance.

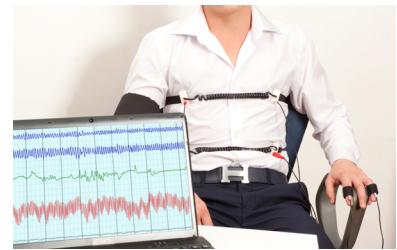
Some advanced interviewing and assessment concepts are included here in summary.

- It is important to assess and strengthen the bridge of connection between you and the person you are interviewing. Image there is a bridge between you and the person you are talking with. Is this bridge weak, falling apart and full of loose boards and gaps? Or is the bridge strong and built on a firm foundation with sturdy handrails. The bridge is a metaphor for the commonalities you share with the person you are interviewing. People will share information more openly when they see a similarity between you and them. Look for ways to strengthen these connections through building rapport, active listening, sharing, and looking for common connections.
- Genuineness and authenticity go a long way in making the person you are interviewing or assessing feel more comfortable sharing information with you. When the person you are talking with sees you as distant, having a hidden agenda or avoiding the “elephant in the room,” they are less likely to feel comfortable sharing with you.
- The famous comedian Andy Kaufman used to do this bit on his TV show where he would host a talk show. Like many talk show hosts of the time, he raised his desk higher than the person he was talking with to create a sense of authority and respect. Unlike many talk show hosts at the time, Andy’s desk was a good 10 feet higher than the people he talked with. Think about the perspective and worldview of the person who you are interviewing. How do they see your position and how does this differential impact their willingness to share openly and freely with you during the conversation?
- In the world of hostage negotiation, they teach about the dual concepts of hooks and barbs. Hooks draw us closer to the other person while barbs are things that create distance and reduce connection. We want to find commonalities and potential hooks and avoid topics that cause an intense emotional response and reduce rapport. If we must ask difficult emotional questions during an interview, such as exploring the nature of sexual contact or personal questions about suicidal thoughts, we should do so only after establishing hooks and connections with the person and have a sufficient hold so they will remain in connection with us during the difficult questioning.
- Jack Schafer’s book *The Like Switch*, talks about his experience interviewing and working in law enforcement. In the book, he introduces the concept of friend and foe signals, using the example of a firefly’s glow to make his point. Friend signals include concepts such as smiling, head tilting, head nodding and eyebrow flash. Foe signals include concepts such as scowling/furrowed brow, not listening, rubbing temples and eye rolling.

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- While the interview itself is important, let's not forgot other concepts that occur outside of the interview in the person's life that provide context to the behavior we may be observing. This may include outside frustrations, fears, room temperature, time pressures and the like.
- When asking interview and assessment questions, remember to explore social, family and community interactions that may provide insight into your direct conversation with the person.
- While it would be wonderful if there was a simple device or approach that could tell if someone is lying, being less than credible or evading accurate answers, approaches such as attending to micro-expressions, verbal assessment and physical measurement (heartrate, blood pressure, breathing rate or galvanic skin response) have been shown to either have no better efficacy than guessing the outcome of a coin flip or are too costly and intrusive to be used practically in our settings.
- What does work is attending to the motivations for why someone may not want to share information with you. This is often referred to as sharing high-stakes information and people are cautious to share this because they are concerned about a negative outcome for themselves, their family, their image, or resources. We can address this by understanding that the person we are interviewing is less interested in lying to us and more interested in managing our impressions of how they are seen. Think about a job interview where a potential employer asks, "What are some of your weaknesses?" Most of us can relate to showing caution here. Telling an employer you drink too much, lack focus and commitment at work and like telling inappropriate political, racial and religious jokes to co-workers will likely result in you not getting the job.
- People are hesitant to share information that may cause harm to them, their friends and family or impact their school or work status. When possible, assure them that sharing information openly and truthfully with you won't lead you to jump to conclusions or make a rash decision. This will help them feel more comfortable sharing with you.
- Conversational bridge backs are an advanced technique used to deepen rapport. They involve remembering a previously mentioned specific detail that shows them you are paying attention and able to recall information.



Interviewing well is both a science and an art that requires practice and a commitment to continuous improvement. Here at D-Prep, we very much encourage cross-training to broaden your skill set and learn how law enforcement, Title IX, counseling, and case management approach the art and science of assessment and interviewing.