

How to Conduct a Capacity Interview

Identify the most likely threats to decision-making, based on the known diagnoses or the person's presentation. What is the person doing/not doing that is generating concern? Your job is to explore and document the effects their mental illness or cognitive impairment has on the ability to manage affairs. Should you spend more time on "understand" or "appreciate"?

First Base:

Ascertain the person's knowledge of the facts of their financial, living or health situation. Here you are assessing memory, comprehension intelligence. For property assessments, verify basic banking, money and calculating skills. If you discover gaps, can they be educated or trained? Take advantage of opportunities to inform/correct and then re-test. (Stop here only if the person's dementia is obvious).

Second Base:

Probe the person's awareness of limitations/unmet needs and understanding of options to better address their needs, e.g. "How well are you managing? What could you do to manage better?" Puts the person's cognitive abilities to the test in a personally relevant context. Here you are assessing insight, self-awareness, ability to take in and hold onto information in order to problem-solve around needs. Probe the ability to reason and problem solve by presenting them with examples of problem behaviours or mismanagement as told to you by your informants.

Third Base:

Probe the person's appreciation for the reasonably foreseeable consequences if they continue to mismanage or if they chose to implement some of the options discussed. Is there evidence of voluntary incursion of risk? Does the person perceive the main risks and judge them realistically?

Home Base:

Evaluate the person's ability to formulate and adhere to a plan. Does the person want to do anything differently to manage better? What solutions can they propose? Here, you are looking at executive planning, impulse-control, imitative and follow-through. Can they "walk the walk", not just "talk the talk"?

Summation:

During your interview, did you see any evidence that the person's ability to understand, retain, manipulate, reason, evaluate or anticipate was impaired? How does this fit with what you learned from the informants or through records review (i.e. does the person's behavior/prior decisions also imply such impairment?) Is there a causal connection between the mental/cognitive impairment and how they handle their finances/personal care? Any conclusions you reach in your report must be tied to the facts and evidence you present in Section 5, i.e. there should be a line of questioning or informant examples that relate to each conclusion you reach about the adequacy of the person's decision making.