

# In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews can be an effective way to capture rich data about a topic and are ideal when you want to discuss a sensitive matter with a child. In-depth interviews can be formal and informal.

A formal interview is one where you lead the questions and style of the interview. At an informal interview you interact with the child while he/she is engaged in an activity (playing with toys, eating lunch) and during the interaction you can ask questions related to your topic.

In-depth interviews can be done with children as young as three years-old and with children who may be excluded from other methods because of a disability

## Strengths

- In-depth interviews can provide detailed information about a topic from the perspective of a child.
- In-depth interviews enable practitioners to engage with children who may not otherwise do surveys.

## Things to think about

- In-depth interviews usually cannot be used to provide a general view of a population. They can however be used to create personas of a population. (Personas are fictional characters who represent different types of users of a service or product).
- They require skilled interviewers and usually take one to two hours. This can be costly, depending on how many you do and how information will be analysed.

## Tips and tricks

### *Conducting in-depth interviews with children*

- **Think about the physical environment** – the space can help the children feel relaxed if it is a familiar location (e.g. their school library, a community centre or their home) and child friendly (spacious, with comfortable furnishings and colourful interiors).
- **Use vocabulary the children will understand** – this means both age-appropriate (where you are interviewing a range of ages this means designing different versions of your questions for different age groups) and avoiding technical terms (instead use terms relevant to children's everyday life).
- **Take time to build rapport** – Because in-depth interviews generally require children to talk about personal matters, you will need to build a rapport with the child before the interview. Think of some fun icebreakers to use at the beginning of the session.

Think about attention spans – younger children will only be able to focus for about 30–45 minutes, but older children can remain engaged for up to an hour of well-designed interviewing.

- **Consider the age and ability of the child** – For example, stick with informal interviews with children under 8 years of age.
- **Use of materials and props** – use photos, collages or items when interviewing. Ask questions about the props (e.g. which do you like better, and why) or have paper and color pencils on hand so you can get them to draw something and ask them about it. For example ask them to draw what makes them happy, then ask them why and what about it makes them happy? A young child will be more comfortable talking with an adult when they are drawing than if they are just sitting together.
- **Be non-judgemental** – be open to responses and supportive of children and young people whatever they say.
- **Don't always be directive** – you may need to let the child or young person lead the conversation for a while and you can always come back to your line of questioning later. This also involves allowing silence if the children need it.
- **If in doubt seek ethical advice** – if there is any possibility that your questions may upset a child, lead to them sharing information about themselves or others being at risk, or is on a sensitive topic, seek advice from others with ethics experience.

Start with easy questions to 'warm up' like age, year at school, ethnicity and how they feel today.

If the purpose of the interview is to obtain very sensitive information from children, ensure that practitioners are skilled and that there is a follow-up plan if a child reveals information that puts them or others at-risk.

## Examples

- *At the Office of the Children's Commissioner, we use in depth interviews when monitoring services and supports for children in State care. The interviews allow us to get detailed understanding of the experiences of children in care. These interviews often cover personal and sensitive topics, so an experienced interviewer who is able to gain the child's trust and confidence is involved.*