State of the art practice with regard to investigative interviews of children in suspected abuse cases has changed greatly since the early 1980s and is now informed by ongoing research concerning children’s memory and suggestibility and the impact of different interviewing techniques.

A number of different interview approaches and protocols have emerged, but these approaches tend to fall into one of two categories –

1) **Structured “Narrative” Interviews**, that emphasize eliciting verbal narratives in response to open-ended invitations (similar to or based on the NICHD protocol), and

2) the **“RATAC” protocol**, the approach taught by the “Finding Words” and “ChildFirst” interview training programs, that incorporate the early use of media, such as anatomical drawings, along with specific questions regarding “touch”

Despite agreement regarding some basics of best practice interviewing, there are still significant controversies and differences. Among these are whether to routinely include interview instructions, whether to elicit a promise from the child to tell the truth, whether to use anatomical drawings and/or anatomical dolls, the importance of an emphasis on “narrative practice” at the beginning of an interview, how to introduce the topic of suspected abuse during an interview, and whether child forensic interviewers should be ‘credentialed’ or ‘certified.’

This workshop will discuss areas of agreement and difference in interview practice. It will include comparison of the key components of the NICHD and RATAC approaches, examples of some of the specific techniques being applied, and discussion of child interviewing skills and techniques that are most effective and forensically sound.
Be clear what we’re talking about:

“Forensic” Interviews – aimed at gathering reliable info for investigations

- Dictionary definition of “forensic”
  - Relating to, used in, or appropriate for courts of law
  - Relating to the use of science or technology in the investigation and establishment of facts or evidence in a court of law
- “Investigative”
- “Good” interviews are a combination of art and science

Goals
- Don’t cause false reports (avoid errors of commission)
- Obtain complete & accurate accounts (avoid errors of omission)
- Focus on reliability as the primary objective


Investigative Interview Purposes:

- Elicit complete & accurate reports
- Collect info to corroborate or refute allegations
- Consider all reasonable explanations (be impartial & objective)

The Child Interview

- “There is no single correct method for conducting child investigative interviews in cases of alleged abuse.”
- “A number of interview protocols... but there is currently little empirical support for one protocol over another.” (true in 2002, but not today – NICHD protocol has extensive research support)

“I don’t always do anything.” - Katherine Eagleson, New Mexico

Excellent and experienced interviewer explaining that there will always be circumstances that may justify deviating from usual practice, as long as interviewer can explain why they did what they did, and why, when they don’t follow usual approach, they deviated.

2 general approaches to forensic interviews in use today:

1. **RATA protocol** - Encourages use of media & early questions about “touch”

2. **Structured “Narrative” Interviews**, emphasizing verbal narratives - **NICHD protocol** or adaptations of it

- Both generally encourage non-suggestive questioning
- Key differences are in the way open-ended questioning is emphasized and in the techniques & components that are encouraged
- Many interviewers blend techniques
RATAF/“Finding Words”/“Child First” protocol

- Developed by CornerHouse Child Advocacy Center, Minnesota in 1989
- Reflects some of the practices common at the time developed, e.g., anatomy ID (AKA “body parts inventory”) and use of anatomical; dolls
- Currently being promoted by the National Child Protection Training Center (located at Winona State University in MN)
- 17 states in the US have been certified to run programs that teach the RATAF protocol: Minnesota, South Carolina, Indiana, Mississippi, New Jersey, Georgia, Missouri, Illinois, Maryland, West Virginia, Kansas, Ohio, Arkansas, Delaware, Virginia, Connecticut and Oklahoma; RATAF trainers have gone to Japan & Colombia to assist in developing RATAF training there

RATAF is an acronym that stands for the following interview steps/stages:
1. Rapport
2. Anatomy Identification
3. Touch Inquiry
4. Abuse Scenario (use of anatomical dolls encouraged here)
5. Closure

Some features and areas of emphasis in RATAF/ChildFirst training:
- Described as “semi-structured;” and adhering to a “Child First” doctrine
- Distinguishes between recognition and reconstructive (rather than recall) memory
- “Process of inquiry” as conceptualized by RATAF suggests that:
  - ‘Indirect’ free recall questions are more appropriate with older children
  - Narrative responses are less likely with younger children
- Use of easel pad, drawings, & dolls: RATAF protocol is oriented around a display board with easel pad that the interviewer writes on and uses to post body outlines; it encourages specific questions about touching early in the interview and the use of interviewing aids, such as anatomical drawings and dolls
- Exploration of ‘alternatives’ focuses primarily on whether there were other perpetrators, other incidents


Components of RATAF:
1. Rapport
   - Face picture: for kids under 8 years of age; optional for ages 8-10
   - Family circles: for kids under 11 years of age; optional for older kids
2. Anatomy Identification (using anatomically detailed diagrams)
   - Gender differentiation: for kids less than 6 years of age
   - Naming body parts: for kids under 6 years of age; optional for older kids
3. Touch Inquiry
   - Questions re: positive touch: for kids under 6 years of age – ‘Do you get hugs/kisses/tickles?’ for ages 6-9: ‘Do you get touches you like?’
Questions re: **negative touch**: for kids under 10 years of age: ‘Are there places on your body you don’t want to be touched (or no one is supposed to touch?),’ followed by asking if someone has touched there

For ages 10 and older: ‘What do you know about coming here today?’

4. **Abuse Scenario**: Details gathered, anatomical dolls encouraged as appropriate; other explanations explored (“provide child w/opportunity to tell about other possibilities”)

5. **Closure**: Educate about personal safety, explore safety options, child’s questions

**Documentation**: Video recording is encouraged; kids 5 & over are told about taping

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**How RATAC differs from NICHD Approaches:**

**Philosophical**

- Beliefs re: Appropriateness of Open-Ended Questioning –
  - Memory Concepts: emphasis in RATAC on **recognition** memory
  - RATAC’s **Process of Inquiry** encourages more direct questioning w/younger children
- RATAC emphasizes use of media (drawings & dolls) throughout interview
- RATAC highlights questions about other possible victims & offenders as a means to explore alternatives

**Practical**: Components & Techniques

1. **Instructions, Truth & Lie Discussions**
   - In RATAC, instructions are addressed “as situation presents” (not as a stage at the beginning)
   - RATAC instructors discourage discussions about & promises to tell truth

2. **Narrative practice**: Not a specific interview stage or component in the RATAC protocol – ‘narrative encouraged throughout interview’

3. **Transition**: In RATAC protocol, occurs during **touch inquiry** unless spontaneous statement made during prior stages; may ask yes/no questions to focus on abuse allegation, followed by “Tell me all about that,” to access free recall; (recommends asking 3 times)
NICHD Protocol
(National Institute of Child Health & Human Development)

- Developed in 2000 by a group of researchers at the NICHD, led by Michael Lamb (now at the University of Cambridge, UK)
- A structured interview protocol designed to translate professional recommendations into operational guidelines
- Utilized in various locations in the U.S., Canada, France, the U.K., other areas in Europe, and throughout Israel where field studies involving actual interviews using these techniques demonstrated impressive improvement in the quality of interviews
- Designed to improve quality & amount of info obtained in investigative interviews, while minimizing the risk of contaminating the child’s account
- Enhances ability of children to report accurately using open-ended prompts to access free recall memory (which is the most accurate)
- Teaches children to provide narrative accounts (they are not accustomed to doing); focus on eliciting verbal narratives before specific questions for all ages
- Downplays the need for interviewing aids such as drawings and dolls

Phases of the NICHD protocol:

1. Introductory phase: explaining the purpose and ground rules; eliciting a promise to tell the truth
2. Rapport building phase
3. Training in episodic memory/narrative event practice
4. Transition to substantive issues: using open-ended non-suggestive verbal prompts
5. Free recall phase: Investigating the incidents using a variety of open-ended prompts
6. Closure

The NICHD protocol is the most researched in the world: over 40,000 real-life interviews have been examined in a wide range of peer-reviewed research studies

SEE ALSO:

Ten Step Investigative Interview (adaptation of NICHD Protocol):
http://works.bepress.com/thomaslyon/5/

Thomas D. Lyon, J.D., Ph.D., Professor of Law & Psychology at USC
For articles, book chapters and other resources written by Tom Lyon, go to:
http://works.bepress.com/thomaslyon
Other approaches based on, or more similar to, the NICHD protocol: (partial list)

- “Stepwise” Approach (John Yuille, British Columbia, Canada)
- WA State Child Interview Guide: contact P. Toth at ptoth@cjc.state.wa.us for soon to be completed 2011 revision
- Ohio Childhood Trust Flexible Interview Guidelines (Erna Olafson & Julie Kenniston)
- National Children’s Advocacy Center (NCAC) Flexible Interview Model (Linda Cordisco-Steele & colleagues)
- N. Carolina RADAR adaptation of NICHD Protocol (Mark Everson & Chris Ragsdale)
- Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) “Investigative Interviews of Children” by Kim Poyer


To understand current issues regarding interview protocols, also see:


NICHD Research Results

- ‘(Protocol) guided interviews elicited more information using open-ended prompts & less information using option-posing & suggestive questions than did standard interviews. In 89% of protocol interviews, children made their preliminary allegations in response to open-ended prompts, compared w/36% in the standard interviews.’
- All ages (even preschoolers) provide 3-5 times more information to open-ended vs. focused prompts
- Following interview guidelines improved the quality of information obtained from children much more dramatically than gender affected the interview process
- 79% disclosure rate w/4-13 year olds & 71% disclosure rate in sexual abuse cases

NICHD research has shown that ongoing feedback, peer review participation, & regular ongoing training are critical to reinforce & maintain interviewer skills
NICHD-based approaches emphasize the importance of maximizing the use of open-ended prompts, even with pre-schoolers:

- Truly open-ended questions elicit longer answers, are less likely to be the product of suggestion, and are most likely to be accurate
- Tom Lyon says that research shows typical interviewers use “tell me more” questions less than 1% of the time
- But research has clearly shown that these kinds of questions (and even simply repeating back to children what they have just said) consistently generate far more details per question from children than Yes/No or multiple choice questions, even with children who are scared or embarrassed and have actually been sexually abused
- Lamb research with over 150 actual interviews in sex abuse cases: 4-5 yr. olds produced twice as many details responding to “tell me more” questions than to Yes/No questions; 8-9 yr. olds produced over 4 times as many details; (consider that an 8 or 9 year old sounds like a 4 to 5 year old when answering a Yes/No question)

**Study examining case outcomes** before & after police detectives in Salt Lake City were trained on the NICHD Investigative Interview Protocol found that after the NICHD protocol was introduced, prosecutors accepted more cases; and more cases that went to trial resulted in conviction than before; “Toward a Better Way to Interview Child Victims of Sexual Abuse,” by Sara Harris, *NIJ Journal* Issue # 267, June 2011

**Characteristics of NICHD-Based/Narrative Interview Approaches** (including adaptations in many locations)
- Emphasize differences in reliability between recall and recognition memory & encourage open-ended questioning that accesses child’s free recall
- Focus is on eliciting narratives before specific questions for all ages
- Downplay the need for interviewing aids such as drawings and dolls
- Focus on eliciting verbal narratives/accounts whenever possible

**Adaptations of NICHD Protocol – distinctive features:**

- ‘Rules’ & practice
- Practice with narrative accounts during rapport building
- Usually include a request that child tell the truth, with discussion of truth-lie competency issues optional
- Alternative open-ended probes to introduce the topic of concern
- Early separation of incidents: “One time or more than one time?”
- Segmentation of the event as a strategy for gathering additional detail
- “Cued recall” questions

**Example:** *WA State Child Interview Guide* (2011 revision)

**Stages:**
1. Introduction (name, role, documentation, people present)
2. Ground rules/instructions with practice, and eliciting a commitment to tell truth
3. Narrative practice (primary method to develop rapport & assess development)
4. Transition (as open-ended as possible)
5. Substantive questions/elaboration-encouraged with open-ended techniques
6. Closure
APSAC Clinic: Teaches a “structured narrative interview” approach
(most similar to NICHD protocol and Tom Lyon’s teachings)
- Emphasis on research-based best-practice techniques
- Attendees create their own structured narrative interview approach
- Major guiding principle = **Best interests of the child** (per APSAC Code of Ethics)

**Effectively Changing & Improving Interview Practices/Skills**
- Difficult to change reliance on focused questions - structured protocol helps
- Must “train” children (& interviewers) to get used to narratives about specific events

**Best Practices**

**Widespread Agreement**
1. **Setting** should be:
   - Child-friendly
   - Neutral (de-emphasize authority)
   - Private and free from distractions
   - Ideally one person interviews the child

2. **Documentation**
   - Video-recording is best & most accurate way to document interviews
   - Child should be told that interview is being recorded

3. **Timing**
   - Interview children as soon as possible (and reasonable) after alleged events have occurred

4. **Number** of interviews
   - Unnecessary multiple interviews should be avoided
   - Artificial limits (such as setting a limit of 1 interview) should not be imposed

5. “**Allegation-blind**” Interviews are not a good idea, but interviewers should be careful not to lose objectivity and should use background information to help determine likely alternative explanations

6. **Interviewer demeanor**: should be supportive, warm and friendly, while maintaining objectivity; should be open-minded and unbiased, and should de-emphasize authority
7. **Build Rapport**
   - Critical to “engage” the child, establish a relationship, and make him/her comfortable before exploring substantive allegations

8. **Be Developmentally Appropriate**
   - Make sure the child understands interviewer (and vice-versa)
   - Keep sentences short & simple
   - Frame - signal change of subject
   - Use appropriate language
     - Remember that children are concrete
     - Pre-schoolers are the most susceptible to suggestion
     - Use people’s names, place names, and specific nouns to avoid possible confusion from using pronouns & other “shifting” words
     - Avoid negatives
       - The use of simple negatives (“not,” “no”) appears to increase the chance of an incorrect answer by AT LEAST 50% in children 4-10
   - Be aware of implications of using “some” v. “any"

9. **Adapt to individual child**
   - Consider child’s age, developmental level, culture, mindset, level of support, any physical/developmental disabilities, etc. and adapt accordingly

10. **Encourage narratives**: Use open-ended (non-suggestive) prompts that get children to provide as much information as possible in the form of narratives; See: Child Abuse & Neglect 34 (2010) 407–413, “An examination of the association between interviewer question type and story-grammar detail in child witness interviews about abuse,” Brooke B. Feltis, Martine B. Powell, Pamela C. Snow, Carolyn H. Hughes-Scholes (Australia)

10. **Flexibility**: RATAc protocol is described as “semi-structured” & NICHD as “structured,” but both approaches allow interviewers to modify their approach to adapt to the individual child and circumstances

11. **Interview as only part of the investigation**: forensic interview alone is not enough for a complete investigation

12. **Necessity of peer review and ongoing training to reinforce and maintain interviewer skills**:
   - Consistent with the results of research conducted by the developers of NICHD protocol
   - Interview training alone is insufficient to maintain & improve interviewer performance
   - Ongoing training to reinforce skills, along with regular support & feedback (including review of interviews with peers) are necessary
Best Practices – Some Basic Principles

- “Build rapport by building narratives” (Tom Lyon); establish pattern for questions & expected responses as early in interview as possible
- Don’t give up when one open-ended invitation doesn’t work
- Be prepared to use multiple approaches to open-ended questioning
- Think about, and use, what child has just said - don’t be thinking about your next question until child has finished talking - if at all possible, use the child’s words in your next question (“cued recall”); See Child Abuse & Neglect 34 (2010) 585–592, “The use of paraphrasing in investigative interviews,” Angela D. Evans, Kim P. Roberts, Heather L. Price, Candyce P. Stefek (Canada)
- Try time framing, time segmentation, sensory focus, ‘feeling’ questions
- Ask direct questions as non-suggestively as possible
  - Frame questions ahead of time if possible
  - “Funnel Approach” - basic interview structure = beginning with open-ended questions & proceeding gradually to more direct questions with caution and always attempt to push interview back to open-ended probes that elicit narrative information
  - “Pairing” - Attempt to follow direct questions with questions that elicit free narratives (also referred to as the “hourglass” approach)

THE NUMBER 1 RULE = Ask more open-ended questions and fewer closed-ended questions!

Closed-ended Questions

- Yes-no questions
- Forced-choice questions
- Questions that can be answered with a single word (closed “WH” questions)

Should minimize use of these because they invite recognition memory & lead to more errors; interviewers usually use these far too much

Yes-No questions Characteristics:
- Child nods, shakes head, or responds with single word
- Often start with: “Did…?” or “Was…?”
- Unintentional yes-no questions:
  - “Do you know/remember…?”
  - “Can you tell me…?” “Will you tell me…?”
  - Paraphrasing the child’s words w/a question mark at end: “You said he hurt you?” or following up a denial with an “Are you sure?”
Forced Choice Questions

Questions that ask child to choose response from a list; characterized by “or”

Multiple choice questions restrict choices & call for short answers

“WH” Questions

- Questions that begin with who, what, where, when, why, & how
- Wh- questions move along a spectrum from open-ended to closed-ended as the information requested becomes more focused & specific:
  - “What happened?” is open-ended
  - “What color was his hat?” is closed ended
  - Wh- questions that can be answered with 1 word are closed-ended
- Wh- questions can pre-suppose information and thus become suggestive; e.g., “Who hurt you?” [when child has not yet said anything about being hurt]
- Although Wh- questions (such as “Who…?” “What…?” and “Where…?”) may not suggest the expected answer & therefore not be suggestive, they often don’t invite narrative responses; when they can be answered w/1 or 2 words, they can, in fact, discourage narratives
- The use of closed-ended “WH” questions should be minimized

Be careful if you ask open-ended questions that combine “tell me” with a “WH” or “how” inquiry, so that you are actively encouraging more than 1 or 2 word answers

Examples:
- “Tell me all about what happened... .”
- “Tell me all about who... .”
- “Tell me all about the place where it happened.”
- “Tell me all about how you know... /how you figured that out.”
More on “WH” Questions: 2 kinds of “WH” words: Concrete & Abstract

Concrete
What
Where
Who

Abstract
When (e.g., “When did it happen?”)
Why (e.g., “Why do you think he said that?”)
How (e.g., “How did he get in your room?”)

- Interviewers should be careful not to ask “abstract” WH questions
- Instead, use concrete questions to determine more abstract info
  Instead of: “When did it happen?”
  Try:  “What else was happening that day?”
  “What was the weather like outside?”
  “What happened right after?”
  “What happened before?”
  “What was on TV?”
  ...and so on

Problems with Closed-ended Questions:
- Children often answer closed-ended questions with a single word, rather than elaborate with their own words and their own memories
- Closed-ended questions state what the interviewer thinks rather than what the child knows
- Closed-ended questions rely on the interviewer’s words, and those words may be difficult or ambiguous
- Closed-ended questions tend to be more suggestive and more prone to response biases than open-ended questions
- Closed-ended questions encourage guessing and are less likely to be answered with “I don’t know.”

Improving Multiple Choice Questions
- Always include an open-ended option at end of any multiple choice question
  - “…or something else?”
  - “…or someone else?”
  - “…or somewhere else?”
- Try not including the expected answer in the choices you offer
- There isn’t yet any research to tell us if this really results in better info though
Yes/no and forced choice questions can be revised/improved to be more open-ended:

**Forced choice:** “Did he touch you on the top of your clothes or under your clothes?”
- Open-ended alternatives:
  - WH- question: “Where on your body did he touch you?” (more open-ended, but doesn’t encourage narrative response)
  - A better option: “Tell me all about how he touched you.”

**Yes/No:** “Did anything come out of his penis?”
- Open-ended alternatives:
  - “What happened with his penis?”
  - “Tell me everything you saw/felt.”
  - “What happened right after he put his penis on you?”
  - “How did you know when it was over?”

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**Always use PAIRING**

Follow a “yes” or “no,” or short answer to a direct or focused question with an open-ended request to provide more information

**Examples:**
- “Tell me more about that.”
- “Tell me everything/all about that.”
- “What do you mean when you say...?”
- “How do you know?” OR
- “How did you figure that out?”
Open-ended questions/invitations

Why are open-ended invitations and eliciting narratives preferred?

Because the answers generated by open-ended questions come from free recall, which is **more accurate**.

- Truly open-ended questioning requires an open mind – an interviewer who is willing to think about possibilities other than abuse before & during the interview
- “Tell me…” is the best way to integrate open-ended invitations in the interview

**Examples: Open-Ended Invitations**

- “Tell me everything that happened from the beginning to the end.”
- “Tell me everything you remember, even the little parts you don’t think are important.”
- “You said _____. Tell me everything about that.” OR “Tell me all about______.”
- “I’m confused, tell me again.”

**AVOID**

- “Did…?”
- “Was…?”
- “Can you/will you tell me…?”
- “When…?” (this is an abstract concept)
- “How many times?” (not a fair question for most anyone)

- Establish pattern for questions & expected responses as early in interview as possible
- Don’t give up when one open-ended invitation doesn’t work
- Be prepared to use multiple approaches to open-ended questioning
- **Think about, and use, what child has just said** - don’t be thinking about your next question until child has finished talking - if at all possible, **use/repeat the child’s words** in your next open-ended request to provide more information
- Do **not** interrupt a narrative
- **Exhaust child’s ability to continue with narrative account** (with “Tell me more…” & “Then what happened?” questions), before using “WH” questions that focus on very specific information
Open-Ended Follow-Up Questioning

- **Tell me more** prompts
  
  "You said ____. Tell me more about ____.
r

- **What happened next** questions
  
  "You said ____. What happened next?" OR "Then what happened?"

- Versions of these are often all that is needed to generate many details and a clear picture of what happened

**Additional open-ended techniques to elicit more details:**

**Time Segmentation**

- Ask for information re: a smaller **segment** of time:
  
  - "I’d like to find out more about what happened. Tell me everything that happened from the time Bob [child’s words] until [child’s words]."

**Frame the event in time**

- Ask questions to determine context – what was happening before and after
  
  - "What happened right before?"
  
  - "What happened right after?"
  
  - "Then what happened?"
  
  - "What happened next?"

**Cued Recall**

- **Cue** the child to *something s/he has previously said in the interview, or in a previous statement* (if it’s an important detail - use the least suggestive cue possible)
  
  - "You said ____. Tell me more."
  
  - "I heard something about ____ [least suggestive cue possible] – tell me about that."
**Sensory Focus**

- Ask questions based on sensory perceptions
  - “Think about what it looked like. Tell me everything you saw.”
  - “Think about the sounds and tell me everything you heard.”

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**‘Feeling’ Questions**

- Ask questions related to emotional and physical feelings and reactions

- Answers often provide important information & evidence, and may warn about the possibility of a recantation

  - “How do you feel about talking to me today?”
  - “Are you worried about talking with me today?”
  - “Is anyone else worried about us talking today?”
  - “How did you feel when he touched you?”
  - “How did your body feel when he touched you?”
  - “What did you think when he touched you?”
  - “How did you feel after he touched you?”
  - “How did it feel when you went to the bathroom?”
  - “How do you feel about everything that has happened?”

See also: *Supplemental Investigative Interview Questions*, (2011) Elizabeth C. Ahern, and Thomas D. Lyon, JD, PhD

 laut image: “Funnel” Approach  “Hourglass” Approach
**Best Practices: Key Components**
*(included in NICHD-type approaches)*

- Instructions/rules – explain & practice
- Promise to Tell Truth
- Narratives - encourage and practice
- Introduction of topic of concern (transition) in most open-ended way

(This is where the biggest differences between RATAC & NICHD are)


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**Instructions** - also called: Ground rules/rules, Explaining Interview Expectations, “Orienting” Child to Interview

**Rationale** for Instructions = Children seek adult approval and may guess, or assume adult knows what happened, or think they must give an answer

**Benefits** (proven by research):
- Increase accuracy
- Decrease inclination to guess
- Increase willingness to ask for clarification
- Increase resistance to suggestion

Time concern?
- When done appropriately, they should take only a few minutes

**Caveats:**
- Instructions aren’t a panacea & won’t guarantee that a child will follow them, but they DO help; less effective with younger children, but still worth a try; suggestive interviewing can easily overtake positive effects of instructions
- Do it correctly though – be slow & methodical or they won’t help
- Give key instructions with feedback/reinforcement for them to be effective - Explain permissible responses, BUT ALSO check child’s understanding and ability to follow

Covering instructions with children
- One at a time
- Simple language
- Explain and practice 3 key instructions (see below)
- Reinforce throughout
- RATAC approach to instructions is not to do so as a stage at beginning of interview but to reinforce these concepts as the opportunity presents itself
Most important, research-based instructions/ground rules

1) ‘Don’t guess’
The “I don’t know” instruction – use examples to practice
- “If I ask you a question and you don’t know the answer, then just say ‘I don’t know.’ Don’t guess.”
  - Q: “So if I ask you, ‘What’s my cat’s name?’ what do you say?”
  - A: “I don’t know.” Q: “Okay, because you don’t know.
  - Q: “But what if I ask, “Do you have a dog?” “Okay, because you do know.”

2) ‘Tell me if you don’t know what I mean’
The “I don’t understand” instruction – use examples to practice
- “If I ask you a question and you don’t know what I mean or what I’m saying, you can say “I don’t know what you mean,” and I’ll ask it a different way.”
  - Q: “So if I ask you, ‘What’s your gender?’ what would you say?”
  - A: “I don’t know what you mean.”
  - Q: “Okay, because ‘gender’ is a hard word. So I’ll ask it a different way, ‘Are you a boy or a girl?’”
  - If child does know what “gender” means, try something like, “How many siblings do you have?”

3) ‘Correct me if I make a mistake’ - use examples to practice
- “Sometimes I make mistakes or get something wrong. When I do, you can tell me I’m wrong.”
  - “So if I say ‘You’re 30 years old,’ what do you say?”
  - “Okay, so how old are you?”
  - Very important ground rule
  - Children may think you already know the answer and be reluctant to disagree or correct you
  - This can help to show if child is able to resist suggestion These instructions equalize the power between the interviewer & the child

4) Uninformed interviewer - Interviewer Lack of Knowledge - ‘I wasn’t there’
- Very important instruction
  - “I need you to tell me what happened, because I wasn’t there and I don’t know what happened.”
  - “I don’t know what happened to you. I won’t be able to tell you the answers to my questions.”
  - This instruction has been shown by research to increase children’s resistance to misleading suggestions, but it doesn’t guarantee they will not be suggestible; a bad interview will wipe out benefits of instructions

Some additional instructions used as interviewers feel necessary:
- When you don’t want to answer: “If I ask you a question & you don’t want to talk about it right now, just tell me you don’t want to talk about it right now.”
- Same Question Asked Again: “If I ask the same question more than once, maybe I just forgot what you told me or maybe I didn’t understand. If what you told me before was right, just tell me again.”
Truth-Lie Discussions
2 separate aspects:
1) Eliciting a **promise to tell the truth**
2) Engaging in an assessment of child’s truth/lie **competency**

### Eliciting a Promise to Tell Truth
This should be included in **every** interview:
- Research results show this promotes increased accuracy/honesty (decreases lies);
- Provides valuable information; e.g., child says “I can’t,” or is unwilling, hesitant, reluctant

**How to Request the Promise**
- “It’s very important that you tell me the truth.”
- “Do you promise that you **will** tell me the truth?” (this wording is recommended in case child doesn’t understand the word “promise”):
- Alternative phrasing: “Will you tell me the truth?”
- “Are you going to tell me any lies?”

### Assessing Truth/Lie Testimonial Competency
Rationale for including a competency assessment with a young or delayed child:
- Makes clear that child knows what s/he is promising
- Helps to indicate ahead of time whether child is likely to be able to testify
- **May help prevent child from having to testify at a competency hearing**
- Even if child doesn’t demonstrate competency, you should still go ahead w/interview & follow-up investigation because other evidence may be discovered

3 requirements for truth/lie competency to testify:
1) Understands concept/difference between truth and lie
2) Understands negative consequences for lying **and**
3) Makes commitment to tell truth

### Assessing Competency with Young Children
Use examples
- See simplified task (using a single picture) for asking children about the meaning of “truth” in 2010 Lyon article above; shortens time involved in exploring competency
- **Scenario example** to demonstrate child understands concept: “Joe ate all the cookies. Joe’s Mom asked if he ate the cookies and Joe said ‘No, the dog ate the cookies.’ What’s Joe doing?”
- Lyon-Saywitz Picture Tasks from 2000: http://works.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1008&context=thomaslyon
  - These 8 picture tasks have been in use since 2000; however, they can take time that would be better spent doing narrative practice
Practicing Neutral Event Narratives:
• Narratives are the single best indicator of an interview that can withstand scrutiny
• Open-ended inquiries that elicit narratives are drawing on recall memory

Together with ground rules/instructions, this is 1 of the most useful child interview strategies proven by research to increase informativeness without decreasing accuracy

To engage the child, evaluate his/her ability & willingness to answer interviewer questions, and provide the child with the opportunity to practice providing narratives
• Best way to develop rapport
• Best way to assess child’s use & understanding of language and developmental level
• Sets pattern of open-ended questions & narrative responses for rest of interview

Purpose

Narrative Practice about a Neutral or Positive Event
• Use same open-ended questioning techniques that you should continue throughout interview – use “Tell me…,” “Tell me more…,” & “Then what happened?” questions
• Use facilitators to keep child talking (“uh-huh,” “okay,” etc.)
• Use child’s name frequently
• Whenever possible, use child’s words in your next question
• 5 minutes should be sufficient; too much time is counter-productive

• Ask open-ended/narrative-inviting questions about a recent event child enjoyed, possibly an event you found out about from the child’s caretaker, teacher, etc.
• Elicit episodic memory rather than script memory
• If you don’t already know about a neutral or positive event to ask about, try:
  o “I’d like to get to know you better – tell me about things you like to do.”
  o Then ask the child to tell all about a recent event related to what s/he likes
    ▪ Example: “You said you like to play soccer – tell me all about your last soccer game.”
  o OR ask child if s/he did something special related to a recent holiday, birthday, school event such as a field trip, etc., and ask about that event
• Yesterday or Today – You can always ask the child about their day so far (before your interview) as a way to practice narratives and retrieve info from episodic memory; Example: “Tell me everything that happened to you today, from when you woke up until you when you got here to talk to me.”

FRAME for transition, and assess level of support for child:
• “Now that I know you better, I want to talk about why you’re here today.”
  o “How do you feel about talking to me today?”
  o “Are you worried about talking with me today?”
  o “Is anyone else worried about us talking today?”
**Transition** to **Substantive Portion of Interview**

(Introducing the topic of concern/suspected abuse – be open-ended, non-suggestive)

**First Transition Attempt** (worth a try in almost every interview)
- “Tell me why you came to talk to me.”
- OR
- “Tell me why I came to talk to you.”
- “It’s really important for me to know why you came to talk to me.”

**Transitions** (using the funnel approach – begin with very open-ended inquiries and only gradually narrow focus)
- “What did [your mom] tell you about why I want to talk to you today?”
- “Did anyone tell you anything about why you’re here today?” [important info you should try to find out no matter what]
- “Why do you think I want to talk to you today?”
- “I understand something might have happened – tell me what happened.”

**Transitions - When there’s been a prior statement**
- “I heard you talked to _______ about something that happened. Tell me what happened.”
- “I heard you saw _____ last week. Tell me what you talked about.”

**Transitions to try** when these don’t work

1. ‘Someone’s worried’
   - “Is [your mom] worried about something that happened? Tell me what she’s worried about.”

2. ‘Bothered You’
   - “I heard someone might have bothered you. Tell me everything about that.”

3. ‘Something wasn’t right’
   - “I heard someone may have done something that wasn’t right. Tell me everything about that.”

**Transitions - When there’s no prior statement**
- Ask contextual questions related to:
  - Location of possible abuse
  - Concerning behavior/activity
  - Precocious drawings/letters/language
  - Alleged/potential offender

**Examples**
- “Your friend is worried something might have happened to you. What do you think she’s worried about?”
- “I heard you talked to [name] about [a problem you were having/a picture you drew, etc.] – tell me about [the problem/the picture, etc.]”
- “I heard you were [doing something with other children/saying some words the teacher didn’t like/etc.] – tell me all about that.”
- “I heard your sister saw you with [suspect] – tell me what was happening.”
- “Your mom showed me/I saw a picture of you with [suspect] – tell me all about what was happening.”
- “Tell me about your family.” “…things you like to do.” “…things you don’t like.”
- “What makes you happy, mad, sad, feel good, feel not so good...?”
**If visible injury** - "I see [you have a bruise/cut/bandage] – tell me what happened."

How serious is the case, and continued risk to this child or others?
- If very serious or high risk, more specific questions may be necessary, but first carefully consider whether or not they are likely to be productive
  - Start with **place**
  - Bring up **suspect** before mentioning conduct
  - Describe **conduct** as last resort, but follow all these with open-ended invitations to try to elicit details through narrative responses

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**Determining Child’s Names for Body Parts (not necessary at beginning of interview)**

An option: Clarify terms **after** child gives some abuse information
- "What do you call that part of your body?"
- "Where is that?" / "Tell me what [child’s word] looked like."
- "Is there another word for that part?"
- "What do you use your [child’s word] for?"
- "Put an ‘X’ where your/his [child’s word] is?" (gingerbread outline/person)

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**Using Dolls & Drawings: Comparing ‘verbal’ & ‘prop-assisted’ interviews**


Prop-assisted interviews may pose an increased risk of memory inaccuracies in young children; therefore, use very carefully & only when really needed

**Advice re: Body Drawings and Other Props (such as dolls)**

- Try to do without & emphasize narrative event practice w/child responding to open-ended prompts
- Always elicit verbal report first
- Use only for clarification, if needed
- Seek verbal elaboration from child:
  - “You said he touched your____. Tell me everything that happened.”
  - “You pointed to the middle of the picture – tell me what body part that is.”
  - “Tell me all about what happened when [suspect] touched you there.”
  - “Then what happened?”
  - “What did he do with his hands?”

- Use the least suggestive tools possible, e.g., “gingerbread” drawings that do not include anatomical details
Future Trends

Certification/credentialing

- 4 tiered credentialing currently being offered by the Nat’l Assn. of Certified Child Forensic Interviewers (NACCFI): http://www.naccfi.com/
- Concerns
  - Position statements from APSAC, NDAA, NCAC & NCA do not endorse credentialing
  - Takes attention away from whether interview is good, regardless of interviewer “credentials”
  - Additional concerns:
    - Cost
    - Appropriateness of requiring an outside credential for law enforcement to carry out an investigative function

Using Dogs to Assist in Child Interviews

2 approaches, with important differences:

- “Service dogs/facility dogs” - See: www.courthousedogs.com
  - Interviewer is dog’s handler
  - Dogs are usually used for a variety of functions, not just to support children being interviewed
  - Volunteer handler is present during interview
REFERENCES

- Child Sexual Abuse: Disclosure, Delay, and Denial, by Margaret-Ellen Pipe, Michael E. Lamb, Yael Orbach, and Ann-Christin Cederborg; Psychology Press, 2007
- Investigative Interviews of Children, by Debra Poole and Michael Lamb; American Psychological Association (1998)
- Handbook on Questioning Children: A Linguistic Perspective, 2nd Ed. (1999); by Anne Graffam Walker, Ph.D.; ABA Center on Children and the Law
- Interviewing Clients Across Cultures, by Lisa Fontes, Guilford Press, 2008
- Child Abuse & Culture, by Lisa Fontes, Guilford Press, 2005
- Memory & Suggestibility in the Forensic Interview, edited by: Mitchell Eisen, Jodi Quas, Gail Goodman; Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers

RESOURCES

- Using service dogs: www.courthousedogs.com
- APSAC: toll free (877) 402-7722, www.apsac.org
- APSAC Child Forensic Interview Clinics
  For info: ptoth@cjtc.state.wa.us or www.apsac.org
- National Children’s Alliance: (800) 239-9950 or (202) 548-0090, www.ncaonline.org