

Basic Interview Techniques



Developed by the Florida Center for Public Health Preparedness

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Training Outcome

Understand basic interview communication concepts and techniques.

- Understand the purpose of an epidemiological field interview.
- Awareness of interviewing techniques.
- Identify the ways in which bias can influence interview results.
- Understand the importance of identifying unusual occurrences.
- Awareness of appropriate cultural sensitivity, confidentiality, and ethics when interviewing.

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Epidemiological Interview Purpose

Purpose of an epidemiological interview. To elicit exposure information from the person being interviewed without bias.

Goal of most epidemiological interviews. To gather information as efficiently and effectively as possible.

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Interviewing Techniques

Communication is the key to effective interviewing.

Two kinds of communication:

- Nonverbal
- Verbal

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Nonverbal Communication

Definition - Any communication that is not verbal or spoken.

- 65 to 85 percent of the meaning of a message comes from the nonverbal component.
- People believe the nonverbal message more than the verbal message.
- During an interview, people spend the first three to five minutes "reading" the other person's nonverbal communication.

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Nonverbal Communication

- Eye contact
- Facial expressions
- Posture
- Personal space and distance

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Nonverbal Communication is . . .

Eye Contact
It is important to maintain eye contact when communicating with interviewees.



Key Elements:

- Look at someone when you ask a question.
- Avoid eye contact when you do not want to be interrupted.
- Use the 60/40 rule.
- Eye contact over 3 seconds without verbal communication is considered staring.
- Pay attention to cultural rules or norms.

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Nonverbal Communication is . . .

Facial Expressions
A skilled interviewer will also be mindful of the facial expressions they display.




Key Elements:

- Adopt a "neutral" or non-judgmental expression when listening to emotional statements.
- Do not express surprise, shock, disdain, disapproval, or disagreement.
- Avoid exaggerated facial expressions.

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Nonverbal Communication is . . .

Posture
It is important that the interviewer maintain an "interested" or open posture during the interview process.



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Nonverbal Communication is . . .

Posture (continued)

Key Elements:

- Orient your body towards the interviewee.
- Do not cross your arms or legs.
- Lean slightly forward to appear "interested" and elicit information.
- Avoid placing clipboards, papers, books, bags, etc. between yourself and the interviewee.
- Maintain a sitting or standing position that is not higher or lower than the interviewee.

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Nonverbal Communication is . . .

Posture (continued)

- Maintain open body posture during the first 3-5 minutes.
- Continually check your posture.
- Monitor interviewee's body posture.
- Open body posture opens up the conversation



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Nonverbal Communication is . . .

Personal Space and Distance

The physical distance between the interviewer and interviewee strongly influences the communication, and is culture- and gender-specific.

Key Elements:

- 18 inches to 4 feet is considered most effective across cultures and gender.
- Touching such as pats on the back, arm, or leg can "violate" culture and gender barriers.

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Closed Nonverbal Communication

Eye Contact: Avoid eye contact completely or “stare” at the interviewee.

Facial Expressions: Adopt a “stone” face or over exaggerate your facial expressions.

Posture: Turn your body away from the interviewee, cross your arms and legs, put objects between you and the interviewee, lean back.

Personal Space and Distance: Sit or stand either too far or too close.

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Open Nonverbal Communication

Eye Contact: Use the 60/40 rule – establish eye contact with the interviewee 60% of the time. The other 40% of the time you will be asking the interviewee questions.

Facial Expressions: Use a “neutral” facial expression or mirror your partner’s expressions.

Posture: Orient your shoulders towards the interviewee, do not cross your arms and legs, remove objects from between you and the interviewee, and lean slightly forward.

Personal Space and Distance: Sit or stand 18 inches to 4 feet away from the interviewee.

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Verbal Communication

Definition - The content or what is said, as well as your voice or how it is said. It communicates feelings and attitudes.

- Content or “what is said.”
- Voice or “how it is said.”

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Verbal Communication is . . .

Content or "What is said"

The way the content is conveyed impacts what the interviewee will hear.

Content is more than the actual words.



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Content or "What is said"

Key Elements:

- **Brevity:** Communications should be short, simple, and to the point.
- **Comprehension:** The comprehension level must be adjusted for the specific interviewee. Avoid the use of jargon and acronyms.

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Content or "What is said"

Key Elements: (continued)

- **Repetition:** During the interview process, it may be necessary to repeat questions or information.
- **Organization:** Communication content should be well organized in a sequential manner. The interview will have a "structure" to it (introduction, body, and conclusion).

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Organization of an Interview

Introduction:

- Your name, title, and organization
- Purpose of the interview
- How information from the interview will be used
- Confidentiality of information
- W.I.I.F.M. – What's In It For Me
- Explain you will be taking notes

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Organization of an Interview (continued)

Body:

- Interview questionnaire or worksheet
- Repeat any of the introduction elements as often as necessary during the interview

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Organization of an Interview (continued)

Conclusion:

- Your name, title, and organization
- Purpose of the interview
- How information from the interview will be used
- Confidentiality of information
- W.I.I.F.M. – What's In It For Me
- Possible follow-up interview

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Verbal Communication is . . .

Voice or "How it is said"

The voice communicates in ways that have nothing to do with the actual words that are being said.



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Voice or "How It is Said"

Key Elements:

- **Tone of Voice:** A skilled interviewer will be mindful of their vocal tone (not being judgmental or condescending).
- **Volume:** The loudness or softness of speech will be adjusted based on the needs of the specific interviewee and the environmental conditions.

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Voice or "How It is Said" (continued)

Key Elements:

- **Speed:** Speech should be paced in a manner so it is clear and can be understood by the specific interviewee.
- **Inflection:** Emphasis should be given to certain key words or phrases to ensure understanding and not change the meaning of a statement.

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Nonverbal and Verbal Communication

- Nonverbal and verbal communication should compliment each other.
- Pay attention to both verbal and nonverbal communication.
- Monitor the verbal and nonverbal communication of the interviewee.

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Interviewing Techniques

- **Ask Open-Ended Questions.**
- **Use Probing.**



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Interviewing Techniques

Ask Open-Ended Questions.

Definition - Questions that require more than a single word answer to encourage conversation.

- Move beyond simple "Yes" or "No" responses.
- Allow the interviewee to provide more detailed answers.
- Give the perception there is no "right" or "wrong" answer.

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Types of Questions

Open-Ended Questions	Closed-Ended Questions
"What brings you to the clinic today?"	"Are you here for a flu shot today?"
"What kinds of meats have you recently eaten?"	"You haven't eaten any uncooked meat, have you?"
"What symptoms are members of your family experiencing?"	"No one else in your family is sick, are they?"
"What symptoms do you have?"	"Do you have a headache?"

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Sample Open-Ended Questions

- "Tell me about. . ."
- "Start at the beginning and tell me about. . ."
- "What specifically is going on?"
- "Could you describe how you are feeling?"
- "What changes in your health have you noticed?"

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Interviewing Techniques (continued)

Use Probing.
Definition – A questioning technique which asks more specific questions about previously stated information.

- Probing is useful when the interviewee's answer is not clear, or when the interviewee has not understood the question.
- Probing only asks about previously stated information. It does not introduce a new topic or new line of questioning.
- Probing is important because it allows the interviewer to obtain more information without influencing the response.

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Probing Techniques

Elaborate: "Tell me a little more about that," or "you started to say something about _____, is there anything else?"

Exemplify: "Can you give me an example of that?"

Explain: "I am not sure if I got all of that, can you explain it one more time?"

Specify: When a respondent says something that requires more information, "Please be more specific about _____."

Restate: Repeat part or all of the interviewee's response in such a way to encourage elaboration or explanation. It allows interviewee to clarify their ideas and listen to what they just said in a way that is non-evaluative.

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Bias and how it influences interview results

Interview Bias

Definition - The difference that occurs from one interview to another in soliciting, recording, or interpreting information during face-to-face or telephone interviews.



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Interview Bias

- Interviews are subjective, no matter how many objective questions are introduced or how hard the interviewer attempts to maintain objectivity.
- Interviewers are human, and carry with them some assumptions about different types of people.
- Interviewers should try to conduct each interview the same while working to minimize the effects of interview bias.

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Interview Bias comes from . . .

There are two common types of interview bias:

- Environment
- Past experiences



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Interview Bias comes from . . .

The Environment

The physical setting where the interview occurs can impact the success of the interview.




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Bias from the Environment

Key Elements

- Time
- Distractions
- Physical Arrangement




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Bias from the Environment (continued)

Time: Consider the amount of time required to effectively gather the information needed, as well as, the time of day.

Strategy:

- Know how much time the interview will take.
- Schedule the interview when the interviewee can focus on the questions.




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Bias from the Environment (continued)

Distractions: Noise, lighting, temperature, furniture, etc. all influence the interview.

Strategy:

- Control those distractions you can.
- Acknowledge those distractions you can't control.



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Bias from the Environment (continued)

Physical Arrangement:

The arrangement of desk and chairs can impact perceptions of power and dominance.



Strategy:

- Sitting side-by-side or at the corners of a desk communicate a more "equal" power level.
- Avoid sitting directly across a desk or table from the interviewee.

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Interview Bias comes from . . .

Past Experiences

The interviewee's past experiences in both interview situations and with medical staff impacts how well they may listen or respond.

Strategy:

Be aware that some resistance or lack of responsiveness by the interviewee may be due to their own past experience.



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Bias from Past Experiences

Past Experiences

The interviewer's past experiences can influence the verbal and nonverbal components of the epidemiological interview.



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Bias from Past Experiences (continued)

Key Elements of the Interviewer's Past Experiences

- Stereotyping
- First impressions
- Interviewee "noise"
- Nonverbal bias



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Bias from Past Experiences (continued)

Stereotyping.

Be conscious of your opinions about how people of a given gender, religion, race, appearance think, act, or respond.

Strategy:

- Focus on the interview sheet and the need for information.
- Do a quick nonverbal check.



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Bias from Past Experiences (continued)

First impressions. It is only natural that first impressions influence our communication with others. Avoid making a snap judgment, whether positive or negative, based on a first impression.

Strategy:

- Focus on maintaining an open body posture.
- Avoid standing or sitting higher than the interviewee.



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Bias from Past Experiences (continued)

Interview noise. Some interviewees want to appear favorable or positive during the interview. They may present information in a way that casts them in a favorable light and/or say things they think the interviewer wants to hear.

Strategy:

- Be sure to ask for examples or specifics.
- Focus on maintaining non-judgmental expressions and responses.



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Bias from Past Experiences (continued)

Nonverbal bias. Undue emphasis might be placed on interviewee nonverbal cues that have nothing to do with the interview (such as loudness or softness of voice, or the type of handshake given).

Strategy:

- Be aware of your body language and nonverbal cues.
- Make sure your nonverbal communication is as neutral and open as possible.



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Communication Techniques to Minimize Bias

Listen actively.

Maintain eye contact, orient your body posture towards the person, lean forward slightly, and nod your head or provide verbal cues that you are listening (example: "Uh, huh;" "Yes, I see").

Probe for more information.

When answers are vague or incomplete, use the probing techniques described earlier.

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Communication Techniques to Minimize Bias (continued)

Repeat questions.

Sometimes people can not hear well or do not hear the question the first time it is asked. Repeat the question when someone provides incomplete or "off-target" answers.

Paraphrase.

Restate the answer in different words and check for understanding. Paraphrasing invites the person to clarify and elaborate on a previous answer.

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Communication Techniques to Minimize Bias (continued)

Use silence.

Sometimes not talking is the best way to get information or clarification.

A pause of up to ten seconds invites the interviewee to continue talking. Use silence with intermittent eye contact as appropriate.



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Identifying Unusual Occurrences

Key Elements:

Be ALERT!
Read over fact sheets so you'll be aware of modes of transmission.



Example: If you are investigating encephalitis, it is important to know the disease can be transmitted by mosquitoes, and standing bodies of water contribute to the breeding of mosquitoes.

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Identifying Unusual Occurrences (continued)

Strategies:

1. Face-to-face clues
2. Environment clues
3. People clues



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Identifying Unusual Occurrences Strategies

1. Face-to-face clues. Look at the person you are interviewing, what clues do you see?

- Many clues about the disease being investigated can be observed from a face-to-face interview.
- Ask interviewee to demonstrate a protocol or behavior.
- Observations during the interview need to be noted.

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Identifying Unusual Occurrences Strategies (continued)

2. Environmental clues. Consider all environmental clues.

- **Water resources.** From where does the water supply originate?
- **Food resources.** How is food stored?
- **Animal resources.** What types of animals are living in proximity?
- **Exposures.** What is the interviewee's occupation?

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Identifying Unusual Occurrences Strategies (continued)


3. People clues. Be sure to consider what interactions the person being interviewed has had.

- Have they traveled recently?
- Are there any pieces of information they give that are contradictory?

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http://www.doh.state.fl.us/Environment/community/foodsurveillance/contact_docs/Epidemiologist_regions.pdf

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Cultural Sensitivity, Confidentiality, and Ethics When Interviewing

The Council on Linkages between Academia and Public Health Practice developed a list of core competencies for public health professionals. Among these are Cultural Sensitivity and Cultural Competency.



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Cultural Competency

In order to interview effectively, it is important to practice cultural competence by responding specifically and sensitively to various cultural and diverse groups.



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Cultural Competency Quick Tips

- **Slow down.** When we speak quickly, we often don't produce all the sounds that help a listener identify a word.
- **Pay attention to your voice.** Avoid a monotone pattern, and remember that louder does not help.



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Cultural Competency Quick Tips (continued)

- **Less is better.**
Choose short words and use short sentences.
- **Rephrase and restate.**
If one way of saying something is not being understood, try using different words.



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Cultural Competency Quick Tips (continued)

- **When in doubt, write it out.**
Some people understand written instructions, information, and/or questions better than spoken ones.
- **Draw a picture.**
A picture is often worth a million words.



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Cultural Competency Quick Tips (continued)

- **Avoid acronyms and jargon.**
Use the most common words with most common meanings.
- **Repeat and summarize.**
If a question is critical or information is vital, repeat it at least 3 times during the course of the interview. Summarize often to assure understanding.



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Cultural Competency Quick Tips (continued)

- **Get help.**
When necessary, call someone else to help.
- **Check the message.**
ALWAYS have the listener re-tell the complete message to check for accurate understanding.



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Ensuring Confidentiality

- Surveys and interviews can be intrusive even when conducted for public health safety.
- Questions about attitudes, beliefs, interests, values, behaviors and background data can be seen as personal and possibly controversial.
- Survey and interview professionals must protect each participant's well-being to prevent harm and to get accurate information.

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Ensuring Confidentiality (continued)

HIPAA: The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) was signed into law on August 21, 1996.

The regulations protect medical records and other individually identifiable health information, whether it is on paper, in computers or communicated orally (United States Department of Health and Human Resources, 2003, <http://www.hhs.gov/news/facts/privacy.html>).

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Ensuring Confidentiality (continued)

Interviewer's Responsibility.

The interviewer has an affirmative responsibility not to discuss or disclose any information relating to the interview to persons or parties who are not authorized to be privy to such information.

During the Interview. Tell the interviewee information exchanged during the interview will be treated with respect, and that standards of confidentiality will be maintained.

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Ensuring Interview Ethics

The ethical principles which guide data gathering are rooted in two inalienable human rights: free speech and privacy.

Interview participants have the right to:

- Speak freely, without constraint, even if others may not like what they say.
- Remain silent.
- If they speak, to set limits on the personal information they divulge, and have what they say as individuals remain confidential (unless they consent to disclosure).

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Interview Strategies Review

Communicate at the interviewee's level of understanding.

- Avoid technical terms, jargon, or words deemed beyond the comprehension of interviewees.
- Clearly explain necessary medical and technical terms and concepts.



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Interview Strategies Review (continued)

Give factual information.

- Demonstrate an accurate knowledge of disease.
- Correct interviewee's misconceptions.
- Provide disease information.
- Avoid extraneous information.



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Interview Strategies Review (continued)

Use appropriate nonverbal communication.

- Maintain eye contact.
- Minimize physical barriers.
- Lean towards the interviewee.
- Nonverbal communication complements the verbal communication.



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Basic Interview Techniques Summary

In this training program, you learned to:

Understand interview communication concepts and techniques.

- Understand the purpose of an epidemiological field interview.
- Awareness of interviewing techniques.
- Identify the ways in which bias can influence interview results.
- Understand the importance of identifying unusual occurrences.
- Awareness of appropriate cultural sensitivity, confidentiality, and ethics when interviewing.

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