

## Interviews and conversations

Key tips for safety and health committee members\*

Interviews are a way to collect information about people's knowledge, opinions, ideas, fears and experiences. Interviews can be formal or informal conversations. The information you get can be used on its own, or be combined with information from surveys, monitoring results, inspection reports, etc.

These tips will help you, as will training and practice. See CP.12B for one way to practice "chatting people up".

### Starting out

- find a quiet and private place to talk
- greet people warmly, to make them feel comfortable
- use a friendly tone of voice
- explain what you're doing:
  - introduce yourself if the person doesn't know you
  - whether or not you know the person, tell them which "hat" you're wearing for the interview
  - provide a short summary of the project, question, etc., that is the reason you're talking to them
- reassure the person that what they say will be treated confidentially
- explain what you'll do with the information afterwards; if appropriate, tell the person where they can find out more or get a copy of written reports
- tell the person how long you expect the conversation to take
- ask if the person minds you taking notes (and don't if they say "yes", but explain why it helps you "get the story straight")

### Things to ask about during the interview

- their name, job, etc.
- the situation they are dealing with (the facts, as best as possible)
- the people who are involved (who?)
- the background or context (facts and understandings/opinions/etc.)
- their ideas for changes, if appropriate
- asking "why" is a good way to understand the reason something happened or was done a particular way (but don't sound like you're accusing the person of some thing or think they're "crazy")

### Things to do during the interview

- be respectful and sensitive to the person and what they say
- listen actively - commit yourself to hearing/receiving accurately the person's ideas, facts and opinions
- listen without interrupting or giving your opinions, even if you disagree strongly with something
- don't let disapproval or impatience show
- use positive body language like sitting forward or upright



## Clarifying, understanding, etc.

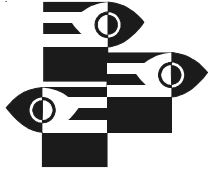
- closed questions (e.g. Were you trained about using that product?) get mostly “yes” or “no” answers
- open questions give people a chance to tell their story (e.g. What kind of training did you have about using that product? Tell me more about how you use that product.)
- if someone’s very talkative, keep them on track by saying “thanks for the very complete answer” and move on to the next question
- if someone doesn’t answer the question, try asking it another way
- ask the person to clarify anything you don’t understand or think may be a different interpretation of particular words or phrases than you intended
- “What are your questions?” is a useful way to wrap up interviews

## At the end of the interview...

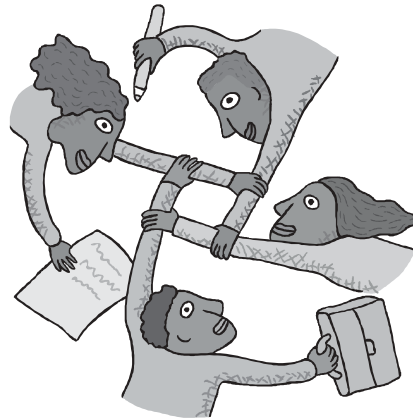
- check the main points said with the person:
  - use people’s own words as best as possible to report what was said
  - when you use your own interpretation, make it clear you want to be sure you understood (e.g. “I thought I could pick it up” could mean someone told the person they should be able to pick it up or that, given their experience, they expected they could pick up the object)
- thank the person warmly
- remind them about where they can find out more or get a copy of your report
- give them your name again and a way to reach you, in case they remember anything else they want to tell you
- ask the person if there is anything they want or need to know

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## Interviews and conversations - practice instructions



1. There are three roles here in this 'fish bowl' practice for interviewing:
  - a. interviewee
  - b. interviewer
  - c. observer(s)
  
2. One person volunteers to be interviewed about one health and safety issue or concern. It could be a hazard, symptoms you're having, a situation, etc. Here are the ground rules for the **interviewee**:
  - decide what the issue is that you're concerned about
  - be as open as you are comfortable being
  - treat this like a regular conversation, so try not to talk more or less than usual and let the interviewer know when they're pushing your personal limits
  - don't deliberately mislead the interviewer
  
3. One person volunteers to be the **interviewer**. Here are the ground rules for that person:
  - treat this like a regular conversation (try to talk in your usual tone and use your normal vocabulary)
  - respect personal limits
  - your goal is to find out:
    - what is the person's concern?
    - why?
    - is this a problem for others?
    - what information does the person have?
    - where else could you get information?
  - you also need to decide if this is likely a work-related concern
  - try using the five w's and their friend "h"



The **observer(s)** do/es two things:

- watch and listen to the conversation for a few minutes, looking for:
  - body language
  - how things are said
  - opportunities taken or missed for getting information
  - other things that are important for an effective interview
- “jump in” to take the place of one of the two people in the interview by saying “stop” and rolling the conversation back to the point where you would start to do or say something differently
- go as far as you need to make your point and then step out



4. Once you decide who has which role, the interviewer and interviewee sit or stand near one another and start the conversation. Have an observer keep track of time; the activity should take about 10 minutes.

5. When the “fish bowl” is done, discuss these questions:

*What worked/made it easy?*

*What was difficult?*

*What information do you still need?*

*How might you get it?*

*What would help you take notes when you talk to someone?*

