



## The Client Interview

One of the most important aspects of a paranormal investigation is the client interview. These interviews allow clients an opportunity to provide the investigator with a convincing reason to perform an investigation. It provides the investigator with a place to start so we can separate normal but unusual experiences from the truly paranormal that need further testing to determine cause.

Some people love to tell you their ghost stories. They pull you aside every time you see them and sometimes it seems you just can't shut them up. Others are more reluctant and need to be coaxed to reveal what for many is a very frightening situation. A good interviewer knows how to put the client at ease, making the interview process pain free for everyone. Some of the simplest techniques are sometimes forgetting as we rush toward the high tech. Remember that a smile and good breath go a long way to putting the witness at ease.

Our recommendation is that one investigator be assigned to perform all case related interviews. This creates continuity with all the witnesses and allows for better determination if trickery or dishonesty is involved. In order to maintain a complete record audio or video record the interview as well as taking handwritten notes.

The basic guidelines below may help you create your own interview process.

1. Identify all witnesses to be interviewed. If possible interview each witness separately.
2. Watch the client closely for shifts in body language that may indicate dishonesty. Make note of any odd or deceptive behavior on the part of the witness. This includes substance use/abuse or collusion between witnesses.
3. If possible have the client fill out a questionnaire prior to the interview. This will allow the interviewer a chance to test the client for memory, perception and reasoning ability.
4. Allow the witness to explain all events, experiences or occurrences completely without interruption. Questions should be held until the witness has completed the account.
5. Ask questions to clarify events.
6. Use the interview questionnaire to ensure that all pertinent data has been collected.
7. Information required for each event reported will follow standard questioning guidelines:
  - **What** occurred?
  - **Who** witnessed the event?
  - **Where** did the event take place?
  - **When** did the event take place? **How** often do events take place?
  - **How** did the witness feel about? **What** was their reaction to the event?
8. Do not ask leading questions. Instead of asking "Did you see an apparition?" ask, "What did you see?" Try to avoid asking questions that may cause the witness to unintentionally give misleading information and add details they think you want to hear.

9. Only ask open ended questions. Try to avoid questions that will result in a yes or no answer. Instead of asking "Did you hear anything?" ask "What did you hear?" Open ended questions allow the witness to tell their own story.
10. Separate first hand experiences from the anecdotal experiences of others told to the witness. This will allow you to decide if you want to interview additional witnesses.
11. If possible create an event timeline. This will help later when researching the history of the location.

Remember you're performing this investigation because the client has experienced something odd. The interview is your first step in determining the cause, whether paranormal or natural. Never go into a case without being armed with the basic facts. Who, What, Where, When. . . your investigation will hopefully give you the how.