

Protocols for Interviewing Teens About Sensitive Topics

Betsarí Otero Class, Mandi Martinez, Benjamin Zablotsky (**NCHS**),
Ariana Muñoz Maurás, and Patricia Goerman
US Census Bureau & **National Center for Health Statistics**

*Presentation for the 79th annual conference of
the American Association for Public Opinion
Research (AAPOR). Atlanta, GA: May 15-17, 2024*



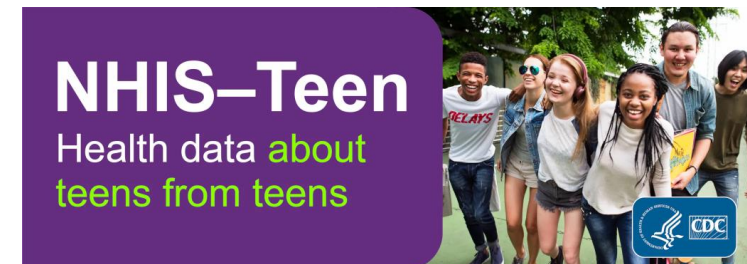
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Introduction

- New cognitive testing project for the National Health Interview Survey for teens or NHIS-Teen that includes some topics that could potentially be sensitive
- We've been looking at the literature and best practices in preparation for the study
- Goal is for lessons learned from this study to contribute to body of literature on qualitative research with teens

NHIS-Teen

- Cognitive testing of questions that appeared on NHIS-Teen
 - NHIS-Teen was a 2021-2023 NCHS follow-back survey of teenagers 12-17 years of age whose parents completed the National Health Interview Survey and was designed to produce nationally representative estimates of teens
 - **Mode:** Web and paper
 - **Length:** 95 questions, approximately 15 minutes to complete
 - **Topics:** Doctor visits, sleep, physical activity, injuries, mental health, social and emotional supports, and experiences with bullying and discrimination
 - **Incentive:** \$5 cash
 - **Number of completed interviews:** ~2,000



Upcoming Cognitive Interview Project

- Cognitive interview
 - Qualitative method of pretesting questionnaires to identify problems in the response process
 - One-on-one interview including observation of person responding and follow up probing
 - Evaluate and fine-tune survey questions
- Cognitive testing not available prior to launch
 - Post-hoc testing could provide valuable insight into quantitative findings
- Cognitive testing will help ensure teenagers understand the questions for possible next iteration of NHIS-Teen



Approach

Cognitive testing

- 3 iterative rounds
- 35 respondents (10, 15, 10)
- Virtual cognitive interviews
- Self-administered web survey

Characteristics

- Teens ages 12-17
- Teens who participate in contact sports
- Teens with a diagnosed learning disability

Considerations for interviews

- Tailoring contact materials and consent forms
- Need for a distress protocol
- Navigating interactions with parents/guardians
- Recruiting teens through their parents/guardians

Teens recruited for cognitive interviewing are not the same teens that participated in NHIS-Teen

Anticipated Recruiting & Interview Challenges with Teens

- Some of the challenges posed by interviewing teens on sensitive topics can be addressed with a well thought out **data collection plan**.
- Possible challenges
 - Parental consent
 - Trust and confidentiality
 - Time constraints
 - Cultural differences
 - Emotional Distress

Distress Protocol

- Guidelines to handle situations where the interviewee becomes emotionally distressed during the interview
- Researchers should have detailed plans in place for identifying and responding to participant distress, particularly in studies involving sensitive topics ¹
 - Techniques to de-escalate a situation, provide emotional support, allow the individual to regain composure



Identifying Potentially Sensitive Topics

- Potentially sensitive topics for teens in the survey:
 - **Discrimination**
 - Identity
 - Sexuality
 - Race
 - Culture
 - **Bullying & Harassment**
 - Technology and Social Media (Cyberbullying)
 - **Family Dynamics & Relationships**
 - Future Uncertainty
 - **Health & Disabilities**
 - Mental Health
 - **Pressure**
 - Academic Pressure
 - Social Pressure
 - **Safety Concerns**
 - Substance Abuse

Participants may also experience distress on topics that researchers did not anticipate to be sensitive.

Identifying Potential Resources Needed for a Distress Protocol

- Mental Health Hotlines
- Online Resources
 - Counseling services
 - Support Groups
 - Emergency Services
 - Teen Help Centers
 - Self Help Materials



Signs of Distress

- Distress may be expressed in different ways and will likely vary depending on participant's age
 - Strong emotion, becomes agitated, distracted or preoccupied
 - Uncontrolled crying, shaking
- Identifying distress may be difficult in virtual interviews
 - Someone could be listening in during the interview, this could be out of the researchers control during a virtual interview
- Researchers must handle signs of distress with sensitivity, offering participants the option to pause or terminate the interview and ensuring that appropriate support is available, especially for remote interviews ²

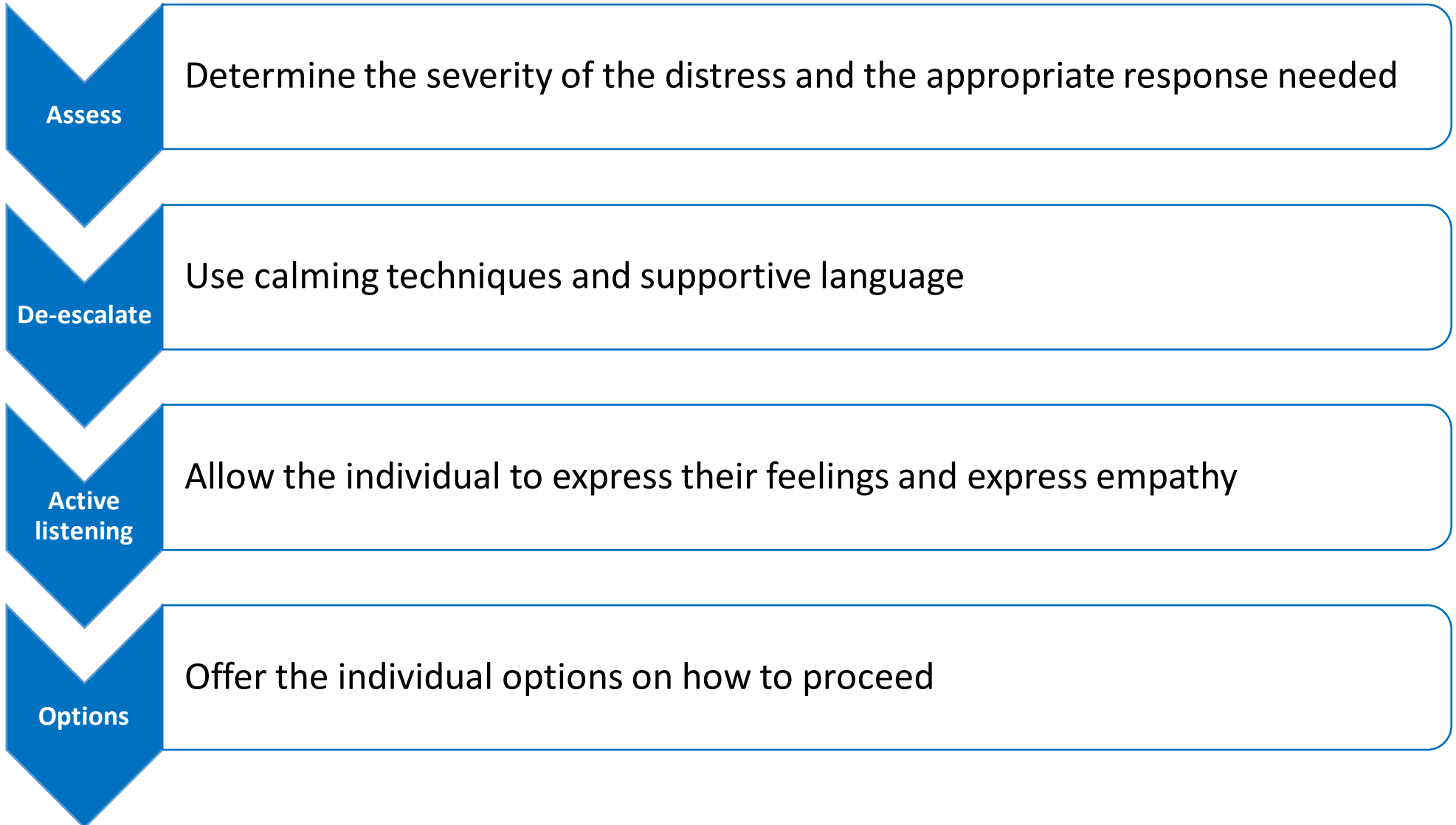


Training Researchers

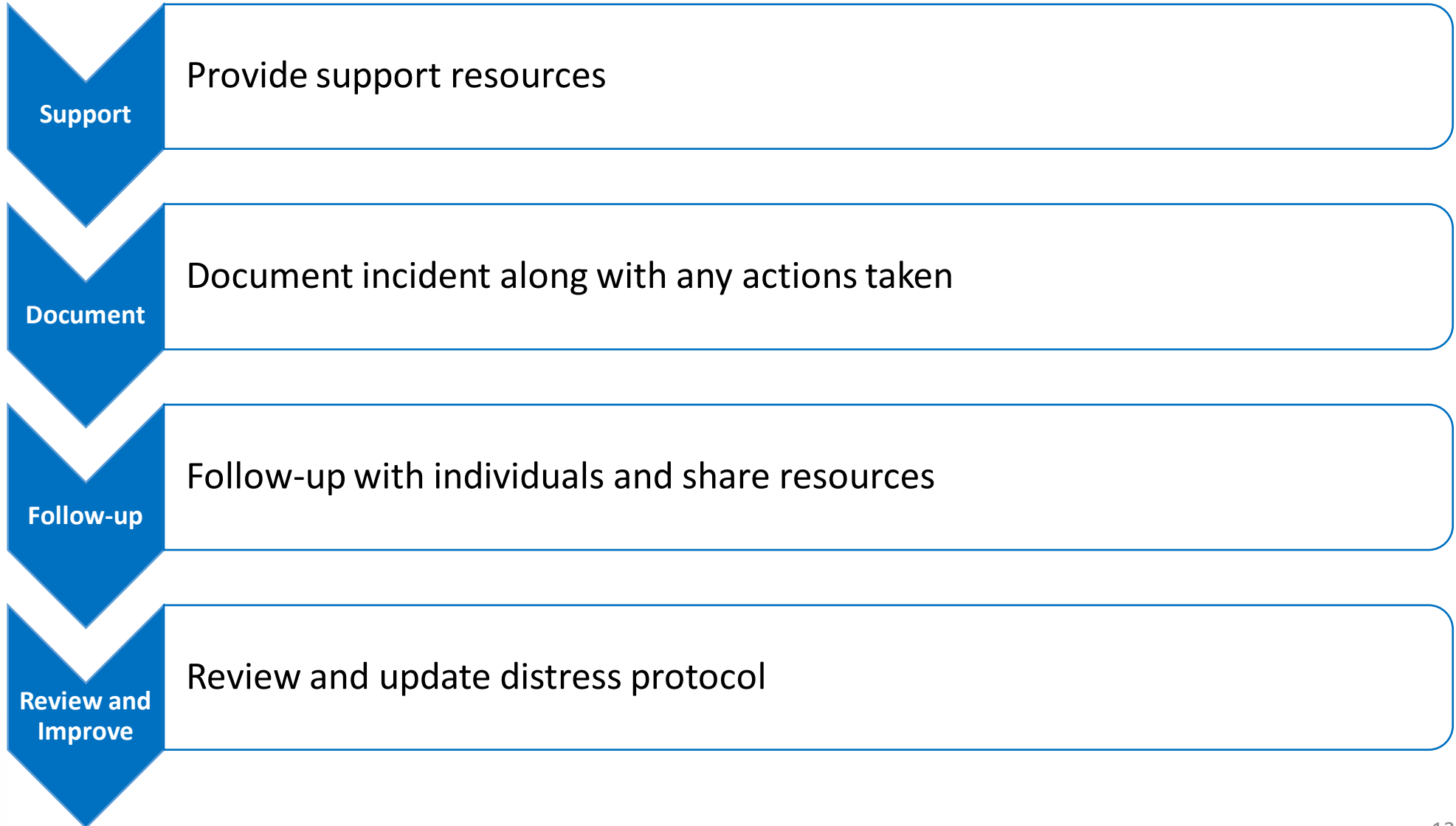
- Researchers involved in a project must be familiar with the protocol and trained in recognizing signs of distress
 - Verbal and non-verbal cues that indicate distress, sudden changes in behavior, facial expressions, or tone of voice
- Adapt their communication style and interview approach to match the communicative culture of adolescent participants, fostering a more comfortable and trusting environment ³



Our Plan: During the Interview



Our Plan: After the Interview



Next Steps

- We have developed a distress protocol for the NHIS-Teen cognitive
- Interviewers involved in the project will receive a training
- A list of resources will be shared with all respondents based on the potentially sensitive topics identified
- Identify lessons learned once all rounds of testing are complete
- Need for more research

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Thank You!

For more information

Email: betsari.otero.class@census.gov

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