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This sheet will explain:

- Why you should think about personal safety while interviewing.
  - How to travel to and from your interview.
  - How to assess possible problems.
  - How to reduce the risks.
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# How can I be safe while interviewing people?

## Some guidance on personal safety when carrying out oral history interviews

We're not suggesting that oral history interviewing is a particularly hazardous occupation! The vast majority of people who offer you an interview will be absolutely genuine and pose no risks at all. However, as interviewing often involves visiting people in their own homes, with limited prior contact with them, it is still worth thinking about possible hazards and how to minimise or avoid them.

### Assess the possible hazards

- Are there any particular risks presented by the location of the building or area that you would be visiting? For example, is it isolated from other buildings, or inaccessible by public transport?
- Would you be alone with an individual not known to you, in their own home or at a location away from other people?

### Travel Tips

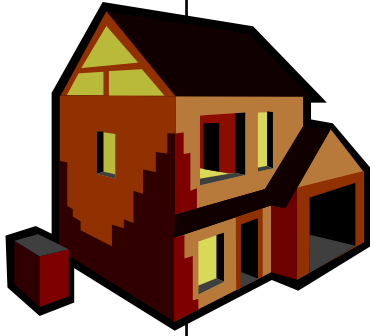
How will you be travelling to and from the interview? If you are using public transport, it's worth thinking ahead:

- Consider the best option for both legs of the journey. It might be appropriate to travel by bus in daylight, but less advisable if you are returning in the evening.
- Make sure you know which train or bus to catch, at what time(s), and the stop closest to your destination. Check the timetable! Even in large cities, bus services can be few and far between in the evenings. Avoid waiting alone at a bus stop at night, particularly in poorly lit or deserted areas.
- Try to avoid walking alone at night – but if you can't, keep to busy well lit roads. Avoid underpasses and short cuts through alleys or across open ground. Walk confidently and with a sense of purpose.
- If in doubt, travel by taxi, but follow these simple precautions:

- ⇒ Use a firm you have used before, or one known to the people you are visiting.
- ⇒ Sit in the back of the cab, and don't give the driver any personal details.
- ⇒ Request a female driver if you prefer this.
- ⇒ Have your fare ready before you reach your destination.



## Before the interview



If you feel uncomfortable for any reason when visiting someone in their own home, trust your instincts. Make an excuse and leave. Try to sit where you can gain access to the door if need be.

- If you have any doubts at all about visiting people in their own homes, arrange for a someone to accompany you (with the agreement of the person you are visiting) – or meet them at a suitable location where there are other people on hand.
- If you have not met your interviewee before, make the effort to check that they are who they say they are. Ring them back at a later stage, for instance, or check their address or number in the telephone book.
- If you are visiting a group or an individual at a community centre or similar building, ask the organiser for clear directions, and check that the building will be open at the time you expect to arrive.
- Make sure that someone knows where you are going, and what time to expect you back. Give them the telephone number and/or address of the person you are visiting, and let them know of any change of plans while you are out. Carry a mobile phone if possible – or a phone card or change for a public telephone.
- Agree with them what to do if you don't return when expected, and haven't contacted them: for instance, to telephone the person or venue and ask to speak to you; to find out what time you may have left and what your plans were; or to contact the police if you have not returned within an agreed length of time.
- Females are generally advised to avoid lone visits to males, and males to lone females – but you need to make your own judgement about this, based on individual circumstances.

### Remember—Be safe!

- Plan ahead
- Consider the possible hazards
- Reduce the risks

## Finally



Many of the people you interview may be elderly or living alone. Encourage them to think of their own safety as well, by providing them with proof of your identity – and gently insisting that they look at it carefully. You could also provide a phone number for them to verify your identity before you arrive or on the doorstep.