

OPTIMIZE & ADAPT
VICTIM AND WITNESS INTERVIEWS

Cognitive Interview Adapted to Trauma
How & Why

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Cognitive Interview Adapted to Trauma



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Cognitive Interview

COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

CI-AT is based on science :

- studies in neurobiology of trauma and memory
- studies on the cognitive interview



Sexual Assault & the Brain



Available in [English](#), [Spanish](#) and [German](#), with other languages coming.

Why don't many people fight or yell when they're being raped?

Why are memories of sexual assault so often fragmentary and confusing?

Is the brain's response to attack essentially the same - controlled by the defense/fear circuitry, running on reflexes and habits - during sexual assault, physical assault, and military combat?

The answers have big implications for people who've been sexually assaulted, for those who investigate and prosecute such assaults, and for everyone else who knows or works with someone who's been sexually assaulted.

The answers, it turns out, are the same in every culture. Around the world, the most common responses of people during sexual assaults are basically the same.

TRANSLATIONS

[Español](#)

[Deutsch](#)

REPEAT RAPE BY COLLEGE MEN

The evidence that (1) most college men don't rape and (2) most who do are repeat offenders responsible for the vast majority of rapes.

[Read more](#)

COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

IS TAUGHT TO INVESTIGATORS OF SEXUAL AND MAJOR CRIMES



QUEBEC PROVINCIAL POLICE



QUEBEC NATIONAL POLICE ACADEMY



HOW & WHY the CI-AT



A SIX-PHASE INTERVIEW

used with flexibility

Phase 1. **Introduction**

Phase 2. **Entirely Free Recall Version**

Phase 3. **Recall using the 5 senses and internal/interoceptive sensations – priority to one sense at a time**

Phase 4. **Recall by segments** – using CI tools/techniques

Phase 5. **Final verification**

Phase 6. **Conclusion**

COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

has been designed to:

Elicit memories in a **non-suggestive** way and **in 3 different ways**, taking memory processing into account, grounded in the neurobiology of trauma:

Phase 2. Fragmented Memory

Entirely Free Recall



Phase 3. Memory linked to senses and internal experiences (feelings, thoughts, body sensations)

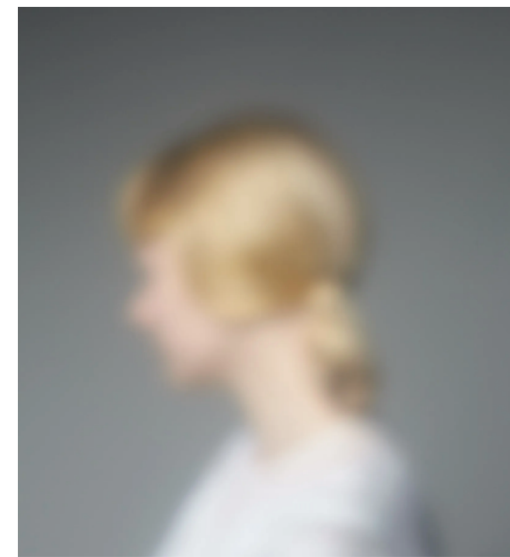


Phase 4. Segmentation of the event

PHASE 2, 3 & 4



THAT EXERCISE SHOWS HOW MUCH
WE CHERISH OUR PRIVACY,
BUT WHEN A VICTIM REPORTS A CRIME,
THAT PRIVACY IS SHATTERED



**...AND THE PERSON REPORTS AN ASSAULT
OR SEXUAL ASSAULT...**



COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

PHASE ① INTRODUCTION

A good **introduction**
is so important



COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

PHASE ① INTRODUCTION

INTERVIEW'S BASICS:

Explain that the meeting is being audio-visually recorded (if true).

Thank the victim for coming to the police station.

Introduce yourself – e.g., your experience in police interviewing

Review how this meeting was planned (recap).



COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

PHASE ① INTRODUCTION

EXPLAIN INTERVIEW FORMAT

Tell them what to expect in this interview

It's not a "question-and-answer" type of interview. There won't be as many questions as people expect in a police interview.

You will not interrupt them



COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

PHASE ① INTRODUCTION

EXPLAIN INTERVIEW FORMAT

We like to present it as teamwork between the interviewer and the victim

Introduce the purpose of the meeting:

- To gather information about the event (assault or sexual assault) they have experienced
- They should not worry about the degree of importance of each piece of information
To report – without filtering – what may or may not be relevant to the investigation.

COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

PHASE ① INTRODUCTION

EXPLAIN THE INTERVIEW FORMAT

During this interview, you may ask a few times for them to describe... in their own words.

You do understand, but their words are important to avoid possible misinterpretations.

E.g., if the victim mentions having been “*vulnerable*” what does this mean for them?

Ex. Victim felt “*twisted*”...



COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

PHASE ① INTRODUCTION

MEMORY – STRESS/TRAUMA IMPAIRS RECALL

Facilitate recall:

- Try to remove any pressure the victim may be putting on self – **reduce performance anxiety**
General e.g.,: when we stress about finding our keys or cell phone..., we find them when we are a little more relaxed about it.
- Reduce stress as much as possible (environment, interaction, formulation of questions)



COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

PHASE ① INTRODUCTION

MEMORY

Today, it's all about accessing what's "available" in your memory, **what you are able to recall.**

If a piece of information is "uncertain," just mention that it is "uncertain."

P.S. Be careful not to affect the victim's confidence.



COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

PHASE 1 INTRODUCTION

ANTICIPATING POSSIBLE DISCOMFORT:

Ask the victim to let you know if a question makes them feel uncomfortable, and you will clarify.

The same applies if the victim perceives you as being judgmental; your question may have been poorly phrased.

Reassure the victim from the outset that you are in no way judging.



COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

PHASE ① INTRODUCTION

ANTICIPATING POSSIBLE DISTRESS:

Promote feeling of adequacy – senses of autonomy and competence in the victim

Explain that strong emotions can come up and that this is normal and okay

Helping the victim to relax, using something they say works for them (e.g., taking deep breaths with them), so long as the victim needs it and finds it helpful.



COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

PHASE ① INTRODUCTION

GIVE CONTROL TO THE VICTIM

They decide on:

- Taking breaks
- Getting some fresh air
- Other things that help them feel safe
- Even ending the interview

Before moving to phase 2, ask victim if they still want to do this interview



COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

PHASE 2

Make sure you begin with
a totally free recall version of the event

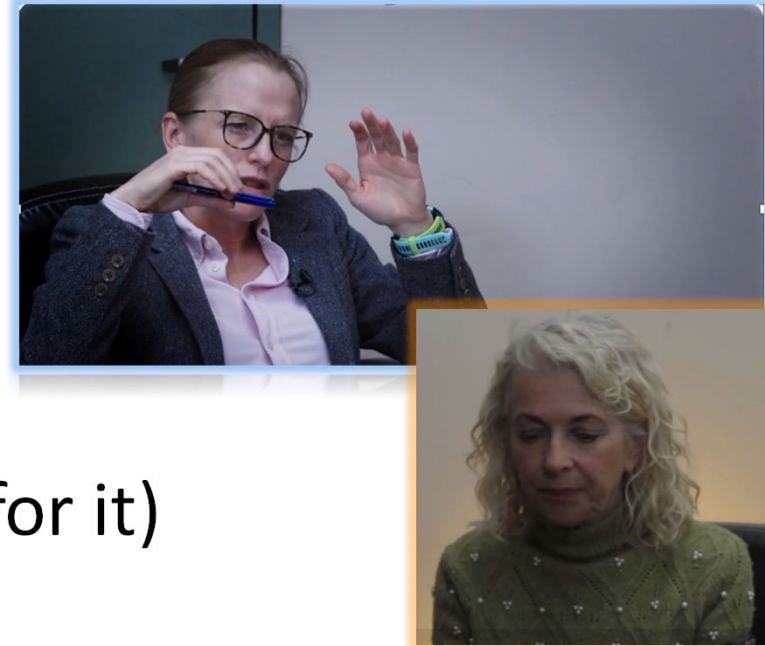


COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

PHASE 2 FREE VERSION

MEMORY

Tell me what you are able to recall about the event (use their word[s] for it)



Begin where you want, end where you want.



COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

PHASE 2 FREE VERSION

MEMORY

Fragmented memory.
Think of details as pieces of a puzzle with lots of pieces missing.

Chronology may not be possible and is not essential*



Investigators are carefully collecting pieces and later can attempt to combine them with other evidence.



COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

PHASE 2 FREE VERSION

MEMORY

Tell the victim, that to help with concentration on their remembering:

- No need to hold the interviewer's gaze
- Close eyes if want to
- Looking anywhere

This is not a conversation, this is a free recall



COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

PHASE 2 FREE VERSION

MEMORY

If there were many violent episodes over a long time (e.g., months, years):

- The victim begins the free recall with the episode they choose
- Talks about the ones that come to mind.
- In general, these would be the ones most significant for them, often including first and last times (primacy and recency effects).



COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

PHASE 2 FREE VERSION

MEMORY

We are used to telling a story chronologically.

Even if the free recall does not require them to think about the event chronologically, victims often report it in a certain order.



COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

PHASE 3

SENSORY RECALL

- PRIORITY TO ONE SENSE AT A TIME –
- INTERNAL/INTEROCEPTIVE EXPERIENCE



COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

PHASE 3 SENSORY RECALL & INTEROCEPTIVE EXPERIENCE

MEMORY

Recall the event thinking of **interoceptive sensations**: body sensations (e.g., pain, heat, pressure, muscle tension), thoughts, feelings

Examples: when attack was first detected, when fear kicked in.

Remember the “**super encoding**” phase, which starts when stress first escalates or the attack or assault is detected.



PHASE 3 CI-AT

Give a brief, non suggestive, example of a very detailed recall using the 5 senses and some internal/interoceptive experiences.

E.g., a morning routine: ... *when I got up this morning, I put my feet on the cold floor, I could hear my dog barking to go outside, I smelled coffee, felt my stomach rumble...*"

Include a feeling and an internal experience



MORNING
ROUTINE



COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

PHASE 3 SENSORY RECALL & INTEROCEPTIVE EXPERIENCE

MEMORY

Then victims report what they are able to remember focusing on one sense at a time. They may choose to the sense they want to begin with.

They usually end up talking about more than one sense, but they do focus on one in particular each time.

Most of the time new information comes up.



COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

PHASE 4

Interviewer verifies or clarifies
the most important elements
for this specific investigation with

Recall by segments



COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

PHASE **4** RECALL BY SEGMENTS

MEMORY

The interviewer can use a variety of tools, case by case:

- Elements that could help to obtain more details and to clarify certain segments of the event



COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

PHASE 4 RECALL BY SEGMENTS

MOSTLY BASED ON THE COGNITIVE INTERVIEW: MEMORY

“Tools” to use, determined on a case-by-case basis:

- Ask to draw a sketch of the environment where the event took place
- Context reinstatement, e.g., if the crime occurred in 1980’s... think of where you lived, what you were doing in those years...



COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

PHASE 4 RECALL BY SEGMENTS

MEMORY

- Use the victim's words to identify segment “tags”
- Check the most important segment first; memory is likely best with the first segments, as fatigue can set in.
- If necessary, check other segments.





Central details...

Video

excerpt from a victim interview
reenactment of a real case

COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

PHASE 5

Before concluding the interview, you should discuss with your colleague (who also attended the interview) whether there are still any elements to be clarified for the investigation:

Final verification



COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

PHASE 6

Conclusion of the interview

As you will have mentioned in the introduction, this interview is and was “teamwork.” Show your appreciation, since the victim had the most difficult part in this meeting.



QUESTIONS FORMULATION



COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

QUESTIONS FORMULATION

TRAUMA-INFORMED BASICS MIXED WITH COGNITIVE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FORMULATION

The questions are based on both the cognitive interview and the trauma-informed approach.



COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

QUESTIONS FORMULATION

TRAUMA-INFORMED BASICS WELL-BEING OF VICTIMS

Poorly formulated questions can be perceived by the victim as:

- a lack of empathy
- not being believed...

Be attentive, careful, and prevent ...



COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

PHASE 5 FINAL VERIFICATION

TRAUMA-INFORMED BASICS QUESTIONS FORMULATION

At any time during the interview, if certain questions are sensitive, i.e. they could disturb or otherwise trigger the victim.

Always anticipate this situation and explain in advance why this verification is important to the investigation.



COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

QUESTIONS FORMULATION

TRAUMA-INFORMED BASICS WELL-BEING OF VICTIMS

E.g. Instead of: “What clothes did you wear?”

“Sometimes the clothes you wore, even if you've washed them, can provide us with evidence.”

“We'd like to know what clothes you were wearing at the time of the attack.”

“Can we pick them up at a time and place convenient to you?”



COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

QUESTIONS FORMULATION

TRAUMA-INFORMED BASICS WELL-BEING OF VICTIMS

E.g. **Avoid asking “WHY”** this or that
“Why” questions often create distress or the fear of not being believed. As a result, the victim may feel “revictimized”.



COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

QUESTIONS FORMULATION

TRAUMA-INFORMED BASICS WELL-BEING OF VICTIMS

E.g. **Avoid asking "WHY"**

Bad formulation: *Why did you stay in the car when [the perpetrator] got out to pay for gas? Why not flee?*

Good formulation: *When you were in the car and the [perpetrator] got out to pay for gas, did you have any thoughts? How did you feel?*



COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

TRAUMA-INFORMED BASICS

WELL-BEING OF VICTIMS

Avoid falling into “lie-detector” mode, which becomes more like interrogating a suspect than interviewing a victim.

False allegations are a possibility (2-5%), **but the investigation, not the interview**, will end up with either (1) enough evidence for a prosecutor to accept the case, or (2) not enough detail, or the wrong kind of detail, to prosecute the case.

QUESTIONS
FORMULATION



COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

QUESTIONS FORMULATION

TRAUMA-INFORMED BASICS WELL-BEING OF VICTIMS

Good question formulation often brings more pertinent information.



COGNITIVE INTERVIEW ADAPTED TO TRAUMA

A **good interview** based on the trauma-informed approach and the cognitive interview is better for the well-being of victims and optimizes memory recall.

CI-AT is a flexible interview structure



CI-AT AND THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM

- Law enforcement
- Prosecutors' feedback
- Victims' feedback
- CI-AT in court (the first few cases)



CI-AT SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Quebec Provincial Police

- Cognitive Interview (classic) and Cognitive Interview Adapted to Trauma
- Victims' survey about their CI-AT experience (independent study)

University of Quebec in Trois-Rivières

