

## 6. INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUES

The ILAB cocoa study will interview respondents of different age ranges and therefore of different developmental abilities. Unlike many studies you have worked on, this will require flexible approaches to interviewing as well as using your best judgment in the field to determine which strategies to use. For community interviews, household head interviews, and interviews with older adolescents, you should follow the rules outlined in section [6.1: \*Best Practices in Interviewing Adults and Adolescents\*](#). However for younger children and some adolescents (who may struggle with recall and conceptual understanding of the survey content), you will need to employ a more flexible and fluid approach which is covered in-depth in section [6.2: \*Best Practices in Interviewing Young Children\*](#).

### 6.1 BEST PRACTICES IN INTERVIEWING ADULTS AND ADOLESCENTS

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#### 6.1.1 Introducing yourself and building rapport

You will be contacting respondents selected for interviews. Respondents do not know you, so it is important to give a good impression and establish good rapport from the start by being courteous and professional. When a respondent feels at ease with you, that respondent will be more motivated to continue the interview and more likely to focus on your questions.

The following list offers useful guidelines on rapport-building:

- Spend approximately 1–2 minutes developing rapport. Less could be too short to make the respondent comfortable with you, and longer will delay the interview too much.
- When introducing yourself, explain carefully the purpose of the interview.
- Be self-assured and positive about the experience. Ours is an important assignment, there is no need to be apologetic. Do not apologize for asking the respondent to take part in the interview. Many respondents find interviews like this to be an important way to share their views. Try to avoid sentences like, “could you spare a few minutes?” or “would you mind answering some questions?” On the other hand, don’t try to be overbearing. For example, say “I would like to ask you some questions” or “I would like to talk to you for a moment.” rather than “You *must* answer the following questions.” Present the invitation to participate in a smiling and relaxed manner.

#### *Listen attentively to what the respondent is saying*

After you’ve introduced yourself, the respondent may agree to participate, may have questions, or may not want to talk with you. It is important to listen attentively to what s/he is saying. You cannot answer questions if you have not listened to what is asked. For example, a respondent may refuse because you have come at a bad time, and not because he or she does not want to participate. A household informant may refuse because s/he is not the head of the household. In this case, you may be able to set an appointment to come back at a better time and avoid a refusal. Be very sensitive to comments from informants and respondents; there is always something more specific behind an “I’m not interested” and that needs to be uncovered by you. Finally, always remember to thank the informants and respondents for their time and to make appropriate notes in your tracking forms.

#### 6.1.2 What to do when the respondent does not seem to want to participate

##### *Stress the importance of the survey*

Stress that the respondent is providing information so that others might learn from their experiences. The selected respondents represent many other persons in Ghana and their experiences cannot be replaced. We want to hear from all types of respondents.

For example, you could say: “We are asking your household to participate in the survey so that your voice can be heard and so we may learn more about people living in Ghana similar to you. Talking with your household is very important as answers will give decision makers in our country the information they need to make informed decisions about changes needed for Ghana that can help people like yourself.”

### *Empathize*

For example, if the household informant or respondent is concerned about the amount of time required for the interview, explain that you understand how difficult it is to manage all of the time demands s/he is under. Ask if there is a better time for you to come back. Assure them you will try to be as efficient with their time as possible.

### *Don't argue!*

Even if the household informant or respondent does not want to participate, maintain a pleasant, friendly attitude and stress the positive. Stress how important the survey is and how important it is for each household and respondent to participate. Make the respondent feel very special and important.

A useful technique is getting him/her to say “yes” to something, like “Do you remember why you were asked to join in this survey?” or “Do you remember what the study is about?” Once a respondent says “yes” to a question, s/he will be much more inclined to continue cooperating.

Survey questions and introductory or transitional statements are to be read exactly the way they are written with no changes in wording. Each question is carefully composed and tested so that most people will understand the meaning. Even small changes in the way questions are worded may have significant effects on the way questions are answered. Questions are written so as not to suggest answers and lead to biased results.

It is important that you practice reading aloud the questions many times prior to the first interview. During training, the opportunity is presented to practice through several mock interviews to learn the questionnaires and rehearse reading the questions. Questions should be read slowly and in a conversational tone emphasizing the appropriate words. Remember, this is the respondent's first exposure to the questions so it is important that s/he hears it correctly.

Every question must be read to the respondent even though it may have already been answered in the context of a previous question or in general conversation. It is appropriate to acknowledge the previous information with a comment such as: “You may have answered this question earlier but I need to ask it at this time. I want to make sure I have it right.” Another question may ask about something that seems obvious to you by observation, such as asking if the respondent has a bicycle and you can see one. DO NOT ASSUME. The bicycle may belong to a visitor or have been borrowed.

## 3 Key Traits of a Good Enumerator

Being Professional: Enumerators perform a delicate balancing act between being congenial with a respondent and maintaining a professional distance. Maintaining a distance is essential to avoid biasing the interview.

Being Non-Judgmental: Enumerators must be non-judgmental, show no emotion or reaction to a respondent's answer and not lead the respondent toward a possible response. It is never appropriate to comment on an answer to a question.

Keeping Control: Occasionally a respondent will enjoy giving his/her opinions, which may ultimately lead to taking control of the interview to tell stories. If this should occur, the enumerator must tactfully, in an assertive manner, regain control.

Occasionally, an informant or respondent may ask you to define something. When this happens, try to first re-read the question. If the respondent still does not understand, you should refer to the enumerator notes for additional guidance. Avoid paraphrasing or defining something when you have not been trained to do it correctly.

**INTERVIEWS CANNOT BE CONDUCTED BY PHONE.** You should only call respondents to find out if they are home or to confirm an appointment. You may allow respondents to use your phone to call someone for clarification on a question, but you should not speak to the person yourself. Also remember that when you interview someone directly, you are required to first go through the procedures for obtaining informed consent.

### 6.1.3 Basic rules

There are several techniques that facilitate the collection of neutral, unbiased data. Following these rules will enhance the quality of the survey data.

#### *Remain neutral*

When interviewing the household informant or respondent, you must be disciplined in your reaction to the information you are given. Be positive and warm all through the interview regardless of any individual responses. Do not let your expression or your reply register disbelief in the data he/she has given you. Avoid facial expressions, impatience, or comments about their responses. You want to encourage the respondent to continue through the entire interview. Periodically thank them for their responses and do not pass judgment on anything they tell you.

#### *Don't estimate for the respondent*

In some cases, you may need to ask respondents to make estimations. If a respondent cannot answer a certain question (for example, "how many hours do you work in a typical week?"), ask them to provide an estimate. You can tell the respondent "Please give me your best estimate" or "I understand you might not know the exact amount, we are still interested in your best estimate though." Remember it is the respondent who is to make the estimate, not you, regardless of the correctness or incorrectness of the answer. While you may help the respondent construct an estimate using worksheets or calculators, any figures that go into such calculations must come from the respondent.

It is also possible that the respondent thinks that more than one answer is appropriate to a single question. In this case, encourage the respondent to choose the one response that is most appropriate or the one response that is more important. Refer to the enumerator guidance notes where appropriate.

If the respondent refuses to answer a question, reassure the respondent that his/her answers are confidential and emphasize how important it is that s/he tries to answer all of the questions. There is a fine line between encouraging the respondent to answer and being too pushy. As an enumerator, you have to provide the respondent with the opportunity to answer, but you also should not force them. If the respondent truly does not know the answer to a question or does not want to answer, mark the item "don't know" or "refused" and proceed to the next question. Do not try to determine an answer based on a statement that a respondent made on a previous response.

#### *Do not change the sequence of the questions*

Ensure that the respondent has answered a question sufficiently before trying to move to the next. Questions should be asked in the exact same order they appear in the questionnaire.

### *Don't hurry*

If you get lost or stumped, take your time to read any instructions and let the respondent know what you are doing. Once you have completed the interview, it will be very difficult to go back and correct errors or edit.

Respondents sometimes try to hurry the interview; don't allow them to do so. Politely say that you have to get answers to each question. If needed, you can schedule at time to return later.

## **Dos and Don'ts**

- Do not talk with the respondent without looking at him/her
- Do not rush through questions, especially if the respondent does not understand what you are asking of them; patiently repeat questions if needed
- Do not make comments on the respondent's answers– remain neutral throughout your interaction with the respondent and his/her household
- Do not talk about issues that may be controversial or introduce bias (e.g., "I also had a negative experience" might cause them to answer differently to future questions in an effort to validate your expressed preferences)
- Do not use harsh words!

### **6.1.4 Additional techniques and concerns**

To supplement the best practices for interviewing, here are tips for good in-person interviewing:

- Appropriate eye contact during the interview is very important to establish comfort and trust with the respondent.
- There are some questions that a respondent may hesitate to answer if other people are present. Use your common sense, tact, and ingenuity to avoid/elude nosy neighbors, fussy children, curious friends or spouses, and other such annoyances. For example you could say to the third party: "I am interviewing [respondent name] for an important survey conducted by Kantar. It is important that I conduct this interview in private. Would you mind coming back at a later time when we are done with the interview?" If all else fails and you cannot rid yourself of a third party, try again to request privacy when you come to a sensitive question. With luck, the third party will become bored and will leave on his or her own.
- Some questions may bring up painful or difficult memories for respondents. Avoid excessively probing for responses to these types of questions if the respondent is visibly upset or shaken. Use your best judgement. Remember that "refused" or "don't know" are acceptable responses.
- In some cases a respondent may request help from another person in answering a question. This is okay as we want accurate information. However you should follow the consent procedures if you are obtaining information on that person directly.

### **6.1.5 Preventing common mistakes**

Review these tips to help you avoid common mistakes and more accurately record responses. Make sure to double-check these points as you fill out the survey:

- Pay attention to categorizing responses. Often times, the codes you enter are field-coded, meaning you have to listen for the respondent's answer, then refer to the

questionnaire to select the appropriate response. When you do this, be careful to record the correct response (and thoroughly review available options before selecting “other”).

- *Pay attention to timeframes and units of measurement.* If the respondent provides the answer “5” to the question “How many hours per week do you work?” you should verify what unit they are referring to. Hours? Days? PAY ATTENTION to what we are asking for — a response of “5” may indicate that the respondent works 5 days per week, rather than 5 hours per week. If the respondent gives a response that is vague or not in the timeframe of your response options, you need to read the options back to the respondent as you categorize the responses. This is especially important if the respondent previously implied they work full-time and said “5” to a question like this – that’s a clear indication that they may have misunderstood the question.
- *If it does not seem right, probe!* Trust your instincts — if a response does not make sense, follow-up with respondents.

### 6.1.6 Bias

While you are conducting an interview, it is very important that you are aware of how you approach the interviewee. Enumerators collect data reflecting the attitudes, opinions, and behaviours of our respondents. Because of this, you should be aware of the ways in which you might influence respondents’ answers. There are *three* main types of bias:

#### *Style bias*

*Style bias is a bias by first impression. Tone of voice, appearance, actions, and attitudes will influence the respondent’s welcome.* It is important to present a pleasant but neutral appearance. You do not want to scare a potential household informant or respondent by presenting yourself in a way that offends or possibly belittles him/her. You should always be aware of the image conveyed by your appearance and attitude and how respondents of different social and economic backgrounds might react to this.

#### *Nonverbal bias*

*Nonverbal bias is revealed in body language and facial expressions.* Nonverbal bias might influence a respondent’s answers through body language or facial expressions. It could be just a raised eyebrow or physically pulling back when the respondent answers or asks a question, such as showing surprise or shock. Even a knowing smile can influence the way the respondent will react to further questions. As an enumerator, you must maintain self-awareness, keep a neutral face, and avoid reacting to respondent’s answers throughout the interviewing process to avoid nonverbal bias.

#### *Verbal bias*

*Verbal bias is influencing the respondent through your words.* Verbal bias can happen during the first few seconds of your introduction, when the household informant or respondent is trying to decide if he/she wants to participate in the study. In this case your words may influence the respondent’s willingness to participate in the study or not.

Verbal bias can also happen during the actual interview as you influence the household informant or respondent’s responses. The interview questions are collecting data from the household and your opinion should not come through to the respondent. Also, you should never make any side comments about the household or respondent on his/her answers.

### 6.1.7 Probing

#### *What is a probe?*

A probe is a question or comment by the enumerator that encourages a clearer or more complete response without biasing the answer. A good probe is always controlled and non-directive or neutral, and helps the respondent focus on the question.

### When is it necessary to probe?

A probe is used:

- For clarity
- For completeness
- For relevance - to return to the point of the question
- To elicit more information from a "don't know" response

### Six basic types of probing

- The silent probe: pausing. A silent probe is often effective. Simply stop writing or typing, and look expectantly at the informant or respondent.
- Re-reading the question. Focus on the specific needs of the question and stress key words. Example: A respondent may answer a pre-coded question with a term that is not one of the given options included in the question. The enumerator then must train the respondent to select one of the given options. The best probe is to re-read the entire question, including the answer options.
- Asking for more information. "Please tell me more." "What else?" "How do you mean that?"
- Stressing generality. "In general, would you say..." – then repeat the question.
- Stressing subjectivity. "In your opinion, [...]" "What is your best estimate?"
- Zeroing in. When the response is a range of numbers, the enumerator needs to zero in for a precise response. When the response is in units other than what the question calls for, the enumerator needs to zero in for the correct units. Where appropriate, you should refer to the enumerator guide for instructions on converting between different types of units.

### Probing don't know responses

**NORC's policy is to probe all "don't know" at least once.** There are 3 basic reasons why people use "don't know" as a response:

- The informant or respondent is thinking over his/her reply and says "I don't know" to fill the silence. The best probe is to pause and wait expectantly while the respondent comes up with an answer that you are able to code (*silent probe*).
- The informant or respondent is unsure and reluctant to answer for fear of giving the wrong response. The best probe is to assure the respondent that there is no right or wrong answers, and that we would like his or her opinion or best estimate (*stressing subjectivity*). The respondent is very likely to come up with a response you are able to code.
- The informant or respondent truly does not know how to reply and cannot give an answer under any circumstances. If an enumerator determines this to be the situation after probing once, it is acceptable to record the response as "don't know".

### Probing sensitive questions

Some of the questions in the interview ask about sensitive topics like income and child labour, so respondents may become upset when asked these questions. Be comfortable asking these questions and monitor respondents to assess whether they become acceptable. Remember that respondents may reply "refused" to any question in the interview. Respondents may also wish to take a break from the interview, which is okay.

## 6.1.8 Checking for internal consistency

As an enumerator, you must also use your common sense and periodically conduct consistency checks. It is your job to record the respondent's answer exactly as s/he communicates them but not necessarily to *blindly* do so. While we have stressed the importance of remaining neutral, not estimating for the respondent and not arguing with the

respondent, you must also remain alert to catch errors or inconsistencies in the respondent's answers.

Be calm and neutral whenever you need to indicate that the data is inconsistent with other data previously given. The first thing you want to do is **repeat the question** to make sure that the respondent heard and understood the question correctly.

If repeating the question does not help, you may want to **re-read the answers** to the respondent to make sure that *you* understood the respondent's answers correctly (only if the question allows the enumerator to read out answers). The conversation may go like this:

- ENUMERATOR: "Let me make sure that I understood your answers correctly – you said earlier that you never listen to the radio for any purpose?"
- RESPONDENT: "Yes, that's correct."
- ENUMERATOR: "And for this question, you said you have heard a political broadcast on the radio?"
- RESPONDENT: "Yes, I think so."

At this point, the respondent may be re-thinking his/her answers, and realizing that the answers do not make sense. Allow them to correct either of their responses at this point and be sure you make the change accordingly in the response you have recorded in the tablet. If the respondent just says "yes it's correct", then record the answers as stated and make a note that the answers are inconsistent but that you did probe.

NORC will also review your questionnaire for internal consistency and completeness, and follow-up with Kantar to discuss this with the supervisor and team. He or she may come to you with questions if some answers appear illogical.

## 6.2 BEST PRACTICES IN INTERVIEWING YOUNG CHILDREN

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Studies that depend on recall and self-reporting of young children are likely to suffer from poor accuracy and reliability. In contrast to older youth or adults, children in the 5-11 age group are prone to memory mistakes due to the fact that their brains are still developing. In addition, younger children have less exposure to language and formal schooling, making technical terms and complex sentence structures difficult to grasp. The most significant challenges in conducting survey research with younger children include:

- Reality-monitoring error. Four to six year-old children are often unable to distinguish between real and imaginary events. As a result, they are highly prone to "confabulation," where errors in memory lead to unintentionally fabricated or distorted stories.
- Source-monitoring error. Many younger children fail to distinguish between memories of internal/lived experiences and events stored in memory from external sources (e.g., hearing about or observing someone else doing farming versus actually doing farming themselves).
- Limited vocabulary. Vocabulary is directly related to age and schooling. Survey questions that include technical language or jargon will not be understood by children even though they may understand the underlying concepts.
- Lack of understanding of measurement units. Research shows that the ability to think chronologically is a direct function of age, with younger children struggling to recall or categorize events in a sequential manner. In addition, time intervals like minutes, hours, days, months, and years are mathematical concepts that are taught in school and reinforced over many years. The same applies for things like weight and distance.

- *Suggestibility*. Younger children tend to want to please adults and easily respond to even subtle cues as to what type of answer they think you are looking for (including any answer at all, in cases where they do not understand the question).

Evidence shows that cognitive interviewing techniques—rapport building combined with free recall and guided memory-tracing—significantly reduce recall error and confabulation among young children (as compared to direct questioning). This guide is designed help enumerators adapt and apply these techniques in order to elicit critical information on the labour status of children in the 5-11 age group.

### 6.2.1 Before starting the interview

Always administer informed consent procedures before beginning an interview. This includes obtaining parent/guardian consent and reviewing the assent script with the child. You should also make sure that the child is not very hungry or tired before beginning. S/he should have the opportunity to eat and rest when needed. Attune yourself to the child's temperament and focus and offer breaks throughout the interview so s/he can refresh.

#### *Rapport building*

Before beginning the interview, it is important to help the child become relaxed and comfortable with you. They should view the interview as a stress-free or even pleasant experience, which will depend entirely on your ability to build trust and rapport. To break the ice, ask the child some questions like:

- “What games do you like to play?”
- “What are the names of your playmates? Siblings?”
- “What do you like to eat?”

You can also come up with your own interesting questions, taking cues from the child's environment. Probe to learn more, as appropriate, and try and find ways to relate to the child through their responses. Show the child that you are listening and interested in what s/he is saying. Be sure to call the child by name and maintain eye contact (but don't stare).

#### *Developmental assessment*

Accuracy of self-reporting is highly influenced by the child's age and cognitive, emotional, and social development. How and to what extent you apply special, child-friendly interviewing techniques will depend greatly on the child's level of development, so you should take time to assess where they are through the following questions.

These questions are ordered from easy to difficult. Be sure to start at a difficulty level that you think is appropriate, and move forward or backwards in the list depending on how they do:

1. “Can you touch your head? Point to your nose? Knees? Shoulders?” [*Ask child to do quickly, as a game*]
2. “Can you count to 10? Can you count backwards from 10?”
3. “Can you name 3 types of work done by people in this community?”
4. “Do you go to religious services? [If yes] on what day?”
5. “On what day of the week were you born? What day of the week comes before that?”
6. “Can you name the days of the week, starting with Sunday? Can you name the days of the week backwards?”
7. “What days of the week do you usually attend school?”
8. “Can you name the months of the year, starting with January? Can you name the months of the year backwards, starting with December?”
9. “How many hours are in a day? How many minutes are in an hour?”
10. “Is it light or dark outside at 11:00 PM? 1:00 PM? 6:00 AM? 7:00 PM?”



If the child shows clear understanding of all of the above, you may proceed to interview him/her using the wording in the questionnaire (i.e., follow procedures for interviewing adults or adolescents). Otherwise, use the results of this informal assessment to help you adapt your language and questioning methods to the child's level. For example, if a child cannot name the days of the week, you should avoid referring to days of the week during the interview. Similarly, if a child does not show conceptual understanding of time, you should avoid referring to times of day, minutes, or hours and instead use concepts familiar to the child (e.g., sunrise, sunset, after sleep, after school, etc.).

### *Set forth the ground rules*

Always go through these ground rules with children in the 5-11 age group. For older children, you should go over any rules that you think will be helpful.

- The child is free to take a break at any time. If s/he needs a drink or has to go to the bathroom, s/he does not need to wait until the end of the interview. If at any point, s/he feels tired or distracted, you should offer a break.
- Ask child to explain the difference between truth and a lie. Check understanding by providing concrete examples such as:
  - "If I said that house was blue, would that be true or untrue?"
  - "If I said your name was X, would that be true or untrue?"
  - Explain to the child that you want to talk only about the true things.
- Ask child to explain the difference between guessing and knowing. Check understanding by providing concrete examples such as:
  - "What did you do after school yesterday?" [*knowing*]
  - "What will your teacher do after school tomorrow?" [*guessing*]
  - Explain to child that the focus will be on things that they remember or know. If they don't know something, they should not guess but instead say "I don't know."
  - Note that you **want** the child to say "I don't know" when s/he is unsure or can't remember something. "I don't know" is an acceptable answer, just like any other answer.
- Tell child that you want him/her to tell you when something you say is unclear so you can try and say it in a different way.
- Explain that you may ask the same question in a different way or more than once because you sometimes forget that you asked already. S/he should not change the answer when this happens, but just tell you what they remember as best as they can. Try the following exercise as practice:
  - "What did you eat for your last meal?"
  - "Did you eat X for your last meal?" [*If child contradicts earlier response, discuss inconsistency and reinforce rules on truth/lie and not needing to change answer if asked the same thing twice*]

### *Practice exercise*

The purpose of the practice exercise is to introduce the cognitive interviewing approach and verify that the child is following the ground rules established earlier. Use the following script for practice:

- "Think back to the last time you visited a friend (or relative)'s house. I want you to tell me everything that you did during the visit."
- "Start with when you first arrived at the house and tell me everything you can remember."

- *[Once child stops giving account]* “Can you tell me anything else about that visit? For example, what was the weather like? Who all was there?”

## Using the Reference Period Worksheet

For children 5-11, you should use the reference period worksheet which is designed to help them understand the reference window without relying on an implicit understanding of time intervals or time units. This tool may also be used with older children if you sense they could struggle with reference periods.

To complete this worksheet, write in the days of the week for the reference period in the top row, starting with the first day of the reference period (day 1) to the last day of the reference period (day 7 or yesterday). As a reminder, the reference period includes the 7 most recent completed days and therefore will not include today. For example, if the interview is taking place on a Tuesday, the reference period will cover from the beginning of last Tuesday (12:00 midnight) to the end of the day Monday (11:59 PM yesterday).

Before starting the interview and with the help of the child’s parent/guardian, siblings, or other household members, identify a memorable event that occurred on the first day of the reference period. This can include things like special meals, special visitors, outings, special activities, market days, church days, disruptive events, etc. Record this event in the box for that day of the week, using drawings where possible/appropriate to represent the event so the child can recall later. You should then ask for other events that occurred throughout the week and record them as well to assist the child in estimating if work activities occurred before or after those events. The enumeration area arrival team will also gather information on key community events that occurred over the past 7 days which you can include. An example of a completed 7-day worksheet is below:

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>	<i>Saturday</i>	<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>
<i>Brother missed school so walked alone</i>	<i>Mosque</i>	<i>Auntie visited and gave banana</i>		<i>Football game</i>	<i>Market day</i>	<i>Yesterday</i>

Use this tool to refer to the reference period throughout the interview, referring back to the day 1 event and other events that occurred after that when asking questions related to that time period.

When moving between 7-day and 12-month reference periods, be sure to switch worksheets.

Once child has finished account follow-up with some questions, including:

- “Was I at your friend (or relative)’s house that day?” *[If child says yes, reinforce rule to only talk about true things]*
- “What did your friend’s mother/father do after you left that day?” *[If child gives answer, reinforce rule about guessing and knowing. Remind him/her that it is ok to say “I don’t know”]*

## 6.2.2 Cognitive interviewing techniques

Cognitive interviewing techniques should be employed for any survey questions that include specific activities and reference periods which respondents don't understand. The goal of the cognitive interview is to credibly establish:

1. Whether the child has *ever* engaged in a given activity; and
2. If so, when s/he *most recently* engaged in the activity.

Because young children are very suggestible, the technique should minimize direct questioning and instead focus on helping the child freely report details of event to enable you to gather sufficient evidence to determine how the questionnaire should be marked. While the method can be employed flexibly, the core principles of establishing understanding and context reinstatement through free recall should generally apply, particularly in cases where direct questioning is not possible due to comprehension or recall problems. Try to avoid any direct questioning until after you have completed steps 1-3.

### *Step 1: Establish conceptual understanding of activity*

- For a given question, begin by asking the child if s/he has ever heard of the activity (e.g., “can you tell me what a business is?”; “what do you know about work?”; “what do people do on cocoa farms?”; “what is a heavy load?”; “what is the difference between domestic work and household chores?”)
- Ask the child to tell you everything s/he knows about that activity (free recall). Where appropriate, correct or supplement his/her understanding to ensure the correct definition is used.
- If understanding is in question, continue a conversation on the topic and make sure that s/he is able to correctly explain the activity back to you before proceeding. Where appropriate, verify understanding from multiple angles/lines of questioning.
- Once definition has been established, ask the child if s/he has ever directly or personally engaged in that activity. Use the child's own language/vocabulary as much as possible when asking.

### *Step 2: Reinstate context for most recent event*

If child reports having engaged in activity, you will now proceed to elicit details on the most recent event.

- Ask child to create a mental picture of the event by thinking about all environmental and personal circumstances of the event. Ask specific questions to help the child think of circumstances (e.g., “what was the weather like?” or “who else was there?”).
- Ask the child to tell you about what s/he did the last time s/he engaged (or accompanied someone who engaged) in that activity. Tell the child to share everything that s/he remembers, big or small. Do not interrupt—be sure to take notes to support you in questioning later on.
- If child stops giving the account, stay silent for a while to see if s/he has more to say. Silence is a very powerful tool in eliciting more information. If s/he remains silent, be sure to ask “is there anything else?” before moving on.

### *Step 3: Questioning*

After the child has given a full open account of the event, you should engage in questioning to obtain any additional details needed to mark the survey and clear up inconsistencies in earlier testimony.

- Explain that you are going to now ask about some details of the event. Remind the child that s/he should share whatever comes to mind without guessing or inventing anything.

- Use open-ended questions as much as possible so that child can provide free account versus single answers (e.g., “tell me about any tools that you touched” versus “did you use a cutlass?”). Only use close-ended questions when you have exhausted other approaches to eliciting the information.
- Use this opportunity to clear up any inconsistencies you noted in earlier reports.

You may depend heavily on questioning to establish the reference period within which the most recent event occurred. More specifically, for each activity you will need to gather evidence to conclude whether the child engaged in the activity: within the past 7 days, between 8 days and 12 months ago, or more than 12 months ago. Completing the reference period worksheet with the child’s parent(s) before the interview will help with this. You can also look for cues within the immediate environment to help in your questioning. Some questions which may help in establishing the reference period of the most recent event include:

1. Did this happen yesterday or a different day?
2. How old were you?
3. What class were you in?
4. Was school in session or was it during a school break?
5. Were you wearing the same shoes/clothes as now or did you wear something different?
6. Did this happen before or after the past weekend or church/mosque visit?

## **Dos and Don’ts for Cognitive Interviewing**

### **DO**

- Adapt to the child’s speech and language—speak to him/her on his/her level
- Use simple words, tenses, and sentences
- Ask child to explain words or expressions that you do not understand
- Move from general to specific questions
- Be patient—do not hurry the child or show annoyance
- Do not react negatively, express disapproval, or laugh at the child
- Recognize when child’s concentration breaks and pause the interview
- Locate events within activities that are familiar to the child using reference periods worksheet
- Praise child for his/her effort (e.g., “you are doing a good job”)
- End on a friendly note. Ask the child what s/he plans to do for the rest of the day to maintain the conversational tone.

### **DON’T**

- Ask yes/no questions if they can be avoided – children will try to guess what you want to hear and answer accordingly. If yes/no questions are necessary, phrase the question as an option (e.g., “did you or didn’t you...?” rather than “did you...?”).
- Interrupt the child. Deal with inconsistencies later on.
- Ask more than one question at a time.
- Ask loaded questions or questions with multiple parts.
- Assume that “any answer” is better than no answer! If you can’t elicit the needed information, mark the survey “don’t know” and seek help from the guardian toward the end of the interview.