# Skills and qualities of an interviewer

**Listening and good communication**

Those who interview children need to have patience, and the ability to communicate effectively.

**An understanding of child development**

Interviewers need to develop effective communication with children of all ages. To achieve this they need an understanding of child development and of age appropriate language.

**An understanding of the nature and effects of traumatic events**

Those who interview children need to understand the types of experience children may have had and the way this might have affected their ability to communicate i.e. they may not wish to or be able to speak, they may regress to an earlier developmental stage in the way they behave and communicate, they may be angry or distressed, sad or withdrawn.

**Openness to the child’s experience**

Interviewers must be non-judgmental, and value the child, being open to the feelings and experiences of the child.

**Building rapport**

Creating the feeling in children that their thoughts and feelings are understood, giving them a chance to make their own decisions, at their own pace, and demonstrating a real interest in helping the child.

**Facilitation**

Assisting children to communicate, listen, and express emotions and concerns. Understanding that children may not tell the truth for a range of reasons; fear of reprisal, wishing things were different, avoiding painful subjects, trying to please the interviewer, to gain attention or to bring the interview to an end. If you have doubts about what they are saying you can come back to that area later; never argue or criticise, instead you could say something like “it isn’t easy to talk about upsetting things in your life”.

**Recording and summarising skills**

Interviewers may need to record facts and the child’s feelings, creating summaries and records of interviews.

**Non-verbal communication skills**

Realising the effectiveness of verbal expression, gesture, and body language in communicating with the child and others and using them appropriately.

**Management of the interview process**

Able to put together a variety of skills, provide a structure for the interview, and keep control of the process.

**Understanding and empathy with children and adolescents**

Those who interview children need to be at ease with the children with whom they work. They need to understand how children of different ages might think, and how children of different ages might express themselves.

**Understanding cultural and religious differences**

Interviewing children necessitates an openness and awareness of other cultures, religions, and ethnic differences. Interviews may be influenced by cultural taboos on gender, venue and the use of facilities.

**Understanding of situations and people**

Has experience with people, some understanding of various different kinds of behaviour, the necessary substantive knowledge of the issues, and a familiarity with relevant rules or guidelines.

**Ability to learn from experience**

Willing to build on knowledge, self-awareness, and understanding of others.

**Genuineness**

Honesty, knowledge of one’s own strengths and weaknesses.

**Openness to other people**

Respect, understanding of differences, and an awareness of own prejudices.

**Impartiality**

Is concerned about the outcomes for all children and is able to demonstrate that to the parties.

**Self-awareness**

Pays attention to own feelings and behaviour, so as not to treat the parties unfairly without realising it.

**Flexibility**

The ability to maintain professional standards but also to respond to the needs of each individual child and to change the interview process in order to meet their needs and the requirements of each new situation.

**Balance**

Interviewers need the ability to be aware of their own feelings, and to balance them with the needs of the situation. They may need to match the need for support and empathy with appropriate keeping of boundaries to keep the child safe, matching authority and control with a concern for the child.

**Commitment to equal opportunities**

A willingness to build an understanding of how race, gender, culture and religion play a part in the child’s experience, to be aware of different cultural needs, and to work with a diversity of children and colleagues in a non-discriminatory way.

**Creativity**

Interviewers need the ability to come up with ideas, trying different ways of working with children where necessary, and being flexible to meet the needs of changing situations.

**Professionalism**

Takes work seriously, is prepared and on time, is respectful to children and adults at all times.

**Interviewing adolescents - Adolescents are almost adults, and so should not be patronised!**

The main skills and qualities need to interview adolescents are:

* Understanding the developmental stage of adolescence
* Establishing trust and rapport without being patronising
* Relating with openness to the adolescent’s experiencing
* Being non-judgmental.
* Setting appropriate boundaries
* Accepting volatile emotions in adolescence
* Understanding the effects of stress and traumatic memories for adolescents.
* Understanding the effects of sexual abuse.
* Offering reassurance and support.
* Arranging support from the adolescents’ peer group.
* Understanding the impact of gender differences in adolescence.
* Understanding the impact of cultural differences in adolescence
* Identifying and offering appropriate resources and referrals
* Helping to restore and improve self-esteem

**Essential attitudes and skills to work with children with special needs:**

* A positive attitude
* Genuineness and non-judgemental attitude
* Openness to the child’s experiences
* Not making assumptions about the child
* Willingness to develop and try new communication skills
* Development of rapport and trust
* Understanding the child’s specific developmental level and intellectual ability
* Learn the child’s body language.
* Learn the child’s own way of expressing emotions and wishes.
* Work at understanding the child’s own way of communicating. It may help to ask others who know the child well about how the child communicates.
* Disability does not mean that one cannot have a sense of humour, share laughter and fun where it is appropriate

**Adapted from Let’s Talk; Developing effective communication with child victims of abuse and human trafficking, UNICEF, 2007 pp. 49-55**