

# CONDUCTING THE LIFE EXPERIENCE TIMELINE (LET) INTERVIEW

## BEFORE THE INTERVIEW- Pre-Interview Information

Because we are conducting a follow-up, we already have information about the respondent. Some of this information is included on the **Health Study Locator Form** and also on the **Follow-up by Subject Report**. Using the information, fill out the LET Cover Sheet and timeline sheet with current date, your name or ID, and other pertinent data. (Some of this information will already be printed.)

Have sharp pencils, a ruler, and a highlighter ready.

We have CII information on most respondents. If the respondent's CII sheet shows arrests and/or incarcerations, put them on their respective lines. You will be confirming this information with the respondent during the interview. Only information confirmed by the respondent will be entered on the incarceration line.

Some Rs will be able to remember changes and events very clearly while others will not be able to recall what happened yesterday. Do the best you can with the information that R gives. It is understood that many Rs will not be able to recall in great detail events and changes that took place many years ago. For those periods we expect to get broader trends than for periods closer to the interview date. With some gentle prodding, most Rs should be able to recall most noteworthy changes of earlier years and more detailed changes of recent periods.

## DURING THE INTERVIEW

The LET should always be filled out in pencil. Make sure that the pencil you use can be completely erased.

To conduct the interview, start by telling R that we want to get a complete picture of his/her life in terms of drugs use, treatment episodes, criminal activity, and legal status from this predetermined index date until today (date of the interview) and will need his/her close collaboration to do so.

Begin the interview by establishing whether the activities/events listed on the Cover Sheet were experienced by R. Start by reading down the behaviors/events listed in the first column for the timeline, asking whether or not R ever experienced each specific activity/event. Use the response cards if specific information is required (e.g., types of criminal activity, etc.). If R never experienced the target behavior/event, mark it as "n" (no). If the behavior/event was experienced, mark it "y" (yes) and record the age that it first occurred. Only behaviors/events that are marked as having been experienced will be discussed in more detail. Skip all behaviors/events that are marked "n" (no). Put a check next to the youngest age that any behavior/event occurred, and use this checked age as

the age to start the timeline, as long as this age is not younger than age 14. If this age is younger than age 14, use age 14 to begin the timeline.

Start the timeline with the youngest age listed on the Cover Sheet. That is, the timeline will begin with the age and associated year for the activity that occurred earliest in R's life, as long as it is age 14 or later. If any activity/event occurred before the age of 14, age 14 will be used as the starting date on the timeline. Remember to list the actual age that the activity/event first occurred on the Cover Sheet, but the earliest age to begin the timeline is age 14. Age 14 is the youngest age for collecting detailed data collection and is entered on the timeline sheet.

The timeline will begin with the year that R turned the youngest age documented on the Cover Sheet, regardless of the month. For example, if R reports age 17 as the youngest age that he/she experienced any of the activities/events listed on the Cover Sheet, the first year of the timeline will cover the year that R turned 17. If R turned 17 in June, then the months of January through May will not be filled out. Calculate the year for the specified date. Fill in the age/year header of each year.

The end date is determined by the month and year of the interview.

Begin filling out the timeline. Each line is used to record specific kinds of information. If any information has already been collected from official records, that information can be entered during the interview. This information includes CII information such as arrests, periods of incarceration, legal status, etc. When entered on the timeline, this information provides a visual record by which behavior and status changes are segmented.

Note that since official records are often incomplete (sometimes even inaccurate), it is important to spend a few minutes with R going over the information to confirm and make any necessary corrections. If no official records are available, only information provided at the time of the interview will be entered on the timeline.

Record any other significant life events that took place between the first age entered and the date of the interview. Such events might include marriages, divorces, births of children, deaths of family members, job changes, and geographical moves. These dates are entered on the bottom of the page as anchor points to aid R's memory.

Remember the following instructions only apply to behaviors/events experienced by R. No detail is necessary for those listed behaviors/events that were recorded as "n" (no). Timelines will be filled out for every year subsequent to the youngest age recorded on the Cover Sheet or, if younger than age 14, age 14 will be used to begin the year-by-year timeline documentation. Along with timelines filled out with specific details, "blank" timelines will be faxed to the DMC if no activity/event was experienced during the two years captured on any one form. **One timeline for every two years between the first age listed on the Cover Sheet (or if earlier than age 14, age 14) and the current year must be sent to DMC, even if no activities/events occurred.**

## Criminal Justice

If R reports participating in any criminal activity on the Cover Sheet, fill out Line #1 **CRIMINAL ACTIVITY** by documenting the kind of criminal activity. Show Card A for specific types of criminal activities, and use the corresponding letters to document on the timeline (shoplifting/vandalism, drug sales or manufacturing, forgery, burglary/larceny/B&E, robbery, assault, arson, rape, homicide/manslaughter, prostitution). Line #2 provides a space to document an additional criminal activity if it occurs **at the same time** as #1. If only one criminal activity occurred at any one time in R's lifetime, then only use Line #1.

Please note this decision rule: Only two activities can be documented at any one point in time. If more than two activities actually occurred at any one time, document the two most "severe" activities listed in order of least to most severe (except for other).

**INCARCERATION:** Fill out Line #3 - the INCARCERATION line. Given that incarcerations represent discrete time periods, it is often easy for Rs to recall these periods, and if experienced, will serve as a solid basis for further questioning. Refer to CII information you filled out on the arrest line. Mark all periods of incarceration, documenting the number of days incarcerated in each incarcerated month on the timeline using the categories listed on Card B. Record the total number of days, even if more than one episode of incarceration occurred during any one month. These include time spent in jail, prison, and juvenile institutions. Note that several of the other target behaviors/events cannot occur during periods of incarcerations. Make sure there is no illogical overlap with any other segment.

## Drug Treatment

**DRUG TREATMENT:** Capture drug treatment of any type/modality/duration on Line #4. Use Card C to detail types of treatment and modalities, to include inpatient, residential and therapeutic communities, detox, outpatient treatments, and private drug counseling. Use the date that R presented for the index treatment as an anchor. Mark the beginning and ending month of the treatment that corresponds to the client's index treatment. If more than one type of treatment is experienced during any one month, document the treatment type that occurred for the longest period.

Line #5 is used to document Drug Treatment **Attendance**. This is the duration of treatment attendance for each treatment episode reported. Use the duration categories listed on Card C.

Use Line #6 to document self-help treatment participation. If R reports having attended a recovery resource such as 12-Step (AA, NA, CA), Rational Recovery, SMART, etc., list the average number of days that self-help was attended during each appropriate month using categories listed on Card D.

### Medical/Psychiatric Treatments

Next ask about **MEDICAL OR PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITALIZATIONS** of any duration and mark those on Line #7. Do not include drug treatment programs on this form. However, do include here if R was hospitalized for mental problems associated with drug use. For dual diagnosis, ask if R was on a drug unit. If so, code as drug treatment on the appropriate form. If you can't decide, write a note explaining the treatment in detail. Use response categories listed on Card E to document the type of treatment received and whether treatment was related to the drug use.

Line #8 is used to document the use of **medications** prescribed for medical and/or psychiatric problems. Use Card F for response categories.

### Drug Use

Line #9 is used to document **tobacco use**. Use Card G for tobacco use frequency response categories and use the corresponding letter to document tobacco use during each month of use.

Line #10 is used to document **alcohol use**. Card H lists the response categories for documenting the average amount of alcohol consumed per day or week.

**Marijuana use** is documented on Line #11, using the average use categories listed on Card I.

**Methamphetamine/amphetamine use** is documented on Line #12. Card J lists amount and method of use categories. Document the average amount of use, and the method of use for each month in which methamphetamine/amphetamine was used.

**Cocaine use** is documented on Line #13, using the average use categories listed on Card K. Document the average amount of use, and the method of use for each month in which any form of cocaine was used.

Line #14 is used to document any **other drug use**, not listed previously. Notate the type of drug used, and use Card L to record the pattern of other drug use. If more than one other drug are used during any one-month, record the drug that is used most often.

Use Lines #15-18 to record **symptoms** experienced by R as a consequence of drug use. Use Card M for a list of possible responses, and use the corresponding letter to record the symptom experienced during each month it was experienced. Four lines have been provided so that up to four symptoms occurring at the same time can be recorded. If more than four symptoms are experienced during any one time, list four most troubling symptoms.

**Final Notes:**

If R has trouble remembering patterns and frequency of use and changes, orient R to events already marked on the timeline. For example say: “When you got out of jail in December of 1998, what was your drug use like?” or “We are talking about the time right after the birth of your son in June. Were you using then?”

Make sure the timeline is filled out as clearly and completely as possible. If there are discrepancies in data collection, it is often possible to reconstruct information based on a well-constructed timeline.

After the timeline is filled out, go over all the information with R again. Make sure no overlap rules are violated. Change information if necessary, erasing completely.

Upon completion of the timeline, the interviewer should have an overview of R’s life history of drug use, treatment episodes, periods of incarceration, and information on all targeted topics.