

Dealing with minors and those who are vulnerable

It is not unusual to find that children or others who may be considered as being vulnerable are amongst those who are reporting an experience to you.

In these circumstances you must always place the welfare and well-being of those who are involved before any desire you may have to investigate the case.

Interviews and questioning should never be undertaken without a parent or responsible adult present to act as their advocate. You should go through your intended list of questions with the parent or advocate and gain their consent before asking the child or vulnerable person.

Be careful that you don't introduce ideas which may be frightening or cause anxiety. Be guided by the words and descriptions used by the child or vulnerable person and reflect those words in your questions. Using drawings or asking them to show you what happened can sometimes be helpful in eliciting information.

If, at any point, the child or vulnerable person is unwilling to answer your questions then immediately bring the interview to an end.

Dealing with time-wasters or thrill-seekers

Unfortunately it is not uncommon to encounter someone whose motives for contacting you have little to do with their experiences

Clues to watch out for

If an account seems vague, has significant changes or the person continually 'remembers' new information. However genuine witnesses can sometimes become muddled or forgetful

Gathering more Information

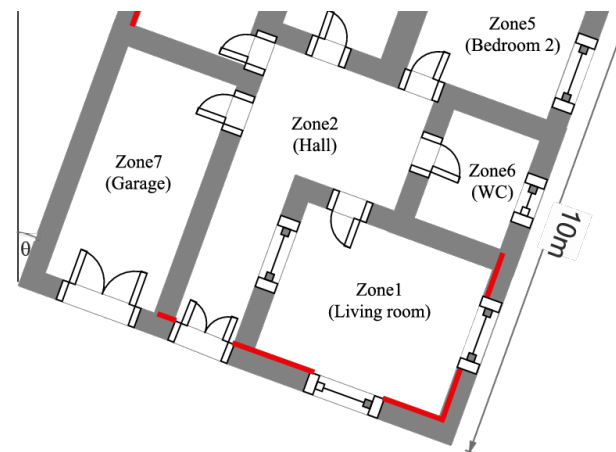
In addition to the information which has been provided by the primary witness. You should also seek additional information and interviews with other witnesses.

Don't overlook information from any other relevant individuals such as co-workers or family members who may not have had an experience of their own or whose opinion may be different to the information provided by the primary witness.

Sometimes it may be worthwhile searching records and archives for relevant historical information.

If necessary use or draw a plan of the location. Ask each witness to indicate their position/s and that of anyone else, their viewpoint and where events occurred. For multiple events use a simple numbering guide.

This additional information can be useful alongside the account of the original witness and help your understanding.



Interviewing the Witness

The starting point for many investigations is an account of an experience provided by one or more witnesses

Guidance Notes for Investigators of Spontaneous Cases

Apparitions, Hauntings, Poltergeists and Similar Phenomena

Investigation Quick Guide



The First Steps

If you are meeting the witness, never go alone and encourage them to also bring along a friend or family member.

Seek to develop a good relationship with the witness. Don't forget to introduce yourself (and your companion).

At this stage it is usually sufficient to simply have an overview of their experience - What? Where? When? Was anyone else also present?

It will also be helpful to have some information about the witness and about the circumstances pertaining to their experience.

Ascertain their expectations and their desired outcome; not everyone wants an investigation.

Listen to what the person is saying. Don't rush to make any predetermination about their experience or what they are describing. Keep an open mind.

Take time to properly review any supporting evidence such as pictures or recordings they may have.

If you are asked for an opinion, be reticent with any suggestions or proffering a diagnosis about their experience until you have been able to gather more information.

Only if both parties agree that an investigation is desirable will it be necessary to fully interview the witness and obtain a detailed account of the experience and further information about the witness and their circumstances.

Interviewing the Witness

Whenever possible, the interview should be done in a quiet place with a minimum of distractions.

It is helpful to make an audio recording of the interview but always seek the person's consent before doing so. Alternatively, written notes may be used (with consent). Offer the witness a copy of your recording or notes.

Explain to the witness that they can decline to answer any question without needing to give a reason.

Ask the witness to describe their experience in as much detail as possible including their actions leading up to the experience and immediately afterwards.

If the witness is hesitant or there are gaps, the witness may need to some gentle prompting to help them recall the events and the timeline. It can often be helpful to ask them to recreate the experience in their minds-eye. If you are already at the location in which the event occurred, you can ask them to walk you through the place and indicate where they were, and talk you through their experience.

Avoid leading or presumptive questions e.g. Did anyone else see the ghost? Or asking compound questions; What did you see and what were your thoughts when you saw it?

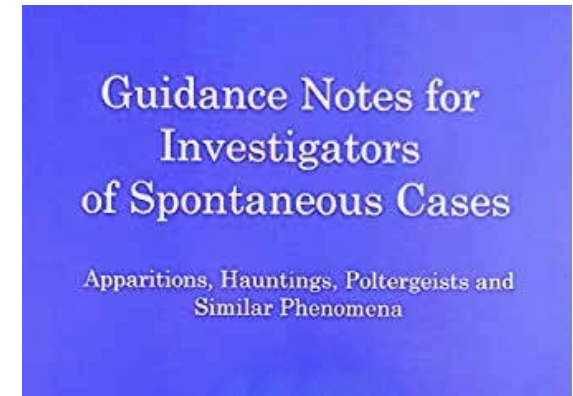
Take care that you don't inadvertently introduce ideas or phenomena which the witness may not have previously been aware of. Most individuals aren't overly interested in the paranormal.

If your suspicions are aroused

Consider a simple internet search using their name. Check if they have made previous claims or if they have approached other investigators or the media.

Don't be afraid to turn down a case

If for any reason you feel uncomfortable or unable to consider a case, politely inform the person that you cannot assist them.



Further Information

For those seeking more comprehensive information about interviewing witnesses; the Society for Psychical Research has published a useful book.

Guidance Notes for Investigators of Spontaneous Cases. Apparitions, Hauntings, Poltergeists and Similar Phenomena.

The book is available in soft back format directly from the SPR website: www.spr.ac.uk (books for sale) and also from Amazon in either printed or kindle formats.

Email: secretary@spr.ac.uk

1 Vernon Mews, London, W14 0RL