

Strategic recommendation – building knowledge and skills

Supporting officers and staff to improve the accuracy and amount of information obtained in first accounts.

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Obtaining initial accounts |

Building knowledge and skills – recommendation

Officers and staff should be supported to develop the skills and knowledge to use evidence-based memory retrieval techniques such as mental reinstatement of context and eye closure, where appropriate.

Evidence summary

Evidence suggests mental reinstatement of context (MRC) techniques can improve the accuracy and amount of information recalled. This is compared to free recall interviews and standard interviews (that do not include specialist retrieval techniques), and using the 'report everything' (RE) technique. The evidence comes from 15 studies, predominantly sampling students, which tested the effects of MRC techniques (including Sketch MRC).

Additionally, evidence from 12 studies indicated that asking interviewees to close their eyes during recall can improve the accuracy and amount of information recalled.

There was some evidence to show these techniques increase the duration of interactions, therefore the Guideline Committee felt they were not feasible to use in all initial account situations.

Empirical evidence

Moderate

Practitioner evidence

Not available

Tools and techniques

MRC is a technique for improving memory recall. It involves the interviewer encouraging the witness to mentally revisit the environmental and personal context surrounding the incident. They can do this by, for example, asking the witness to form a mental picture of the environment in which they witnessed the event.

Other techniques include asking the witness to draw a sketch plan of a scene or memory, which can aid memory retrieval. In an initial account context this technique may be particularly useful when witnesses were recalling spatial information, identifying the location and movements of multiple witnesses at a scene or for road traffic accidents.

Although traditionally used as part of a cognitive interview, evidence suggests MRC can be effective on its own and could potentially be used in an initial account context.

Currently, Professionalising Investigations Programme (PIP) level 2 investigators are trained in techniques such as mental reinstatement of context when learning about the cognitive interview. The committee felt that officers and staff involved in initial account taking should also be given the appropriate skills and knowledge to use these memory retrieval techniques.

Tags

Evidence-based policing