

## SRC - Survey Research Operations

### Respondent and Interviewer Support Protocol

---

This document describes general procedures that apply to all research studies involving interactions with respondents. Individual studies may require additional procedures which are covered in study-specific training.

The Survey Research Center is committed to providing support to respondents and to interviewers. We understand that the job of the interviewer involves interacting with respondents in our studies. Sometimes the questions we ask may sometimes call up mild or stronger emotions in both the respondents and the interviewers. During in-person interviews, field interviewers observe what goes on in respondent homes and even during telephone interviews interviewers may hear or be told of difficult situations in respondents' lives.

We have established specific protocols to help interviewers respond appropriately to these types of situations. The most important thing for an interviewer to know is that you have the support of the University of Michigan Survey Research Center. In general, you are not expected to and should not handle these issues alone. We will outline the protocol for handling the type of situations that you may encounter:

- 1) Distressed Respondents
- 2) Reporting Possible Abuse or Other Situations
- 3) Emergencies
- 4) Getting Help for Yourself

#### **Distressed Respondents**

Although our experience shows this happens rarely, sometimes when a questionnaire includes sensitive topics, some respondents may experience distress during or after an interview. You should familiarize yourself with this protocol so that you are comfortable handling these types of situations when they do occur:

1. You should never try to advise the respondent. If the respondent is too upset to continue the interview, you should take the following steps:
  - a. Convey to the respondent that you are sorry that they are upset and that you will wait until they are ready to continue. If the interview is in-person and the respondent is crying, you may wish to offer a piece of Kleenex or ask if she/he wants to get a drink of water. Give the respondent ample time to compose him or herself.
  - b. If the respondent is not able to proceed after a few minutes or if he or she asks you for help, you should say "I'm not trained to help you with this situation, but the University has help available for you that is confidential. We have someone associated with our study who is specifically available for this purpose. Would you like me to have that person give you a call? She will contact you soon and talk to you and if you need further help, she will help you find a resource in your area."
  - c. In the very rare situation where the respondent mentions that he/she is thinking of hurting himself/herself or others, you must tactfully end the interview and tell the respondent that you will be contacting someone from the Clinical Contact Program (CCP) Team to call them as soon as

possible. You should ask the respondent for a number where they can be reached within the next 24-48 hours. If the threat of suicide is immediate, contact 9-1-1 first. (This is highly unlikely. We mention it here only so that you will know what to do if it ever does occur.)

2. If the respondent is able, make an appointment to complete the interview at a later time. If not, let him or her know you'll follow up in a few days.
3. The next step is to immediately contact the CCP Team.
4. In cases where the respondent shows some distress, but is able to continue with the interview, you still may offer this service to him or her at the end of the interview.
5. You may contact the CCP Team about a respondent even if you did not talk about this possibility with the respondent. Sometimes you may not be fully aware of your concern about a respondent until a day or two after the interview. Please note that all members of the CCP Team have signed the ISR Pledge of Confidentiality and are bound by it.

#### **CONTACTING THE CLINICAL CONTACT PROGRAM TEAM:**

The best way to contact the team is to complete and submit the [CCP Referral Form](#). A CCP Team member will then contact you by telephone to gather more detailed information about the Respondent. In some cases, you may feel like the situation is more urgent and that you need to speak to someone right away. If so, call the 800-line (1-800-759-7947). The 800-line staff will contact the CCP Team member and someone will call you back as soon as they can. If you do call, you should still submit a referral form to the CC Team.

### **Reporting Possible Abuse or Other Situations**

There may be times when you are at a respondent's house that you may observe suspected abuse, neglect or endangerment of someone in the household. These situations can be very upsetting. If you feel or even suspect that you have observed abuse, you should immediately send an email to [SAintakeForm@umich.edu](mailto:SAintakeForm@umich.edu), or follow the link on the Interviewer Website. Provide only your name, phone number and a good time to reach you. A triage member will contact you to complete a Suspected Abuse Intake Form (SAIF). The SAIF will notify SRO's triage team to immediately contact you to set up a meeting. In this meeting, you and the SRO triage team will review the SAIF and determine how to respond to the incident and if necessary, fulfill appropriate reporting requirements.

If you are considered a mandated reporter in your state, after the triage process, you may also separately file a report of suspected abuse following the guidelines of the state in which you are a mandated reporter. You are required to notify SRO that you intend to file (or have filed) a report and provide documentation of the report and the respondent information released. SRO is obligated to notify the research team and the Survey Research Center, and may need to notify the IRB that a report has been filed and that respondent confidentiality has been broken.

As outlined in our Human Subjects Protection training, there are individuals who require additional protection (including pregnant women, minor children and the elderly). If you interview a respondent who requests help, but indicates that he or she does not want to communicate with their caregiver about the problem, or if you see something involving a person in the home that concerns you (this person may or may not be a respondent in the study), complete a SAIF. Each situation will be reviewed and handled on a case-by-case basis.

## Emergencies

When interviewing in a respondent's home, you may observe a situation which warrants immediate action on your part. Though very rare, should you ever witness a violent crime, a child or anyone else in immediate danger, or any other similar situation where not calling the local police or fire department would endanger the lives of the people living in the respondent's household, call the local authorities immediately.

As soon as possible after you have done this, please contact your production manager. If you cannot immediately reach your production manager, please call the SRO toll-free number (1-800-759-7947) and ask to speak with your project leader. If he or she is not available, please ask to speak with one of the members of the Survey Research Operations (SRO) management team.

It is highly unlikely that you will ever be involved in such a situation. If there is any ambiguity about the severity of the situation, please call your production manager first, **before** taking any action. We want to protect the privacy of the respondents and members of their households, but not at the cost of the safety of individuals. However, when interacting with authorities in an emergency situation please remember not to identify the study you work on or disclose a respondent's participation in our research.

## Getting Help for Yourself

Sometimes survey questions may upset you, and cause you to remember or think about things from your life, your family's life or your close friends' lives. If you, yourself, need assistance in handling any relationship, emotional or work-place upset, you can contact the Faculty and Staff Counseling and Consultation Office (FASSCO). FASSCO is available for you as a University employee, and is free of charge and completely confidential. Brochures are distributed at registration. To schedule an appointment for counseling, you may contact FASSCO at 1-734-936-8660 (this is not a free call) or you may email them at [fassco@umich.edu](mailto:fassco@umich.edu). For more information about services available at FASSCO, see their website: <https://hr.umich.edu/benefits-wellness/health-well-being/mental-health-counseling-consultation-services/faculty-staff-counseling-consultation-office-fascco>. If you are an employee living outside of Michigan, you and your adult dependents can access confidential, short-term counseling services (up to five sessions) at no charge by calling ComPsych toll free, 844-206-1126 (TTY: 800-697-0353). You can speak by phone with a clinician or be referred to a counselor or other resource in your area.

In situations where you are upset due to something that has happened in the course of interviewing, you should always contact your production lead. Your production lead will help you triage the situation and determine the best next steps, or is available to listen to your concerns.

Anytime you contact FASSCO for yourself, the service is kept strictly confidential.