



I&RC Newsletter

Get it right, first time and every time

January 2026

Welcome to our first newsletter of 2026 following a fab year for us. We have been busy delivering face to face and online training in investigative skills, safeguarding and forensic interviewing in addition to assessing victims and witnesses to assist with police investigative interviews and trials. Laura has now assessed around 620 victims and witnesses, advised police officers how best to interview them, and been present during the interviews and trials!

In this month's edition we have a quick read regarding the importance of interviewee assessments and some (not all) factors to consider prior to your investigative interview. We have another top tip for your investigations and a few minutes on the importance of independent reviews.

Again, we are always interested in feedback so please give us your thoughts via the link at the bottom of this letter. We hope you enjoy this read!

Interviewee Assessments

The requirement to assess your interviewee's communication abilities prior to an investigative interview has long been recognised, and in fact, police forces in England and Wales have utilised the skills of Registered Intermediaries (RI) to assist with forensic interviews since around 2006, following several successful pilots.



The RI role is coordinated by the National Crime Agency (NCA) and is primarily to assess the communication abilities of the interviewee and advise interviewing officers on the best way to interview them. They will also assist the courts (prosecutors, defence and judges) regarding the way interviewees should be treated and questioned.

It should be noted that generally, the RI skills are only afforded to victims and witnesses and are exempt from working with suspects. It is normally left for the legal defence to source their own intermediaries for a suspect.

So, what does the RI consider?

They will consider the interviewee's **educational background** and what impact this may have. For example, did they go to a mainstream school or one of Special Needs and what is their general communication and intelligence levels? How did they react to pressured environments and tests such as educational exams?



They will examine their **receptive communication** ability with particular attention to their auditory verbal comprehension or their ability to understand spoken language and follow discussions. Does the interviewee state that they understand a question but the evidence during the assessment would suggest otherwise? How well do they understand complex language? For instance, how do they grasp the concept of prosecution and the difference between a witness, a victim and a suspect. What is a trial? Other receptive communication skills will also be explored such as their ability to draw inferences in addition to abstract language.

The interviewee's **expressive communications** will also be examined and how their communication abilities may impact how they express themselves. How they respond to questions in terms of time needed? Interviewers may need to consider the interviewee requires additional time to process and respond to questions – this is particularly important if your interviewee is a child. Interviewers can often be in a rush and be impatient when waiting for a response from children. How they describe the matters which are under examination – a crucial aspect when dealing with a victim of sexual abuse, especially when describing body parts and emotions, is also examined by the RI.



Sequencing of events and concept of date and time will also be considered, testing whether they will discuss matters in a chronological order or testing how they know what date and time the matter under examination occurred. Do they have the ability of verbal sequencing? Can they read the time from a watch, or do they only use a mobile phone for time or, do they have no concept of time at all and can only say that matters occurred when it was dark?

How the interviewee responds to **question types** such as closed, probing or open. Some individuals find open questions such as **Tell, Explain, Describe** (TED) too wide and can often go off on a tangent. These individuals may respond better to more probing questions, for example, "What was the colour of the car?". Length of questions would also be a consideration for the RI to advise the police officers on, i.e. the interviewee responds better to short pieces of information. This list of examinations is not exhaustive, and the reality of an interviewee assessment is far wider than these bullet points.

We will be delivering training in the next few months on interviewee assessments via a real-life case study.

Other factors which will be considered are **mental health and any diagnosis of mental health issues**, medication and how they respond to it. Triggers and how they may react to traumatic discussions or events. Court processes, truth and lies, fidget toys, body maps and non-anatomical dolls are all to be explored too as well as the use of sketch plans and writing down responses, pronouns and what name they would like to be called. Do not call someone Edward when they prefer Ted.

So, why are these assessments important?

Well, the reality is that if the interviewee does not understand the questions asked of them in an investigative interview and matters implicate another individual, then the correct outcome may not be served. If the interview relates to criminal matters, then a bad interview can easily result in an offender not being prosecuted. If this is a family proceedings interview, then a child may easily be placed with the wrong family member resulting in further emotional/physical trauma. If the interview is one conducted by a safeguarding investigator within sport, education or any organisation where there are power imbalances – your interview may be thrown out at an employment tribunal.

Every investigative interview has a planning and preparation stage and if the plans do not cover 'interviewee assessment' then the planning is already flawed. Not all interviews will have or need the skills of a RI. Generally speaking, they work only with children or vulnerable adults, however, every interviewer, no matter what their role, should have a grasp on interviewee assessments and consider the elements discussed above.

Where the relevant safeguarding investigator has a case for a child who has disclosed that they have been touched by a sports coach, and the case does not reach the threshold for police investigation – the safeguarding investigator should be interviewing the child. This could mean a suspension for the coach in addition to financial and reputational damage. Even worse the coach may be continuing in their role, despite potential danger, due to an inadequate interview. The child's family or the coach, may bring a financial claim against the organisation therefore it is imperative interviews are carried out correctly. The interviewee assessment should be an essential tool in your interview kit and should be around the top of your planning and preparation.

Join us for our training on interview assessments with the date coming soon!

Top Tip

Our top tip for your investigation is “**always turn up**”. Rather than squeeze in an interview with very little time on your hands or diary it on a day when things can change – pause and consider when the interview will be conducted. Base it on real timescales and your already busy diary and do not let the interviewee down. If we over promise, we under deliver and let people down.

Independent Reviews

Finally, we want touch briefly on the importance of an independent review of your safeguarding investigations (SGI). SGI's can be very complex and stressful, and these factors can cause missed opportunities and investigative problems. Actions can become undocumented and delayed, cases can be handed over due to sickness, turnover or not within capacity of certain investigators.

Some cases carry far more significant risks to the individuals and the organisation and sometimes an investigator, despite their well-meant intentions will make mistakes. More often than not, mistakes or lack of action can quickly and easily be rectified, and this is why independent reviews of your SGI cases are vital.

Our independent reviews provide an impartial, unbiased and confidential examination of the concerns, the actions taken and the results. We examine your organisations policies, procedures and/or Codes of Conduct and advise if there have been breaches. The result is when the vital decisions are made regarding any potential outcome – you can document that your case has been examined by an independent body with over 25 years of investigation and safeguarding experience which you have taken into account.

Minimise the risks by getting it right and get it right, first time and every time.

Check out our link to this service here:

[View Independent Review](#)

Please provide us with any feedback on our newsletter or let us know your thoughts on our topics above:

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Thank you and we hope you enjoyed this edition
Keith and Laura.