

Value based interviewing: a guide for the designated teacher for safeguarding and child protection

Value based interviewing can assist the DDT in their role in ensuring the most appropriate and 'safe' appointment to a specific post. Tina Rae provides an introduction to VBI in safer recruitment and highlights some of the questions that may be used at interview

There is increasing interest in the value based interviewing process in education. This may be due to a number of significant recent cases which also highlighted and reinforced the need to improve training around the selection of candidates to work with children. The Bichard Inquiry in particular focused upon the need to improve procedures and systems (following the murders of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman). The Choosing with Care report (Warner, 1992), an inquiry into the abuse of children in residential homes, and the serious case review into abuse by nursery worker Vanessa George also reinforced the need for more robust and effective procedures.

What is value based interviewing (VBI)?

VBI focuses on how and why an individual makes their choices in the work context and the underlying reasons for their behaviour

Value based interviewing is a process designed to support school-based staff and other organisations in safer recruitment of staff. It specifically focuses on recruiting those who are the most suitable in terms of working with children and young people. Key to this approach is the assessment of the attitudes, values and motives of those who are applying for the job.

VBI aims to complement existing selection processes but focuses specifically on how and why an individual makes their choices in the work context and the underlying reasons for their behaviour. This is usually done via a separate interview conducted in addition to the normal panel. The process generally aims to reduce the risk factors by investigating and interrogating the candidate's value systems, behaviours and character.

VBI aims to reduce the dangers of reliance on intuition via the adoption of 'value-behaviour' based criteria. The questions posed therefore provide the employer with a genuine insight into the candidate's attitudes and values – specifically identifying individuals who have positive safeguarding attitudes and values, and who are therefore themselves likely to be more effective in identifying and addressing safeguarding issues in the school context. In terms of safeguarding children and young people, value-based interviewing involves asking specific questions at the interview to examine attitudes towards children.

How does a VBI work?

During the VBI those conducting the interview will usually select four or five questions which enable them to use the organisation's values and behaviours to explore a candidate's suitability to work with children and young people. They will also use active listening skills. This is particularly important as they will be looking to 'hear' the real motivators behind the candidate's behaviours and desire to undertake the work. The interview will generally be conducted in a more relaxed manner with less formal seating.

Identifying key success characteristics

What is most important is the DT takes a lead in terms of developing staff skills in identifying the key success characteristics and in asking the 'right' questions

The interviewers will tend to have identified the questions as part of the process of identifying the post's key attributes. For some, this can best be done by interviewing the best members of staff in the school context and asking them the following questions:

If you were looking to recruit a wonderful person for your own job in this school, what would you be looking for?

What skills and attitudes help you to do your job well?

Staff then might ask a relevant behaviour-based question such as:

Tell me about a difficult situation you experienced with a child that you handled really well?

The outcome of this process will usually be the formulation of a list of key success characteristics. In order to narrow these down, staff can rank these in order of importance so as to identify the most important five or six. It is then possible to formulate key questions for the VBI which specifically interrogate each one in order to identify skills, characteristics and belief systems. It is at this point that the DT can support the VBI panel in formulating the most appropriate questions.

Five key success characteristics: asking the right questions

In one school context the VBI interview team and DT worked together in collaboration in order to identify the key success characteristics and supporting questions. The team was able to clarify the key necessary requirements as follows.

- ✓ Self-awareness
- ✓ Integrity
- ✓ Managing children and young people in an effective way
- ✓ Handling pressure and stress
- ✓ Showing genuine compassion

In order to ensure that each of these key elements were addressed and that the interviewee was appropriately interrogated a number of questions (see download attached) were formulated. It is important to consider how the language and approach would facilitate the identification of an individual's genuine motivations and characteristics.

Results

In conclusion, it is obviously important to ensure that school based staff are encouraged to reflect on how and why they do their jobs well and ensure the well-being and safety of the children and young people that they work with. For the DT there is also a moral imperative and genuine need to ensure that the recruitment process is the best that it possibly can be in terms of safeguarding via the identification of interviewees' key characteristic and underlying motivations. The VBI clearly provides an appropriate forum in which this objective can be met, what is most important is the DT takes a lead in terms of developing staff skills in identifying the key success characteristics and in asking the 'right' questions.

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Self-awareness

- Describe a situation where you had to deal with a child who didn't like you (or you didn't like) and how this made you feel and respond.
- Tell us about a time when you found yourself in a new or unfamiliar situation at work and how you behaved and responded.
- Sometimes our work is judged or criticised unfairly or our intentions are misunderstood. Can you tell us about a recent situation that fits this description for you?
- Tell me/us about a recent threatening or difficult work situation when you felt that you showed yourself to be a person of real value and worth. What were your feelings like at the time?
- What did you learn about yourself on further reflection?

Integrity

- Can you give us an example of a situation when you observed someone at work bending the rules in a way that made you feel slightly uncomfortable?
- Tell me/us about a time when you felt you absolutely had to address a difficult situation with your manager when other work colleagues simply wouldn't.
- Tell me/us about a time when you felt compelled to express an unpopular viewpoint in order to maintain your integrity and level of self-respect.

- Tell me/us about a situation when you had to speak up so that you could get a point across that was important to you or crucial to the child you were working with.
- Tell me/us about a time in your job when you went the extra mile for a child or young person even though it was more work for you or went against your instincts.

What happened? What was the outcome?

What did you say and how did you say it?

What was the result?

What obstacles or barriers did you have to contend with?

Managing children and young people in an effective way

- Tell me/us about a time when you perceived friction or resistance from a child, and you immediately addressed this issue to further build your working relationship and ensure that this would be built on.

What did you do? How did your behaviours and attitudes impact on the outcomes?

How did you assist the child? What was the result?

What was the issue and how did it turn out?

Why was this important to you? What was at stake in your view?

- Why do you think young people sometimes behave in a negative way?
- Do you think that all behaviour is a form of communication?
- What behaviour has made you feel most uncomfortable and why do you think this is the case?
- Tell us about a time when you have handled a child in a way that made you feel uncomfortable.

What was the issue?

How could you have managed this in a way that would have caused less stress to you and the child?

Handling pressure and stress

- Tell me/us about a recent threatening or difficult work situation you have experienced which involved a child or young person at risk.

Why was this stressful? How did you experience the pressure?

What was the impact on your ability to get things done? What was the impact on the others' ability to get things done?

What were the circumstances?

What was the impact of the change on you?

How did you react to this? What other approaches did you try?

How did you resolve this issue? What was the outcome?

Showing genuine compassion

- Tell me about a time when you volunteered your help to a child or young person in need.
- Give me/us an example of a time when your compassionate attitude caused a child or young person to remain positive and calm.
- Tell us about a time when you had to use your coping strategies to remain compassionate when dealing with a high-pressure situation regarding a child or young person.
- Give an example of a situation where someone on your staff team showed compassion to you at work.

How did this make you feel?

Describe what you did. What was the impact for you?

How has this helped you in your job?