

### TIPS & TOOLS #3: CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

- ***Start with a non-threatening, open-ended question*** to build rapport and get the respondent talking. Then place more difficult or sensitive questions at the end of the interview.
- ***Use probes to stimulate discussion and obtain more information.***  
**Common probes include:**
  - “Please tell me more about that.”
  - “I’m not sure I understand. Could you explain that again [or in more detail]?”
  - “What would be an example of that?”
  - “If I were your client [boss, staff, the Governor, etc.], how would you describe that to me?”
  - “Is there anything else [on that topic] that you would like to add?”
- ***Stay silent to give the respondent time to think.*** When a respondent doesn’t start answering right away, don’t immediately start talking again. Silence (an expectant pause) can also be used as a sort of probe to indicate that more information is expected.
- ***Practice active listening.*** Active listening occurs when the listener provides feedback (verbal and/or nonverbal) to the respondent.
- ***Overcome barriers to active listening:***
  - Suppress disruptive habits (finger drumming, change jingling).
  - Don’t begin reading documents provided by the interviewee.
  - Be aware of your biases and how they might be filtering the respondent’s message.
  - Don’t jump to conclusions; hear out the respondent.
  - Don’t interrupt or debate.
  - Don’t assume that you understand what the respondent meant; request clarification, especially of key words or ideas.
  - Don’t monopolize the conversation.
  - Turn off your cell phone.

- ***Use verbal active listening techniques:***
  - Make reassuring sounds, such as “uh huh,” “I see,” “that’s interesting,” etc.
  - Probe the respondent’s initial responses in order to expand or clarify the information given.
  - On key points, restate in your own words what the respondent has just said.
  - Summarize the main points of the discussion.
  
- ***Use non-verbal active listening techniques:***
  - Maintain eye contact and sit up straight.
  - Use occasional affirmative nods to show understanding and interest (but don’t let this become a habit lest it start to seem like you are approving, not just affirming the responses).
  - Take notes as appropriate to show that information is relevant and important.

***For more Tips & Tools and other resources, go to our website:  
<http://tobaccoeval.ucdavis.edu>***