



Association of
Title IX Administrators

Intermediate Interviewing Techniques & Strategies for Higher Education

Training and Certification Course

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Strategic Risk
Management Solutions



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The content and discussion in this course will necessarily engage with sex- and gender-based harassment, discrimination, violence, and associated sensitive topics that can evoke strong emotional responses.

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Course Introduction



This course focuses on the best available research and field-tested practices for effective investigations.

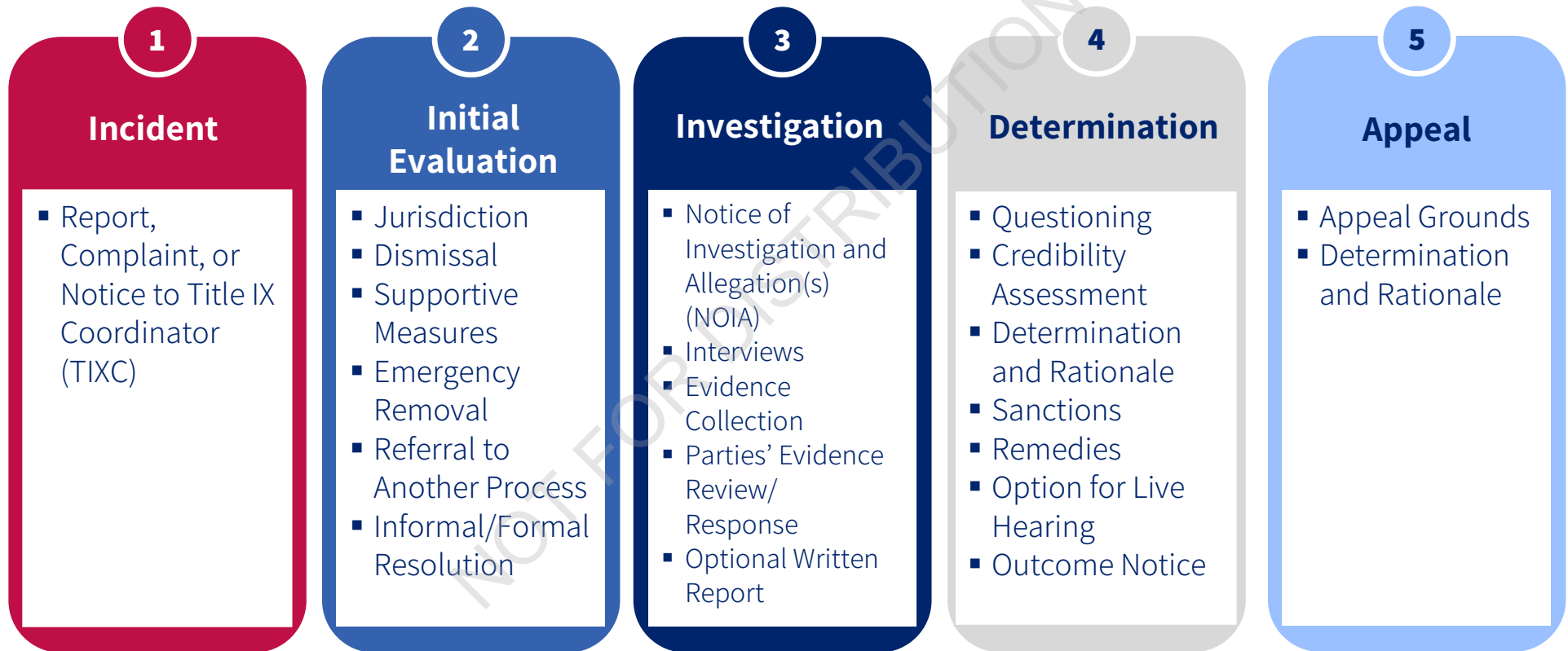


Practitioners will learn how to conduct a cognitive interview and apply sophisticated investigation skills to an array of Title IX complaints.



Our goal is to provide you with an opportunity to practice and refine your investigative skills to increase proficiency and confidence.

Title IX Resolution Process Overview



Investigation Steps

10 Steps of Investigations:

1. Receive Notice/Complaint
2. Initial Evaluation and Jurisdiction Determination
3. Determine Basis for Investigation
4. Notice of Investigation and Allegation(s)
5. Establish Investigation Strategy
6. Adequate, Reliable, and Impartial Investigation
7. Summary of Relevant Evidence/Investigation Report
8. TIXC Reviews Evidence
9. Parties Review Draft Report Relevant Evidence with Opportunity to Respond
10. Final Investigation Report

Building Rapport

Building Rapport

- Rapport is meant to create a level of transparency and trust
 - Reinforce neutrality and impartiality with authenticity
 - Set the tone for the interview
 - Establish expectations
- Rapport building occurs throughout the interview, not just in the first five minutes
 - Ongoing effort to build and maintain rapport
- Do not sacrifice professionalism or neutrality to build rapport

Ethical Considerations



Professional
vs.
Buddy-Buddy



Understanding
vs.
Agreeing

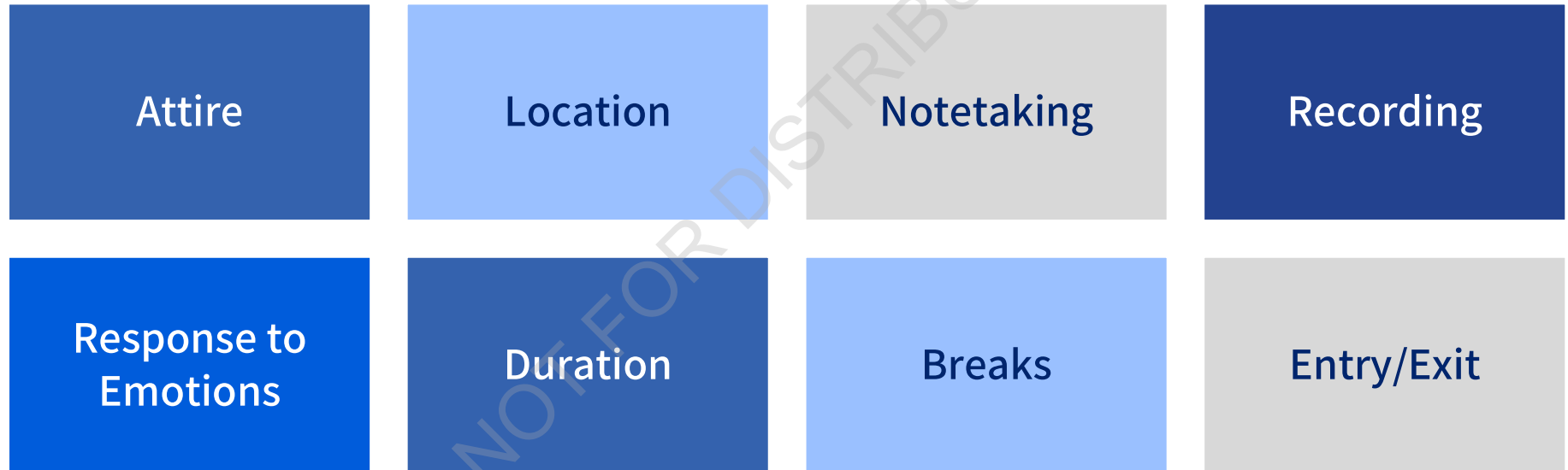


Neutrality
vs.
Empathy



Equity
vs.
Advocacy

Practical Considerations



The Introductory Spiel

Explain:

- Process and interview flow
- Investigator role
- Expectations
- Retaliation and amnesty
- Interviewee rights
- Advisor role
- Privacy/confidentiality and their limits
- Need for truthfulness



The Introductory Spiel

- Answer questions
 - Anticipate reluctance or fear
- Provide option to take breaks
- Answer their questions about the interview or process
- Encourage interviewee to refrain from filtering language
- Avoid playing “cat and mouse” with the complaint contents or allegation details



Difficult Interviewees

- Interview in Investigator pairs
- Mirror responses
- Review facts
- Highlight conflicts
- Emphasize contradictory statements
- Accept any information they will share
- Ask logical follow-up questions
- Clarify vague, nonsensical, or non-responsive answers



Activity: Interview Video

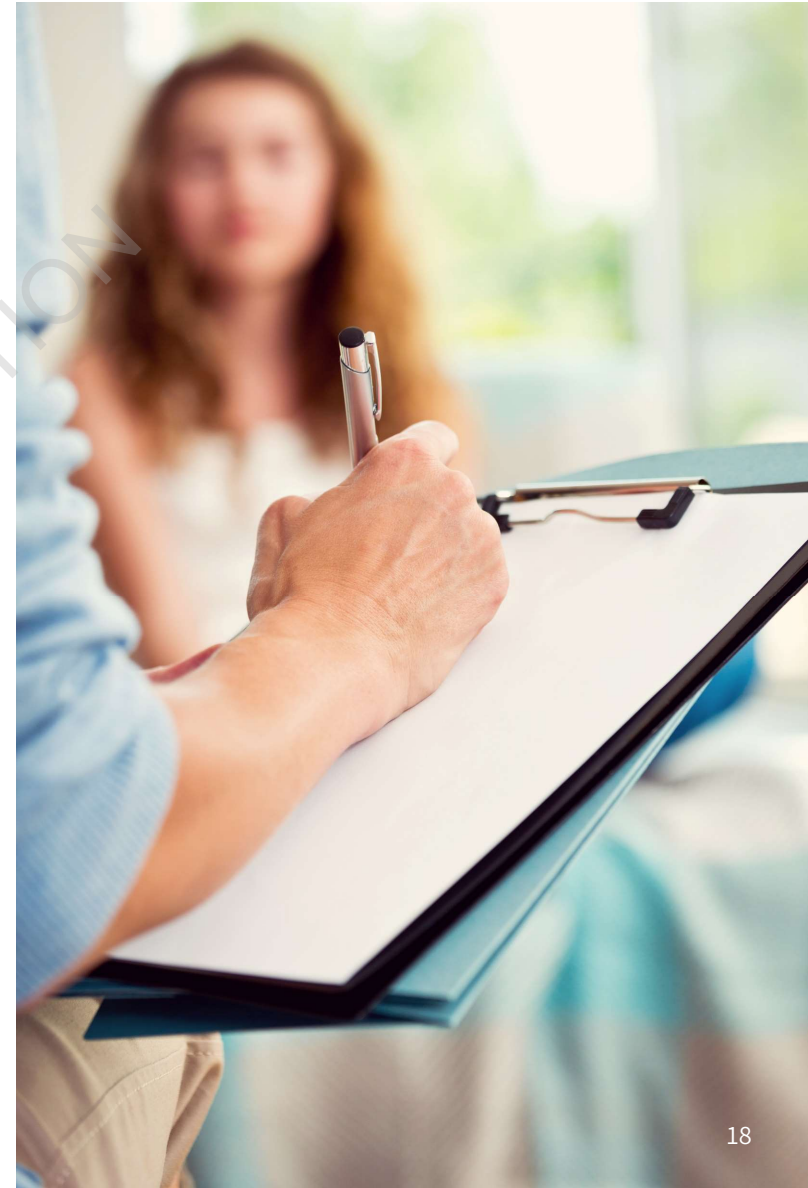
Anatomy of a Bad Interview



Cognitive Interviewing

Non-Cognitive Interviews

- Interviewer briefly establishes rapport
- Open-ended questions
 - Narrative answers
- Direct questions focusing on details
- Neutral delivery
- Limited effort to promote memory recall
- Linear questions tracking anticipated timeline of events
- Occasionally solicit a written narrative before the interview



Outcomes to Avoid

Non-cognitive interviews tend to disrupt the natural process of memory searching, leading interviewees to:

- Withhold information
- Fail to volunteer unsolicited information
- Abbreviate answers
- Provide inaccurate answers



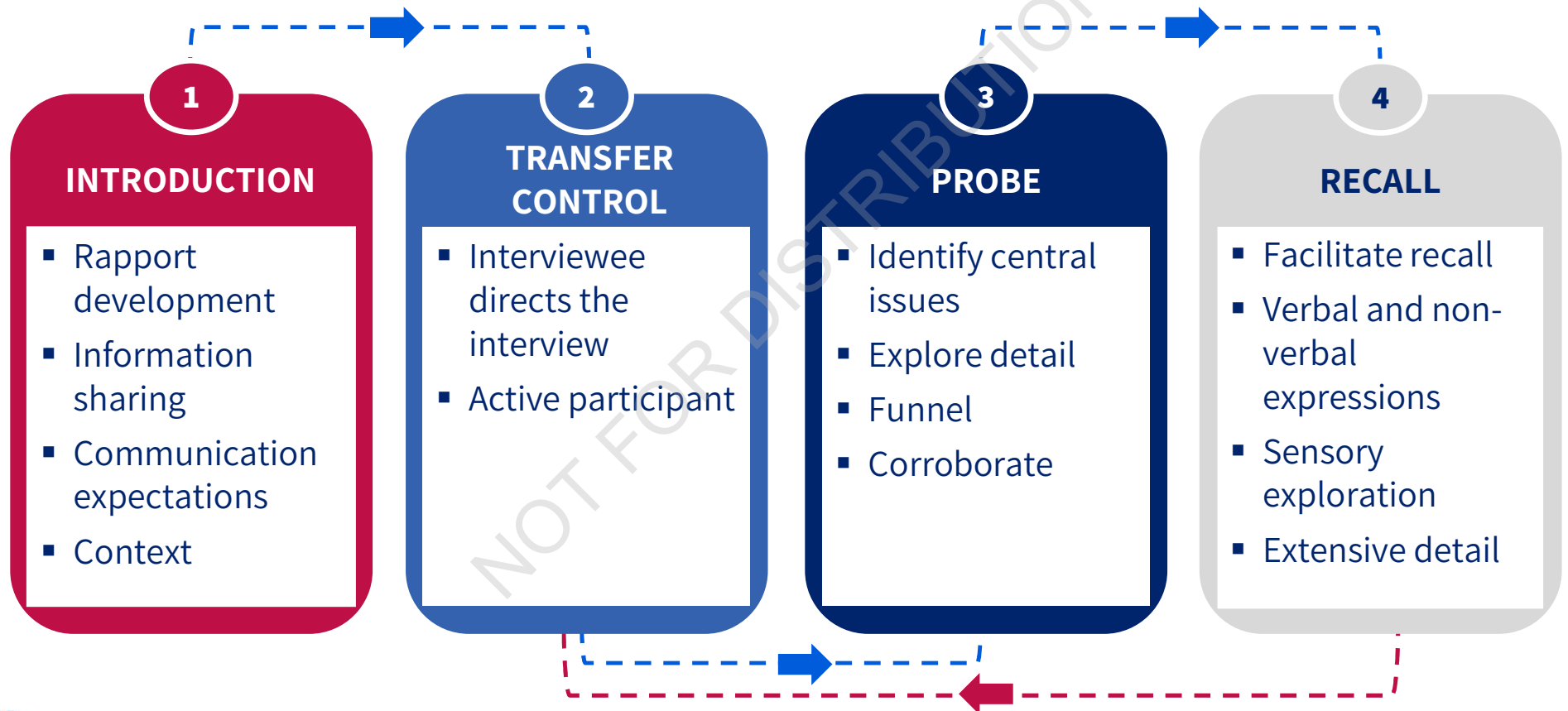
Cognitive Interviewing

- Based on principles of memory and communication
 - Increases the quality and amount of relevant information an interviewer can gather
 - Decreases the likelihood of an interviewee recalling an event incorrectly
- Rapport is highly valued
 - Increases willingness of interviewee to share
 - Decreases:
 - Anxiety about discussing sensitive subjects
 - Sense of feeling judged
 - Defense mechanisms

Cognitive Interview Considerations

- Cognitive interviewing requires the interviewer to bring the interviewee back to the scene
 - Raises concerns of re-traumatization
 - Prepare the interviewee for the possibility
- Interviews will likely take more time
- Investigators may want to explain the interview approach
 - Transparency is a rapport-building tactic
- If using co-Investigators, do not switch questioners during the recall process
 - Switching could break focus and disrupt recall

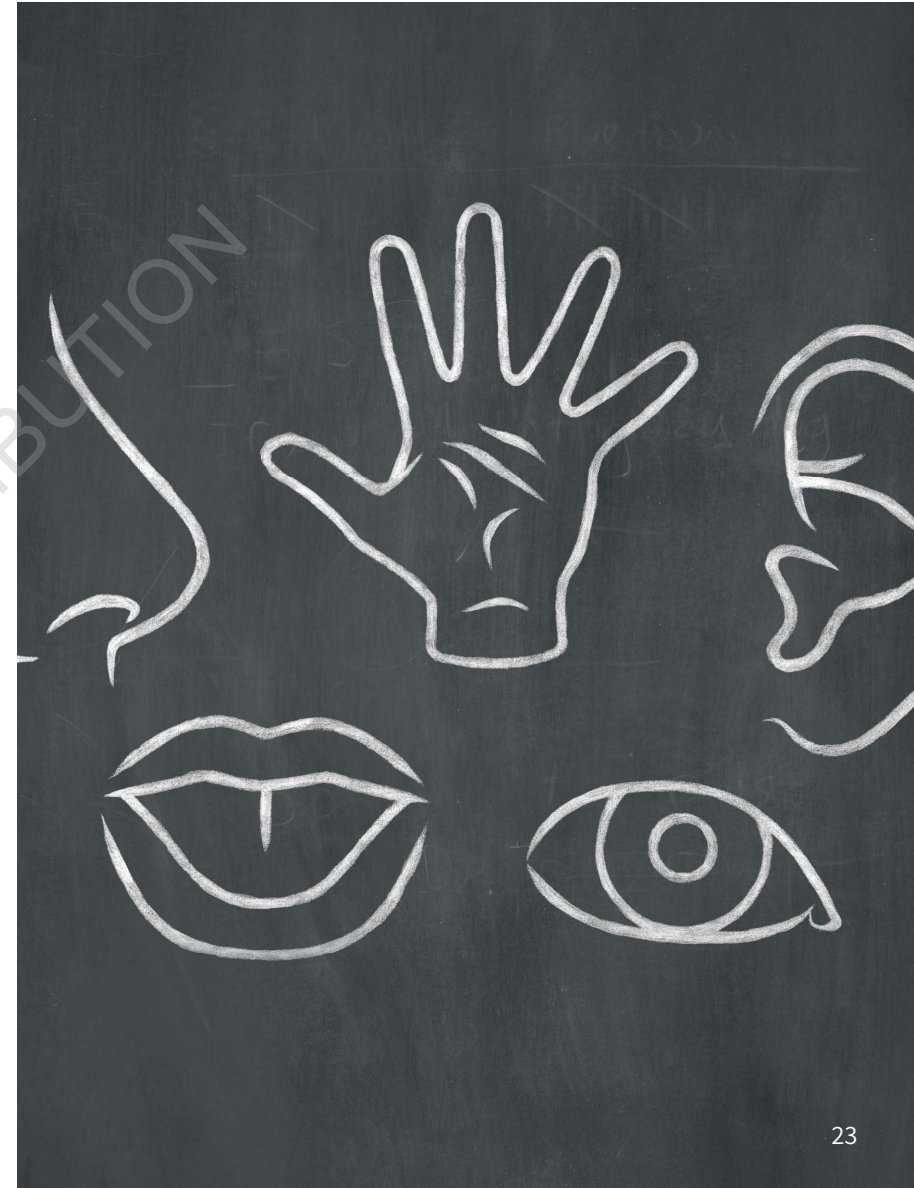
Cognitive Interview Structure



Sensory Recall

Prompt recall through sensory experience, rather than event narrative

- “Are there specific scents or smells you remember?”
- “Are there specific sounds that you recall?”
- “How did the drink taste to you?”
- “How did it feel as you sat down on the couch?”
- “What else do you remember seeing from your spot on the couch?”



Memory Jogging Techniques

Prompt recall through accessing memories with divergent, rather than direct, retrieval methods

- Recount the events from the perspective of an imaginary third-party viewing the scene
- Take the witness to the scene to jog recall, but beware of trauma triggers
- Have the witness give a factual account without editorializing, then transcribe the account and ask the witness to go back and add their opinions and perceptions

Additional Tactics and Tools

Reverse Chronological
Order

Model Statements

Unexpected Questions

Written Narrative

Draw/Use a Picture

Third-Party Point of
View

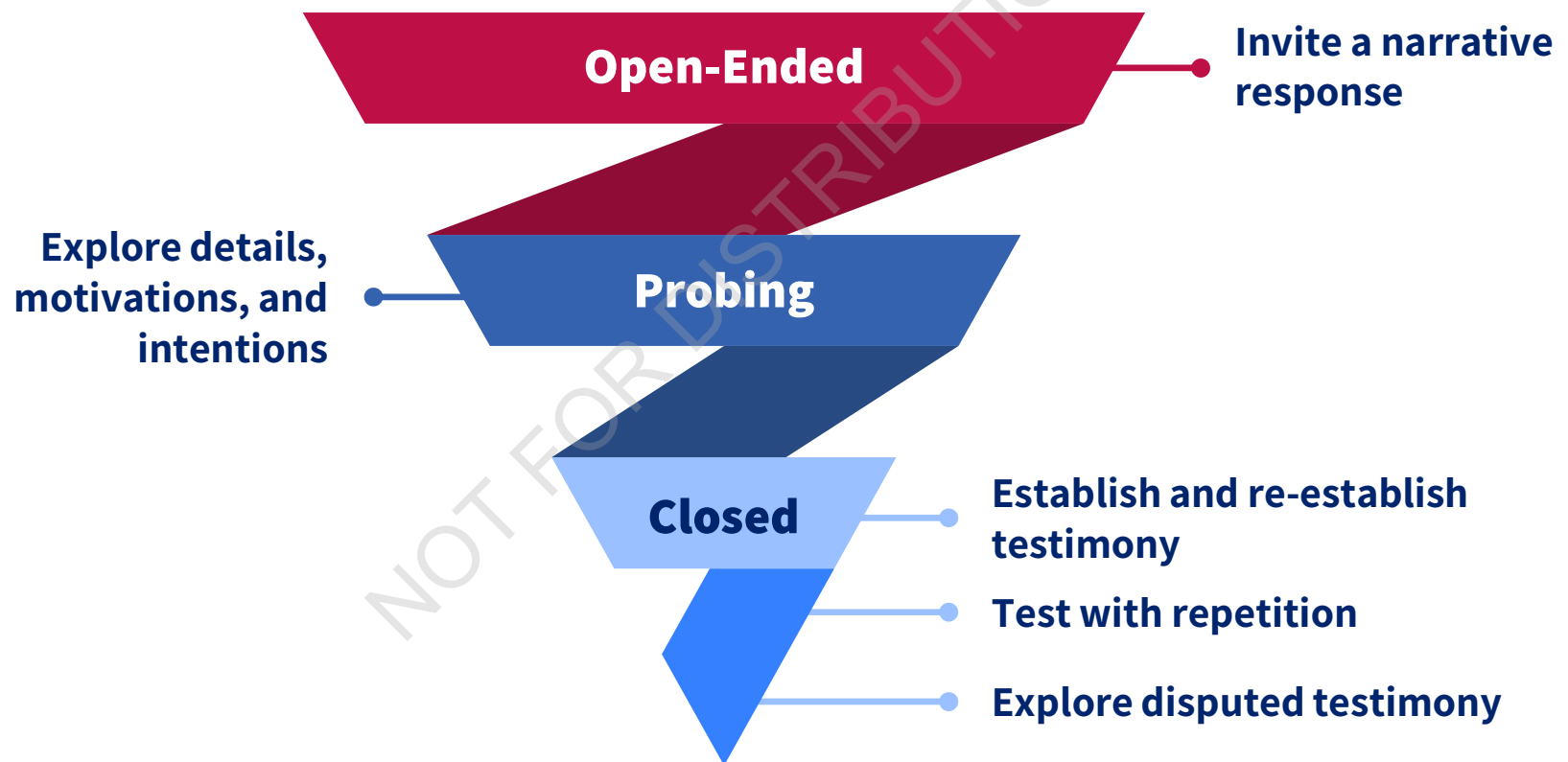
Focus on Specifics

Review details to:

- Spur additional recall
- Check for accuracy and consistency
- Correct errors or omissions
- Clarify contradictions or ambiguities
 - Terms
 - Phrases
- Rephrase confusing questions



Funnel Technique



Interview Closure

- Ask the interviewee to contact the Investigator with any new information
 - Extends the interview
 - May result in more or better detail
- Ask interviewee to suggest other individuals for the Investigator to interview
 - Or suggest questions to ask others



Activity: Cognitive Interviewing

Cognitive Interviewing Activity

Step 1

- **Interviewee:** Review your prompt in the lobby
- **Interviewer:** Review your prompt in the lobby

Step 2

- **Both:** Do not share details from your respective prompts
- **Interviewer:** Conduct interview and take notes

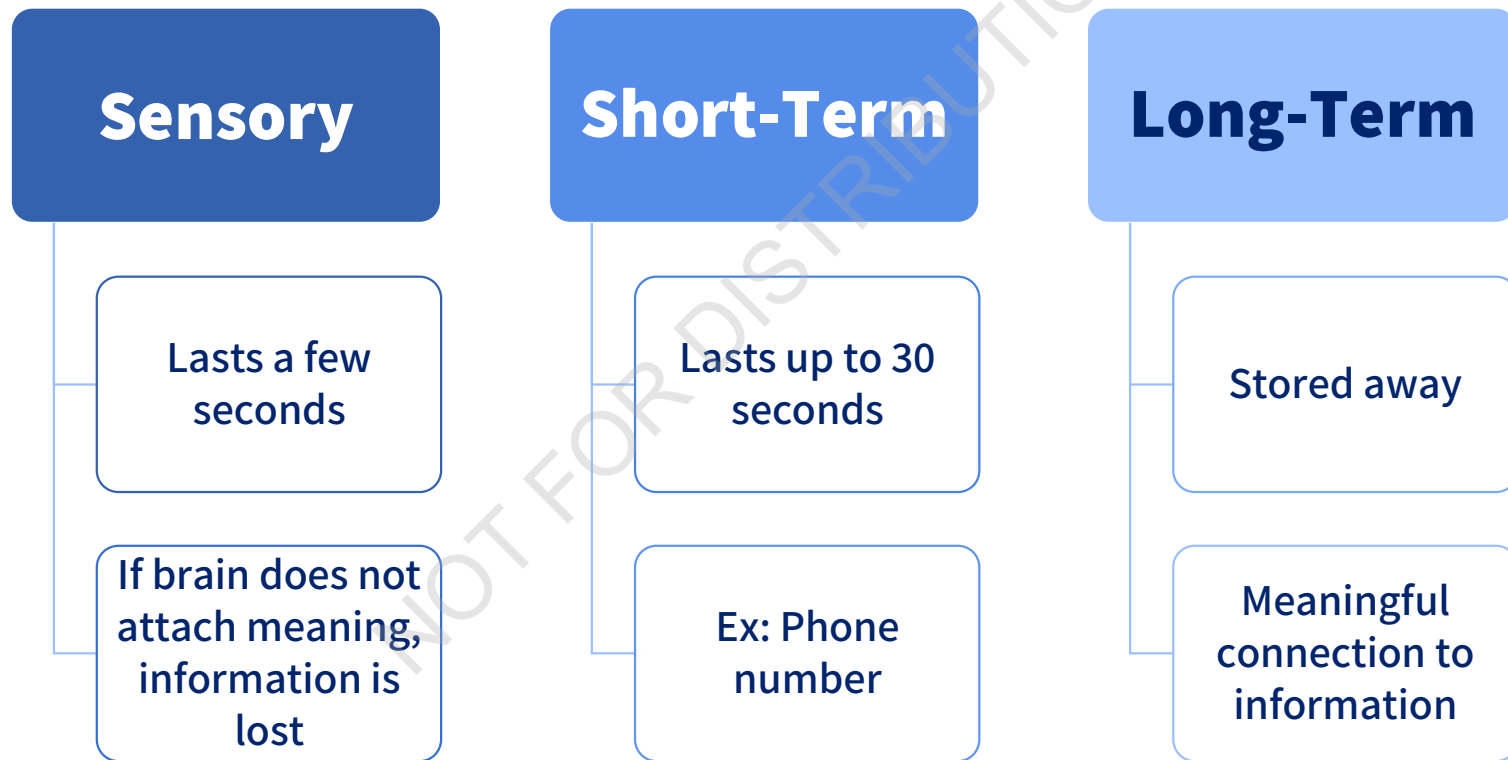
Step 3:

- **Interviewee:** What did the interviewer do that helped, hindered, or distracted you?
- **Interviewer:** What approaches did you use? Were they effective?

Memory

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Memory Basics



Memory, Perception, and Accuracy

- Long-term storage is strengthened through association
 - Accessing memory means traversing association pathways
- Memory is not like a carbon copy of a file or a video
 - Memory is filtered through:
 - Prior experiences
 - Beliefs
 - Education
 - Perspective
 - The result is a mix of factual recollection and filtered perception
 - May alter facts; memory can vary with each retrieval

Memory and Recall

- Repeated recollection attempts can strengthen recall and improve accuracy
 - Neural access pathways can literally thicken
 - Strategies encouraging holistic memory retrieval yields more accurate information
 - Questions focused on episodic memory or isolated critical moments are less reliable
- Focus on broader recall, even innocuous details
 - Repetition can help
- Use open-ended questions, delay funnel questioning if needed
- Tie critical details to nonessential details for continuity
- Provide adequate space and time for recall to occur
- Silence can be useful; don't rush to fill it

Trauma Review

- **Trauma** is exposure to an event or events that create a real or perceived threat to life, safety, sense of well-being, or bodily integrity
 - Acute, chronic, or complex
 - Neurological, biological, psychological, social, and emotional impacts
 - Developmental, intergenerational, historical, secondary, vicarious, or collective
 - Responses to trauma can vary, depending on a variety of factors
- Trauma-infused practices serve to better communicate and interview

Memory and Trauma

- Trauma may cause the brain to block access to memory
 - Traumatic memories are stored, but access may be hindered
- Trauma-informed interviewing techniques lower the brain's defensive measures
 - In a safe environment, the brain is more willing to access and experience traumatic memories
- Don't assume trauma is the cause of memory issues



Memory and Trauma

- Traumatic memories are highly filtered
 - Self-blaming
 - Normalization
 - Lack of recall
 - Denial
- Trauma can impact Complainants, Respondents, and witnesses
 - Different forms and manifestations
- Being trauma-informed as an interviewer can help to draw greater detail from an interviewee, but trauma should never be allowed to excuse the absence of evidence



Credibility

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Credibility

- Credibility assessments weigh the accuracy and reliability of relevant information
 - Not synonymous with “truthful”
 - Evasion, misleading testimony, or memory errors may impact credibility
- Primary consideration is **corroboration**
 - Source + content + plausibility
- Avoid too much focus on **irrelevant** inconsistencies
 - However, consistency of testimony can enhance credibility, especially when other sources of evidence corroborate that consistency

Common Credibility Errors

- Misplaced emphasis on:
 - Nonverbal indicators (nervousness, anxiety)
 - Inconsistent information
- Confusion about memory
 - Stress and emotion can complicate memory
- Parties' status
- Investigator bias



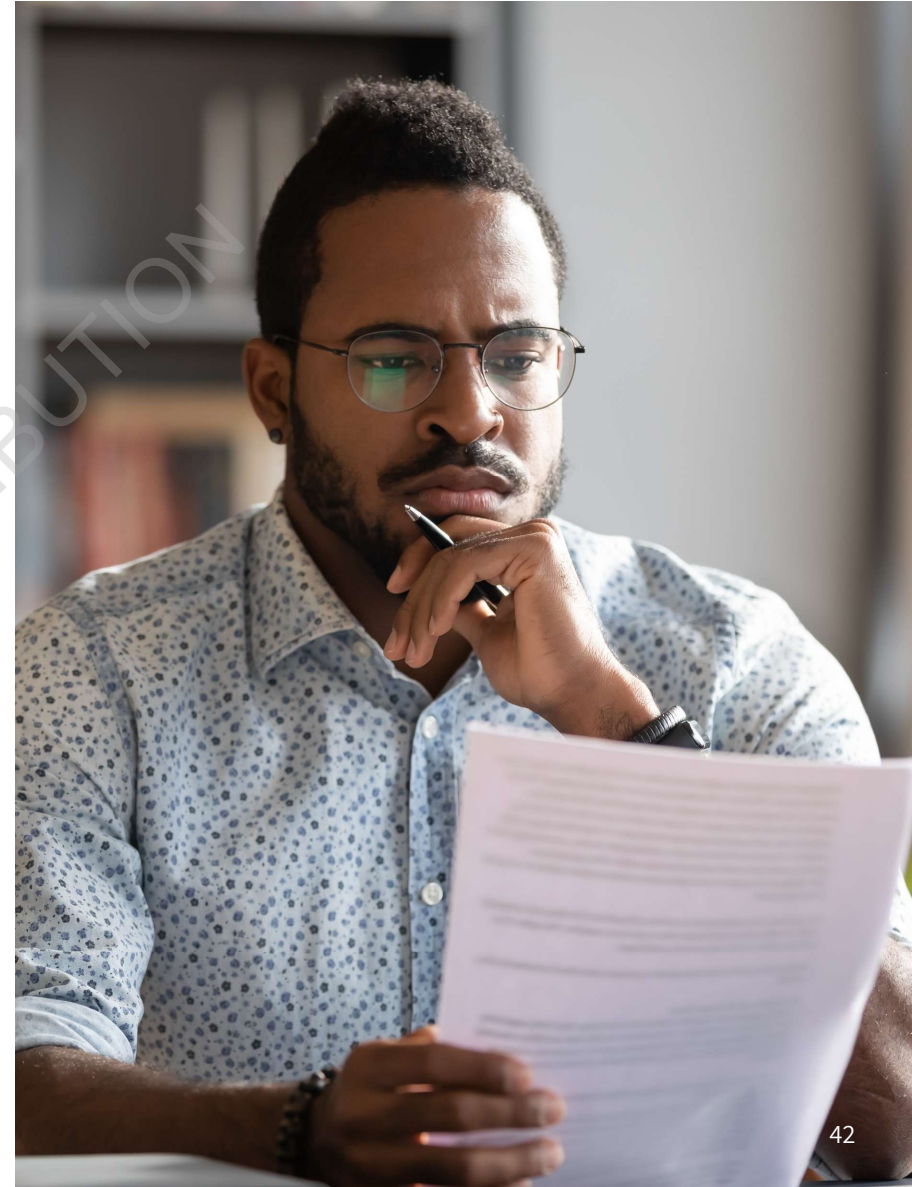
Cognitive Interviewing and Credibility

- Deception requires greater cognitive load
- Deceptive individuals:
 - Prepare responses to anticipated questions
 - Develop a consistent, fixed narrative
- Honest individuals generally provide more detail or information
- Cognitive interviewing leverages differences in cognitive processing and strategy
 - Reveals inconsistencies in fixed narratives
 - Elicits verifiable details in credible accounts
- The motive for deception may also be of interest

Source: Vrij, A. (2019). Deception and Truth Detection When Analyzing Nonverbal and Verbal Cues. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 33, 160–167.

Trauma and Credibility

- Investigators can only collect available relevant evidence
 - Never substitute trauma indicators for evidence
 - Trauma is neutral; it neither enhances nor detracts from proof
 - Lack of evidence from an individual often negatively impacts their credibility
- Avoid biased thinking about what a person “should” or “would” have done, as this may invoke sexist tropes, rape myths, or other “victim-blaming” notions



Trauma and Credibility

- If an individual's account changes, differentiate between **more** information, **different** information, and/or **contradictory** information
 - Minor or insignificant variations should not significantly impact credibility
- One's affect is **not** evidence
 - May signal a need to probe more deeply or differently



Credibility Factors

Corroboration

- Aligned testimony and/or physical evidence

Inherent Plausibility

- “Does this make sense?”
- Be careful of bias influencing sense of “logical”

Motive to Falsify

- Do they have a reason to lie?

Past Record

- Is there a history of similar behavior?

Demeanor

- Do they seem to be lying or telling the truth?



Corroborating Evidence

- Strongest indicator of credibility
- Independent, objective authentication
- Corroboration of central vs. environmental facts
- Contemporaneous witness accounts
- Outcry witnesses
- Allegiances
 - Misleading alignment with friendly witnesses because of relationships



Inherent Plausibility

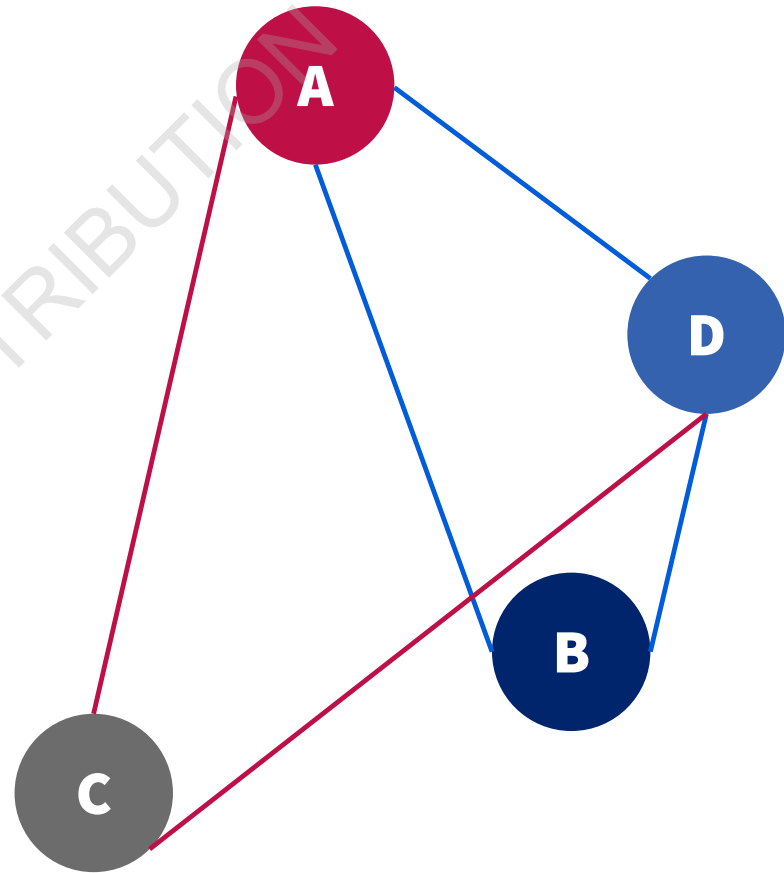
- “Plausibility” is a function of “likeliness”
- Does what the interviewee described make sense?
 - Consider environmental factors, trauma, relationships
- Is it believable on its face?
- Is the interviewee’s statement consistent with the evidence?
- Is their physical location or proximity reasonable?
- How good is their memory?

Triangulating Credibility

- Abductive reasoning
 - Likeliest possible explanation based on incomplete facts
 - Less compelling than corroboration, but sufficient in some circumstances
- Investigator is faced with two different but equally plausible explanations
 - Need to determine which may be more likely, more logical
 - Use other evidence to drive the analysis
 - “In light of evidence provided by Witness C and Witness D, Respondent’s account appears more likely than Complainant’s account”

Triangulating Credibility

- Circumstantial analysis
 - More helpful when standard of proof is the preponderance of the evidence
 - A formal way to process inherent plausibility
- If A and D are true, is B or C more likely to be true?
 - C is a bigger stretch to get to than B, so B is more plausible
- Using known data points to extrapolate the likeliness of unknown facts



Consistency

- Consistent accounts may bolster believability
 - Parties or witnesses may be consistent **but not truthful**, which is why credibility is more about assessing believability than a way to find truth
 - In practice, inconsistency may be a better tool to assess credibility than consistency
- Carefully parse words or language to assess how (in)consistent a detail may be
 - Note when accounts are similar but **not** exact
- Consistency, like demeanor, is often a basis to probe more deeply
 - When someone gives inconsistent testimony, it presents an opportunity to clarify, recognize deviations, and explore what their basis may be

Motive to Falsify

- Does the interviewee have a reason to lie?
- What's at stake if the allegations are true?
 - Academic or career implications
 - Personal or relationship consequences
- What if the allegations are false?
 - Other pressures on the Complainant
- Reliance on written document while answering questions
- Be very clear that having a motive to falsify does not mean there is proof of falsification



Past Record

- Applicable in pattern investigations or for Decision-makers considering sanctions
 - Is there evidence or records of past misconduct?
 - Are there determinations of responsibility for substantially similar misconduct?
 - Written/verbal statements
 - Pre-existing relationships
- Use **caution**
 - Past violations do not mean current violations, just as a record of honesty or lying does not mean someone is being honest or lying in the present moment

Demeanor

- Use significant **caution** here
- Physical presentation and speech patterns are not determinative of truthfulness
- Humans are excellent at picking up non-verbal cues
 - But are terrible at spotting liars
- Do certain lines of questioning create agitation or argumentation?
- Look for indicators of discomfort or resistance and ask additional questions
- Demeanor is a prompt to inquire more deeply



Making Credibility Assessments

- Examine consistency of the story
 - Analyze statement substance and chronology
 - Inherent plausibility of all relevant evidence taken together
- Compare degrees of credibility within evidence
 - Is a piece of evidence consistent with other evidence known to be credible?
- Consider the amount of detail provided
- Non-verbal behaviors may be important to note
 - Do **not** let this drive the analysis

Credibility Assessments in Investigation Reports

If not making findings as the Investigator, indicate to the Decision-maker where to focus without rendering conclusions or making determinations related to credibility

NOT GOOD

“The Decision-maker should find Mark to be unbelievable in his testimony about having received consent for the following reasons...”

BETTER

“Mark’s testimony about X conflicts with Mariana’s testimony about X. The accounts of Witness 1 and Witness 7 aligned with Mariana’s testimony, not Mark’s, during the investigation.”

Decision-Making and Credibility

- The decision-making phase is the last chance for the Decision-maker and parties to probe credibility
 - Institutions may select from several options for the decision-making phase
 - Some courts have endorsed a hearing for credibility assessment purposes
- Common decision-making structures
 - Questioning through the Decision-maker
 - Questioning through parties' Advisors when credibility is at issue
 - Questioning through exchange of written questions

Activity: Credibility Assessment

Credibility Assessment Activity

Step 1

- Read the fact pattern and statements from Omar and Devya
- Highlight elements that factor into credibility assessment

Step 2

- What information boosts Omar's or Devya's credibility?
- What evidence could potentially bolster or detract from Omar's or Devya's credibility?

Step 3

- Outline the evidence that impacts each Party's credibility
- Itemize evidence you would like to collect related to credibility

Looking Ahead

- Day Two Activity
 - Opportunity to practice skills from today
 - From the initial investigation strategy through interviews and credibility assessments
 - Intentionally small and sparse case file
 - Mix of small group role-playing and large group discussion
 - Faculty modeling some skills

Investigation Simulation Exercise

Introduction

Participants will have an opportunity to practice skills from Day One:

- Investigation Strategy
- Rapport Building
- Cognitive Interviewing
- Funnel Technique
- Trauma-Informed Questioning
- Credibility Assessments

Activity

- Participants will review file documents in phases; do not read ahead
 - Each document will provide information or evidence
 - Each phase will have specific tasks
- Participants will engage in small group discussion and role playing to practice different skills
- **Note:** The file, by design, will only provide limited evidence
 - Participants should keep notes of any evidence that comes from small group or paired role-playing
 - Those notes will become part of the credibility exercise at the end

Phase 1

Materials for Review

- Formal Complaint
- RA Report
- NOIA Excerpt

Tasks to Complete

- Discuss the file as you would in a strategy meeting
- Outline the introductory spiel, given the information in the file
- Prepare initial questions for the Complainant, using cognitive interviewing strategies and techniques
- Discuss pre-interview rapport building strategies

Phase 1 Debrief

Phase 2

Materials to Review

- Materials from Phase 1
- Complainant interview transcript excerpts

Tasks to Complete

- Review the transcript excerpts
- Identify areas needing:
 - Further development through more questioning or evidence gathering
 - Different questioning structure
 - Improved trauma-informed questioning
- Keep notes of small group discussion

Phase 2 Debrief

Faculty Skill Modeling

Phase 3

Materials to Review

- Materials from Phases 1 and 2

Tasks to Complete

- Take turns acting as interviewer and interviewee
 - Use funnel method
- Keep notes of answers
- Interviewees can review Cognitive Interviewing Activity for ideas on how to vary their role playing

Phase 3 Debrief

Phase 4

Materials to Review

- Materials from Phases 1-3
- Respondent interview transcript excerpts

Tasks to Complete

- Review the transcript excerpts
- Identify areas needing:
 - Further development through more questioning or evidence gathering
 - Different questioning structure
 - Improved trauma-informed questioning
- Keep notes of small group discussion

Phase 4 Debrief

Phase 5

Materials to Review

- Materials from Phases 1-4
- Additional evidence file
- Any notes from role playing or other discussions

Tasks to Complete

- Assess Parties' credibility using strategies outlined in Day One slides
- Draft key points for credibility analysis, as you would for the investigation report

Simulation Debrief



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Questions?

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