

Child Advocacy Centres Knowledge Exchange, Ottawa
Monday morning, February 28, 2011

Panel # 1: *Investigations and Interviewing Techniques*

Em Chan, Police detective, Zebra Child Protection Centre, Edmonton, AB

Mireille Cyr, Professeure, département de psychologie Université de Montréal,
Montréal, QC

See presentation: [Cyr] [NICHD Protocol: best practices – investigative interviews with children](#)

See full paper: [Cyr] [NICHD protocol – investigative interviews with children](#)

Kevin Pierce, Child abuse investigator, Regina Children’s Justice Centre, Regina, SK

Kim Roberts, Professor, Dept of Psychology, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo,
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See presentation : [Roberts] [Interviewing Children who are Victims or Witnesses](#)

See full paper: [Roberts] [Interviewing children – best practices](#)



Mireille Cyr at the podium. Moving right: facilitator Lynne Tyler, Kim Roberts, Kevin Pierce and Em Chan

Mireille Cyr addressed forensic interviewing of children and described the NICHD Investigative Interview protocol (NICHD =National Institute of Child Health and Human Development). She also discussed Quebec based research on the effectiveness of forensic interviewer training.

The NICHD protocol was designed to assist forensic interviewers in adhering to best standards of practice when interviewing children. The protocol encourages the use of more open-ended questions and it increases the number of details obtained from the child. She described the protocol as detailed, concrete and user-friendly, and

suitable for cases of sexual and physical abuse. It integrates recent knowledge of child memory functioning and suggestibility. She took the delegates through the protocol's three main stages.

She cited research results from several studies into interviews done with the NICHD protocol. Highlights include: that 4- to 6-year-olds provide more details in response to free-recall prompts; that the protocol results in more disclosures, there is more clarity about plausible versus implausible allegations, and that more charges laid. See Cyr's [presentation](#) and longer [paper](#) for details and citations.

She described the NICHD interviewer training, and then focused on two studies conducted in Quebec. The first study examined interviews conducted in French by the same police officers before and after they received training in using the protocol. The second study examined whether feedback, following a week of intensive training, was necessary to maintain the skills acquired during the training.

[Kim Roberts](#) followed next with a presentation about how children of different ages remember things – and how trauma affects memory recall in negative ways. She explained that memories of repeated events are quite different from memories of a single event. Children who are repeatedly abused tend not to remember details of specific events – which can cause problems when they are pressed for time-specific details in court. She described how she structures her training for police about fundamentals of child development, how children remember, and interviewing techniques.

She talked about the abilities and limitations of 4, 6 and 8 year-olds, in terms of language and memory. Younger children have limited vocabularies and will be confused by many terms that seem simple to an adult (e.g. don't say "describe his appearance," instead say "what did he look like?") Even the use of a "he" or "she" pronoun may confuse a child. It's better to use the name of a person or that person's role ("your mom").

See the [presentation](#) and full [paper](#) for more details.

[Kevin Pierce](#) explained how the Regina Children's Justice Centre operates as a multidisciplinary child service unit, where police and social workers work together,

in a child-friendly environment, at a location away from the police station. They also work closely with crown attorneys. “We each have different agendas,” he said, “but we collaborate for the sake of the child.”

While discussing the interview process with a child, he stressed the importance of rapport-building: the child has time to play before the interview; with younger children, interviewers literally get down on the floor, to sit at the child’s level, when doing interviews.

The goal of their centre is to get the maximum amount of information from a child in that crucial first and hopefully only interview. They follow RATAc interview protocol. They prefer to use cartoons, rather than dolls, to address anatomy issues. They find out what terms the child uses for genital organs, and then use those terms that the child has chosen throughout the interview. When a child makes a disclosure, they follow-up with more questions to clarify.

Each interview ends with a “magic wand” question: “what would you change in your home, if you could do it just like that, by magic?”

[Em Chan](#) began by explaining how the CARRT (Child At Risk Response Team) in Edmonton operate as first responders. Each CARRT team includes one police officer and one children’s services worker. Hospital medical staff are also part of the team. They also work with an ICE unit (Internet Child Exploitation), who seize and analyze computers, cell phones and other technology that may be involved in suspected child abuse. They seek advice from child psychologists and polygraphists on strategies to use in different interview situations. All practitioners from the different disciplines meet frequently to share knowledge, offer mentoring and do peer review.

In 2010, they had an 89% rate of guilty pleas and convictions, up from 82% in 2009. They strive to get charges laid quickly – within 6 months of the alleged event, as that timing leads to more summary convictions and more guilty pleas – which save the child from having to go to court.

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For a summary of the discussion on these topics at the Round Tables, see:
Round Table Summary 1 – Investigations and Interviewing Techniques