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Questions that Matter: Title IX Interviewing Workshop

Workshop Materials

February 25, 2026

T9 Mastered LLC provides the materials in this manual for informational purposes only and not for the purpose of providing legal advice.

PRESENTERS



Liz DeChellis serves as Van Dermymden Makus' Title IX Program Director, overseeing all Title IX investigations and hearings. She also frequently conducts Title IX trainings as a faculty member of T9 Mastered. Trained in Trauma Informed Forensic Interviewing, Liz is also an experienced investigator in Title IX sexual misconduct claims. Liz understands best practices in the Title IX arena, and the challenges facing schools and parties when sexual violence allegations surface. She has conducted investigations for K-12 Districts, as well as higher education institutions. Liz is an expert in conducting Title IX Hearings. In this role, Liz serves as the final adjudicator, completing the complaint and investigation process. She also serves as an Appeal Officer when students challenge the process, the outcome, and/or the sanction. Liz has overseen cases involving dating violence, drug abuse, sexual assault, and incapacitation. She has experience questioning parties using trauma-informed techniques, making admissibility and relevance decisions, and issuing well-reasoned, thorough decisions. She is licensed to practice law in the State of California, and is certified as a Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR).



Yohance Edwards is an Attorney Investigator with Van Dermymden Makus Law Corporation. His practice focuses on conducting impartial and thorough investigations in both workplace and campus settings. Yohance brings nearly 15 years of experience serving in neutral roles across a wide spectrum of institutions, including federal agencies, higher education, and the judiciary. Yohance has conducted and supervised hundreds of campus and workplace investigations in those roles. Those diverse experiences enable him to understand the importance of thorough and reliable investigations from various perspectives. Yohance has expertise in handling harassment, discrimination, retaliation, and abusive conduct complaints, and has also developed and provided trainings on these topics for students, professors, federal judges, managers, and employees. Yohance is equally adept at handling sensitive matters involving high-profile professors, judges, and leaders as he is at handling matters involving everyday employees or students. He is trained in trauma-informed practices and brings compassion along with a steady calm and a deep commitment to impartial fairness to every investigation.

T9 MASTERED: Questions that Matter

TITLE IX INTERVIEWING WORKSHOP

February 25, 2026

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Meet Your Presenters



Liz DeChellis

Partner and Director of Title
IX Services



Yohance Edwards

Attorney Investigator



Training Logistics



15-Minute Break



Participant
Handout



Interactive
Training



Ask Questions
Throughout



GROUP DISCUSSION



What are some of
the challenges of
conducting Title IX
interviews?

AGENDA



I. Title IX Investigative Interviews

II. Interview Question Types

III. Creating an Interview Outline

IV. Trauma in Title IX Investigations

V. Title IX Interviews: Trauma-Informed Approach

Title IX Investigative Interviews



Investigative Interviews



Strong interview skills get:

- ⇒ More comprehensive responses
- ⇒ More specific evidence
- ⇒ More accurate information

Plan, Prepare & Practice

Challenging Witness Situations



- ⇒ Emotional witness
- ⇒ Distracting location
- ⇒ Reluctant witness
- ⇒ Deflector
- ⇒ Loyal friend
- ⇒ Hostile witness
- ⇒ Hearsay witness
- ⇒ Talkative witness
- ⇒ Interference in process
- ⇒ Represented witness

Unique Elements of Title IX Interviews



Student-Aged
Witnesses



Parent, Attorney,
or Advisor
Present



May Have
Experienced
Trauma



First Impressions are Important



Dismissive
Rushed
Robotic
Unprepared
Too Casual



Professional
Organized
Attentive
Transparent
Warm



Opening Introduction

- ⇒ Investigator's Neutral Role
- ⇒ Overview of the Process
- ⇒ Method of Recording/Notetaking
- ⇒ Retaliation & Confidentiality
- ⇒ Opportunity for Questions from Witness, Advisor, & Support Person

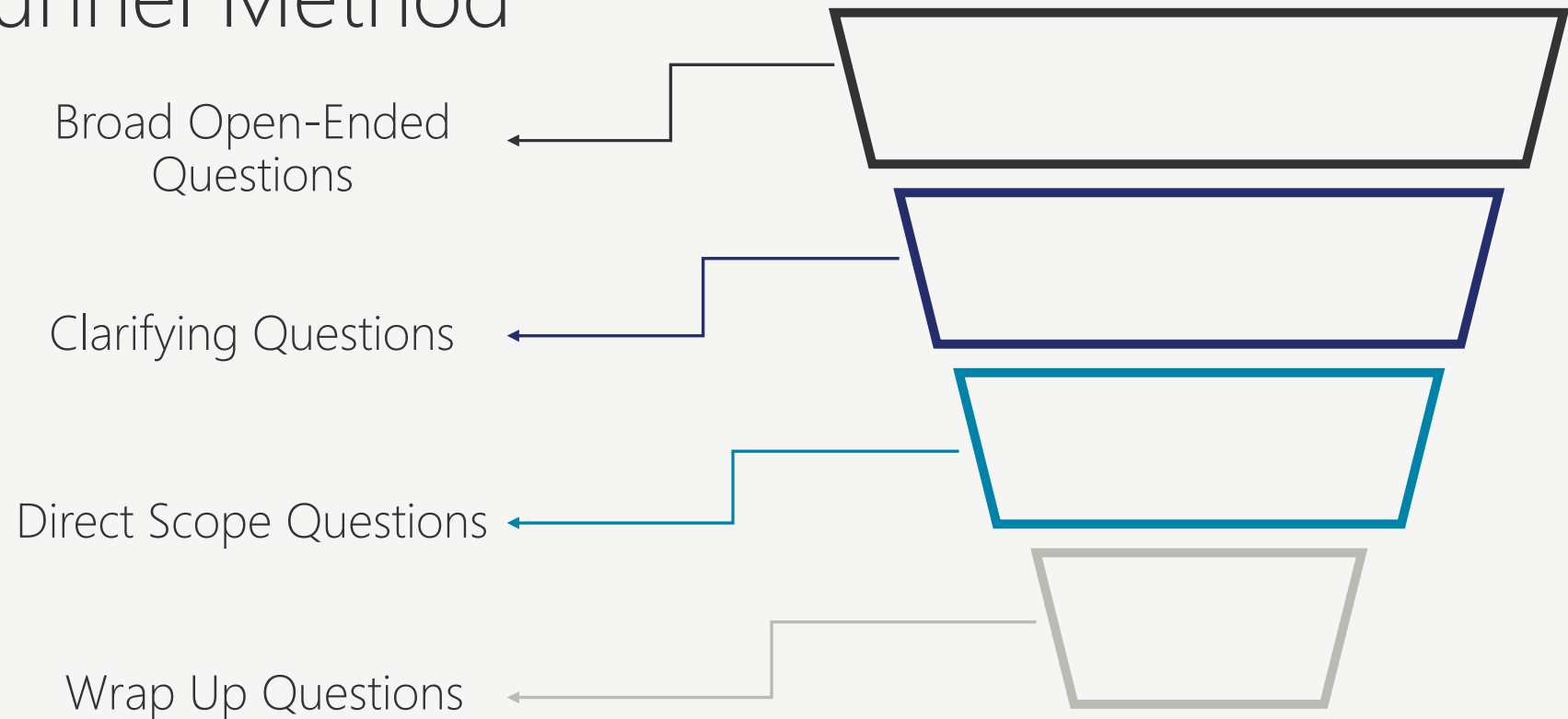
Be clear about who you are and why you are there.



Interview Question Types



Funnel Method



Interview Question Types



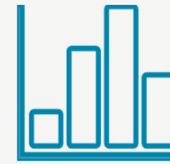
Introductory



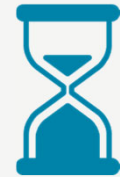
Open-Ended



Clarifying



Quantifying



Closing



Hypothetical Allegations

Dr. Meister alleged that Dr. Cameron made “sexually explicit comments” nearly every time he saw her at department meetings.



Introductory Questions



- + Warm-up questions
- + Build rapport
- + Ease the nerves of witnesses

Examples:

- ⇒ *What are you majoring in?*
- ⇒ *What do you like to do outside of class?*

Hypothetical Complaint: Introductory Questions

Dr. Meister alleged that Dr. Cameron made “sexually explicit comments” nearly every time he saw her at department meetings.



What Introductory Questions might you draft for the complainant interview?



Open-Ended Questions



- + Who? What? When? Where? How?
- + Allows the witness to explain in their own words
- + Avoids “yes/no” responses

Examples:

- ⇒ *What happened during the department meeting on May 12?*
- ⇒ *How did Shannon respond when you gave her a hug?*

Hypothetical Complaint: Open-Ended Questions

Dr. Meister alleged that Dr. Cameron made “sexually explicit comments” nearly every time he saw her at department meetings.



What Open-Ended Questions might you draft for the complainant interview?



Clarifying Questions



- + Better understand the details of a witness's account
- + Avoid assumptions
- + Funnel Method

Examples:

- ⇒ *How do you know that information?*
- ⇒ *When you say that Micah is stalking you, what do you mean by that?*

Hypothetical Complaint: Clarifying Questions

Dr. Meister alleged that Dr. Cameron made “sexually explicit comments” nearly every time he saw her at department meetings.



What Clarifying Questions might you draft for the complainant interview?



Quantifying Questions



- + Require witnesses to quantify
- + Numbers and scales provide more details
- + Avoids assumptions for words like "frequently" and "few"

Examples:

- ⇒ *You mentioned that he "always" stares at you during class. How often does this happen per week?*
- ⇒ *"When you say he yelled, where would you put the volume on a scale of 1-10, 1 being a whisper and 10 being a scream?"*

Hypothetical Complaint: Quantifying Questions

Dr. Meister alleged that Dr. Cameron made “sexually explicit comments” nearly every time he saw her at department meetings.



What Quantifying Questions might you draft for the complainant interview?



Closing Questions



- + Collect any final information and documentary evidence
- + Set expectations for next steps in the process

Examples:

- ⇒ *What witnesses do you think I should speak to?*
- ⇒ *What documents or other relevant evidence do you think I should collect?*
- ⇒ *What else should I know that we have not already discussed?*

Question Types to Avoid



Leading

"You do not know how many drinks she had, do you?"



Compound

"What time did you arrive, and how long were you there?"



Assumed Facts or Priming

"Was Sam mad about that or was she okay with it?"



Judgmental

"If you knew Chandler might show the picture to his friends, why did you send it to him?"



ACTIVITY: Witness Interview Review



Time: 10 minutes

Group size: Individual

- ⇒ Review the interview transcript of a witness on pg. 29 – 32 of your handout.
- ⇒ Identify strong interview questions asked by the investigator.
- ⇒ Identify problematic interview questions asked by the investigator.
- ⇒ Rewrite the problematic interview questions.
- ⇒ Be prepared to share your answers with the group.

ACTIVITY: Witness Interview Review

- ⇒ Review the interview transcript of a witness below.
- ⇒ Identify strong interview questions asked by the investigator.
- ⇒ Identify problematic interview questions asked by the investigator.
- ⇒ Rewrite the problematic interview questions.
- ⇒ Be prepared to share your answers with the group.

INTERVIEW DETAILS

- **Witness:** Jordan Martinez, Kat's Roommate
 - **Case:** Allegation of non-consensual sexual activity between Anthony and Kat
 - **Date:** February 20, 2026
 - **Location:** Title IX Office, Conference Room B
-

[Investigator's introduction has been removed for length.]

INVESTIGATOR: Now that we have covered my role, your role, retaliation, and confidentiality, I'm going to record some basic information first. Can you please state your full name and student ID number?

JORDAN: Jordan Martinez, student ID 20456789.

INVESTIGATOR: And what is your current year and major?

JORDAN: I'm a junior, majoring in psychology.

INVESTIGATOR: Thank you. I understand you're Kat's roommate. Is that correct?

JORDAN: Yes, that's correct. We've been roommates since our sophomore year.

INVESTIGATOR: How would you describe your relationship with Kat?

JORDAN: Kat is my best friend on campus. We hang out most weekends, get meals in the cafeteria, study together, that kind of thing.

INVESTIGATOR: I appreciate that context. Now, I want to ask you about the night of November 12. Do you recall attending a party that took place that evening?

JORDAN: Yes, I do. It was at one of the off-campus houses on Maple Street.

INVESTIGATOR: Was Kat also at the party?

JORDAN: Yes, Kat came with me.

INVESTIGATOR: What about Anthony—were they at the party as well?

JORDAN: Yes, Anthony was there too.

INVESTIGATOR: Can you describe what you observed that night? Let's start with when you first arrived.

JORDAN: Sure. Kat and I got there around 10 p.m., I think. It was pretty crowded already. We hung out together for a while, got some drinks, talked to people we knew.

INVESTIGATOR: When you say you got drinks, can you be more specific about what you and Kat were drinking?

JORDAN: There was a keg and some mixed drinks available. I had a few beers. Kat had maybe two or three drinks—I'm not entirely sure. I remember we took a couple of shots with some friends of ours. Kat doesn't usually drink that much.

INVESTIGATOR: Did you observe Kat's behavior that night? Did you see Kat drinking heavily, acting intoxicated, and unable to make decisions that night?

JORDAN: Kat seemed... tipsy, maybe? I don't know, I thought she seemed fine.

INVESTIGATOR: OK, you said she seemed fine, but also that she was tipsy. Which was it?

JORDAN: I guess tipsy? Like, laughing more than usual, having a good time. But not like, falling-down drunk or anything. At least not when I was around.

INVESTIGATOR: Did you see Kat interact with Anthony at the party?

JORDAN: Yeah, I saw them talking at one point. They were standing near the kitchen. They seemed to be having a conversation, maybe flirting a little? I didn't think much of it at the time.

INVESTIGATOR: What do you think Kat was feeling when she was talking to Anthony?

JORDAN: I mean, it looked like she was into him. He seemed to be into her too.

INVESTIGATOR: What happened after you saw them talking?

JORDAN: Well it looked like Kat was having a good time so I went to talk to some friends in another room, and when I looked for Kat later, I couldn't find her. I heard from a friend of ours that Kat left the party with Anthony.

INVESTIGATOR: Did you try to contact Kat?

JORDAN: No, I honestly wasn't concerned at the time.

INVESTIGATOR: Does she have a history of leaving parties with male students?

JORDAN: I mean, not that often, but it has happened before.

INVESTIGATOR: What happened when you got home that night?

JORDAN: I went to bed. Kat wasn't home yet.

INVESTIGATOR: When did Kat return?

JORDAN: I'm not exactly sure. I was asleep. But Kat was there in the morning when I woke up.

INVESTIGATOR: What time did you wake up?

JORDAN: Around 9 a.m.

INVESTIGATOR: Can you describe Kat's behavior that morning?

JORDAN: Kat was... quiet. Really quiet. Just kind of stayed in bed. At first I thought she was just hungover, but then she started crying. I asked her what was wrong and that is when she told me that Anthony had sex with her without her consent. She said she was completely drunk when he started touching her and she couldn't move or talk to say no. I tried to ask more questions about it and whether she was okay, but she said she was too upset and didn't want to talk about it.

INVESTIGATOR: Do you think she was incapacitated?

JORDAN: I mean, based on what Kat described, definitely.

INVESTIGATOR: Can you tell me about Kat's behavior since the party?

JORDAN: Yeah. Kat has been really different. More withdrawn, I guess. Kat doesn't go out as much anymore, even to class sometimes.

INVESTIGATOR: Is there anything else you've observed or that Kat has said that you think might be relevant?

JORDAN: I don't think so. I mean, I'm really worried about Kat.

INVESTIGATOR: I understand your concern. Is there anything else you can think of about the night of the party or Kat's behavior since then that we haven't discussed?

JORDAN: I don't think so. I just want to make sure Kat is okay and gets whatever help or support is needed.

INVESTIGATOR: I appreciate that. The university has resources available, including counseling services, if Kat or you need support. Before we conclude, I want to remind you that it's important not to discuss the details of this interview with others, including Kat, as it could interfere with the investigation. Do you understand?

JORDAN: Yes, I understand.

INVESTIGATOR: If you remember anything else or if anything else comes up, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Strong Interview Questions:

Problematic Interview Questions:

Rewrite the Problematic Interview Questions:

Creating an Interview Outline



Interview Preparation: Topic Outline vs. Question List



1. Create an outline of topics or categories to guide the interview
2. Draft key questions that need to be asked during the interview
3. Listen and ask follow-up questions!



An Interview Outline is NOT



Investigator's Script



Ordered List of Questions



Cross-Examination



Interview Outline Example

Complaint: Nikos alleged that beginning in August 2025, Ingrid subjected him to “harassing” conduct, including “stalking” him at his dormitory, making unwelcome comments of a sexual nature, and spreading false rumors about him to other students on campus.



What are the question categories for the complainant interview? Key questions?



Interview Outline Example

Category 1: Introduction

KEY QUESTIONS: How did you meet Ingrid? When did you meet Ingrid? How would you characterize your relationship prior to August 2025? After? What was your level of interaction with Ingrid prior to August 2025? After?

Category 2: "Stalking" at Dormitory

KEY QUESTIONS: Tell me about your interactions with Ingrid at your dormitory. How often does Ingrid come to your dormitory? Where does Ingrid go in the dormitory? What does Ingrid do or say while at your dormitory?

Category 3: Unwelcome Comments

KEY QUESTIONS: Tell me about each unwelcome comment of a sexual nature by Ingrid. How many? When? Any witnesses?



Interview Outline Example

Category 4: Spreading False Rumors

KEY QUESTIONS: Tell me about each rumor by Ingrid. How many? When? Who else heard these rumors? Tell me why you think Ingrid would share false information with classmates.

Category 5: Impact

KEY QUESTIONS: How has this affected you? What impact has this had on your life on campus?

Category 6: Closing Questions

KEY QUESTIONS: What witnesses do you think I should speak to? What documents or other relevant evidence do you think I should collect? What else should I know that we have not already discussed?



ACTIVITY: Draft an Interview Outline



Time: 10 Minutes

Group Size: 4 – 5 people

- ⇒ Review the hypothetical allegations on pg. 40 of your handout.
- ⇒ Identify the main categories of questions for the complainant interview.
- ⇒ Draft key questions that need to be asked.
- ⇒ Be prepared to share your responses with the large group.

ACTIVITY: Draft an Interview Outline

- ⇒ Review the hypothetical allegations below.
- ⇒ Identify the main categories of questions for the complainant interview.
- ⇒ Draft key questions that need to be asked.
- ⇒ Be prepared to share your responses with the large group.

Allegations: On November 17, 2025, Freshman student Luke filed a complaint against Junior student Trent. The complaint alleged that Trent engaged in unwanted physical contact of a sexual nature. Luke specifically alleged that on September 30, 2025, while in the locker room before basketball practice, Trent grabbed Luke's buttocks without his consent. Trent then told Luke he should stop by his dorm room after practice to finish up Econ 101 homework. While in Trent's dorm room, Trent took Luke's hand and put it on his pants for about 5 seconds in the penis area without his consent. While Luke's hand was on his pants, Trent said, "This would be way more fun than Econ homework." Luke said he was immediately uncomfortable and pretended not to understand what Trent was referring to. He responded saying, "Too bad this homework is due tomorrow." Luke said he stayed for another 30-minutes and then said he needed to get back to his own dorm room.

Categories and Key Questions:

Trauma in Title IX Investigations



Understanding Trauma

Individual Trauma: An event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being

Trauma-Informed: Understanding the impact of trauma and recognizing the signs and symptoms of trauma



SOURCE: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration <https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/trauma-violence>

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Types of Trauma

ACUTE TRAUMA

Results from a single stressful or dangerous event

CHRONIC TRAUMA

Results from repeated and prolonged exposure to stressful or dangerous events

COMPLEX TRAUMA

Results from exposure to multiple traumatic events

SECONDARY TRAUMA

Results from close contact with someone who has experienced a traumatic event



Reactions from Trauma



Reactions after a traumatic event may vary significantly.

- ⇒ Anger
- ⇒ Anxiety
- ⇒ Fear
- ⇒ Numbness
- ⇒ Withdrawal from family or friends
- ⇒ Eating or sleeping too much or too little
- ⇒ Depression
- ⇒ Impact on Memory
- ⇒ Difficulty Focusing

Title IX Interviews: Trauma-Informed Approach



Six Guiding Principles to a Trauma-Informed Approach



SAFETY



TRUSTWORTHINESS
& TRANSPARENCY



PEER
SUPPORT



COLLABORATION
& MUTUALITY



EMPOWERMENT
VOICE & CHOICE



CULTURAL,
HISTORICAL, &
GENDER ISSUES



SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention –
Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response.

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Impact of Trauma on Parties

- ⇒ Stress and trauma **interrupt** the memory process
- ⇒ Individuals are **reluctant** to recall experiences that evoke negative feelings and emotions
- ⇒ Traumatic stress can **interfere** with daily living



Preparing for a Trauma-Informed Interview



Private and Secure Environment



Create Opportunities for Choice



Familiarize Yourself with Signs of Trauma



Trauma-Informed Approach: Interview Introductions

- ⇒ Ask how the interviewee is feeling
- ⇒ Give the interviewee options
- ⇒ Clearly explain your role and the process
- ⇒ Be aware of your body language
- ⇒ Use same approach for both parties





Trauma-Informed Tone

EMPATHY

"I know this might be difficult to talk about."

COMPASSION

Give parties time and space

DIGNITY

Show an appropriate level of seriousness





Trauma-Informed Questioning

Begin with open-ended questions

⇒ “Can you tell me how the night began?”

Carefully worded follow-up

⇒ “Had you ever been alone together before?”

⇒ “Help me understand your thoughts about seeing them again.”

Elicit sensory memories

⇒ “What do you recall feeling, seeing, hearing?”

Exercise patience

⇒ Fragmented, disorganized, and inconsistent verbal accounts are common – do not force the witness to tell the story in the way you want



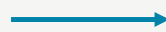
Reframing Interview Questions

How many people were at the party?



Can you talk to me about the party?

How many alcoholic beverages did you consume?



Tell me about the alcohol you drank that night.

Why did you go back to her apartment?



Help me understand what you thought about going back to her apartment.





Reduce the Chance of Re-Traumatization

"I would like to hear about your experience. Is it okay if I ask you about X?"

"Tell me what you remember about X. Please start where you feel comfortable."

"Thank you for sharing that with me. Is there anything else you remember about X that you think would be helpful to me?"



Neutral Role in Trauma-Informed Interviews

Non-Neutral Statements

"I am so sorry this happened to you."

"What they did to you was wrong."

"You did nothing wrong."

Alternative Statements

"I can see it's hard for you to talk about this."

"It sounds like this was a very difficult experience."

"I know this process is hard."



Interview #1: Trauma- Informed



? What did the investigator do well?

? What could be improved?

Interview #2: Trauma- Informed



? What did the investigator do well?

? What could be improved?

ACTIVITY: Draft Trauma-Informed Interview Questions



Time: 10 Minutes

Group Size: 4 – 5 people

- ⇒ Review the hypothetical allegations and complainant interview questions on pg. 58 of your handout.
- ⇒ Reframe the questions using a Trauma-Informed Approach.
- ⇒ Draft additional questions you would want to ask during the complainant interview.

ACTIVITY: Draft Trauma-Informed Interview Questions

- ⇒ Review the hypothetical allegations and complainant interview questions below.
- ⇒ Reframe the questions using a Trauma-Informed Approach.
- ⇒ Draft additional questions you would want to ask during the complainant interview.

Allegations: On December 2, Teaching Assistant Kristi reported that on October 13, Professor Kline invited her into his office, closed the door, looked at her body, and said, "It is hard to concentrate when you're wearing those leggings."

Kristi is the Teaching Assistant for Professor Kline's Psychology 101 course. Kristi alleged that she and Professor Kline were working in the department common space to prepare for class. There was a lot of commotion in the area so Professor Kline told her they should move to his office for some "alone time." When they got to his office, he closed the door, looked her "up and down" and said, "It is hard to concentrate when you're wearing those leggings." Kristi said his gaze stayed on her buttocks for about 5 seconds before he moved to his desk chair. She was uncomfortable by the comment and staring, but didn't know how to respond. Kristi said she pretended not to hear the comment and redirected by asking a question about the upcoming Psychology 101 class.

QUESTION	TRAUMA-INFORMED QUESTION
Didn't you think 'alone time' meant something sexual?	
Tell me everything you remember about October 13th from the beginning to the end, with as much detail as possible.	
You previously said no one else was around, but now you said Dr. Shannon was in her office next door. Which is the truth?	
Why didn't you report it the day it happened?	
<i>Other questions for the complainant interview:</i>	

Final Interviewing Tips



Keep questions short, clear, and concise



Ask only one question at a time



Let the witness answer fully and listen to their answer



Repeat back information to confirm and demonstrate



Do not interrupt or suggest an answer



Remain neutral in your questions and demeanor



QUESTIONS?



QUESTIONS & NOTES