

**Investigation and Interviewing**  
**Techniques For Search and Rescue Responders**  
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## **Investigation and Interviewing Techniques For Search and Rescue Responders**

### **Overview:**

The best way to find a missing person in the wilderness or urban environment is not to send out an armada of search teams and personnel hoping to find clues, but to place heavy emphasis on the initial investigation and then prepare a search plan that focuses on places the subject would likely be found. Information on where to look can best be obtained from good investigation. Build a profile of the missing subject in your mind as if he or she is someone you already know. Get to know whom their family, friends, business associates or schoolmates are in order to understand the missing subject. That way you can better plan what the missing subject will do in a particular situation. You may find that the initial call that came in as a possible child abduction is determined later, through investigation, to be a runaway or a case of the child forgetting to call home.

Investigation as used in a search context, is the continual process of gathering information about the missing subject and the circumstances under which he or she is missing, including interviewing persons who have pertinent knowledge of the subject. This process commences with the first report of the missing subject and is completed at the end of the search operation. It includes the interview with the subject after he or she is found, to determine what happened.

Besides usefulness in search planning, investigation gathers historical and statistical information, which can be useful in future, searches for similar subjects. The investigation report should include post-search information on the effectiveness of the resources utilized in locating the missing subject. The complete report of the investigation and the management of the search incident can later be incorporated into a training exercise.

### **Interview and Interrogation**

It is helpful to understand the difference between interview and interrogation. Law enforcement agencies are tasked with investigating incidents to determine whether crimes have been committed, and, if they have, to arrest the perpetrators. Established rules and techniques have been developed to complete these tasks, which include interview and interrogation. For Law Enforcement these are defined as:

Interview – A structured non-accusatory process to obtain useful information from someone who may or may not have knowledge of events or circumstances of the incident. Specific techniques may be used to aid recall or elicit behavior useful in determining the veracity or involvement of the interviewee. It should be noted that the interviewee might not have any knowledge of the crime or the perpetrators. Interviews may also evoke lies and themes to use against the uncooperative. In some instances there will come a point in an interview where the interviewee may become a suspect of a crime. The interview will then become an interrogation.

Interrogation – A structured accusatory process during which a suspect to a crime is confronted in a confident manner and then convinced their best decision would be to admit responsibility. The techniques used in obtaining useful information are designed to apply pressure to, or intentionally trip up, the subject.

In law enforcement interview and interrogation, there are laws and codes to protect the interviewee and define when a subject is considered free to walk away from the questioning at any time, if they are just being detained or in a custodial environment. There may be a need to read the subject their Miranda rights. An attorney may need to be present before any questioning occurs.

In law enforcement interviews and interrogations a great deal of the time is spent preparing for the actual session. Questions are carefully crafted and well thought out to induce a specific response. During the sessions the first hours are devoted to general conversation, which the investigator uses to develop a rapport with the subject and identify behavioral changes to the change in topics.

In lost or missing person's incidents involving law enforcement and/or search and rescue personnel there is a more specific definition:

Search Interview – A structured but informal questioning process to obtain useful information from someone who has first hand and/or pertinent knowledge of the missing subject. The tone of the interview is such that there is no condoning or condemning the action of the missing subject, the interviewee or the circumstances surrounding the subject's disappearance. Questions are structured to aid the interviewee in recalling specific details and events leading up to the disappearance of the missing subject. The information gathered is used to develop a subject profile, collect lists of other persons to interview and aid in the planning of where to look for the missing subject.

In this type of missing person interview, the questions are nearly the same in all types of searches and subjects. A rapport is developed almost immediately because of the common goal of the interviewer and interviewee, to find the missing subject and bring them home safely. Note in most circumstances the interviewee is free to walk away from the questioning at anytime but is encourage to stay and help.

Some techniques used in search interviewing and investigations are designed to solicit full and accurate information about the missing subject. Some questions may even be designed to trip up the interviewee so the answers can be corroborated with other interviews, in order to find out who has the most credible information.

### **Whom to Interview**

Obviously the person (or persons) who reported the subject missing is the best place to start. Anyone with first hand knowledge or potentially important knowledge of the

subject can give the investigator the best information to help develop the subject profile. A partial list of potential interviewees would be:

- Parents
- Spouses
- Children
- Siblings
- Other relatives
- Close friends
- Co-workers
- School teachers
- School administration, counselor, nurse
- Classmates
- Family physician
- Mental health professional
- Subject's caregiver
- Other health or welfare worker (the person who feeds the Alzheimer patient)
- Business associates
- Civic group members the subject belongs to
- Local law enforcement personnel familiar with the missing subject and/or familiar with the area
- Person or persons who last saw the subject
- Eyewitnesses to the incident
- People who have seen the subject since he or she was missing

### **Information to Obtain:**

Initial reports of missing subjects will start the information gathering. The 911 operator will establish the nature of the emergency with the standard list of questions. These are based around the classic precursor to most questions: who, what, where, when, why and how.

If the nature of the emergency is established to be a missing person then these questions are asked:

- Name of subject (or subjects)
- Physical characteristics
- Clothing
- Mental, emotional and physical condition
- How long the individual has been missing
- The location where the missing person was last seen
- Any suspicious, special or anomalous circumstances known about the event.
- Availability and mode of transportation
- Suspect information if possible abduction.
- Callback telephone number for the reporting party.

This information is then forwarded to a “beat” or duty officer by the dispatcher. The officer is dispatched to investigate the missing person incident and prepare a report. A suggested checklist of items to note during this initial investigation for an Officer Response to Missing Person Report would include:

- Establish the physical point last seen (PLS) of the missing person and how long the person has been missing.
- Determine who last saw the missing person and have that person available for further interview.
- Get a detailed physical description of the missing person, including clothing and any information about their footwear.
- Obtain a recent photograph of the missing subject.
- If the missing person is a child or elderly person, and the PLS is a home, check the interior and exterior of the residence yourself, paying particular attention to under beds, in closets or cabinets, etc. Do this even if family members assure you the home has already been checked
- Obtain information from family members and/or friends who may have conducted any searches in the area. Have anyone who has been in the area of the PLS remain until the Search and Rescue Team arrives so their tracks can be recorded.
- Have dispatch contact local hospitals, the jail, and local shelters to determine if the missing person is in any of those facilities.
- Find out if the missing person has ever been missing in the past and under what circumstances.
- Locate and secure any clothing, bedding, etc. that belongs to the missing person that can be used as a scent article for trailing dogs. Keep others away from any such material until the arrival of the Search and Rescue Team. (Note that some trailing dog handlers may want to collect these scent articles themselves)
- Determine what the missing person may have had with them such as wallet, identification, papers, food, money, cigarettes, camping gear, etc.
- Get a list of addresses and phone numbers of any friends or relatives.
- Try to get information on the mental state of the missing person.
- If the missing person is a child, find out what school they go to and the name of their teacher and school administrator
- If the missing person is an adult find out the name, address, and phone number of the employer or caregiver.
- Complete the standard missing person form as department procedure manual and protocol dictate.

This initial investigation by the responding officer generally leads to a more in-depth and expanded investigation by trained investigators/interviewers. Besides confirming such basic information as name, age, sex, clothing description, shoe size and point last seen, the interview should look at incident variables. The following list represents some examples:

1. The subject's mobility and ability to travel: Missing subjects can move in a straight line in an urban environment and if unrestrained or blocked they could travel out of the local area, thus expanding the search area in a very short period of time. This could lead to a complete rethinking of where and how to search for the subject.

Example Questions:

- Can they walk, ride, hitchhike or drive?
- Do they have access to a vehicle, bicycle, horse, boat, or airplane?
- Do they have knowledge and access to public transportation, rapid transit, trains, buses or taxis?

2. Their ability to survive: Survival in any urban environment is not as critical as in the wilderness, but some subjects may be unable to recognize or utilize the facilities, services or resources, that are obvious to the average person to maintain life (i.e. food or shelter). They may be unwilling, afraid, or too independent to ask for help. These attitudes could affect their survival chances, and increase the urgency of the search effort.

Example Questions:

- Do they have any money with them?
- Do they have a pager or cell phone?
- Do they know how to call home?
- Are they familiar with their surroundings?
- Do they live in the area?

3. Their mind set and intent: Had the missing subject an idea of what they were doing, where they are going and what they intended to do when they got there? Is the missing Alzheimer's patient trying to reach a former residence? Is the missing person contemplating suicide and do they have the means to carry out their plan?

Example Questions:

- Was the subject just going for a walk?
- Are they trying to find something or someone?
- Did they leave a note?
- Do they have a diary?

4. Their ability or tendency to respond: The tendency of the subject to respond to attraction techniques, such as calling their name, may be very normal when they are in a normal situation or state of mind. However, circumstances in the urban environment or in their life may preclude them from doing so. Persons that do not want to be found (i.e. runaways, despondents, etc.), may avoid searchers or not respond.

Example Questions:

- Was the missing child taught not to respond to strangers unless they know the secret password? Is there a password established?
  - Did they do something that would make them feel guilty? Will they avoid responding because they are afraid of punishment?
  - For adults, is there a mental, physical or language problem that could hinder their ability to answer searchers' calls?
5. Their likes and dislikes and what attracts their attention The missing subject may have a fondness for a specific activity, a place to “hang out”, a special pet or animal that they enjoy being around. The converse to this would be: What would cause the subject to turn away, shun or hide, if they were exposed to an unpleasant activity, crowded environment or specific type of person or thing?
- Do they like to play video games at the local fast food store?
  - Do crowds bother them?
  - Do they prefer solitude?
  - Do they like animals?
  - Are they afraid of someone in a uniform?
6. Their past and recent behavior and life history: Is there anything influencing them in the recent, not so recent or distant past that would account for the missing subject's behavior. Does the subject long to return to a better time or place in their life? Alzheimer patients often think they are living in the past and will try to return to an old residence. Did they just decide to go visit a friend they have not seen in a long while? Was there a pleasant or unpleasant event that just occurred?
- Is there something in their life that occurred recently or in the past that might affect their current mindset?
  - Where did they grow up? Do they return there often?
  - Who are their friends, peers, and relatives?
  - What was their life's work and where?
  - Did they just return from a trip and where did they go?

Frequently, after collecting this information from one source, a list of additional sources of information will be developed. This would include names of friends, family, teachers, relatives and clergy - all the people who know the missing subject. It could include a list of places and attractions. More information may be available from other outside agencies and jurisdictions frequented by the missing subject. Make contact and check with institutions such as hospitals, battered women shelters, homeless shelters and jails.

### **The Interviewers:**

The law enforcement agency that called for search team resources may have already completed a good background investigation and interview. Sometimes this is not the case due to the rapid development of the incident and/or the unavailability of trained personnel. Law enforcement personnel deal with formal interviews and interrogations as it relates to criminal cases on a routine basis but may not be skilled in search

interviewing. Additional information to develop search strategies needs to be obtained. If the requesting law enforcement agency does not have the resources or skills for search investigation, then the information gathering may fall to the search team managers.

The personnel assigned to interview should consist of two investigators per interview team. Prior to sitting down with the interviewee, the interviewers should determine who should ask the questions and who should be the scribe or note taker. This is to establish whom the interviewee will focus on and build a rapport. During the interview, conditions may dictate that the roles be reversed, because the interviewee may prefer to talk to the other member of the team, such as a female.

The scribe, besides taking notes, can also ask follow up or clarification questions but should not dominate the interview. The scribe should be listening carefully to the questions and answers, as well as observing the interviewee's demeanor and body language. He can also be looking around the room for clues.

When conducting the interview the interviewers need to be cognizant of their demeanor. These would include:

- First and foremost you must be a good listener. Be attentive to what the interviewee says and how they are saying it.
- Stay calm. Realize that the interviewed subjects are under a lot of stress and do not need any more pressure brought on by someone who is hyperactive, excitable or anxious.
- Be non-threatening. This may require a change of uniform or appearance. The mere fact that you have a uniform on is enough to intimidate the interviewee and make them uncomfortable and less inclined to be forthcoming with information. Law enforcement personnel may want to take off their duty belt and weapon.
- Do not be intimidating. Eye contact can be an important part of this. In casual conversations there is sporadic eye contact. Staring at someone can make him or her feel uncomfortable and less likely to be cooperative. Some cultures avoid all eye contact in conversation and consider it an insult if you casually glance at them.
- The tone of your voice and the words you use should not convey that you condone or condemn the actions of the missing or the interviewed subjects. This would include condemning anyone for his or her actions or lack of action (Example "Why did you let them do that?"). Do not treat anyone with disrespect. Do not be patronizing or condescending. It is not our place or responsibility to judge those we interview, and such attitude could lead to distrust of the interviewer's sincerity in using the information obtained to only find the subject.
- Be respectful and polite. Use "please" and "thank you". This goes a long way to build trust and rapport.
- Be reassuring and let them know what's happening. As noted, the interviewee may be under a lot of stress and may want to be somewhere else. Tell them about the number of teams that are out looking for the missing subject. Let them know that they will be notified as soon as any new information becomes available.

Stress the importance of the information being gathered in the interview will be helpful in the search effort.

- While being reassuring, it is equally important not to give false hope. Saying something like “Sure we will find him” will be tough to recant if you have to come back later and say, “We could not find him”. This could be devastating to the family of the missing loved one. Don’t lie, but do assure him or her that every effort and resource is being used to locate the missing subject.
- Do not ask leading questions, especially if you already know an answer from another source that may be contradictory. For example, don’t ask, “Is he a good boy?” The parents may say, “Yes”, whereas the boy’s teacher may describe him as a “bad boy” and a disciplinary problem).
- Be cognizant that some of the questions may be sensitive. They should be prefaced with a statement such as “I know this is a sensitive question but we need to ask if the missing subject has tried to commit suicide in the past” Besides suicide, questions about drug and alcohol abuse, sexual activity and even religious and ethnic beliefs can be sensitive. Someone may not want to give up this information for fear of tarnishing a reputation, not wanting to accept the possibility or truth or even the fear of retribution or other repercussions. Note here that you are gathering facts and each piece will help put the puzzle together. If you sense that the interviewee is uncomfortable with the question it may be stated that this information will be held in confidence and shared with only those who need to know.
- Do not rush the questioning along or interrupt a response. Wait for the full answer to the question. Some people do not process questions quickly, especially the elderly. When under stress it can take even longer. Allow time for thinking and once they have answered allow time for more thinking. Most people cannot sit silently for more than six seconds in an interview without saying something. That six-second pause can produce additional information. It may be necessary to break the questions down into smaller pieces in order for the interviewee to better understand and respond appropriately.
- Project a sense of positive urgency. You are there to help find the missing subject. The interviewee may not see the need or understand the urgency of the situation. Again, reassure them that the search effort has started and is continuing and that the information they are providing will help in the search planning on where to look.
- Above all be professional. Take your job seriously. Sit up straight; keep your feet off the furniture - all the things your mother or drill sergeant taught you.

### **The Interview Setting:**

It is important to note here that a good interview can take upwards of two hours. Therefore, the location for the interview is very important and should be someplace that is quiet, comfortable and non-distracting, to help put the interviewee at ease. It may be difficult to find a quiet spot due to the circumstances, but plan out the best location. This would include someplace where there is not a lot of foot traffic and people coming in and out. This is very distracting, can be very detrimental and can destroy the moment or the

train of thought and concentration of the interviewee. Another distraction is law enforcement personnel being around or coming in and out of the interview room as part of their job. There may be a need to find a hiding place to conduct the interview.

Another consideration for the location of the interview is whether it should be at the residence or the search site. Interviews at the residence usually work out better. It is a place they know well and feel comfortable and safe. A side benefit is that the home is a source of resource information like addresses, phone number and other potential documentation or clues.

Friends, family or loved ones may be comforting during an interview, but they can divert the interviewee's attention away from the interviewer. What is worse is that the friends, family or loved ones will answer the question and not allow the real interviewee to answer. This is especially true of divorced parents. The dominant "ex" will answer the question and may not allow the other "ex" to answer. The solution is to split them apart and have multiple interviewers.

Having food and something to drink available during a long interview may be a necessity. Be aware that beverages containing caffeine or alcohol should be discouraged as they can affect judgment and cloud responses to questions. Smoking can also be a problem for both the interviewee and interviewer. The need to have a smoke, if not satisfied, may cause the subject to become nervous and uncooperative. If allowed, however, smoke may fill the room and be distracting to the interviewer. The issue of smoking should be discussed with all parties prior to starting the interview. A simple adjustment of location to allow for ventilation may be all that is necessary.

The room itself should have space to sit down in comfortable chairs. This could be in the living room as well as the kitchen. The important thing is to sit down. It would be helpful to have a writing surface for note taking. The seating should be situated so that one interviewer is facing the interviewee and the note taker is slightly offset to the interviewee.

It is very helpful to have a list of questions, either standard questions as found on The Bay Area Search and Rescue Council (BASARC) web site: [http://www.basarc.org/forms/BASARCFORMS/InterviewShort\\_V.9-2000.doc](http://www.basarc.org/forms/BASARCFORMS/InterviewShort_V.9-2000.doc) and [http://www.basarc.org/forms/BASARCFORMS/InterviewLong\\_V.9-2000.doc](http://www.basarc.org/forms/BASARCFORMS/InterviewLong_V.9-2000.doc) or a special set of questions made up for the particular incident or subject. The interviewer can use these as a guide to make sure all pertinent questions are asked and to keep everyone on track. The question forms found on the web site are designed with the same questions in a long and short format. The scribe would use the list with the questions that include a place to write the answers. The second form just has the same questions with no space for answers and is just used by the interviewer.

As interviewers, pay attention to your surroundings and environment. Is it safe to be there? Are there kitchen knives or other potential aggressive weapons within arm's reach? Should the interview be conducted in a different location? Is the home well kept

or messy? Are there any visual clues to be seen that might aid in building a profile of the missing subject? Both interviewers should be making written and mental notes.

### **The Questions:**

In building a profile of the missing subject and establishing a rapport with the interviewee, start with an opening statement that begins by saying:

“We don’t know your missing father (or child), and we need to know as much as we can about them to better understand and figure out what they will do in a given or particular situation. This will also give us an idea of where to search and make the best use of our resources”.

In all questioning it is important to take advantage of tangent questions that lead off an initial basic question. For example an initial question would be: “Does the missing subject smoke” and the answer is “yes”. The tangent questions would lead to:

- What brand do they smoke?
- How many packs do they have with them?
- Why do they smoke? Is it to reduce stress?
- When do they smoke?
- How many cigarettes do they smoke a day?
- What would happen to their smoking consumption if they were under stress like being lost?
- What would happen to them physically and/or mentally if they ran out of cigarettes?

The tangent questions could go on and on, depending on the subject matter. The interviewer needs to think out of the box and take the tangent questions as far as they will go. However, be cognizant of the fact the interviewee may start to go off on their own tangents not relevant to the subject and the interviewer may have to bring them back into focus.

Be aware that the interviewee is usually under a lot of stress and may have a difficult time focusing on the questions. This will require the interviewer to paraphrase or break the questions down into manageable parts for clarity.

There may be variables in the subject’s life that could affect the outcome of the incident. Breaking the questions into groups will add control to the interview and help keep everyone focused and on track. A prepared list of questions (as seen on the BASARC web site [www.basarc.org](http://www.basarc.org)) will also aid in continuity. These questions are broken down into the following:

#### 1. Health Status

Questions similar to those taught in first aid, first responder or Emergency Medical Technician courses that use the mnemonic device **SAMPLE**

- S Are there any **Signs or Symptoms** of any illness or injury?
- A Do they have any **Allergies** to insect bites or medications we need to be aware of?
- M Are they taking any **Medications**? If so, what for and where are they? What happens if they miss their medications? What happens if they take too much of their medications?
- P Are there any **Past** medical conditions we need to be aware of? Are they under a doctor's care?
- L When was the **Last** time they had food or water?
- E Were there any **Events** leading up to their current health conditions?

## 2. Mental Status

Questions related to their past and current mental condition and what changes could occur in their condition.

- Are they happy or sad? Are they depressed, have feelings of guilty or fearful? Have they turned inward and withdrawn or more outward and friendly? What is making them this way?
- What are their likes and dislikes about people and things?
- What is their level of responsiveness? Have they been or are they disoriented to their surroundings?
- Would they give up the fight to find their way home?
- Would they become fatigued and unable to move on?
- What are their good and bad habits? Do they have and what do they use for a "security blankets"?
- Are they outgoing and friendly to kids, adults, strangers or animals?
- Things to determine for someone who is despondent and possibly suicidal both verbal and non-verbal.
  - ◆ Has their sleep been disrupted?
  - ◆ Has there been a stressful event or significant loss (actual or threatened) in their life
  - ◆ Is there a history of serious depression or mental disorder
  - ◆ Have they expressed feelings of guilt, hopelessness or depression?
  - ◆ Have they been expressing great emotional and/or physical pain or distress?
  - ◆ Have they been putting things in order like paying up insurance policies, calling old friends, giving possessions away?
  - ◆ Have they talked about planning suicide?
  - ◆ Have they attempted suicide in the past?
  - ◆ Have they shown efforts to learn about means of death or rehearse fatal acts and precautions to avoid rescue?
  - ◆ Do they have the means (i.e. gun, pills, rope) to complete their intent?

## 3. Historical Information.

Has something like this happened before? If so what happened and what were the results? Have they walked away from other care facilities before and where were they found? Is there a history of runaway?

4. Outside Influences

What are the outside influences that could hamper or change the outcome of the search? In urban areas, weather and terrain are less of a factor than in the wilderness, but can be if they are severe. More likely are those related to the density of people and buildings. The fewer people looking for the missing subject, such as what happens during night searches where residents are inside, the fewer chances of him being seen. Similarly, the more buildings/streets/houses there are, the more places that must be searched.

5. Past and Current Search Activity

Once the subject was noticed missing:

- What efforts have you (the reporting party) done to find subject? This will help determine if search areas have been missed or require additional re-searching.
- What efforts have others done to find subject? What searching is still going on? Again, this will help determine if search areas have been missed or require additional researching and who else might still be out there looking for the missing subject.

6. Time When Noticed Missing

- When did you notice them missing?
- What were you (the reporting party) doing or what activities were you engaged in prior to the time you noticed them missing? This question can be revealing because there can be a considerable difference from the time they were reported missing and the actual time they were last seen.

7. Time Since Last Seen

- When was the last time they were seen and what were they doing?
- When was the last time they had medication?
- When was the last time they had sleep and for how long?

8. Sensitive Questions

Some questions may be sensitive. So before asking you may state "The next set of questions may be sensitive, but we need to ask them to better understand the missing subjects state of mind or possible impairments. Example questions asked about adolescents:

- How are they handling puberty ("the hormones on the run")?
- What are their sex habits?
- Do they have a girl/boy friend?
- Have they ever sneaked away to see their boy/girl friend?

Some questions may be sensitive when asked about adults:

- Could they be experiencing postpartum (after birth) depression?
- Are they going through menopause and how are they handling it? Are they taking any medications?
- Have they been diagnosed or do they suspect that the subject is experiencing dementia or Alzheimer's disease?

Some questions may be sensitive when asked about people of any age:

- Could the missing subject use or have a problem with drugs or alcohol?

## 9. Final Questions

Probably the most important questions are saved until the end. They are:

- Is there anything we should know that would help us locate the missing subject?
- Where do you think they are?

Both questions at the end of an interview produce surprising results. Asking if there is anything else and then pausing will give the interviewee time to ponder and usually come up with one or two tidbits that could prove important. The response to the last question can be very accurate, as the following example illustrates:

A German couple came to visit a brother in the United States. The visiting wife went for a walk and did not come back. Law enforcement was called and a very difficult interview was conducted with the husband that was interpreted by the brother. It was found that the wife was depressed and had a heart condition. It was felt, however, that the brother was altering the questions and responses for some reason. An additional non-law enforcement interpreter was brought in and coached on the questions to be asked. The new interpreter eventually took a walk with the husband and asked the final question "Where do you think your wife is"? The response was very detailed. The husband stated that he thought his wife would walk for awhile, find a secluded spot along a road, smoke one cigarette, take all of her heart medication and lay down to die. Later that day some sightseers spotted the missing wife alive but unresponsive, just barely visible from an overlook. Upon investigation of the site a single butt of a German brand of cigarettes was found along with the empty blister pack of her heart medications.

The above story illustrates that those closest to the missing subject may have the best insight into the missing subject and what they really think has happened. At the beginning of an interview there may be many possible scenarios as to why a person is missing and the hope is that the outcome will be simple. After interviewing for a few hours, however, the interviewee may come down to reality and may even be resigned to the fact the final outcome may not be so simple. The strengthening of the rapport established over this time may help the interviewee to open up. With that realization the interviewee may be able describe, sometime in great detail, what they think happened to the missing subject.

In some situations, the interviewee's answers to the questions may seem vague or untruthful. It is wise to have a certain level of suspicion but do not let on or show it.

Asking the same question a different way later on in the interview will confirm or alleviate this suspicion. People under stress get easily confused and may give two different responses to the same question and not realize it. In an interrogation of a suspected criminal, the idea is to trip up the suspect. The early rapport building questions during an interrogation are designed to establish the interviewee's truth response mode. If, during a missing person interview, it is felt that the interviewee is being less than truthful, it may be necessary to bring in law enforcement personnel skilled in interrogation to discover the truth.

## **Additional Considerations in Interviewing**

### **Body language (The Study of Kinesics):**

Depending on the source, it can be said that anywhere from 50 to 80% of communication is non-verbal, through body language. Posture, hand gestures, eye contact, licking of the lips, and fidgeting in a chair are all examples of where to look for this non-verbal communication. How to read body language will not be covered here. There are several books and other resources on the subject. Be aware of the interviewee's body language and record what the interviewer sees. This may help later when there is a need to determine truthfulness. The interviewer's own body language, of course, should convey understanding, trust and professionalism.

### **How Long Will the Interview Last?**

A good interview can take as much as two hours, in order to be thorough and to take advantage of tangent questions. This being the case, tell the interviewee up front that this activity will take this long and that there will be frequent breaks to gather up thoughts and make use of the restroom or obtain refreshments. The first interviewee will generate lists of others to interview and each person could conceivably take another two hours. Investigation staff will need to gear up to manage more interviews and interview teams.

When is a good time to stop the interview? A good time is when you have exhausted the prepared list of questions. When sufficient crucial information has been gathered it can be transmitted to the search planners during a break. If a particularly hot item of information becomes apparent, then stop briefly and transmit the information immediately:

Example: At the start of a search for an elderly walkaway from a care home, searchers were told that the missing subject uses a cane to walk. Through the use of tangent questions during the interview of the reporting party, it was determined that if the subject lost or dropped the cane he would fall and that he did not have the upper body strength to get up. The interview was interrupted and the information transmitted to the field. Searchers were then advised that they should look for someone lying down or walking. Indeed, the missing subject was found lying down after he lost his footing and cane. His first words were "I fell and can't get up".

Inevitably, after reviewing the interview data with others, there will be more questions. Let the interviewee know that you will be back with more questions and set up a place to meet again. Have someone stay with the interviewee so they won't get away, but also to have someone to talk to and perhaps continue with an informal interview.

Lists of others to interview will be generated and each person could conceivably take another two hours. Investigation staff will need to gear up to manage more interviews and interview teams.

### **On the Use of Tape Recorders:**

Many interviewers are not able to quickly write down responses to questions and may want to use a tape recorder. Keep in mind when recording conversations - to many people a tape recorder is intimidating. Once you place it on the table the interviewee may not be as forthcoming with full or truthful responses even if you ask if it is OK to tape the interview. The alternative is to not tell the interviewee that the conversation will be recorded. This brings up other issues. The interviewers need to be aware of the laws governing recorded conversations. Many law enforcement jurisdictions allow recording as long as one party is aware of the recording or if one party is under the direction and is an agent of law enforcement (**Reference: California Penal Code Section 633 and 633.5**). Further, as noted before most interviews are lengthy and most tape recorders will not record continuously without having to stop and turn the tape over. Most recorders have an end of tape audible signal. If caught by the interviewee, the interviewer's credibility and rapport will be gone or severely diminished, which will cause irreparable damage.

### **Dealing with Parents of Missing Children:**

It goes without saying that the parent of a lost or missing child is going through a lot of emotions. Feelings of shock and horror, denial and doubt, anger and aggression, agitation and restlessness, as well as crying are just a few that are common. These emotions are directed at themselves, other family and friends as well as the interviewer. It is important for the interviewer to understand these emotions and how to deal with them. Voicing concern and understanding is important. It is very difficult to be empathetic unless the interviewer has personally experienced a lost child but a sympathetic "I understand how you feel" voice is appropriate.

Obviously, the parent under a lot of emotional stress will have a tough time focusing on the task of being interviewed. If it is noticed that they are not focused, point it out by saying something like: "I know this is difficult, but in order for us to help locate your child we need to get through these questions. Let's see if we can answer a few more and we'll take a break." As noted earlier, they will also have difficulty understanding and answering complex questions. Break the questions down if necessary.

Another problem that will arise occurs with divorces or separated parents. Accusations will be hurled from both sides in order to place blame or cause hurt. One ex-spouse may

be hiding something from the other. Do not play referee. Separate the parents into different rooms with different interviewers.

A good guideline when dealing with parents of missing children can be found in “When Your Child is Missing: A Family Survival Guide” written by Shay Bilchik, Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention, which can be found online at <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/pubs/childmissing/contents.html>

### **Document, Document, Document:**

Take notes (or use an interview form to record the conversation)! It is imperative to take good notes for several reasons. The most important is to pass on the information obtained in the interview to search management or the responsible law enforcement agency, so that they can review and evaluate it, and ultimately use it to improve the search. Another reason is to keep track of who talked to whom and when. Still another is for the legal record in case the missing subject case turns out to be a crime. Be aware that things said and documented in the interview can be used in court. This being the case the interview records should be written up as soon as possible while the information is fresh. Both the questions asked by the interviewer and the interviewee’s responses should be included in the report. Be careful not to put in subjective information such as “they seemed uneasy” that could be subject to interpretation and questioning by a lawyer

### **Post-Search Interviews:**

If the outcome of the search is positive, that is, the missing subject was found alive, then it is a good idea to conduct a post-search interview. Consider what the subject has been through. It may not be appropriate to talk to them right away due to medical or mental conditions. Try to get it first hand from the subject, however, not from a third party that could misinterpret a response.

Once a time and place has been established, try to find out:

- Where they went
- What they did
- Why they did what they did
- How they survived
- Did they see the searchers, helicopters, signals, or hear their name called?
- Was there anyone else with the subject and what happened to them?

This information can then be used to confirm how effective the search planning was done and the effectiveness of resources such as dogs or helicopter. The information gathered can also be used for statistics and future training

### **Telephone Interviews:**

It may be necessary to conduct interviews over the telephone or even a radio in some circumstances. The important thing to keep in mind is that all of the interview and investigation techniques discussed thus far apply to telephone interviews. You do however lose the ability to:

- Watch body language, that 50% of non-verbal communication.
- Show and discuss maps or diagrams to clarify information
- Obtain physical evidence or items that could be helpful in the investigation

Keeping the above in mind the interviewer needs to:

- Be a good listener.
- Be more descriptive and colorful in questioning. This will require more time. Use plain language they understand.
- Have marked-up maps faxed or, transmitted by other electronic means, or by messenger
- Slow your rate of speech. Many people subconsciously interpret speech by listening and reading lips. When the ability to read lips is gone the speech will have to be slowed down. This also means slowing down more than would be necessary due to the stress factors.
- Lower your voice pitch. Due to the design of telephones the higher frequencies are filtered out. Lowering the vocal tone will prevent this problem.
- Speak directly into the telephone transmitter to prevent muffled and unintelligible speech
- Use their name a lot. This conveys to them that you care and are paying attention
- Listen for overtones in the interviewee's voice. This is like reading between the lines and helps take the place of body language.
- Listen more intently to the responses to questions.
- Listen to your own voice. Does it convey warmth, sincerity, confidence, interest, and professionalism?

Documenting phone interviews is the same as noted before. There may only be one interviewer to record the information. Additional interviewers can listen in on an extension phone or use a speakerphone, however, this can be intimidating to the interviewee. If cell phones are used make sure the batteries are charged and/or extra batteries are available. It is disruptive if there is a dropped call or several breaks to change out batteries.

### **Interview Practice**

In order to learn and reinforce any new skill you need to practice. A simple technique to learn interview skills is to set up simple scenarios between three people - one interviewee and two interviewers. An example scenario would be:

The interviewee (who will also be the reporting party) is told to pick an elderly relative or friend that they know and can describe both physically and mentally.

The situation is described as follows: The elderly subject came to visit for the weekend. The interviewee left alone to go to the grocery store for about an hour. Upon returning home the elderly subject is missing. The circumstances as to why they are missing are unknown.

The interviewers conduct an interview using a prepared list of questions and try to build a profile of the missing subject. After about 20 to 30 minutes stop the interview and discuss the following:

1. Note how many questions (including tangent questions) were completed in the given time period.
2. What did you learn about the missing subject?
3. What did you learn about the interview process?
4. What questions can you add?
5. What would you do differently?

Switch roles, change the scenario, make the missing subject a juvenile, and discuss the results.

### **Field Interviews**

As field teams progress on their search assignments they will come upon people living and working within the search area. They should take the opportunity to stop and interview these people to elicit information that could be useful in the search. It can be as simple as showing a picture of the subject and asking if they have seen the person. Some hints on field interviewing follow.

First, be selective on whom you interview and under what circumstances. People need to feel they are not threatened or inconvenienced. Searchers need to feel they are safe. Take into account the time of day, the surroundings, and the urgency of the search. People who live in or frequent the area are usually the best bets.

Second, approach them in a friendly manner and ask basic questions first. "Have you seen (or "Do you know") this person?" "How long have you been here?" "Would you have seen him if he was in this area?" "Who else might have seen him?" "Did you hear anything unusual?" Record in your notebook all negative responses, as a record of places where the subject was NOT seen. If you get any kind of positive responses, ask more questions to find out what they know. If it seems that the information is particularly important, have an experienced interviewer meet the person, or have them go to base for a more complete interview, but if they can't take the time, you might also get a name and phone number to contact them again.

If they ask you about what's going on, be careful to only give them non-sensitive information about the subject and the conduct of the search. Do not give any information you find out to the media. Refer them to the Public Information Officer (PIO) at base.

## Summary:

The process of investigation and interviewing in a lost or missing person incident is a continual process of gathering information to better understand what the missing subject will do in a particular circumstance and plan how to make the best use of resources involved in the search effort. The success in the process relies on several factors. The points that must be stressed include.

- Understand that interviewing in a lost or missing incident differs from those conducted in the context of a standard law enforcement interview and interrogation.
- Interviews are in depth and designed to paint a mental picture of the missing subject.
- Interview everybody who has direct knowledge of the missing subject and/or direct knowledge of the circumstances leading up to the disappearance
- Besides gathering the basic descriptive information, expand the list to include the subject's:
  - Mobility and ability to travel
  - Ability to survive
  - Mind set and intent
  - Ability or tendency to respond
  - Likes and dislikes and what attracts their attention
  - Past and recent behavior and life history
- Understand that when conducting an interview you are building a rapport and your demeanor can make the difference in the amount and quality of the information received.
- Be a good listener.
- The location and setting of the interview is important to keep in mind to reduce the stress of the interviewee.
- Have a guideline or list of questions prepared prior to conducting a lost or missing person interview to keep the interview on track.
- Take advantage of tangent questions.
- Practice, Practice, Practice