Chapter 10
The Interview: A Basic Tool Used in Correctional Counseling and Treatment

Introduction

An interview is used for a number of purposes and is applicable for use in a variety of situations. Gorden (1992, p. 342) defines interviewing in the following way: "Interviewing is conversation between two people in which one person tries to direct the conversation to obtain information for some specific purpose."

The purpose for which the information is being sought determines to a great extent how the interview will be constructed. For example, if a police officer is interviewing a person who had just witnessed a crime, the officer does not obtain a great deal of personal information about the witness. The name, address, and telephone number of the witness may be sufficient.

The Five Ws of Interviewing

The interview should focus on questions pertaining to what is referred to as the five "W" words critical to any interview. They are as follows:

Who: The officer will ask the witness to describe the alleged perpetrator of the crime in detail, including approximate age, gender, clothing worn, and other identifying characteristics. The officer will also ask if the witness is acquainted with the alleged offender.

When: The police officer wants to know the exact time the incident occurred. If the exact time cannot be ascertained, the officer wants as close an approximation of the time as possible. Often the officer's immediate course of action will depend on the timing of the event. If an officer arrives on the scene a few minutes after a person was robbed, the offender may still be in the immediate vicinity, and other officers will be quickly dispatched to the area to conduct a search.

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What: The police officer may ask the witness, "What did you observe?" The officer will ask the witness to give as detailed an account of the crime incident as possible.

Where: When an officer is called to the scene of a crime, the "where" generally becomes known. However, when the police receive complaints regarding certain alleged crimes, such as child physical or sexual abuse, the location of the alleged crime may not be discovered until after the interview is completed.

Why: The police officer responding to the scene of a crime will try to discover why the crime occurred. At times this may be relatively easy to determine. If the crime was a robbery, the officer can surmise that the robbery was motivated by the desire to obtain money. The officer is not concerned about why the offender wanted or needed the money and thus does not ask the offender such questions. The motivations for committing a criminal act may be as diverse as the possible ways to respond to crime. For example, the witness may have seen an auto accident following which the driver of the auto who was not at fault got out of the car and punched the driver who was at fault in the face. The motivation for the assault might have been a response to feelings of anger or frustration, or some other reason.

If the person being interviewed is the victim of the crime, the police officer will still want to obtain the same information, but now there will be a need to obtain much more personal information from the victim. If it was a violent crime, the officer will ask about injury, the victim's possible relationship to the offender, and other types of personal information. If a rape or other types of sexual crime have occurred, the officer might call in a victim assistance advocate to help with the interview. If the person being interviewed by the police officer is the criminal suspect, the nature of the interview will change, with the questions being directed toward the criminal event. It is likely that the suspect is going to be uncooperative and try to avoid answering the interview questions as much as possible. The officer then must use all of the tricks of the trade, including deception, to try to solicit the information desired.

Interviewing in Justice System Settings

If we now concentrate on functions of interviewing related to the prosecutorial and the judicial components of the justice system, the types of questions asked during an interview will depend largely on who is being interviewed and for what reason. For example, a prosecutor interviewing a victim of a crime on a direct examination will ask the victim many of the same questions previously asked by the police, with the answers already recorded in the initial police report. However, the defense attorney, on cross-examination, may ask the victim questions with the hope that the answers will discredit the victim's story as presented to the police. If the alleged offender is convicted of the crime, the judge may ask the offender some questions before sentencing. These may relate to the motivation for committing the crime and the circumstances surrounding the criminal event. This information, along with other

factors such as the offender's age, prior offenses, employment, and family situation, may be useful to the judge in deciding upon a just sentence.

The judge may also ask the victim questions as part of a *victim impact statement*. These questions, addressed to the victim, pertain to the way the crime has affected his/her life. If the defendant has been convicted of a serious felony offense such as robbery, rape, aggravated assault, or homicide, the judge will postpone the sentencing and order that more information be obtained on the offender before a sentence is given.

Those who collect the information for presentence investigations and risk/needs assessments are generally community corrections personnel. A major function of the presentence investigation is to determine if the convicted offender would be a major threat to the community if allowed to remain in the community rather than being incarcerated in a secure correctional facility and if the convicted offender would be likely to benefit by having the opportunity to remain in the community. Some courts use risk and needs assessments as part of the presentence investigation. The court personnel, usually probation officers skilled in interviewing, have the primary purpose of gathering information from those being interviewed. Generally, they will use several information-gathering instruments that are highly structured and have been tested for reliability. The interview is very directed. The interviewer tries to verify the truthfulness of the information being provided to the extent possible. The main purpose of this form of interviewing is to collect information that will be helpful to the sentencing judge when making a decision on the sentence and to provide information to those who will be supervising the convicted criminal in the community or in a correctional institution.

Those correctional personnel who interact with and supervise sentenced criminals in correctional facilities, including probation officers, alcohol and drug abuse counselors, and social work counselors, must develop interviewing skills that far exceed those needed for information gathering. Shearer (1993, p. 15) suggests seven primary interviewing skills that are needed for counselors and other treatment personnel to be effective. They are as follows:

- The interviewer must have empathy, that is, be interested in the welfare of the person being counseled.
- The interviewer must focus on concrete experiences, needs, and changes that will lead to the adjustment of the person being counseled.
- The interviewer must know how to adjust the speed and pacing of the interview so that the counseling is given in a timely manner.
- The interviewer must know how to summarize the information provided by the person being interviewed, as well as the information provided by the counselor to the person counseled.
- The interviewer must know when an immediate response is needed, such as in a crisis situation, and have the skills to draw out the response.
- The interviewer must know when to confront the person being interviewed, particularly when it is apparent that the person is "playing a game" or not taking the counseling session seriously.
- The interviewer must be assertive when the situation demands assertiveness.

The initial goal of the person who is conducting an interview, regardless of its purpose, is to obtain as much information about the person as possible. Nasheri and Kratcoski (1996, p. 45) state, "Initially, an interviewer may ask open-ended questions in order to stimulate conversation." These questions may be rather broad and are predominately used to stimulate the person to cooperate, to respond, to feel relaxed, and to develop some rapport. It also provides an opportunity for the interviewer to observe the body language of the respondent. For example, in a counseling interview, the interviewer may ask some personal questions related to self, family, friends, or habits, even though the interviewer may already have knowledge of the information requested as a result of having reviewed the files on the person. The initial interview between a representative of a criminal justice agency and a person accused or convicted of a crime may be one of the most important interactions of the offender's life. Typically, the person will be anxious, embarrassed, not sure what is going to happen, and perhaps distrustful of the authority figure conducting the interview. Although the initial interview is used primarily to obtain information that will be passed on to another official or a professional counselor who may supervise or counsel the client, the initial interview is important because it sets the general tone and provides a learning experience for the offender as to what will be likely to follow in subsequent interactions with members of the justice system. Mauer (2005) emphasizes the importance of the interviewer providing information pertaining to the purpose of the interview, what is expected of the interviewee, and why the interview is important. Mauer also emphasizes the importance of conducting the interview in an environment that would assure a minimum of distractions.

According to Mauer (2005, pp. 31–32) the objectives of the initial interview are the following:

- To establish a good working relationship with the client
- To obtain information about the client's background
- To provide information about what to expect during the interview
- To identify the general nature of the client's problems
- To obtain a detailed history of the facts leading up to the present problem and any factors that may have contributed to the problem the client is facing
- To ask follow-up questions on areas in which the information provided is not complete or fully understood and to probe when necessary

The Skill Learning Cycle

In his book, *The Nature of Interviewing*, Gorden (1992) introduces the skill learning cycle. The cycle involves four basic phases, planning, doing, analyzing, and reflecting.

Planning

The planning phase is most critical in those cases in which the person completing the interview does not have a set of questions on the subject that were previously constructed. The interviewer is starting completely from scratch. In the planning stage, the interviewer originally has a topic or problem that must be covered and a set of objectives, that is, what is expected to be accomplished through the interview. According to Gorden, the planning stage involves several steps. They include:

Formulating Relevant Questions. To arrive at relevant questions, the interviewer must (1) clearly define the objectives of the interview, (2) translate each objective into specific points of information needed, and (3) translate those points into questions to be asked.

Using the presentence Investigation as a starting point, the person completing the interview of a convicted defendant who is awaiting sentencing has several objectives that must be accomplished. The interviewer must gain information that will be helpful to the sentencing judge regarding the defendant's risk to the community if sentenced to community corrections rather than to a term in a secure correctional facility. Another major objective of the interview is to determine if the person will be amenable to treatment in the community. To accomplish this, the interviewer must obtain information about the major sources or causes of the criminal behavior, such as drug and/or alcohol abuse; violence toward others, including family members; failure to hold a job; and other problems. The interviewer thus develops specific questions to tap these problem areas.

Formulating Motivating Questions. Another quality of a useful question is that it helps to motivate by making the respondent either more willing or more able to answer the question.

When interviewing those who are not there voluntarily, this is not as easy task. In regard to those who are being interviewed as a result of a court order, the interviewer may find the behavior of the interviewee to range from outright hostility at one extreme to being very cooperative on the other extreme. The interviewer must also be aware of the possibilities that the interviewee is lying or being evasive. Even those who have considerable experience in interviewing may find it difficult to find the right questions that will motivate the respondent to be cooperative.

Establishing a Communicative Atmosphere. Before the first question is asked, the interviewer can increase the chances of obtaining the needed information by establishing a physical and verbal setting that helps the process.

Often it is difficult to conduct interviews with those who are defendants or under supervision of a criminal justice agency. For example, those accused of a crime who are being considered for pretrial release are often interviewed in their cells or in a tiny room reserved for such activities. Even when those incarcerated in jail or a prison are being interviewed by a psychologist or social worker, the emphasis on security may make the atmosphere tense and thus not conducive to the development of a trusting relationship between the service provider and the person being

interviewed. Despite the situational and environmental factors that might interfere with the interviewing process, the experienced interviewer can generally make the adjustments needed to establish a communicative atmosphere.

Doing

The doing phase of the skill learning cycle is the heart of the interviewing process. It requires the interviewer to use a number of skills simultaneously. These includes delivering the question, listening to the respondent, observing the respondent, evaluating the response, probing the response, and recording and coding the information.

Delivering the Question. The format used in the structuring of questions for an interview may take several different forms, depending on the purpose of the interview. For example, when interviewing for a survey of people's political opinions on a matter such as who they are likely to vote for in the upcoming elections, the questions are highly structured, and each respondent is asked exactly the same questions in the same manner. The questions are generally closed-ended, that is, the respondent must choose an answer from the finite categories of responses provided. If the interview is being completed electronically or by telephone, the delivery of the questions by the interviewer becomes less important. However, in face-to-face interviewing situations, the nonverbal factors accompanying the questions become much more important. Nonverbal factors (Gorden, 1992, pp. 304–305) "include the interviewer's body position, eye contact, facial expression, tone of voice and pacing."

Listening to the Respondent. Normally a person has to be trained to become a good listener. Most people would prefer to talk themselves rather than listen to someone else talk. If one observes the conversations of people in informal settings, the person asking the question often interrupts the respondent and begins talking before the respondent finishes. Gorden (1992, p. 305) states, "Listening is the active, intellectual phase of seeking meaning in what another person says; it is hearing with a purpose. The good interviewer tries to understand what the words mean to the speaker as well as how this meaning is related to the objectives of the interview." The following are a number of hints of how to be a good listener. Do not anticipate what the respondent will say in response to a question. Do not interpret what the respondent is saying before the entire answer to the question is given. Ask for a clarification of the answer, if the meaning of the response is not fully understood. Either repeat the question or rephrase it if it is apparent that the respondent is not answering the question asked. Use facial and body language expressions to show that you are sincerely interested in the answers to the questions given by the respondent.

Observing the Respondent. During an interview, it is important to notice the body expressions of the respondent. Gorden (1992, p. 305) states, "Clues such as body posture, movements of hands and feet, facial expressions, and eye movement all constitute a nonverbal context that provides clues to the meaning and validity of the verbal message as well as to the energy level, mood, and attitude of the respondent." An interpretation of these nonverbal body expressions can provide the skilled interviewer with considerable information regarding whether the person is being evasive, is in need of support, needs to be challenged, or is in need of encouragement.

Evaluating the Response. Gorden (1992, p. 305) notes that, when evaluating the response of the person being interviewed, there are three evaluative questions the interviewer must constantly keep in mind. They are "Is the response relevant to the objective of the question? Is the information valid (true)? Is the information complete?" Criminal Justice practitioners will generally have other sources of information to rely on when evaluating the responses of those being interviewed regarding the completeness of the response and the truthfulness of the response. For example, the police report regarding the incident, prior convictions, prior incarcerations, school record, employment history, and the person's health records is generally available to the practitioner. For questions regarding aspects of the individual's personal life such as family life, dependence on alcohol or drugs, and aggressive tendencies, it may be more difficult to obtain a truthful answer, and the interviewer will have to use various methods to try to elicit truthful responses from the respondent. Also, the interviewee may not recognize that there is a problem with controlling anger or dependence on alcohol. There may also be a tendency on the part of some of those being interviewed to blame others for the inappropriate behavior. For example, a respondent charged with assault for beating his spouse may blame the spouse because she was always nagging him.

Probing the Response. If, during the interview, the interviewer realizes that the responses to the questions are either incomplete, evasive, or not consistent with the prior knowledge the interviewer has on the matter, the interviewer must probe in order to obtain more reliable and complete information. Gorden (1992, p. 305) notes, "To probe effectively, the interviewer needs to have command of a variety of probe forms that will encourage the respondent to elaborate and clarify without biasing the response with subtle suggestions or assumptions."

Recording the Response. The appropriate way to record the responses of the interviewee may have been determined during the planning stage of the skill learning cycle. Gorden (1992, p. 305) states, "If the interviewer records a response by simply checking a predetermined category in order to classify a response into some analytical scheme, then recording and analyzing are done simultaneously. On the other hand, if the interviewer writes verbatim quotes from a response or tape records the interview, then recording the information is separate from the analysis phase of the Skill Learning Cycle."

Analyzing and Reflecting

A critical analysis of the results of the interview is necessary before the information gleaned from the interview can be used. For example, if the interview was conducted to determine the respondent's need for counseling or treatment for a mental health problem, one should be certain that the information collected is correct, relevant, and complete. Gorden (1992, p. 305) notes, "Before conducting a second interview on a topic, the interviewer should critically analyze the results obtained from the first interview. This critical analysis has two main aspects: objectively analyzing one's own interviewing behavior and evaluating the total amount of relevant information obtained." The analysis of the interview to determine to the extent possible the validity, relevance, and completeness of the interview is especially important when interviews of defendants in the criminal justice system are completed. For example, a convicted defendant being considered for probation may be interviewed by a probation officer who specializes in presentence investigations. The information on the presentence investigation is given to the sentencing judge, who uses it to assist in making a decision on the sentence. If probation is granted, the information on the defendant will be given to another person who specializes in probation supervision. The information will be used to determine the special conditions of probation and the special needs for counseling and treatment. Thus, several justice functionaries are making decisions on the basis of the original information obtained in the first interview.

Recording and Coding Information

Referring back to the skill learning cycle, the manner in which the information obtained will be recorded depends on the purpose of the interview. If the purpose of the interview was to obtain basic information on the individual, it is likely that the majority of the interview involved closed-ended questions. If the information is being used for assessment of risks or classification, the format of the questions will consist predominately of closed-ended response categories, and the coding format for the answers can be established even before the interview is conducted. On the other hand, if the purpose of the interview is to serve as a source of information for selecting the appropriate type of counseling and treatment to be given to the person interviewed, the questions asked in the interview may pertain to both subjective and objective matters, and many of the responses may require long narratives from the interviewee. In coding the responses, the interviewer, who may be a trained psychologist, social worker, or counselor, will interpret the responses, summarize them, and place them into categories suggesting the types of counseling and treatment needed to address the causes of the person's deviant behavior.

Types of Interviewing

The data collection instrument used for an interview should be designed to address the issues, attitude, opinions, and beliefs of the respondents on the specific problem or topic being considered. Questions are asked to obtain information. The type of information being sought depends on the purpose of the interview, who is being interviewed, and how the knowledge obtained from the interview/s will be applied. Information requested from the respondent can relate to behavior, such as what the person has done, such as being previously arrested, or what the individual is planning to do, such as going to college after graduation; opinions, such as whether the state should allow students to bring firearms on a university campus; feelings, emotions, and attitudes, such as "What were your feelings toward the person who robbed you at gunpoint and stole your purse?" and "Are you afraid that the USA will be targeted for another terrorist attack?"; or knowledge, such as "Who is the governor of the state in which you reside?." The form of the questions asked can be either open-ended or closed-ended. For example, if a respondent is asked the question, "How old are you?," the open-ended format is being used. On the other hand, if the respondent is asked to choose from one of several specific age categories, under 18, 18–35, 36–65, and 66 and older, this is a closed-ended format.

Most interview instruments will consist of a combination of open-ended and closed-ended questions. If the purpose of the interview is to obtain information on an individual for assessment or case work planning, the majority of the questions will probably be open-ended, since this form of questioning will allow the interviewer to obtain more in-depth responses, probe into areas the interviewee may want to avoid, and also provide an opportunity to study the body language of the respondent. However, if the interviewer is not skilled, there may be some drawbacks related to this form of questioning, such as there is difficulty in keeping the respondent focused on the subject, the interview may be very time consuming, much of the information provided may not be relevant to the problem, and often the responses to the questions may be difficult to interpret. If the interview schedule is predominately composed of closed-ended questions, as is generally the case when conducting surveys, the advantages are related to the interview being less time consuming, easier to code and analyze, and more reliable. However, there are some disadvantages to using closed-ended questions. For questions relating to feelings, attitudes, and behavior, the respondents do not have a chance to express their knowledge, feelings, opinions, and behavior in depth. Also, there is little opportunity to introduce new topics not covered in the interview schedule. Most interview schedules will utilize both open-ended and closed-ended questions, with the purpose for completing the interview being the primary factor determining which form of question will predominate.

Cognitive Interviewing

Hess (1997, p. 19) suggests that the *cognitive interview*, in which specific memory-enhancing techniques are used in an attempt to enhance the memory of events, experiences, thoughts, and feelings of the person being interviewed, may be effective when trying to obtain more in-depth information on a matter. Specific memory-enhancing techniques used in the cognitive interview include:

- Restating the context of the event
- Recalling the event in a different sequence
- Looking at the event from a different perspective

If the purpose of the interview is to obtain information that will be useful for counseling the interviewee at a later date, then the cognitive interview format may be quite helpful, since the counselor may obtain information that the client was confused, could not recall, or was hesitant to disclose information.

Hess (1997, p. 20) states that restating the context simply means that the interviewer should try to establish a particular mood, so that the person being interviewed, victim, witness, or client, will mentally relive the events that occurred before, during, and after the event and be able to provide the information to the interviewer.

In *cognitive interviewing*, the interviewee is often asked to provide the information sought in a different time sequence. Instead of asking the person to start at the beginning and provide information on everything considered important until the time is reached when the critical event (victimized, committed a crime, had a mental breakdown) occurred, the interviewer might start at the end point and ask the person to go back in memory to the starting point. The interviewer must keep the person on track, occasionally probe, or ask for clarification.

In *cognitive interviewing*, the interviewer will try to get the client, victim, or offender to look at the situation from a different perspective than the original perspective provided. Hess (1997, p. 22) states, "By prompting a witness to physically change the positioning in his or her memory, the interviewer gives him or her the opportunity to recall more of his or her experience. Interviewers can change the witness' perspective by asking him or her to consider the view of another witness, victim, or an invisible eye on the wall."

Hess (1997, p. 23) concludes, "The cognitive interview often helps interviewers to avoid traps normally associated with routine interviewing, specifically, rushing the witness and interrupting his or her account. Witnesses must feel confident that they have the time to think, speak, reflect, and speak again without annoying impatient interviewers." In addition, Hess states, "Experience shows that the cognitive technique allows interviewers to continue discussing events without feeling or sounding redundant. This continued conversation often prompts additional recall."

Motivational Interviewing

Motivational interviewing is similar to cognitive interviewing in the sense that some of the same techniques are used to obtain information. However, motivational interviewing has assisting the persons to bring about changes in their lives as a major goal. The International Institute for Restorative Practices (2016, pp. 1–2) states, "Motivational Interviewing (MI) is a collaborative dialogue process that supports people in identifying their goals and achieving positive changes in their lives. Practitioners in a wide range of settings-including juvenile justice, drug and alcohol recovery, health care, education and the workplace—are employing MI to help people discover for themselves what stops them from making progress, so they can move forward."

Counseling Interviewing

The counselor who is interviewing a client for the purpose of obtaining information needed to provide appropriate counseling can use a variety of methods and techniques to achieve this goal. The counseling interview in corrections is used to obtain information that will be useful in developing a case management plan for the offender and for use in the actual counseling of the client. Depending on the personal characteristics of the client, the environmental setting, the type of information needed, and the changes in the client desired, the specific approach to the interview may differ. For example, in interviewing a defendant who has been found guilty of sexually molesting a child, the offender may be very reluctant to admit any fault and try to place the blame on the victim. In such situations, a direct, matter of fact approach in the questioning, in which the person does not have an opportunity to avoid the subject and the interviewer forces the person to report about the occasion or occasions in a straightforward, objective way, may result in the offender realizing that denial of responsibility for the act is not possible. A plan for treatment can then be developed. The interviewer might want to use a more nondirective approach with other clients, such as those who appear to be mentally disturbed or addicted to drugs or alcohol.

The National Center for Alcohol Education (1978, pp. 1–2) lists eight basic communication skills that are needed in the counseling of alcoholic clients. They are as follows:

- **Attending**. Demonstration of the counselor's concern for and interest in the client by eye contact, body posture, and accurate verbal following
- **Paraphrasing**. A counselor statement that mirrors the client's statement in exact or similar words
- **Reflection of feeling**. The essence of the client's feeling, either stated or implied, as expressed by the counselor

- **Summarizing**. A brief review of the main points discussed in the session to insure continuity in a focused direction
- **Probing**. A counselor's response that directs the client's attention inward to help both parties examine the client's situation in greater depth
- **Counselor self-disclosure**. The counselor's sharing of his/her personal feelings, attitudes, opinions, and experiences for the benefit of the client
- **Interpreting**. Presenting the client with alternative ways of looking at his/her situation
- **Confrontation**. A counselor's statement or question intended to point out contradictions in the client's behavior and experiences for the benefit of the client

Mastering of these basic communication skills is also essential for those who are completing counseling interviews, regardless of the types of client being counseled.

Hints on Structuring and Conducting Interviews

Typically, an interview should follow a four-stage process. These are as follows:

An Introduction Statement

The reasons for completing the interview are given to the respondent with an appeal for cooperation and assistance. How much explanation is needed for the respondent is dependent on the circumstances. If a convicted felon is being considered for probation and the judge ordered a presentence investigation, the felon is aware of the reasons for the interview and is likely to be quite cooperative. In contrast, when interviewing a victim of crime, the prosecutor or victim services advocate is likely to devote considerable time to an explanation of the purpose of the interview and the importance of the information provided.

Demographic (Personal) Questions

These are questions relating to age, gender, education, employment, and occupation. This information may not always be needed and in many cases can be obtained from other sources, such as public records.

Body

These questions pertain to information relating to the subject matter. They will focus on eliciting information on the behavior, opinions, feelings, and knowledge of the person being interviewed.

Closing Statement

This portion includes asking the respondent if there is any other information that he/she would like to add, a thank you for being cooperative, and a statement on the possibility of further contact.

The actual interview should flow as close to a conversation as possible. Even though the interviewer may dominate the flow of questioning in interviews relating to the criminal justice system, the interviewer can assist in the questioning process by providing some information on the purpose for asking specific questions, by being sensitive to the respondent's feeling when asking potentially embarrassing questions, using transition statements when moving from one topic to another, avoiding leading questions, and using open-ended questions when appropriate.

Methods for Completing Interviews

When interviewing large numbers of respondents, the typical door-to-door method of completing face-to-face interviews is becoming obsolete. This is true for several reasons, including the expense of hiring trained interviewers, the amount of time needed to complete the surveys, and the high refusal rate. However, there are many advantages to conducting face-to-face interviews, including having a higher response rate, having an opportunity to probe if not satisfied with the response to a question, having the chance to clarify questions if it is apparent the respondent did not understand the question, having the opportunity to observe the body movements of the respondent, and having the opportunity to develop more personal interaction with the respondent. There are some situations that demand face-to-face interaction, such as in specialized interviewing in which the subject matter is very technical or in cases in which the topic is very sensitive. For example, a victim of rape is not likely to be very responsive if asked to respond to a telephone or electronic interview. Even in face-to-face interviews, if the interviewer appears to be more concerned with inserting the information into a computer than with listening and understanding the response, the respondent may quickly become dissatisfied with the process.

Although it is becoming more difficult to complete face-to-face interviews for large numbers as a result of the factors mentioned above, it is still possible, if the

interviewers have an opportunity to have the potential responders together in one location and have a major block of time to complete interviews. For example, the author was given permission to interview older inmates at several state and federal correctional facilities. The older inmates were interviewed in an area of the prison in which they had privacy. Engaging in the interview was voluntary, and the inmates did not receive any special reward for participating, with the exception of having a few hours away from their normal routine in the prison. The questions pertained to their adjustment in the correctional facility and some of the major problems they were experiencing.

While face-to-face interviews may be preferred, other methods for obtaining information can be used for the majority of cases involving criminal justice participants and personnel. There are some situations in which an electronic interview (with the interviewee receiving a questionnaire via computer) may be quite suitable and in fact preferable to a face-to-face interview. For example, an electronic interview of an administrator of a correctional facility, a court judge, a professional practitioner, or the public prosecutor may be the only way the person can find time to respond to the questions. In addition, having an opportunity to think about the questions and to structure a response is a definite benefit. Having an opportunity to review a transcript of the interview and correct any errors or misinterpretations of information made by the interviewer is also a positive motivation to cooperate for administrators and officials who may be sensitive to the impressions they make on the public.

Interview Schedules

Interview schedules are designed for a variety of purposes. When seeking to obtain in- depth information from a particular individual, such as a convicted felon who appears to have mental health problems, the case study approach would be utilized. This would require the use of a number of open-ended questions as well as structured, closed-ended questions. One might also be interested in knowing how a work group operates, and this would require not only asking questions about the individuals in the group but also questions about the interactions of the members in the group. Interviews may also be structured to obtain information about the opinions, feelings, and behavior of a larger population. In this case, a representative sample of the larger population will be selected, and the interview instrument will generally be composed largely of closed-ended questions. If the interview schedule consists mostly of closed-ended questions, the responses can be easily placed into the appropriate category, and the total number responding to each category can be readily tabulated, allowing for a less time-consuming analysis of the information.

A discussion with Crista Cross, a forensic interviewer who serves as a member of a team that interviews and provides counseling with sexually abused children, reveals the process the team uses to elicit information from these children.

When asked how the preparation for the interview with the child is completed, Crista responded: "A report comes through the Child Services Hotline and is assigned to an intake social worker or detective of the jurisdiction in which the alleged abuse occurred. Contact is made with the caretaker of the alleged victim, and the interview is scheduled for the child to come into my office" (Kratcoski, 2016, p. 252). There is a pre-interview with the child's caretaker before the interview of the alleged victim is completed. "The victim's caretaker and members of the Child's Network multi-disciplinary team discuss exactly what will happen during the interview of the child and answer any questions the caretaker may have. The interviewer informs the caretaker that the interview will be videotaped, but the child will not be aware that it is being taped. Before, proceeding with the interview of the child, the family advocate takes the caretaker into her office and explains the entire process to him or her, while I go and get the child for the interview. Usually with small children I stop along the way and talk about all the jungle animals I have in my hallway, because it breaks the ice and gets them talking about regular things and I am able to observe their body language, eye contact, and just overall presence. I then take the child into the room, and as I walk in there is a switch on the outside wall that I flip and that starts the video-taping. During the interview, I ask general questions about everything to do with the child's life--family, friends, school, sports, hobbies--and then get into more sensitive issues such as fears, worries, secrets, and safe and unsafe touches" (Kratcoski, 2016, p. 252). Crista notes that she always tells the child being interviewed that he/she only needs to tell the truth and that they will not get into any trouble for telling the truth. If the information from the interview reveals that the child may be in need of a medical examination, the caretakers are informed, and a nurse assigned to the multidisciplinary team completes an examination.

The child forensic interviewer does not conduct any counseling of the child beyond that which may occur during an interview. For example, a child may become hysterical and would be in need of crisis intervention counseling. However, typically, the case is turned over to a case worker or psychologist depending on the needs of the child.

Summary

The interview is the basic tool used for those who provide counseling and treatment in corrections. There are several purposes for interviewing persons who are processed through the criminal justice system, and those conducting the interviews do not all have to have the same level of skill and proficiency. All interviewers must have enough proficiency in communication and interpersonal skills to be effective listeners, to be able to clarify information, to probe for a more in-depth answer, to recognize when the interviewee is lying, to be able to establish some rapport, and to be able to summarize material if a summary is needed. Interviewers who are merely seeking information about the client, such as those involved in the intake process,

do not have to have the same interviewing skills needed when completing counseling interviews. Those interviewers who counsel special problems clients such as substance abusers, sexual offenders, or those with mental health problems need special training in interviewing as well as in counseling.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the advantages of conducting face-to-face interviews in corrections?
2. Assume you are interviewing a child who was sexually victimized. Discuss what procedures you would follow to assure that you obtain reliable and valid information as well as being able to protect the child from trauma as a result of recalling the experience.
3. Why is it so important to be a good listener when conducting interviews?
4. You are employed with the county adult probation department. Your job is to conduct interviews with the criminal offenders who are being considered for probation. You are responsible for completing the presentence investigation as well as the risk and needs assessment. Discuss when it would be appropriate to use open-ended questions and when closed-ended questions would be appropriate. When would you have to be directive (aggressive) in your questioning, and when would it be appropriate to be more nondirective (passive) in your questioning?
5. What are evidence-based approaches to correctional programs? Discuss why risk and needs assessments are considered evidence-based tools used in corrections.
6. Identify the four major parts of a structured interview. Assume you are interviewing an adult male who has been convicted of assaulting his wife during an argument. When would it be appropriate to vary the order in which the questions are asked during the interview?
7. Discuss the types of communication skills that are needed to be an effective interviewer. Is it necessary to have a certain type of personality to be effective at interviewing criminal offenders?
8. What are the differences between the informational interview and the counseling interview? What type of credentials would be required to be qualified to complete counseling interviews with drug abusers who are in a rehabilitation program?
9. If you are employed as a social worker/counselor in a low-security correctional facility that houses older inmates with multiple problems relating to physical health, mental health, and alcohol and drug abuse, when would it be appropriate to use persuasive interviewing? Assume one of the inmates on your caseload is depressed, is fearful of other inmates, and does not engage in recreational and

social activities. How would you conduct a persuasive interview to try to convince the person to become more involved?

10. What are the major methods that can be used to complete interviews? What are the reasons why the interviewer might use electronic interviewing? When would the use of a highly structured questionnaire be appropriate?

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