

Interviewing Children & Adults

The Interview

One of the most important sources of data during a psychological assessment

Primary means of developing rapport

Places test results in a broader context of *who* this person is

Can provide behavioral observations as well as insight into thoughts, feelings, & behaviors

Interview or Conversation?

Not the same thing *at all*

Interviews have a end goal in mind, a specific purpose to conducting one

Good interviews have a clear sequence of questions or content to cover

The assessor directs and controls the interview

Biases & Impressions

First impressions of clients can often influence later information gathering via the

- Confirmation bias

- Halo effect

- Emphasis of traits versus situational factors

Clients can also attempt to present themselves favorably or unfavorably, distorting certain information

Flexibility v. Statistics

Interviews are not standardized tests, but can be subjected to same type of psychometrics

Interrater reliability and validity is not very good for unstructured interviews

Structured interviews show much higher levels of both, but at a loss of flexibility

What to Do?

Semistructured interviews should be used in clinical settings, due to their balance of flexibility and reliability/validity

Requires clinical expertise and skill, but can provide more and more useful information than unstructured interviews

There are several basic areas that should be covered in a good interview

Broad Areas to Cover

- History of the problem
- Family history and background
- Personal history and background
- Current symptoms and impairment

Interviewer Characteristics

- Assessors should show:
- Expression of sincerity and genuine interest
 - Accepting, non-judgmental attitude
 - Empathic and warm
 - Positive regard for a person's worth
- How the interviewer recognizes nonverbal responses to questions is very important to the client – much communication is not aloud

General Communication Skills

In order to establish rapport and maintain client cooperation, keep in mind basic types of communication during the interview

- Acknowledgments
- Verbal or nonverbal response that indicates attention, expresses empathy, or provides feedback to a client
 - Does not describe or evaluate the client's thoughts or behaviors

General Communication Skills

Descriptive statements

Generally only used with children
Ongoing verbal picture of a person's behavior
Gives attention and encourages behavior to continue

Reflective statements

Paraphrase and give back what the client said
Conveys interest, understanding, and acceptance

General Communication Skills

Reframing

Provides a more appropriate interpretation of a situation for a client
Especially for negative outlooks, recognize client's feelings, but guide them to a more accurate interpretation

Labeled praise statements

Used with children to indicate approval

General Communication Skills

Summary statements

Reviews previous information and helps focus client on a particular topic of interest
You can then solicit new information from the client, ask for conformation of your understanding, or introduce a new topic

Avoid critical statements at all costs, with both clients and adults, as it decreases rapport

General Communication Skills

Use open-ended questions rather than closed ones when interviewing

- Lead to more information

- Help minimize biased answering

Closed-ended questions can be used as follow-ups to the open-ended ones

Meeting the Client

The use of communication and language should be both age- and cognitive level appropriate

- Avoid use of jargon or unclear vocabulary

- Be aware of current reference points or things of interest to the client

Use of physical contact should also be appropriate to the type of client

Interview Tactics

Preliminaries to attend to include:

- Physical setting of the interview

- Introductions and clarification of address

- Informed consent and confidentiality

- Fees and arrangements for payment

- Review purpose of interview and answer questions or concerns

- Explanation of use of interview information

- Explanation of the structure and format of the interview / assessment

Interview Tactics

With interviews from an evidence-based psychology perspective, one takes a more directive approach

This often means having clients complete self-report measures prior to the formal interview
This information helps to guide the interview

Start with more structured questions, end with open-ended, non-directive ones

Interview Tactics

Your responses determine if the client will or will not continue talking

Encourage the flow of the conversation with verbal and nonverbal replies

Confrontation can be necessary at times to comment on inconsistencies or suspicious information

“Why” should be avoided – rephrase to use “What” or “How” questions if possible

Mental Status Examinations

Can be either conducted as a part of, or in addition to, an interview

Less frequently used by psychologists due to high overlap with standard interview information

- General appearance and behavior
- Affect and mood
- Perception
- Thinking
- Speech

Interpreting Interviews

Treat the information like any other type of assessment data

Use the information gathered to make hypotheses, and evaluate the quality of that data by how well hypotheses are supported

Interview data is typically organized around different areas of functioning or history in the assessment report
