



# Tips for Interviewing Older Adults and Adults with Disabilities: Overview

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# APSIL

This webinar is sponsored by the Adult Protective Services Program at the Illinois Department on Aging under a grant awarded by the Administration on Community Living.

Trained case workers at local provider agencies conduct investigations and provide support in resolving reports of abuse, neglect, financial exploitation, or self-neglect involving adults with disabilities (age 18 – 59) and other older adults (age 60+) living in community-based (non-institutional settings).



# Disclaimer

- This presentation is provided for general information purposes only and does not constitute legal or professional advice.
- The views expressed in this presentation are those of the speaker and may not necessarily represent the policy interpretations and procedures issued by the Adult Protective Services Program at the Department on Aging.

# Session Objectives

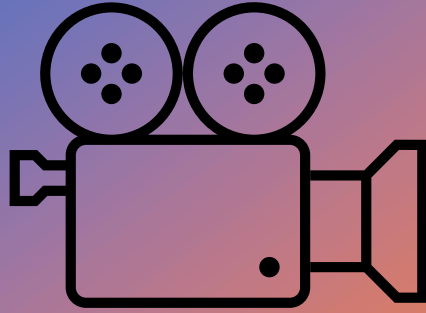
- Distinguish the goals of the first responder interview from those of the investigator follow-up interview
- Describe the importance of the interview setting, timing, and addressing sensory issues
- Describe at least 3 techniques for interviewing a person who has dementia



# Interviewing is a Critical Skill for Law Enforcement

## Overview:

- Most older adults and adults with disabilities can and should be interviewed.
  - Do you have any preconceived ideas, including ageist and ableist stereotypes, about the victim?
- Most people with dementia and other cognitive conditions can be interviewed.
  - Their recall is accurate even if the ability to communicate has diminished.
  - Believe statements made by victims unless there is strong contrary evidence.
- A joint interview with APS or a Department of Human Services Provider should be considered in cases involving adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities.



# Interviewing Considerations

- Elder Justice Initiative Video
- “Interviewing Older Adults”

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE  
**ElderJustice**  
INITIATIVE

EJI Video: “Interviewing Older Adults”

# Goals of the Interview (1)

- Vary by type of interview
  - Initial contact by First Responder
  - Follow up interview by investigator or forensic interviewer
  - To document victim's apparent incapacity relevant to an issue in the case, such as the ability to give legal consent





# Goals of the Interview (2)

- Initial Contact by First Responder - find out basic information:

What happened? Any other victims? Can suspect be identified? Were weapons used? Does victim need medical care? Any safety issues for the victim, law enforcement, and others? Provide mandated notifications.

- Follow up interview by investigator or forensic interviewer

- May be conducted by first responder or different interviewer according to agency practice

- Obtain a more complete statement:

Identify all witnesses. Learn about history of parties. Check on prior incidents and contact with APS. Collect records.

- Connect victim to services

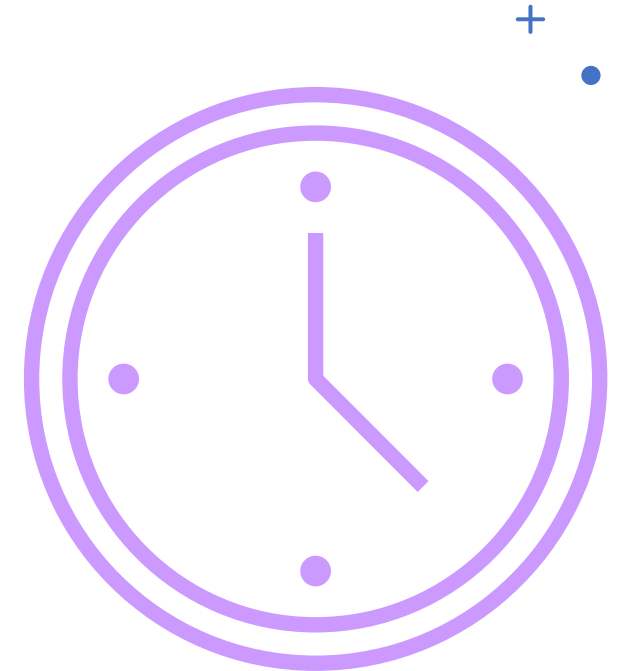
# Goals of the Interview (3)

- If a victim is not able to provide reliable information/testify due to a cognitive condition, check with the prosecutor about using interview to:
  - Document the level of incapacity
  - Demonstrate the victim's vulnerability
  - Show how obvious the victim's impairment would have been to the perpetrator if consent is in issue in a case - e.g., perpetrator knew or reasonably should have known that victim could not legally consent
- Use a 3-part interview — see suggested questions in the handout **“Interview Guidelines for Victims with Questionable Capacity”**

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# Interview Considerations

- Timing of Interview
  - Interview at time person is functioning at their best
  - If victim cannot provide information, talk with caregivers, family, or others who know the victim and their schedule
- Location
  - Schedule interview at safe location where victim is most comfortable, usually their home
  - If victim lives in a facility, consider where victim can be interviewed in a private, calm setting and avoid scheduling conflicts with daily activities



# Interview Considerations (2)

- The interview environment
  - Calm, quiet, without distractions
  - Turn off radios, televisions, etc.
  - Be mindful of victim triggers (e.g., glare/lighting, background noise levels, sudden movements)
- Sensory issues (hearing and sight issues are common)
  - Make sure person has glasses, working hearing aids, etc.
  - Do not touch a person without permission
  - Avoid placing person in glare
  - Increase lighting to improve ability to see and read
  - Use sound amplification

# Accommodations

- Make sure person to be interviewed has any communication aids they use
- Assure appropriate translators are present
- Consider need (and right) to have support person present
  - Is a professional/advocate available?
  - Make sure person is not a suspect or aligned with a suspect
  - Clarify their role

Do not “coach” or instruct the person being interviewed. Do not answer for a person. Do not change the wording of questions. Do not interrupt a speaker.

# Victims with Dementia and Cognitive Disabilities

- Treat as adults in respectful manner
- Use simple language and short sentences
- Avoid abstractions and “why” questions
  - “No use crying over spilled milk”
- Give person adequate time to process the question and respond
- Person may not be able to provide information in chronological order
  - May also be a trauma-related side effect

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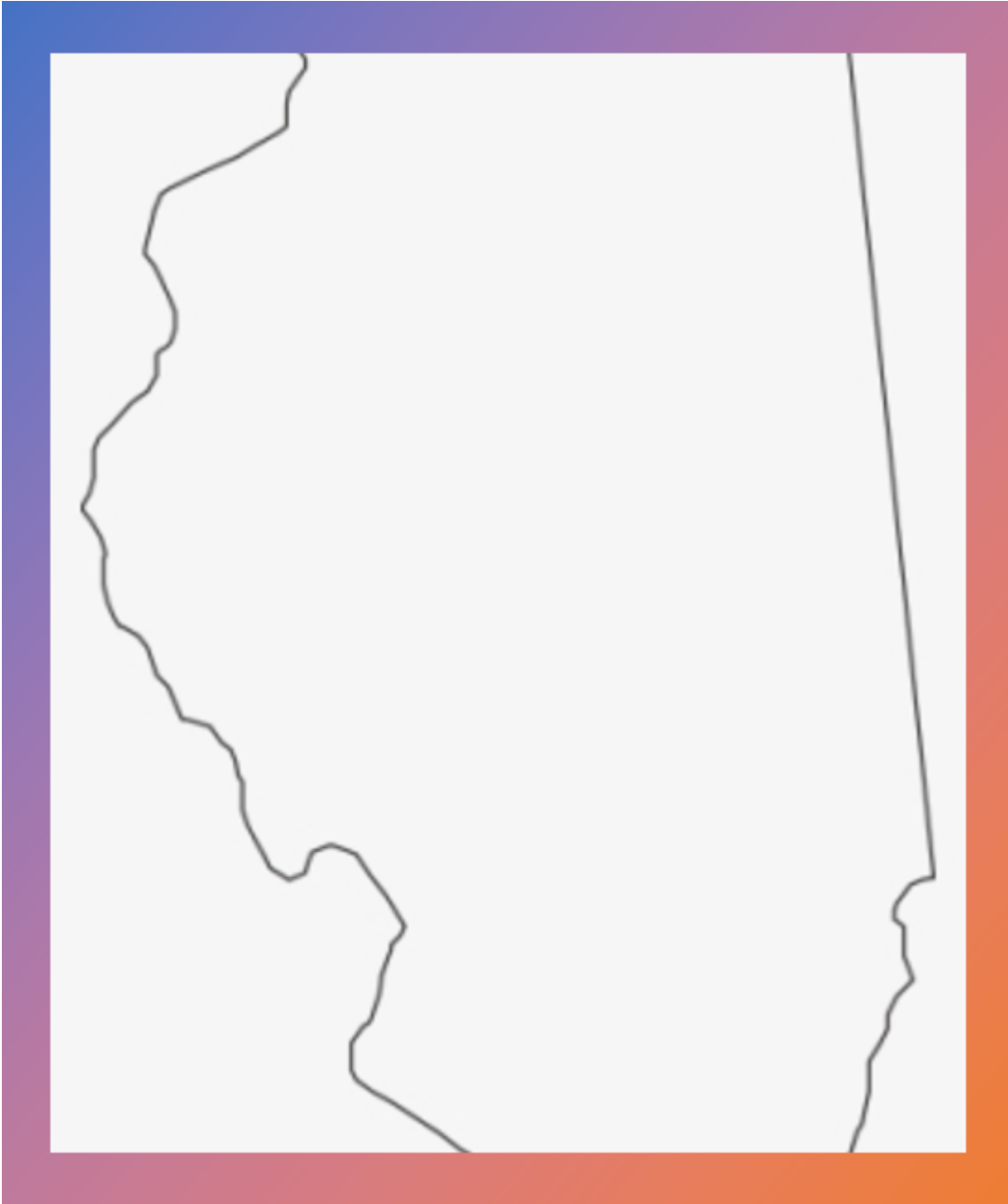
## Additional Toolkit Information

- Tips for Interviewing Older Adults
- Tips for Interviewing Adults with Disabilities



# Summary Points:

- Assume that a crime victim who is elderly or has a disability can be interviewed.
- Determine the best time and location to conduct the interview.
- Anticipate that the person being interviewed may process questions and formulate responses more slowly than younger witnesses and witnesses without disabilities.





# Other Presentations

## Segments on:

- Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation of Older Adults and Adults with Disabilities
- Rapport Building
- Medical issues
- Capacity and consent
- Powers of attorney
- Abuse Investigation Case Study



# For More Information

To report abuse, call:

**1-866-800-1409**, Adult Protective Services Hotline (24-Hour)

Additional Resources:

- <https://www2.illinois.gov/aging/ProtectionAdvocacy/Pages/abuse.aspx>
- <https://www2.illinois.gov/aging/Engage/Pages/default.aspx>



**Thank you for the work you do  
to investigate allegations of  
abuse to protect older adults  
and adults with disabilities!**