

How to Conduct Efficient Forensic Interviews Adapted to Children's Developmental Capacities: Strategies and Attitudes

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**Presentation outline**

- ▶ Interviewer preparation
- ▶ Forms of resistance
- ▶ Preparing the child/adolescent to increase the amount of detail
- ▶ Tempering expectations to the child/adolescent's abilities

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**Recommendations from the research**

1. Adapt the interview to the child's developmental level
2. Establish a relationship of trust and promote a supportive environment
3. Establish the rules of communication
4. Get the child's account via recall memory rather than recognition memory

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**Recommendations from the research**

5. Practice with a few open-ended questions on a neutral subject
6. Follow a continuum of questions: Open and then more specific
7. Remain objective and explore alternative scenarios
8. Interview filmed in a private location with no distractions

- ▶ Conduct forensic interviews at the CAC, which provides access to the MDT

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**Interviewer preparation**

The interviewer should have three types of information before the interview:

- ▶ About the child, their living environment and culture
- ▶ About the disclosure
- ▶ The alleged facts

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**Forms of resistance**

- ▶ Children who are reluctant to disclose information show signs of resistance very early on.
- ▶ It is important to identify these signs and take action right away.
- ▶ Consider a second interview.

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### Non-verbal signs of resistance

- ▶ Contraction/closure
- ▶ Hiding
- ▶ Standing up
- ▶ Turning around

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### Verbal signs of resistance

- ▶ Refuses to cooperate: 'I don't want to talk' or being silent
- ▶ Refuses to elaborate
- ▶ Digression
- ▶ Expresses a negative emotion: anxiety/fear, timidness, shame, confusion

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### Dealing with resistance from the child

1. Identify the nature of the resistance  
*"I see that you don't want to talk to me. What's going on?"*
2. As soon as the child gives an answer, continue with open-ended questions (*"Tell me everything about that."* *"You say you're afraid, tell me more about that."*)
3. Try to reassure the child by addressing the resistance directly but not making any promises.

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### Dealing with resistance from the child

- Empathy
- Legitimizing expression
- Generalization of the child's difficulties
- Expression of confidence/optimism
- Comfort
- Offer help

\* Lamb et al., 2018 *Tell me what happened: Questioning children about abuse* (2nd ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons Inc.

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### Dealing with resistance from the child/adolescent

- Choose to postpone the interview to another time
- Choose another investigator if you think a rapport is not being established
- Maintain multiple hypotheses

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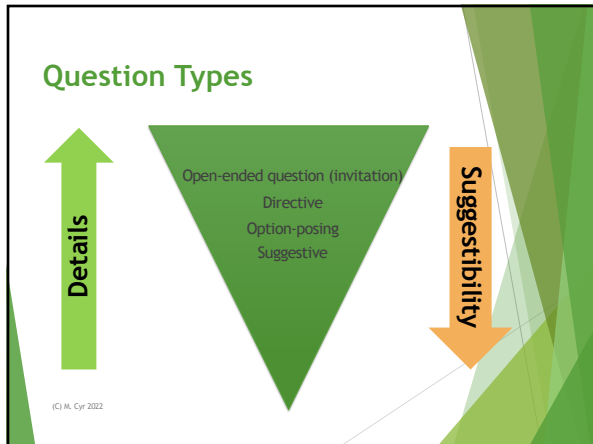
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### Preparing the child/adolescent to increase the amount of detail

- ▶ The objective is to get as much detail as possible from the child with the fewest questions possible from the interviewer.
- ▶ Use open-ended questions that require recall memory because they are more informative and less suggestive.

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### Invitation targeting free recall

- ▶ “Tell me everything about that.”
- ▶ “Tell me everything about the last time that something happened.” (if the child has stated that it happened more than once)
- ▶ “Tell me what happened after you went into the bedroom.” (which the child mentioned)
- ▶ “Tell me everything that happened when he locked the door (which the child mentioned) until he kissed you (which the child mentioned).”
- ▶ “Tell me more about his hand rubbing your stomach.”

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### Why invitations are preferable

- ▶ Children are suggestible
  - ▶ Do not put any pressure on the child with respect to the content.
  - ▶ Use the child’s words and content as they will better understand the questions.
  - ▶ Let the child decide when their account is done.

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### Why invitations are preferable

- ▶ How memory works
  - ▶ Free recall vs. recognition
  - ▶ Uses free recall memory, which is more accurate but incomplete
  - ▶ The quality of what is registered in the memory varies

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### Directive intervention

- ▶ **Happening:** “How did this happen?”
- ▶ **Action:** “How did he touch you? What did he do?”
- ▶ **Context:** “Who is it?” “When did it happen?” “Where were you when it happened?”
- ▶ **Static:** “What colour was his t-shirt?”
- ▶ **Assessment:** “How do you feel about him?”
- ▶ **Causality:** “What made you feel afraid?”

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### Directive intervention

- ▶ With preschool age children, the questions:
  - Why and How:*
  - are used frequently (21.7%);
  - yet they yield answers in only 19.6% of cases.
  - Children find *why* questions to be accusatory or critical and therefore try to justify their actions instead of describing them.

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### Directive intervention

During interviews:

- ▶ 11% about what is happening
- ▶ 28% about actions
- ▶ 52% about context, static elements, causes or assessment

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### Why directive questions should be tempered

- ▶ Children are suggestible
  - ▶ Pressure to come up with an answer to questions from adults (will rarely say “I don’t know”)
  - ▶ If the question is not appropriate for the child’s developmental level, they will answer (when, how many times, where)
- ▶ How memory works
  - ▶ Not everything is registered in the memory

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### Preparing the child/adolescent to increase the amount of detail

- ▶ Practice on a neutral or pleasant subject
- ▶ Should only include invitations
- ▶ Should not last longer than 7 minutes with very young children
- ▶ Should follow the structure that will be used during the declarative part

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### Training the child for invitations

This allows the interviewer to:

- ▶ Assess the child’s developmental level
- ▶ Assess the child’s ability to provide certain categories of information
- ▶ Adjust to the child’s pace and style
- ▶ Show interest and consolidate the alliance
- ▶ Establish a baseline against which the declarative part can be compared in case of doubt

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### Training the child

This allows the child to:

- ▶ Get used to using open-ended questions
- ▶ Understand the amount of detail expected
- ▶ Understand that the investigator doesn’t know anything about them
- ▶ Learn to trust the investigator
- ▶ Develop a sense of competence in answering questions

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### Effect of practice

Trained children:

- ▶ Cooperate better, feel more competent and motivated to cooperate and therefore resist less
- ▶ Give a more complete initial account of the event
- ▶ Give answers that are 3-4 times longer and more detailed

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### Tempering expectations to the capabilities of the child/adolescent

- ▶ Children continue to develop until the age of 21-25.
- ▶ This means adolescents do not operate the same as adults.
- ▶ The ability to produce an organized and coherent narrative is learned at home.

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### Tempering expectations to the capabilities of the child/adolescent

- ▶ Abused children have a 1.5-year language acquisition delay, on average.
- ▶ Not everything is registered in the memory.
- ▶ Have realistic expectations so as not to discredit the child's narrative.

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### Language and evidence

Young children (< 6 years old):

- ✓ Short account focused on gestures
- ✓ Low capability for specifying location, time, name

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### Language and evidence

Children 6 to 8 years:

- ✓ Use possessive and qualifying adjectives to better describe
- ✓ Able to give more specific details
- ✓ Able to situate the moment in relation to their daily activities

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### Language and evidence

Children 9 years and older:

- ✓ Use more accurate and varied words to describe gestures
- ✓ Use qualifying adjectives
- ✓ Spontaneously give more time indicators
- ✓ Name their emotions and thoughts more

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### Children with ID, autism or ADD

- ▶ Performance similar to children of the same mental or chronological age
- ▶ If disability is moderate = less information about chronology, content and context markers

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### Children with ID, autism or ADD

- ▶ These children give shorter answers and answer 2 out of 3 questions.
- ▶ Therefore, they need more questions.
- ▶ Questions should be cued invitations.

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### Children with ID, autism or ADD

- ▶ Because autistic children are more concrete, sentences should be short and the request clear.
- ▶ “Is there/Do you/Did he” type questions should be avoided because they lead to numerous errors in the answers (positive response bias).

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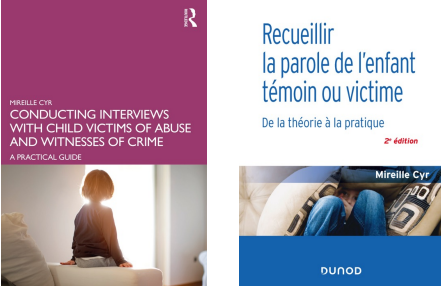
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### Learning and maintenance of skills

- ▶ Official specialized training including exercises, an evidence-based interview protocol (NICHD) and a formal exam
- ▶ Key to success: Regular but reflective practice
- ▶ Look at interviews to correct mistakes
- ▶ Get feedback from colleagues, individual or group supervision sessions
- ▶ Train yourself on making invitations, role-play with children on neutral subjects

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Palo Alto University:  
Workshop: Introduction to  
Developmentally  
Appropriate Interviewing  
Using the Revised NICHD  
Protocol

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### Q&A

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