

Suggesting eye closure

Helping witnesses to improve their recollection.

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Suggesting eye closure – guideline

In some circumstances, the officer may suggest that the witness close their eyes if they need help to focus and recall more detail.

Evidence summary

Evidence from 12 experiments found that asking interviewees to close their eyes during recall can improve the accuracy and amount of information recalled. No experiment found that eye closure had a detrimental effect on recall. The majority of experiments were conducted in a laboratory setting using undergraduate students as mock witnesses. Two experiments conducted in more realistic settings found no effect on the accuracy and amount of information, but an increase in forensically relevant information recalled. There is also some evidence from three experiments to suggest using this technique can increase the duration of an interview. The Guideline Committee felt, therefore, that this technique would only be appropriate in some circumstances.

Empirical evidence

Moderate

Practitioner evidence

Not available

Introducing the technique

Evidence suggests that getting witnesses to close their eyes during recall can improve the accuracy and amount of information recalled. Closing their eyes may help witnesses recreate the original context in their mind's eye, as well as possibly helping to reduce distractions.

It is recognised that, while this technique could be used when taking an initial account, it may not be appropriate in some circumstances and may make people feel uncomfortable – particularly if the initial account is being taken on the street or while the offender is in the vicinity. If a witness is struggling, however, it might be a helpful memory retrieval technique provided the witness is not pressured to do it. The following ways to introduce the technique were suggested:

- 'Close your eyes and think of where you were. What happened next?'
- 'If it helps you to focus, you could try closing your eyes or focusing on the wall.'

Tags

Evidence-based policing