

Handling emotional interviews

At Digital Collection Days, you may have to listen to or see upsetting content relating to people's experiences during the Second World War.

Here are some tips for preparing for and handling this challenge.

SAFEGUARDS

- Consider building in breaks away from the interviews. Also take breaks *during* interviews so that both parties can take a 'breather'.
- Rotate volunteers so that they do not spend all day at the Interview Stage.
- Establish agreed rules and limits around interview length (around 20 mins). If you see an interview lasting longer than 20 minutes, go and check on the volunteer and, if they confirm that they feel uncomfortable/distressed, encourage them to end the interview and tick the 'Longer Interview' box.
- Limit time spent with difficult materials both during and after the Digital Collection Day (i.e. only look at them briefly when interviewing, digitising and uploading).
- If children are serving as interviewers and it is clear that an interview is/will be 'difficult', remove them from the situation or, if necessary, the room.

DECOMPRESSION

- Talk to someone in advance of the interview about how they have dealt with a similar situation
- Identify someone who is willing for you to talk to them about your emotions and reactions after the interview
- Physical exercise such as a walk or a run can help to 'process' a difficult interview and put it into perspective

TECHNIQUES

- If the contributor offers a particularly emotional response, try to 'ground' them by focusing them on the present and not the historic memory. One way to do this is to ask them to place both feet on the floor, take a few deep breaths, and notice the features of the room in which you are sitting
- Do not hesitate to end the interview earlier than expected, if you feel that this is appropriate.

Further reading

- <https://www.ohs.org.uk/looking-after-yourself/>
- The Royal British Legion's 'Veterans' Gateway' supports veterans and their families to find the help they need. A team of advisors are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week on 0808 802 1212.