Detecting Deception in Investigation Interviews
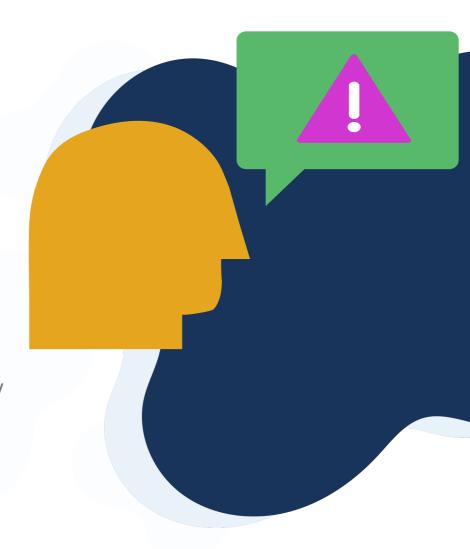
Case IQ

An interviewer's ability to detect deception can lead to the success or failure of an investigation and there are many theories about how it's done. Among the more reliable methods, language indicators can provide valuable clues when you know what to look for. Analyzing language can help investigators spot the grey areas in investigation interviews.

According to expert investigator Don Rabon, certain words and phrases can be "linguistic indicators of the possibility of deception." A good interviewer should treat them as cues to probe further in the places where they occur.

The presence of one or two of these indicators is not necessarily a sign of deception, warns Rabon. Investigators should look for clusters of these language cues and treat them as markers for where to insert more probing questions.

Once an investigator establishes an area of the subject's narrative that raises red flags, they can probe further by:

- requesting details in the areas of inquiry that raised suspicion

- asking the subject to tell the story backward

- questioning any conflicting information

What to Listen For

After establishing a baseline for the subject's normal linguistic style when telling the truth, the interviewer should listen for the presence of any of the following in the interviewee's responses:

- Weakened assertions, such as "to tell you the truth" or "as a matter of fact"
- Attempting to evade questions
- Stalling, using hesitation or phrases such as "let's see"
- Lack of specificity, using vague identifiers such as "someone" or "something"
- Giving vague answers to questions
- Conflicting information
- Irrelevant information
- Different answers to the same or similar questions
- Use of second-person pronouns • Use of passive language
- Delayed responses
- Lack of detail and specifics
- Unusually short responses
- Inability to commit to their own narrative through the use of modifying words such as:
- Normally
- Usually
- Sort of
- Kind of
- Basically