***Training Materials on the International Protocol***

**PART 2 MODULE 7 – INTERVIEWING**

**Session objectives:**

* Recognising the advantages and potential difficulties of interviewing
* Understanding helpful interview techniques and appropriate questions
* Identifying how to create a supportive, comfortable and encouraging atmosphere

**Suggested duration of session:**  150 to 240 minutes

**Exercise:** Interview Planning (45-90 mins)

**Relevant sections of International Protocol:**

Pages 50-61; Module 3 – Preliminary Considerations; Module 4 – Key Planning Topics; Module 6 – Testimony; Module 9 – Storing Information; Annex 1 – Evidence Workbook; Annex 3 – Fundamental Interviewing Principles; Annex 4 – Personal Data Template

This module builds on the principles in Module 6 on Testimony and provides more detail on key planning and ethical considerations for interviewing and dealing with survivors or witnesses of sexual violence. The trainer for this session must therefore have professional experience in conducting investigative interviews with survivors and witnesses of sexual violence, particularly in a local context. They should ideally be a recognised and experienced trainer on interview techniques and have specific qualifications related to interview skills and training.

The trainer should make clear that the International Protocol is not an investigative interview handbook, and that the participants should ideally receive additional professional training on specific interview techniques, but that there are certain basic principles which can be helpful when interacting with survivors, witnesses or others affected by sexual violence. The trainer should emphasise that interviews can be a distressing or re-traumatising experience for survivors and witnesses as it forces them to relive and remember very upsetting events, but if handled correctly, interviews can also have the potential to empower and engage survivors and witnesses and give them a sense of agency and control. The trainer should emphasise that an interview is not the same thing as an interrogation. The atmosphere the participants create as interviewers will be vital to the success or failure of the interview – they must create a rapport with the interviewee, establish trust and respect, provide a comfortable and secure environment and behave in a calm, patient and respectful way in order to give the interviewee the confidence and reassurance to speak about what happened to them. If the interviewee does not like or trust the interviewer, interpreter or other team members, they will not open up.

The first section of the module explains some of the advantages and potential drawbacks of interviewing as a means of obtaining information. The trainer should encourage participants to discuss their experiences with interviewing, the challenges they encountered and any approaches that they have found particularly successful. The next section of the module sets out a useful potential framework for the participants to use to plan and structure their interviews according to the PEACE model. The trainer should ensure that they are familiar with the elements and stages of the PEACE framework and capable of answering any questions the participants may have on the topic. The PEACE framework and interview checklist can be used as a skeleton around which to build the details of a specific interview. The trainer should ensure that the participants understand the progression between the different phases of the interview – planning, engage and explain, account and clarification, closure and evaluation – and which actions or techniques are appropriate or necessary at each of the different phases.

The next section deals with interview settings, and the trainer should ask the participants about their experiences in this regard. Some may only have interviewed in offices or clinics, some may have conducted interviews under trees in refugee camps or in dry river beds. The participants should understand that the perfect interview location will often not be available to them, and that they must prioritise the comfort, security and convenience of the interviewee when choosing the interview setting. The participants should consider not only the overall location (auditory and visual privacy, accessibility for interviewee, transport options), but also the particular space in which the interview will take place (indoors or outdoors, seating arrangements, cultural considerations).

The next section deals with types of questions and potential subjects for questioning. The trainer should be familiar with productive question styles – open questions, TED questions (tell me, explain to me, describe for me) and use of W questions (what, when, where, who, why and how) – and less helpful styles such as leading or opinion/statement questions, multiple questions or forced-choice questions. The trainer should be able to provide multiple examples of each type of question and provide more detail on the circumstances under which they would or would not be appropriate to use.

For example, in relation to closed questions, the trainer should explain that they may not be productive at an early stage in the interview when you are trying to encourage the interviewee to open up and provide a full account, but that they can be helpful and appropriate at a later stage in the interview for clarifying specific detail or when dealing with an evasive or uncooperative witness. The trainer should also encourage the participants to think very carefully about how to phrase questions when dealing with children, since they can often be very suggestible, interpret things literally or try to provide an answer which they think will mollify or please an adult. If the trainer or any of the participants have specific experience with interviewing children, they should share those experiences and any advice or lessons learned with the rest of the group.

Make sure that the participants remember the importance of asking questions about all the elements of sexual violence as an international crime – specific, contextual and linkage – and not just the specific act(s) of sexual violence. The trainer should also highlight the detailed examples of such questions provided in the International Protocol and Evidence Workbook. It is important for the participants to understand the difference between the language of specific legal elements which must be proven (i.e. penetration, however slight) and the best way to phrase a question in order to elicit information that could satisfy that element, rather than a conclusion or assertion from the interviewee (i.e. “what did they do to that part of your body?” rather than “were you forcibly penetrated?”). They must also remember to avoid leading or influencing the witness with their questions (“was it the same commander you saw earlier?”) or making any assumptions themselves about what the answers should or are likely to be.

The next section deals with interview techniques, and each slide addresses a specific aspect of the interview process, from choosing questions to interviewer demeanour, working through interpreters to dealing with children, preparing for common emotional responses and avoiding damaging or patronising stereotypes. The trainer should deal with each issue carefully, allow plenty of time for questions and reinforce links to related issues in other modules such as the Do No Harm principle, confidentiality and informed consent, working with interpreters and key planning topics.

The trainer should also specifically highlight the issue of the gender composition of the interview team, as this will require careful consideration at both the planning and interview stages. Some of the participants may believe that female victims of sexual violence will only be comfortable speaking to female interviewers, or that male victims will only open up to a male interview team. The trainer should emphasise that this is not always the case, and that an interviewer who is competent, professional, kind and non-judgemental may be able to establish a better rapport with a survivor than someone who is just the same gender as them. If possible, the interviewee should always be given a choice about whether they would prefer to be interviewed by a male or female interviewer or interpreter. Although limited staff or resource considerations may mean that this is not always a possibility, it is an important issue to consider at the planning phase when identifying the most suitable approach for that survivor/witness and when choosing the most appropriate interview team.

The final section relates to recording and storing interview information, and should be linked to the principles contained in Module 9 on Storing Information. The trainer should underscore the point that the participants must consider their responsibility and capacity to securely store information before deciding to proceed with the interview, at the planning and preparation phase. The trainer should also make clear that asking to record personal data or the contents of an interview might be a stressful or upsetting experience for the interviewee, particularly if they have had a bad experience under interrogation before. If the interviewee becomes anxious or distressed about recording information at the engage and explain phase, it may be better to move on with the interview, continue to build rapport and trust with the interviewee, and return to the issue again at the closure phase. The participants should be conscious that, like many other aspects of interviewing, obtaining informed consent for the recording or storage of personal information is a sensitive issue and will depend on the degree of trust and confidence they can inspire in the interviewee.

**Exercise instructions**

For the ‘Interview Planning’ exercise, the trainer can use either the suggested scenarios from the Evidence Workbook or the same scenario they used for the ‘Approaching Witnesses’ exercise in Module 5. The scenarios from the Evidence Workbook are only intended as examples; the trainer should consider using survivor/witness statements from local newspaper or NGO reports.

The participants should be split into working groups and should be asked to prepare a detailed interview plan for that survivor or witness. They should use the PEACE model as a framework and plan for what actions or techniques would be required at each of the different phases of the interview. They should consider the specific individual needs and context of that interviewee, possible coordination and referral issues and the most appropriate composition and profile of the interview team. The trainer should remind them that, if possible, the interviewee should be given a choice about the gender of their interviewer and interpreter (which may have resource or staffing implications) but that they may not automatically prefer/be more comfortable with someone of the same gender.

The participants should also consider practical and logistical arrangements, including transport to and from the interview location (for the interview team and interviewee), timing and likely duration of the interview, contingencies in case the interviewee is hungry/tired/unwell, and whether multiple interviews may be necessary. The groups should then present their completed interview plan to the rest of the group and deal with questions and feedback from the trainer.