

# Investigative Strategies to Interview Older Adults Who are Experiencing Abuse

## Pre-interview Considerations

- Assess needs relevant to the interview and the older adult's strengths (skills, abilities, language, and resources)
- Consider possible medical, mental health, cognitive, functional, sensory, and medication-related impairments and conditions
- Provide physical, emotional, and sensory accommodations (large print forms, Bluetooth auditory receivers, assistive devices, verbal and visual cues)
- Provide alternative ways to communicate, if needed (written, verbal)
- Engage online or qualified and trained language interpreter/sign language interpreter
- Assure a safe and accessible physical and psychological environment – neutral, private, and comfortable
- Schedule interview on a day and at a time best for the older adult
- Address interviewee concerns prior to the interview
- Allow additional time for the interview
- Be mindful of the level of authority represented and avoid interviews in intimidating locations

## Strengths-based Strategies

- Adopting a strengths-based perspective focusing on the older adult's positive traits and resiliency factors
- Treat the older adult with dignity, respect, and transparency
- Engage in rapport building and respectful communication
- Introduce yourself and explain the interview process
- Remain attuned and responsive to the older adult's verbal requests and nonverbal cues throughout the interview process

## Supports

- Allow personal or comfort items during the interview
- If desired, facilitate use of victim advocates, support persons, or support/therapy animals
- Enlist cultural or faith-based liaisons
- Provide water, snacks, and breaks as needed

## **The Interview**

- Conduct the interview free of distractions (e.g., turn TV off, select a private room without others present)
- Remain objective and adaptable to meet the older adult where they are
- Utilize person-centered, culturally-responsive, and trauma-informed approaches in verbal and non-verbal communications and interactions
- Sit beside older adults, face them at eye level, and refer to them by their formal title or preferred name
- Be warm, friendly, and conversational
- Use non-leading, non-suggestive, and victim-focused questions
- Use jargon-free, neutral, concise, and clear language
- Use free-recall questioning and open-ended prompts
  - Narrative Prompt (tell me what you know)
  - Open-Focus (what happened next)
  - Choice (was it like this, or was it like that)
- Mirror the older adult's language in your questions (e.g., use their words)
- Dispel biases, prejudices, and/or stereotypes
- Engage in active listening and reflection
- Check for understanding (e.g. let me check to see if I got this right...)
- Record/document interview

## **In addition to the preceding approaches, consider the following for interviewing older adults with cognitive impairment:**

- Explain your actions prior to doing them
- Give simple, step-by-step instructions, and, whenever possible, a single instruction at a time
- Speak slowly and clearly while using simple words, short questions, and brief conversations
- Use nonverbal communication along with verbal instructions
- Minimize speaking with hands and sudden movements
- Don't speak to or treat older adults as though they are a child
- Gently redirect or de-escalate if the individual becomes anxious
- Become aware of any triggers and avoid them
- Repeat statements and questions if necessary; avoid saying "I've already told you that" or "Like I said before..."
- Simplify questions if needed by asking questions that provide a choice (e.g., this or that) or request a yes/no response
- Consult geriatric clinical specialists to advise the process, as necessary