

# Engaging and communicating with victims of modern slavery

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## 1 What to consider?

- Victims often experience uncertainty and fear for their **safety** and their future
- Victims often lack **trust** and **confidence** in authorities to keep them safe
- Victims can experience a sense of powerlessness and helplessness
- Victims will likely provide a disjointed story due to trauma and the length of the victimisation experience

## 2 What to promote?

- Feelings of **safety, calmness** and **comfort**
- **Trust** building and **reassurance** that professionals care for their **safety** and **well-being**
- Victims' sense of control and **predictability** about their future



## 3 Supportive communication

### Show genuine attentiveness:

- Show care and interest for their **safety** and **well-being**
- Prioritise victims' needs and **safeguarding** over investigative needs
- **Listen** to their needs and concerns

### Be approachable:

- Promote a **non-threatening** and **non-coercive** environment
- Be aware of power imbalances and remove "signs of authority"
- Adopt a communication style that fosters **calmness** (think about tone, eye-contact)
- Don't underestimate the positive impact of 'small gestures of kindness' (e.g. offering a drink)
- Be empathetic and **non-judgmental**



## 4 Trust-building

- Recognise that **trust** is built progressively and through multiple and **continuous interactions**, showing care and interest for victims' wellbeing
- Demonstrate competency by addressing victims' needs and concerns
- Be honest and straightforward about the potential challenges and difficulties
- Do not overpromise and **act on what you promised**

### Prepare the victim:

- Help them **manage expectations** on what to expect and what is expected from them.
- Provide **clear explanations** on what will happen, who they will encounter, what the procedure will entail, and what the purpose of actions and interactions is.
- Provide victims with timely and **regular updates**

## 5 Empowerment

- Help them **take ownership** of their safety and recovery
- Don't assume, offer options, **choices** and encourage them to make decisions
- Respect victims' timings, space, choices and preferences

### Make it personal

- Recognise the potential impact of the trauma and the **cultural background**
- Support the victim in navigating the criminal justice system and accessing victim services
- Use available resources/ staff: **Victim Liaison Officers** or **Victim Navigators**



## Working with interpreters

### Before the interview:

- Use only **certified** professional interpreters with specialist qualifications
- Brief the interpreter
- **Define key terms** before the interview and discuss with the interpreter if any may be problematic in the other language. Define terms before using them in the interview  
(e.g. *What do you think X means exactly (in your language)? In English X means...*)
- Focus on eliciting the relevant details explicitly and precisely (even though it may sound atypical/unusual/unnecessary to you): mind the fact that your language may not be precise enough  
(e.g. *You said that they pushed you off the curb as they were passing by. Was that on purpose or not?*)
- Have **procedures** in place as to what to do when problems arise (e.g. how to interrupt and signal there is a problem without losing neutrality)

### During the interview

- Stop speaking after one or two sentences to allow the interpreter time to interpret
- Speak in **short and unambiguous sentences** to avoid confusion and unnecessary clarifications  
(e.g. *when referring to times or events*)
- Reformulate questions as many times as needed to check that you understand the reply
- If you need information or clarification about mannerisms, perceptions or cultural norms: ask the victim first; if still unsure, clarify with the interpreters  
(e.g. *Do you understand what is meant by the word "assault" or the phrase "incriminating behaviour"?*)

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