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Robert L. Listenbee, Administrator

From the Administrator

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is committed to preventing the victimization of children and ensuring the well-being of all youth. In suspected abuse or maltreatment cases, law enforcement, medical, court, and other child protection professionals must respond swiftly and effectively and in a manner that avoids retraumatizing the affected youth.

To assist those who work in this field, the National Children's Advocacy Center convened experts from the major national forensic interview training programs to identify best practices in child forensic interviewing in cases of alleged abuse or exposure to violence.

The resulting discussions led to this publication, which provides guidance on topics, such as interview timing and setting, question type, rapport-building between the interviewer and the victim, interview aids as well as vicarious trauma and self-care.

This bulletin represents commendable collaboration across multiple entities and is an effort to build consensus within the field. We hope that the information contained within it will aid practitioners' efforts to protect children from abuse and bring those who prey upon them to justice.

Robert L. Listenbee
Administrator

Child Forensic Interviewing: Best Practices

Chris Newlin, Linda Cordisco Steele, Andra Chamberlin, Jennifer Anderson, Julie Kenniston, Amy Russell, Heather Stewart, and Viola Vaughan-Eden

Highlights

This bulletin consolidates the current knowledge of professionals from several major forensic interview training programs on best practices for interviewing children in cases of alleged abuse. The authors discuss the purpose of the child forensic interview, provide historical context, review overall considerations, and outline each stage of the interview in more detail.

Among the topics that the authors discuss are the following:

- No two children will relate their experiences in the same way or with the same level of detail and clarity. Individual characteristics, interviewer behavior, family relationships, community influences, and cultural and societal attitudes determine whether, when, and how they disclose abuse.
- The literature clearly explains the dangers of repeated questioning and duplicative interviews; however, some children require more time to become comfortable with the process and the interviewer.
- Encouraging children to give detailed responses early in the interview enhances their responses later on.
- Forensic interviewers should use open-ended questions and should allow for silence or hesitation without moving to more focused prompts too quickly. Although such questions may encourage greater detail, they may also elicit potentially erroneous responses if the child feels compelled to reach beyond his or her stored memory.

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During the last quarter of the 20th century, the United States began to fully recognize the incidence of child abuse and neglect affecting our country. Increased public awareness and empirical literature have improved efforts to intervene effectively on behalf of children. One of the most significant interventions has centered on how to elicit accurate information from children regarding abuse and neglect—a process commonly referred to as "forensic interviewing" (Saywitz, Lyon, and Goodman, 2011). Following two decades of research and practice, professionals have gained significant insight into how to maximize children's potential to accurately convey information about their past experiences. Yet, as this effort continues and practice evolves, professionals face new challenges in standardizing forensic interviewing practice throughout the country.

A relative lack of both research and practice experience challenged pioneers in the field. As such, protocols and training efforts underwent significant revisions as more research was conducted and people began gaining practice-based experience, which informed further training. Additionally, given the dearth of resources at the time, geographically diverse training programs began to develop naturally throughout the United States, emanating from frontline service providers who struggled to provide quality services themselves and who also wanted to help fellow professionals. Different case experiences, contextual perspectives, and community standards influenced these training efforts. In addition, these service providers were not directly communicating with one another about the content of their training or their theoretical approaches. This further supported the existence of various approaches and the lack of standardized training language regarding forensic interviewing.

It is now widely accepted that professionals should have formal initial and ongoing forensic interview training (National Children's Alliance [NCA], 2011). However, the field has yet to determine one standardized practice to follow throughout the country. Although national training programs are generally based on the same body of research, some differences exist. Focusing on the variations among them often obscures consistencies within the various forensic interview models. In some cases, the veracity of the child's statement or the performance of the forensic interviewer has been questioned solely on the basis of the model being used. However, forensic interviewers often receive training in multiple models and use a blended approach to best meet the needs of the child they are interviewing (Midwest Regional Children's Advocacy Center [MRCAC], 2014). Furthermore, the model being used and any subsequent adaptations to it are often rooted in jurisdictional expectations. State statutes and case law dictate aspects of interview practice, further demonstrating that no one method can always be the best choice for every forensic interview.

In 2010, representatives of several major forensic interview training programs—the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children, the CornerHouse Interagency Child Abuse Evaluation and Training Center, the Gundersen National Child Protection Training Center, the National Children's Advocacy Center, and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development—gathered to review their programs' differences and similarities. The resulting discussions led to this bulletin, which consolidates current knowledge on the generally accepted best practices of those conducting forensic interviews of children in cases of alleged abuse or exposure to violence.

This nation must remain committed to consistently putting the needs of children first. It is the authors' hope that this document will become an essential part of every forensic interview training program and will be widely used as an authoritative treatise on the implementation of best practices in forensic interviewing.

Purpose of the Child Forensic Interview

The forensic interview is one component of a comprehensive child abuse investigation, which includes, but is not limited to, the following disciplines: law enforcement and child protection investigators, prosecutors, child protection attorneys, victim advocates, and medical and mental health practitioners. Although not all of the concerned disciplines may directly participate in or observe the forensic interview, each party may benefit from the information obtained during the interview (Jones et al., 2005).

Most child abuse investigations begin with a forensic interview of the child, which then provides direction for other aspects of the investigation. Although forensic interviewers are trained to conduct quality interviews, it is important to note there is no "perfect" interview.

For the purposes of this bulletin, and in an effort to build consensus within the field, the authors offer the following definition of a child forensic interview:

> A forensic interview of a child is a developmentally sensitive and legally sound method of gathering factual information regarding allegations of abuse or exposure to violence. This interview is conducted by a competently trained, neutral professional utilizing research and practice-informed techniques as part of a larger investigative process.

Historical Context

In the 1980s, several high-profile cases involving allegations that daycare providers had sexually abused multiple children in their care became the subject of considerable analysis because of the interview techniques that were used (Ceci and Bruck, 1995). Law enforcement depended on mental health practitioners because of their ability to establish rapport with children. However, mental health practitioners often used therapeutic techniques that were later deemed inappropriate for forensic purposes, primarily because of concerns regarding suggestibility. The courts scrutinized the interview procedures used in these early cases and found that techniques that invited make-believe or pretending were inappropriate for criminal investigations.

As awareness of child abuse grew, professionals realized that it might take special skills to interview children. Sgroi (1978) was the first medical/mental health professional to address the issue of investigative interviewing in the literature. The American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC) wrote the first practice guidelines—*Psychosocial Evaluation of Suspected Sexual Abuse in Young Children* (APSAC, 1990)—the title of which reflects the initial focus of these interviews: mental health. Today, the focus has shifted from the mental health or clinical perspective to a forensic perspective. Even the nomenclature changed to include terms such as "forensic interview" and "child forensic interview training."

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, substantial empirical literature discussed children's developmental capabilities and appropriate ways of engaging them in the interview process. The Cognitive Interview (Fisher and Geiselman, 1992) and Narrative Elaboration (Saywitz, Geiselman, and Bornstein, 1992) models included specific strategies that applied memory-based techniques to elicit detailed information from witnesses. Traces of both models remain in current approaches to evidence-based forensic interviewing (Saywitz and Camparo, 2009; Saywitz, Lyon, and Goodman, 2011).

Considerations Regarding the Child

Many influences have an impact on a child's experience of abuse and on his or her ability to encode and communicate information. These influences interact in a uniquely individual manner, such that no two children will ever engage or relate their experiences in the same way or with the same level of detail and clarity. This section describes the major influences on children's memory, language abilities, and motivation to converse.

Development

All of the forensic interviewing models agree that considering the age and development of the child is essential. Lamb and colleagues (2015) state that "age is the most important determinant of children's memory capacity." A child's age and developmental abilities influence his or her perception of an experience and the amount of information that they can store in long-term memory (Pipe and Salmon, 2002). Infants and toddlers can recall experiences, as demonstrated through behavioral reactions to people, objects, and environments; however, these early memories are not associated with verbal descriptions. Even as they begin to develop their language

capabilities, young children are less able to make sense of unfamiliar experiences, have a more limited vocabulary, and are less accustomed to engaging in conversations about past experiences than older children. As children age, their attention span improves and they are better prepared to comprehend, notice unique elements, and describe their experiences verbally. This, in turn, allows them to store more information and also allows them to discuss remembered events with others, which further serves to consolidate and strengthen memories. Children of all ages are more likely to recall salient and personally experienced details rather than peripheral details (Perona, Bottoms, and Sorenson, 2006).

Metacognition—the ability to recognize whether one understands a question and has stored and can retrieve relevant information—also improves as children mature. Very young children find it difficult to focus their attention and to search their memory effectively when interviewed. They may simply respond to recognized words or simple phrases without considering the entire question, and they are unable to monitor their comprehension or answers to questions (Lamb et al., 2015). As children grow older, both natural development and knowledge gained from school improve their skills.

Remembering an experience does not ensure that a child will be able to describe it for others. Forensic interviews are challenging for children, as they involve very different conversational patterns and an unfamiliar demand for detail (Lamb and Brown, 2006). Young children may use words before they completely understand their meaning and may continue to confuse even simple concepts and terms such as "tomorrow," "a lot," or "a long time." As children mature, they acquire the ability to use words in a more culturally normative way, although terminology for sexual encounters, internal thoughts and feelings, and particularly forensic and legal matters may be beyond their grasp (Walker, 2013). Forensic interviewers and those who evaluate the statements that children make in a legal context would do well to appreciate the many extraordinary demands made on child witnesses.

Although concerns about younger children's verbal and cognitive abilities are well recognized, the challenges of effectively interviewing adolescents are often overlooked. Because adolescents look much like adults, forensic interviewers and multidisciplinary team members may fail to appreciate that adolescents vary greatly in their verbal and cognitive abilities and thus fail to build rapport, provide interview instructions, or ensure the comprehension of questions (Walker, 2013). Ever conscious of wanting to appear competent, adolescents may be reluctant to ask for assistance. Forensic interviewers and investigators must guard against unreasonably high expectations for teenage witnesses and should not adopt a less supportive approach or use convoluted language, which will complicate matters.

Culture and Development

A child's family, social network, socioeconomic environment, and culture influence his or her development, linguistic style, perception of experiences, and ability to focus attention (Alaggia, 2010). Cultural differences may present communication challenges and can lead to misunderstandings within the forensic interview. Fontes (2008) highlights the importance of having clear-cut guidelines and strategies for taking culture into account when assessing whether child abuse or neglect has occurred. Forensic interviewers and investigators must consider the influence of culture on perception of experiences, memory formation, language, linguistic style, comfort with talking to strangers in a formal setting, and values about family loyalty and privacy when questioning children and evaluating their statements (Fontes, 2005, 2008; Perona, Bottoms, and Sorenson, 2006).

Disabilities

Children with disabilities are potentially at greater risk for abuse and neglect than children without disabilities (Hershkowitz, Lamb, and Horowitz, 2007; Kendall-Tackett et al., 2005). Forensic interviewers are unlikely

"Cultural differences may present communication challenges and can lead to misunderstandings within the forensic interview."

to have specialized training or experience in the broad field of disabilities or regarding developmental or medical concerns; thus, collaboration is often necessary to successfully interview these children. Interviewers should use local resources—including disability specialists or other professionals who work with children and their primary caregivers—to gain insight into the functioning of specific children and any needs they may have for special accommodations (Davies and Faller, 2007). The interviewer may have to adapt each stage of the interview, balancing these adaptations with the demand for forensic integrity (Baladerian, 1997; Hershkowitz, Lamb, and Horowitz, 2007). More than one interview session may be necessary to gain the child's trust, adapt to the child's communication style and limitations, and allow adequate time to gather information (Faller, Cordisco Steele, and Nelson-Gardell, 2010).

Trauma

Children who have been victims of maltreatment or were witnesses to violent crime often react uniquely to their experiences. Forensic interviewers must be cognizant of factors that mitigate or enhance the impact, as trauma symptoms may interfere with a child's ability or willingness to report information about violent incidents (Ziegler, 2002). The memories of children who have suffered extreme forms of trauma may be impaired or distorted (Feiring and Tasca, 2005); these children may not recall their experiences in a linear fashion but, instead, as "flashbulb memories" or snapshots of their victimization (Berliner et al., 2003). In addition, their memories of traumatic experiences may be limited, with a particular emphasis on central rather than peripheral details (Fivush, Peterson, and Schwarzmueller, 2002). Interviewers and those involved in investigating child abuse may need to modify their expectations of what a traumatized child is able to report. They should not attempt to force a disclosure or continue an interview when a child becomes overly distressed, which may revictimize the child. Children who are severely traumatized may benefit from additional support and multiple, nonduplicative interview sessions (Faller, Cordisco Steele, and Nelson-Gardell, 2010; La Rooy et al., 2010).

Disclosure

Understanding the disclosure process is critical for both the investigative process and child protection outcomes. Research to date on children's disclosure of sexual abuse—based mainly on retrospective surveys of adults and reviews of past child abuse investigations—indicates that no single pattern of disclosure is predominant (Lyon and Ahern, 2010). Disclosure happens along a continuum ranging from denial to nondisclosure to reluctant disclosure to incomplete disclosure to a full accounting of an abusive incident (Olafson and Lederman, 2006). Some children also disclose less directly, over a period of time, through a variety of behaviors and actions, including discussions and indirect nonverbal cues (Alaggia, 2004).

The interaction of individual characteristics, interviewer behavior, family relationships, community influences, and cultural and societal attitudes determines whether, when, and how children disclose abuse (Alaggia, 2010; Bottoms, Quas, and Davis, 2007; Hershkowitz et al., 2006; Lyon and Ahern, 2010). Factors that help to explain a child's reluctance are age, relationship with the alleged offender, lack of parental support, gender, fear of consequences for disclosing, and fear of not being believed (Malloy, Brubacher, and Lamb, 2011; McElvaney, 2013). A review of contemporary literature reveals that when disclosure does occur, significant delays are common. In a recent analysis of child sexual abuse disclosure patterns, Alaggia (2010) found that as many as 60 to 80 percent of children and adolescents do not disclose until adulthood. If outside corroborative evidence exists (e.g., physical evidence, offender confessions, recordings, witness statements), there is still a high rate of nondisclosure (Lyon, 2007; Sjoberg and Lindblad, 2002). Furthermore, children who disclose often do not recount their experiences fully and may, over time, provide additional information (McElvaney, 2013).

Current literature on children's disclosure of sexual abuse has implications for practice. According to Malloy, Brubacher, and Lamb (2013), precipitating events or people frequently motivate children to disclose abuse. Some children require a triggering event, such as a school

safety presentation, to allow them to discuss abuse without being the one to broach the subject (McElvaney, 2013). Other children may need to be questioned specifically about the possibility of abuse. Child abuse professionals should understand the many intersecting dynamics that help a child disclose maltreatment and should be open to the possibility that disclosure is not an all-or-nothing event.

Considerations Regarding the Interview

Almost universal agreement exists regarding the need to interview children about allegations of abuse. Once this is accepted, there are a number of important considerations, such as timing, documentation, setting, interviewer, questions to be asked, and whether to use interview aids/media.

Timing

Conduct the forensic interview as soon after the initial disclosure of abuse, or after witnessing violence, as the child's mental status will permit and as soon as a multidisciplinary team response can be coordinated (APSAC, 2012; Saywitz and Camparo, 2009). As time passes, the opportunity to collect potential corroborative evidence may diminish, children's fortitude to disclose may wane, and opportunities for contamination, whether intentional or accidental, increase (Johnson, 2009). However, children who are overly fatigued, hungry, frightened, suffering from shock, or still processing their traumatic experiences may not be effective reporters in a forensic interview (APSAC, 2012; Home Office, 2007; Myers, 2005).

Documentation

Electronic recordings are the most complete and accurate way to document forensic interviews (Cauchi and Powell, 2009; Lamb et al., 2000), capturing the exchange between the child and the interviewer and the exact wording of questions (Faller, 2007; Warren and Woodall, 1999). Video recordings, used in 90 percent of Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) nationally (MRCAC, 2014), allow the trier of fact in legal proceedings to witness all forms of the child's communication. Recordings make the interview process transparent, documenting that the interviewer and the multidisciplinary team avoided inappropriate interactions with the child (Faller, 2007). Recorded forensic interviews also allow interviewers and others to review their work and facilitate skill development and integrity of practice (Lamb, Sternberg, Orbach, Esplin, and Mitchell, 2002; Price and Roberts, 2011; Stewart, Katz, and La Rooy, 2011).

Neutral and Objective Setting

The National Children's Alliance (NCA), as a part of its accreditation process, requires CACs to provide child-focused settings that are "comfortable, private, and both physically and psychologically safe for diverse populations of children and their non-offending family members" (NCA, 2011:36). However, there is a dearth of literature on what constitutes a child-friendly environment (NCA, 2013).

Interview rooms come in all shapes and sizes, are often painted in warm colors, may incorporate child-sized furniture, and should only use artwork of a non-fantasy nature. The room should be equipped for audio- and video-recording, and case investigators and other CAC staff should be able to observe the forensic interview (Myers, 2005; NCA, 2013; Pence and Wilson, 1994). Although it is generally recommended that there be minimal distractions in the interview room (APSAC, 2012; Saywitz, Camparo, and Romanoff, 2010), opinions differ about the allowance of simple media, such as paper and markers. More recently published literature suggests that younger children may benefit from having access to paper and markers during the forensic interview (Poole and Dickinson, 2014). Materials that encourage play or fantasy are uniformly discouraged, as is any interpretation by the interviewer of the child's use of media or other products.

Role of the Interviewer

Forensic interviewers should encourage the most accurate, complete, and candid information from a child and, to this end, the child should be the most communicative during the forensic interview (Teoh and Lamb, 2013). Interviewers must balance forensic concerns with decisions about how much information to introduce (APSAC, 2012; Orbach and Pipe, 2011). In addition, they should be attentive to the possibility that their preconceived ideas may bias the information gathered—particularly if the interview is conducted in an unduly leading or suggestive manner—and should avoid such practices (Ceci and Bruck, 1995; Faller, 2007).

Question Type

Maximizing the amount of information obtained through children's free recall memory is universally accepted among forensic interview models as a best practice. Forensic interviewers should use open-ended and cued questions skillfully and appropriately to support children's ability and willingness to describe remembered experiences in their own words (Lamb, Orbach, Hershkowitz, Esplin, and Horowitz, 2007; Myers, 2005; Saywitz and Camparo, 2009; Saywitz, Lyon, and Goodman, 2011). Ask more focused questions later in the interview, depending on the developmental abilities of the child, the child's degree of

candor or reluctance, the immediacy of child protection issues, and the existence of reliable information previously gathered (e.g., suspect confession, photographs) (Imhoff and Baker-Ward, 1999; Lamb et al., 2003; Perona, Bottoms, and Sorenson, 2006). This approach reduces the risk of the interviewer contaminating the child's account.

A common language for labeling the format of questions does not exist; however, similarities in currently used labels do exist (Anderson, 2013; APSAC, 2012; Lyon, 2010). Agreement also exists that questions should not be judged in isolation. The labels for memory prompts may be classified into two main categories—recall and recognition—and are based on the type of memory accessed.

Recall prompts are open-ended, inviting the child to tell everything he or she remembers in his or her own words; such prompts have been shown to increase accuracy (Lamb, Orbach, Hershkowitz, Horowitz, and Abbott, 2007; Lamb et al., 2008). Open-ended questions encourage children to elaborate and to include salient details without significant input from the interviewer, who should use them throughout the interview. Recall prompts may include directives or questions, such as "Tell me everything that happened," "And then what happened?" and "Tell me more about (specific person/action/place that the child previously mentioned)." Although the accounts retrieved through the use of recall prompts can be quite detailed and accurate, they may not be complete. Interviewers may ask specific, focused questions to obtain additional details about topics the child has already mentioned, using a "who, what, where, when, and how" format. Although these detailed questions focus the child on certain aspects of his or her report that are missing, the child may or may not recall such information. These questions may promote a narrative response or may elicit brief answers (Saywitz and Camparo, 2009; Hershkowitz et al., 2012). They do not introduce information or pose options to the child: "You said you were in the house. What room were you in?" followed by "Tell me about that."

Once open-ended questions are exhausted, it may be necessary to progressively focus the query. Children may omit details because they do not know the significance of the information sought or because they are reluctant to divulge certain information. In contrast to recall prompts, recognition prompts provide the child with context or offer interviewer-created options. Recognition prompts may elicit greater detail once the child has exhausted his or her capability for narrative or when a child cannot comprehend a more open-ended question. The risk of using recognition prompts is that they may elicit responses that are less accurate or potentially erroneous if the child feels compelled to reach beyond his or her stored memory. It is essential to use these questions judiciously, as over-use can significantly affect the integrity and fact-finding function of the interview (Faller, 2007; Lamb, Orbach, Hershkowitz, Horowitz, and Abbott, 2007; Myers, 2005; Perona, Bottoms, and Sorenson, 2006). Suggestive questions are those that "to one degree or another, [suggest] that the questioner is looking for a particular answer" (Myers, Saywitz, and Goodman, 1996) and should be avoided.

Interview Aids/Media

The goal of a forensic interview is to have the child verbally describe his or her experience. A question remains, however, as to whether limiting children to verbal responses allows all children to fully recount their experiences, or whether media (e.g., paper, markers, anatomically detailed drawings or dolls) may be used during the interview to aid in descriptions (Brown et al., 2007; Katz and Hamama, 2013; Macleod, Gross, and Hayne, 2013; Patterson and Hayne, 2011; Poole and Dickinson, 2011; Russell, 2008). The use of media varies greatly by model and professional training. Decisions are most often made at the local level, and interviewer comfort and multidisciplinary team preferences may influence them. Ongoing research is necessary to shed further light on the influence of various types of media on children's verbal descriptions of remembered events.

The Forensic Interview

Forensic interview models guide the interviewer through the various stages of a legally sound interview; they vary from highly structured/scripted to semi-structured (interviewers cover predetermined topics) to flexible (interviewers have greater latitude). All models include the following phases:

- The initial **rapport-building phase** typically comprises introductions with an age- and context-appropriate explanation of documentation methods, a review of interview instructions, a discussion of the importance of telling the truth, and practice providing narratives and episodic memory training.
- The **substantive phase** most often includes a narrative description of events, detail-seeking strategies, clarification, and testing of alternative hypotheses, when appropriate.
- The **closure phase** gives more attention to the socioemotional needs of a child, transitioning to nonsubstantive topics, allowing for questions, and discussing safety or educational messages.

Divergent research, state statutes, community standards, and identified child/case populations contribute to the variations among models. Lack of adherence to a particular model does not, in and of itself, deem an interview forensically unsound. Increasingly, forensic interviewers receive training in multiple models and use a blend of models individualized to the needs of the child and the case (MRCAC, 2014).

Rapport-Building Phase

All interview models acknowledge that building rapport is important for both the child and the interviewer. During this phase, the child can begin to trust the interviewer and become oriented to the interview process. The interviewer can begin to understand the child's linguistic patterns, gauge the child's willingness to participate, and start to respond appropriately to the child's developmental, emotional, and cultural needs. A narrative approach to building rapport sets a pattern of interaction that should be maintained throughout the interview (Hershkowitz et al., 2015; Collins, Lincoln, and Frank, 2002; Hershkowitz, 2011).

Interview Instructions

Giving interview instructions during the rapport-building phase sets expectations that the child should provide accurate and complete information and also mitigates suggestibility. The child's age may influence the number of instructions and, perhaps, the type of instructions that may be most helpful. Interviewers may want to include some of the following instructions:

- "I was not there and don't know what happened. When I ask you questions, I don't know the answer to those questions."
- "It's okay to say 'I don't know' or 'I don't understand that question.'"
- "Only talk about things that really happened." (This emphasizes the importance of the conversation.)

For younger children, interviewers may want to have them "practice" following each guideline to demonstrate their understanding (APSAC, 2012; Saywitz and Camparo, 2009; Saywitz, Lyon, and Goodman, 2011). When children demonstrate these skills spontaneously, interviewers should reinforce them.

"Truth Versus Lies" Discussion

Recent research indicates that children may be less likely to make false statements if they have promised to tell the truth before the substantive phase of the interview (Lyon and Evans, 2014; Lyon and Dorado, 2008; Talwar et al., 2002). State statutes and community practices may vary about whether to include a "truth versus lies" discussion in forensic interviews. Some states require such a discussion or mandate that children take a developmentally appropriate oath before the substantive phase of the interview. In other states, interviewers have more autonomy regarding the techniques they use to encourage truth telling—to assess whether the child will be a competent witness in court and to increase the likelihood that the recorded interview will be admitted into evidence (Russell, 2006).

Narrative Practice/Episodic Memory Training

A substantial body of research indicates that encouraging children to give detailed responses early in the interview (i.e., during the rapport-building phase) enhances their informative responses to open-ended prompts in the substantive portion of the interview. When interviewers encourage these narrative descriptions early on, children typically will begin to provide more details without interviewers having to resort to more direct or leading prompts (Brubacher, Roberts, and Powell, 2011; Lamb et al., 2008; Poole and Lamb, 1998).

To help a child practice providing narratives, the interviewer may select a topic that was raised during a response to an earlier question, such as "Tell me some things about yourself," "What do you like to do for fun?" or "What did you do this morning?"; ask a question about a favorite activity; or ask for a description of the child's morning. The interviewer should then instruct the child to describe that topic from "beginning to end and not to leave anything out." The interviewer should continue to use cued, open-ended questions that incorporate the child's own words or phrases to prompt the child to greater elaboration. The interviewer may cue the child to tell more about an object, person, location, details of the activity, or a particular segment of time. This allows the child to provide a forensically detailed description of a nonabuse event and enables the interviewer to begin to

understand the child's linguistic ability and style (APSAC, 2012; Saywitz and Camparo 2009; Saywitz, Lyon, and Goodman, 2011; Walker, 2013).

Substantive Phase

The interviewer should be as open-ended and nonsuggestive as possible when introducing the topic of suspected abuse, using a prompt such as "What are you here to talk to me about today?" If the child acknowledges the target topic, the interviewer should follow up with another open invitation, such as "Tell me everything and don't leave anything out" (APSAC, 2012; Lamb et al., 2008; Orbach and Pipe, 2011; Saywitz and Camparo, 2009; Saywitz, Lyon, and Goodman, 2011) and proceed to the narrative and detail-gathering phase of the interview.

However, if a child is anxious or embarrassed, has been threatened or cautioned not to talk, or has not made a prior outcry of abuse, the interviewer may need a more focused approach (Pipe et al., 2007). There is a distinction between real and apparent reluctance. Real reluctance refers to children who are cautious and significantly unwilling to respond to questions, whereas apparent reluctance refers to children who are introspective before responding to questions. Interviewers should therefore allow for silence or hesitation without moving to more focused prompts too quickly. In many cases, gently reassuring the child that it is important for the interviewer to understand everything that happened can effectively combat a child's reluctance.

Interviewers should plan for this transitional period deliberately, taking into account the child's characteristics, information included in the initial report, and any case concerns (Smith and Milne, 2011). Variations exist among interviewing models as to the most effective and defensible way to help a reluctant child transition to the substantive portion of the interview. Broadly speaking, options range from (1) the use of escalating and focused prompts gleaned from information in the allegation report (APSAC, 2012; Lamb et al., 2008; Saywitz, Lyon, and Goodman, 2011) to (2) the use of an incremental approach exploring various topics, such as family members, caregiving routines, body safety, and so forth (APSAC, 2012; Faller, 2007) to (3) the use of human figure drawings along with a discussion of body safety and appropriate and inappropriate contact (Anderson et al., 2010).

Forensic interviewers who have been trained in multiple models may use a variety of options, depending on child and case characteristics. Use focused or direct prompts only if good reason exists to believe the child has been abused and the risk of continued abuse is greater than the risk of proceeding with an interview if no abuse has occurred (Lamb et al., 2008; Orbach and Pipe, 2011).

Narrative and Detail Gathering

All forensic interview models direct the interviewer to ask the child to provide a narrative account of his or her experience to gain a clear and accurate description of alleged events in the child's own words. Do not interrupt this narrative, as it is the primary purpose of the forensic interview. Open-ended invitations ("Tell me more" or "What happened next?") and cued narrative requests ("Tell me more about [fill in with child's word]") elicit longer, more detailed, and less self-contradictory information from children and adolescents (Lamb et al., 2008; Orbach and Pipe, 2011; Perona, Bottoms, and Sorenson, 2006). Because of their relatively underdeveloped memory retrieval processes, very young or less cognitively and linguistically skilled children may require greater scaffolding and more narrowly focused open-ended questions to elicit information regarding remembered events (Faller, 2007; Hershkowitz et al., 2012; Lamb et al., 2003; Orbach and Pipe, 2011). Cued and open-ended prompts, attentive listening, silence, and facilitators, such as reflection and paraphrasing, may help (Evans and Roberts, 2009). Additionally, "wh" questions are the least leading way to ask about important but missing details and can either be open-ended ("What happened?") or more direct ("What was the man's name?") (Hershkowitz et al., 2006; Orbach and Pipe, 2011). Interviewers should delay the use of recognition prompts and questions that pose options for as long as possible (APSAC, 2012; Lamb et al., 2008; Saywitz and Camparo, 2009; Saywitz, Lyon, and Goodman, 2011).

Because many children experience multiple incidents of abuse, interviewers should ask them whether an event happened "one time or more than one time." If a child has been abused more than once, the interviewer should explore details regarding specific occurrences in a developmentally appropriate way (Walker, 2013), using the child's own wording to best cue the child to each incident (Brubacher, Roberts, and Powell, 2011; Brubacher et al., 2013; Brubacher and La Rooy, 2014; Schneider et al., 2011). Using prompts such as "first time," "last time," and other appropriate labels may lead to additional locations, acts, witnesses, or potential evidence.

No one recalls every detail about even well-remembered experiences. Questions related to core elements of the abuse can maximize the quantity and quality of information a child provides. Research suggests that children and adults may recall personally experienced events better than they recall peripheral details or events they witnessed (Perona, Bottoms, and Sorenson, 2006; Peterson, 2012).

Once the child's narrative account of an alleged incident(s) has been fully explored, the interviewer can then follow with focused questions, asking for sensory details, clarification, and other missing elements. If a child provides only brief responses, the interviewer should follow up by asking for additional information or explanation using focused questions that incorporate terms the child previously provided. Although particular elements may have forensic significance (e.g., temporal dating, number of events, sexual intent, penetration), the child may not have accurately perceived or stored the information in long-term memory (Friedman and Lyon, 2005; Hershkowitz et al., 2012; Orbach and Lamb, 2007; Lamb et al., 2015). Forensic interviewers should proceed with caution when encouraging children through the use of recognition prompts to provide such information.

Introducing externally derived information (e.g., information gathered outside the interview or that the child has not divulged) may be appropriate in some interviews. There is broad consensus, however, that interviewers should use such information with caution and only after attempting other questioning methods. It is important to understand the suggestibility of such information within the context of the overall interview, the other questions asked, the child's presentation and development, and the strength of any external evidence obtained. Before or during the interview, multidisciplinary teams should discuss how, if, and when to introduce externally derived information or evidence. The manner and extent to which this information is presented varies across jurisdictions and models.

Alternative Hypotheses

Contextually appropriate questions that explore other viable hypotheses for a child's behaviors or statements are essential to the overall integrity of the interview. Allow the child to explain apparently contradictory information, particularly as it concerns forensically relevant details (e.g., the suspect's identity or specific acts committed). Additionally, the interviewer may need to explore the circumstances surrounding the targeted event to distinguish abuse from caregiving activities, particularly with a young child or one with limited abilities.

Questions about the child's source of information or prior conversations or instructions may be helpful if there are concerns about possible coaching or contamination. There is no one set of questions used routinely in every interview, as child characteristics, contextual settings, allegations, and case specifics vary greatly.

Consultation With the Multidisciplinary Team

Forensic interviews are best conducted within a multidisciplinary team context, as coordinating an investigation has been shown to increase the efficiency of the investigation while minimizing system-induced trauma in the child (Cronch, Viljoen, and Hansen, 2006; Jones et al., 2005). Before the interview, multidisciplinary team members should discuss possible barriers, case-specific concerns, and interviewing strategies, such as how best to introduce externally derived information, should that be necessary. Regardless of whether the forensic interview is conducted at a CAC or other child-friendly facility, the interviewer should communicate with the team members observing the interview to determine whether to raise additional questions or whether there are any ambiguities or apparent contradictions to resolve (Home Office, 2007; Jones et al., 2005). The interviewer often has to balance the team's request for further questions with the need to maintain legal defensibility and with the child's ability to provide the information requested.

Closure Phase

The closure phase helps provide a respectful end to a conversation that may have been emotionally challenging for the child. The interviewer may use various strategies during this phase (Anderson et al., 2010; APSAC, 2012; Home Office, 2007; Poole and Lamb, 1998):

- Ask the child if there is something else the interviewer needs to know.
- Ask the child if there is something he or she wants to tell or ask the interviewer.
- Thank the child for his or her effort rather than for specific content.

"Because many children experience multiple incidents of abuse, interviewers should ask them whether an event happened 'one time or more than one time.'"

- Address the topic of safety plans and educational materials and provide a contact number for additional help.

Other Considerations

Multiple evidence-supported forensic interview models are used throughout the United States, and all of these require the interviewer to adapt the model to the needs of each child based on unique situational variables. Some of the more commonly faced situational variables are highlighted below.

Multiple, Nonduplicative Interviews

One comprehensive forensic interview is sufficient for many children, particularly if the child made a previous disclosure, possesses adequate language skills, and has the support of a family member or other close adult (APSAC, 2002; Faller, 2007; London et al., 2007; NCA, 2011; Olafson and Lederman, 2006). The literature clearly demonstrates the dangers of multiple interviewers repeatedly questioning a child or conducting duplicative interviews (Ceci and Bruck, 1995; Fivush, Peterson, and Schwarzmueller, 2002; Malloy and Quas, 2009; Poole and Lamb, 1998; Poole and Lindsay, 2002). However, some children require more time and familiarity to become comfortable and to develop trust in both the process and the interviewer. Recent research indicates that multiple interview sessions may allow reluctant, young, or traumatized children the opportunity to more clearly and completely share information (Leander, 2010; Pipe et al., 2007). Multiple, nonduplicative interviews are most effective when the interviewer uses best practices in forensic interviewing; adapts the interview structure to the developmental, cultural, and emotional needs of the child; and avoids suggestive and coercive approaches (Faller, Cordisco Steele, and Nelson-Gardell, 2010; La Rooy et al., 2010; La Rooy, Lamb, and Pipe, 2009).

Supervision and Peer Review

Although agreement exists that knowledge of forensic interviewing significantly increases through training, this newly acquired knowledge does not always translate into significant changes in interviewer practices (Lamb, Sternberg, Orbach, Hershkowitz, Horowitz, and Esplin, 2002; Lamb et al., 2008; Price and Roberts, 2011; Stewart, Katz, and La Rooy, 2011). Supervision, peer reviews, and other forms of feedback should help forensic interviewers integrate the skills they learned during initial training and also improve their practice over time.

Supervision facilitates one-on-one interaction between a more experienced forensic interviewer and a professional new to the job and may or may not include assessment of the interviewer's performance (Price and Roberts, 2011; Stewart, Katz, and La Rooy, 2011). Larger CACs may employ multiple forensic interviewers who can provide individual support to newly trained interviewers. Often, CACs operating within a regional service area undertake similar efforts.

Peer review is a facilitated discussion with other interviewers or team members and is intended to both maintain and increase desirable practices in forensic interviewing (Stewart, Katz, and La Rooy, 2011). It is an opportunity for forensic interviewers to receive emotional and professional support and for other professionals to critique their work. The peer review should be a formalized process in a neutral environment with established group norms and a shared understanding of goals, processes, and purpose. Power dynamics, a lack of cohesion, and differing expectations can easily derail peer review efforts, leading to a failure to achieve real improvements in practice. Training in the use of tools for providing more effective feedback (e.g., guidelines for giving and receiving feedback), checklists to assist peer reviewers in defining practice aspects for review, and strong leadership can assist practitioners in establishing a meaningful and productive process.

Vicarious Trauma and Self-Care

Professionals exposed to the reports of abuse and victimization of children often suffer from vicarious traumatization, an affliction commonly called "the cost of caring" that has symptoms similar to those of posttraumatic stress disorder (Figley, 1995; Perron and Hiltz, 2006; Lipsky and Burk, 2009). Studies suggest that forensic interviewers, law enforcement officers, child protection workers, victim advocates, therapists, medical personnel, attorneys, and judges can all suffer from repeatedly hearing reports of child victimization (Conrad and Kellar-Guenther, 2006; Perron and Hiltz, 2006; Russell, 2010).

Vicarious trauma can be mitigated at multiple levels. Supervisors and organizations should be particularly attentive to the mental health of their staff and should be aware of factors that can exacerbate the development of vicarious trauma, including gender, past personal trauma, work dissatisfaction, large caseloads, long hours, and a lack of personal and professional support systems (Meyers and Cornille, 2002). Individuals should recognize the benefits of the work they undertake in their professional lives and celebrate their successes, knowing they have made a difference in a child's life.

Summary

The CAC movement was born out of the concept that the traditional fragmented and duplicative child abuse investigative process was not in the best interests of children. The multidisciplinary team approach has proven to be more child-friendly and better able to meet the needs of children and their families (Bonarch, Mabry, and Potts-Henry, 2010; Miller and Rubin, 2009). This revolutionary approach should continue to guide the nation's response to child abuse investigations. To increase the likelihood of successful outcomes for all children, it is imperative to continue ongoing discussions among professionals in both direct service delivery and program planning.

Although there have been significant efforts over the past several decades to improve the nation's response to child maltreatment, these efforts have often emanated from a single program or region without leading to a national debate on a particular topic, such as the development of forensic interviewing with children. This bulletin serves as the first collaborative effort, by professionals from many nationally recognized forensic interview training programs, to summarize the current knowledge and application of best practices in the field.

INTERVIEWER TIPS

Overall Considerations

- Conduct the interview as soon as possible after initial disclosure.
- Record the interview electronically.
- Hold the interview in a safe, child-friendly environment.
- Use open-ended questions throughout the interview, delaying the use of more focused questions for as long as possible.
- Consider the child's age, developmental ability, and culture.

Building Rapport With the Child

- Engage the child in brief conversation about his or her interests or activities.
- Provide an opportunity for the child to describe a recent nonabuse-related experience in detail.
- Describe the interview ground rules.
- Discuss the importance of telling the truth.

Conducting the Interview

- Transition to the topic of the suspected abuse carefully, taking into account the characteristics of the child and the case.
- Ask the child to describe his or her experience in detail, and do not interrupt the child during this initial narrative account.
- Once the initial account is fully explored, begin to ask more focused questions if needed to gather additional details, get clarification, or fill in missing information.
- Mirror the child's wording when asking followup questions.
- Exercise caution at this stage. Use focused queries judiciously and avoid suggestive questions that could compel the child to respond inaccurately.
- Explore other viable hypotheses for the child's behaviors or statements.
- Consult with those observing the interview to determine whether to raise additional questions or whether to resolve any ambiguities or contradictions.

Ending the Interview

- Ask the child if there is anything else he or she would like to share or to ask.
- Discuss safety plans and provide educational materials.
- Thank the child for participating.

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