



Guidelines for interviewing children

Preparation

- Be aware of your own attitudes to children. Don't patronise them or show that you know more than they do. Put yourself in their place, and treat them with respect.
- Explain in detail what you're doing, and why you want to talk to them. Show examples of publications with other children's interviews. Explain what you'll use the material for, and seek their permission to use it. Be honest about what you're doing, and don't raise expectations (eg, of money, a job, medical help).
- If you need a translator, choose someone who relates well to children, won't intimidate them, and understands the purpose of the interview. Tell the translator to translate everything, to say the child's words, not to report their speech or give a summary of what they say.
- Use a tape recorder (unless your shorthand is excellent). Otherwise the originality of the child's language and expression may get lost.
- Find a suitable place (inside or out) that is quiet and where the child feels comfortable and relaxed. Let them choose it.
- Ensure that adults are out of the way – except for the translator and perhaps a project worker, teacher, or another adult that the child knows and trusts.
- It can help to interview a small group of 2 to 5 children so that they get support and ideas from each other. But think about how to identify who is saying what.
- Try to create a relaxed environment. Have a chat, play a game, let them hear themselves on the tape recorder. Get down to their level – eg, by sitting on the floor with them.
- Bring something personal, such as photos that can put them at ease or start a discussion.

The interview

- Let them set the pace and tell their story in their own time.
- Beware of using labels (eg, 'prostitute' rather than 'sex worker'), which they may not use or like.
- Ask the easy questions first – eg, their name, age, where they live. Keep using their name when addressing them.
- Ask open questions. Avoid too many closed questions, such as 'do you?' which call for a yes or no answer.
- You may have to ask questions in several different ways before you get the information you need. It's worth gently persisting, talking around a subject, and even challenging children to think about the questions you're asking.
- Be aware of when the child is uncomfortable, and don't push them on sensitive issues. Be prepared to finish the interview or move on to a less sensitive topic if they become upset.

After the interview

- Thank them for their time and for talking to you.
- Ask them if they have any questions for you.
- Think about compensating them for the time they've spent with you (eg, working/street children)
- Explain again what the article will be used for, and arrange to send it to them.
- Ask them if they want to leave anything out, or change their names or any other details.