

A summary of the P.E.A.C.E. model

Preparation and Planning; Engage and Explain; Account (Clarify and Challenge); Closure; and Evaluation

P - Planning and Preparation

Thorough and considered preparation is foundational to effective interviewing.

Planning involves intentional thinking about who we are interviewing, why, and the best approach. And it's where - particularly in safeguarding or workplace harassment investigations - survivor-centred and trauma-informed practice is either built-in, or missed entirely.

Many interviewees require special consideration: vulnerable witnesses (including children); survivors of sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment; people with physical, mental or learning challenges; and those facing language or cultural barriers. Failing to plan properly is failing them and, potentially, the investigation.

Effective preparation also includes further practical considerations, such as risk and safety, interview needs and interview team composition, as well as the actual physical interview environment.

E - Engage and Explain

In the PEACE model, Engage and Explain (E&E) sets the tone for the entire interview.

Being interviewed - whether as a survivor, a witness, or the subject of a complaint - is rarely easy. Those first moments often involve anxiety, uncertainty and strong emotions, which may present in a variety of human responses, including hesitation, guardedness, or resistance.

Engagement begins with the basics, done well: introducing yourself and anyone else present (co-investigators, interpreters), explaining roles, and clearly outlining the process.

We set expectations, answer questions, respond to concerns, and provide reassurance. This is where rapport is built and trust begins to form, through demonstration of a co-operative attitude, empathy, respect and with awareness of our own biases.

This phase is also where kinesics matters. Our tone, body language, patience and presence all create an impression. By taking time and care, we build rapport, put the interviewee at ease, and create the conditions for meaningful engagement.

‘A’ - Account

The Account (A) phase of the PEACE model is where we invite the interviewee to share their experience in their own words; this requires interviewers to create the conditions in which accurate, meaningful accounts can safely emerge.

To support the free recall phase, it is good practice to:

- Give clear, supportive instructions: encourage the interviewee to share everything they remember, in any order, without self-editing, even if details feel unclear or unimportant

- Use demonstration for more detail: model the expected level of detail by describing a neutral object or experience

- Apply the funnel approach: start with open-ended questions, then move to probes (who, what, where, when, how) that focus on circumstances and processes.

A trauma-informed Account also rests on core principles:

- Ask one question at a time

- Avoid closed and leading questions

- Minimise “why” questions

- Use clear, neutral language

- Allow silence and processing time

- Be attentive to non-verbal cues.

‘C’ – Closure

The closing stage needs to be just as complete and effective as any other; it should have been considered in the initial planning phase.

This stage involves summarising the interviewee’s account of what happened and verifying that everything that needs to be discussed or asked by either party, has been covered.

Effective closure should:

review and summarise the information given by the interviewee, to ensure there is mutual understanding about what they have said
verify that all questions have been asked and points clarified, and that the interviewee has been given the opportunity to provide all the information that they are able to
offer the interviewee the opportunity to ask questions or receive clarification
explain what next steps will be.

'E' – Evaluation

This phase of review applies both to the information disclosed, and the efficacy of the interview process itself.

It is vital not to skim over the evaluation process as objective review and learning can impact next actions in this investigation, and also how future interviews are undertaken.

Evaluation also enables the interviewer to reflect on their abilities, confidence and techniques and identify any opportunities for improvement.

was the interview successful in terms of quality and comprehensiveness of information shared by the interviewee?

was the interaction deemed successful in terms of quality of engagement?

how does this information disclosed affect the investigation?

could anything have been done differently, in order to better deliver in terms of information relevant to the investigation, as well as the interview experience?