

A practical guide to interviewing child witnesses

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we address some of the investigative interviewing challenges unique to children, and offer suggestions for facilitating children's reports. We then outline a set of investigative interviewing recommendations for conducting interviews with children. Specifically, we recommend (i) using open-ended prompts, (ii) strategic sequencing of prompts, (iii) structuring the interview and, (iv) using developmentally-appropriate techniques. These recommendations are based on years of research on eliciting reports from young children, as well as our practical experience with investigative interviews of children

In legal cases involving child witnesses, the child's statement against the accused is often critical. Preserving this key evidence poses challenges not typically encountered with adult witnesses; there are special developmental, linguistic, and interpersonal considerations that are unique to children. An accurate and detailed statement from a child victim can lead to swift and strong action taken on the child's behalf; whereas an inconsistent or weak statement can lead to delays in prosecution and may place the child at further risk. It is crucial that investigators provide children with the best opportunity to present strong and clear evidence of the allegation. In this article, we outline a set of scientifically-based, investigative interviewing recommendations that afford children the best opportunity to provide the highest quality evidence they can. Specifically, we describe effective methods of questioning children and structuring interviews, as well as review some issues unique to children that interviewers should consider.

Concerns about Investigative Interviews with Children

Under ideal circumstances, children even as young as 3-years-old are capable of accurately – though perhaps not completely – reporting reasonably detailed accounts of personal experiences. The quality of their reports, however, is necessarily limited by the ways in which children are questioned. This can be illustrated using the well-known satanic ritual abuse case in Martensville, Saskatchewan. In this case, multiple children alleged physical and sexual abuse by numerous employees at their child care centre. Children alleged that several perpetrators physically and sexually assaulted them, including one child who alleged that a child's nipple had been cut off and eaten. These allegations were implausible given the lack of supporting physical evidence, but were pursued vehemently by interviewers who used coercive questioning strategies. All but one of over 100 charges in the Martensville case were eventually dropped and the Saskatchewan court of appeals concluded that:

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“...highly suggestive interrogation techniques can create a serious and significant risk that the interrogation will distort the child’s recollection of events, thereby undermining the reliability of the statements and subsequent testimony concerning such events.”

(*R. v. Sterling*, 1995 at para. 277).

An interesting empirical investigation of a single case of a false allegation of sexual abuse suggests that the coercive questioning techniques need not be extreme to elicit an inaccurate allegation. Hershkowitz (2001) examined the case of a 10-year old child who, while walking through the woods one day, was grabbed by a man who then exposed his genitals to her. Approximately a week later, she disclosed the incident to her mother. In an effort to determine precisely what took place, the mother began asking a series of direct questions (e.g., “Did somebody hit you?”). The young girl responded affirmatively when asked if someone had touched her private parts. The mother called police and what resulted was an allegation of forceful penetration. Although the allegation was rescinded the following evening, it was only after police reported to parents the lack of physical evidence. Unfortunately, an inappropriate act may have taken place, but because of poor interviewing, determining precisely what happened became difficult or impossible.

In both of these cases, children appeared to incorporate details into their reports that they had not experienced themselves. Although other factors may have influenced the accuracy of the statements of these child witnesses, a large body of scientific research has shown the direct impact of poor interviewing techniques on the accuracy and completeness of children’s reports (see Pipe et al., 2004 for a review). In this article, we draw on that large body of scientific research and translate the findings into investigative questioning techniques that promote quality reports from children.

The Purpose of an Investigative Interview

A recent shift in the literature on children’s eyewitness testimony has been to focus less on techniques that impair children’s reports and more on techniques that facilitate children’s recall. To understand how we can enhance children’s reports, we must first consider the purposes of an investigative interview. There are at least two important goals of an investigative interview:

- (1) Facilitate a true and complete account of the events in question;
- (2) Preserve the evidence of the child’s statement.

Concerning the first purpose, “facilitation” of a child’s statement is precisely as it sounds. The child, not the interviewer, should direct the content of the interview

because reports are most accurate when witnesses can freely recall the alleged events from their own memories (Saywitz & Goodman, 1996). Interviewers can reduce the chances of a false allegation by remaining open-minded about the events in question rather than pursuing a single hypothesis. Regarding the second purpose, it is essential to remember that interviews are evidence and need to be treated with the same care as any other piece of evidence in an investigation. That is, interviewers can strive to avoid contaminating the child’s statement (e.g., with leading questions) and follow procedures that best preserve the evidence in its most natural form. Other things to avoid are injecting inferences and personal interpretations into the interview. A key point in preserving this evidence is to interview a child as soon as feasible after the event(s) in question because it reduces the likelihood of contamination from other sources and allows for the elicitation of recall before memories fade (Warren & Lane, 1995).

Recommendation 1: Use Open-Ended Questions

Perhaps the most critical part of an interview with a child is question phrasing. Most interviewers are aware that open-ended questions are far superior to specific or closed questions in eliciting accurate and complete information from witnesses (see Poole & Lamb, 1998). However, precisely what constitutes an “open-ended” question may not be as obvious. A quality open-ended question encourages a narrative description, does not direct the child to what particular information they must report, and does not include any information not mentioned by the child. Examples of good open-ended questions include: “Tell me everything that happened”, “What happened next?”, “Tell me what happened from the very beginning to the very end”. Interviewers can also follow up on information that the child has already disclosed by asking the child, in an open-ended way, to expand on what s/he said, for example, “What else can you tell me about the time at X’s house” (when the child has already disclosed that something happened at X’s house), “You said that ‘he did it’. Tell me everything he did”. It is important to stick closely to the child’s words, however.

Open-ended questions are effective in eliciting complete and accurate information for a number of reasons. First, open-ended questions encourage children to freely recall the event from memory. Such free recall involves extensive cognitive processing because there are no cues to the precise details that must be reported. Deeper cognitive processing is likely to result in fewer reporting errors because children are required to think effortfully and evaluate memories critically. Second, when children are free to report whatever they choose, they typically select information they remember best. Infor-

mation based on stronger memories is generally likely to be the most reliable. When specific cues are provided that target information a child may not remember well, he or she may make an “educated guess” which is likely to be less accurate than if the child is allowed to simply respond based on his or her memory.

In contrast to the freedom of open-ended questions, specific questions pinpoint particular details. Such questions usually begin with “What”, “Who”, “When”, or “Where”. Though certainly not ideal, specific questions may at times be required to establish whether or not an act took place or to elicit information about particular details. If such questions need to be asked, it is best that they take place after considerable opportunities for free recall have been given (not just one or two open-ended questions), they should be non-suggestive, and followed-up with additional open-ended questions.

I: Did daddy hurt you?

C: Yes.

I: Tell me about daddy hurting you.

If the child simply says “Yes” to the first question for any reason other than that the act took place, it may be difficult to provide additional detail to the prompt that follows. A simple “Yes” response to the first question may not be enough information on which to base an allegation.

Recommendation 2: Sequencing of Prompts

Although statements can progress from general descriptions (e.g., “he always does it”) to more precise (“he lifted my shirt up and touched my boobs”), prompts can still be phrased in an open manner. Consider the following exchange between an investigative interviewer and a 4-year old child alleging that her “nanny” hit her:

I: Tell me everything you can remember about the time nanny hit you.

C: She hit me on the leg and my leg got all red.

I: Okay. What else can you tell me?

C: Umm... it was with the stick and it was really, really hard.

I: Mmmm. Tell me more about the hit.

C: Nanny was mad and it hurt.

I: Tell me about your leg getting red.

C: It was a really big red part and it was red for a long time.

Here the details elicited become more precise as the interview progresses, but the interviewer still phrases the questions openly. This “breadth-to-depth” approach to questioning in which the interviewer moves from very general recall (“what else...?”) to more specific follow-ups (“tell me about *the hit*, tell me... *your leg getting red*”) can be repeated for each subset of information the child volunteers. Each of the more detailed prompts re-

lies on information the child previously offered, thus reducing the chances that the interviewer will ask suggestive questions. Once this procedure has been followed for each piece of information the child reports, it may be appropriate to ask direct questions (Who? What? When? Where?) if sufficient detail has not been previously provided, again returning to open-ended questions to keep the child in a free-recall mindset.

Recommendation 3: Structure the Interview

Prior to beginning an investigative interview it is important to consider the perspective of the child. In typical interactions with adults (e.g., teachers, parents), adults are the knowledgeable parties in the conversation. That is, children are often engaged in interactions in which adults are looking for pre-determined answers and it is the children’s job to figure out what answers the adults are looking for. In contrast, in an investigative interview, the child is the expert. It is the interviewer’s job to ensure that children are made aware of this role-reversal, and of the consequences for the ensuing conversation.

The phases of an interview presented next are designed to teach the child to engage in a style of conversational interaction that may be new to them. The recommendations centre on (a) introductions, (b) establishing an understanding of “ground rules” for the interview, (c) building rapport, (d) conducting a practice interview, (e) structuring the substantive phase, and (f) closing the interview. The following recommendations are heavily reliant on the well-researched and respected structured interview protocol developed by researchers at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (e.g., Orbach, Hershkowitz, Lamb, Sternberg, Esplin, & Horowitz, 2000). Despite the introduction of additional phases, providing the recommended structure usually reduces the duration of interviews because these techniques are geared towards asking fewer questions and conducting fewer interviews overall.

Part I: Introduction. The interviewer should describe his or her identity in terms the child will understand. Though it may seem obvious, it is not uncommon that children’s perceptions of authority figures are inconsistent with the adults’ roles. For example, some children have reported that the role of police officers or social workers is to “take kids away from their parents.” Though this may be an unfortunate result of an investigation, it is not the primary goal of an investigative interview. An example of a description appropriate for young children may be: “My name is X and I am a police officer. It is my job to find out the truth about things that have happened to children.” This description is accurate and makes clear that the primary objective of the interaction that follows is to uncover the truth.

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Part II: Ground Rules. As discussed above, the rules for engaging in an investigative interview are different from the norms and rules in communication that children typically encounter. The interviewer should clarify the child's role in the interview to ensure that children are able to provide the best evidence possible. There are three ground rules in particular that are consistently recommended by scholars (e.g., Poole & Lamb, 1998).

- (1) Elicit a promise to tell the truth;
- (2) Instruct the child that it is okay to say "I don't know" and that they can ask for clarification if they do not understand something the interviewer has said;
- (3) Instruct the child that they can correct the interviewer if the interviewer says something wrong.

These rules should be described at the outset of the interview and practice should be provided in implementing each rule. The following excerpt from an investigative interview is an example of how such an exchange may play out:

I: So when I talk to kids, it's really important that they only tell me about things that really happened or things that are true, OK? So if I were to tell you that I am wearing a snowsuit right now would that be true or not true?

C: Not true.

I: Not true, so I can, I can [*sic*] tell you know what it means to tell the truth.

C: Yeah.

I: Yeah, so when we're talking today I need you to promise only to tell me things that are true. Do you promise?

C: Yeah.

I: Yeah, OK and if I make a mistake, 'cause sometimes I mix things up or get things wrong I want you to correct me and tell me, OK?

C: Yeah.

I: So if I said you were a 2-year old girl, what would you say?

C: I'm an 8-year old boy.

I: Good. And if I ask you a question and you don't know the answer, then it's OK to tell me that you don't know

C: OK.

I: OK, if I ask you what's in my purse, what would you say?

C: I don't know.

I: You don't know. Good, and that's OK.

Part III: Rapport Building. To encourage children to communicate openly, it is first important to develop rapport. The onus is on adults to provide an environment (physical and emotional) in which the child feels

comfortable discussing sensitive issues. Building rapport with a child victim or witness can help overcome fear, shame, and other negative emotions that may lead to a resistance to discuss their experiences (Siegman & Reynolds, 1984). The rapport phase of the interview also allows for an informal assessment of the child's linguistic and developmental ability and provides the child with the opportunity to provide narrative descriptions of topics that are easily remembered and the child is comfortable discussing. A simple way to begin the rapport-building phase of the interview is to ask the child to tell you about him or herself. For example, "Before we get started, I would like to get to know you a little bit better. Tell me about yourself." This allows the child to choose any element of his or her life to discuss and to take control over the direction of the interview. As the child discloses details about him or herself, it is appropriate to follow-up with specific open-ended questions that elicit more detail, "You said you like to play soccer. Tell me about playing soccer."

There is little empirical evidence that supports any particular method of rapport development over another but generally, it is recommended that adults attempt to discuss innocuous topics to relax the child and ease him/her into discussions about more difficult issues (Saywitz & Camparo, 1998). There are, however, indications that the style of questioning during rapport-building contribute to the quality of the subsequent interview. Sternberg and colleagues (Sternberg et al., 1997) found that when rapport-building involved open-ended rather than more direct questions, children's responses to the substantive portion of the interview were more detailed (children reported 2.5 times more details than when rapport-building was achieved with more specific questions). Open-ended rapport also appears to increase the accuracy of children's reports (Roberts, Lamb, & Sternberg, 2004). Clearly, although these recommendations are designed to make the process easier for children and reduce stress, they serve another important goal by encouraging the child to disclose as much information as possible.

Part IV: Practice Interview. After the introduction, describing and practicing the ground rules, and establishing rapport, it is a good idea to put these principles into practice before moving onto the substantive portion of the interview. The child must now be practiced in taking control of the interaction. Specifically, the child requires practice in providing narrative responses and exhausting his or her memory about a specific event. This is essential for an investigative interview because the goal of such an interview is to obtain as much information as possible from the child. If a full description of the event(s) is not elicited, the details the child chooses not to disclose

- either because s/he did not want to or did not deem them significant enough to report - may indeed be some of the most critical details to the investigation.

Topics for practice interviews can include a variety of experiences and events, but should be recent and significant (e.g., birthday, Christmas, a camping trip), and not something that occurs on a regular basis (e.g., school days, getting ready for school). The topic should be a specific event because the focus of an investigative interview is typically on eliciting details of a specific event and practice in this particular type of recall is key. It is best to identify an event and begin with a very general open-ended prompt that allows the child to provide a narrative of the event, "I'm really interested in hearing all about your birthday. Tell me everything you can remember about your birthday from the very beginning to the very end." Once the child has reported some information about the event, selected details can be followed-up with additional open-ended questions, "You said that you played games. I really want to hear all about the games you played. Tell me everything about the games." As the responses increase in detail, prompts can become more specific to elicit additional information (following the open-ended style of questioning described above). Once the child has provided a detailed account of the event and the interviewer feels comfortable that the child is ready to follow the pattern of responding, the interview can turn to the substantive portion.

Part V: The Substantive Phase. The purpose of the substantive portion of the interview is, of course, to obtain detailed information about the event(s) in question from the child. The transition to the substantive portion of the interview should make clear that the focus of the interview is shifting. "Now that I know you better, I want to talk about why you are here today." After this introductory statement, there are a number of options of how to introduce the target topic: An ideal statement would be:

(i) "Tell me why you are here today"

Based on our experience, many children will disclose in response to this prompt as most children know ahead of time that they are going to be interviewed. Indeed, children provide more information in response to the *first* substantive prompt when they have already been given practice answering open-ended questions in the rapport-building phase (Sternberg et al., 1997) and the practice interview (Orbach et al., 2000) than children who have not had such practice. Once the child has disclosed something, open-ended prompts to elicit breadth and depth can then be used, as described in the section on using open-ended questions. If children do not disclose, other open-ended prompts could be used, such as:

(ii) "I understand that something may have hap-

pened to you. Tell me everything from the very beginning to the very end as best you can remember. Don't leave anything out."

(iii) "I've heard that you talked to [a doctor]. Tell me what you talked about."

During the substantive phase of the interview, there are some common errors to avoid:

(1) **Repeating questions without a rationale** - Children may change their answers if asked the same question twice either within an interview or across two or more interviews. Children's propensity to change responses is often the result of complying with what a child perceives to be an interviewer's desires (Poole & White, 1991). That is, a child may assume that a question is asked again because the interviewer did not like the child's first answer, as is common in most adult-child interactions. If the same question must be asked twice, the child should be provided with an explanation such as, "I'm confused about something" or "I didn't hear your first answer." Sometimes children may not have provided much information to the initial question because they did not understand the question (Waterman, Blades, & Spencer, 2000) and thus it could be re-phrased.

(2) **"Can you?", "Do you?", or "Is there?" questions** - Many interviewers report having asked children questions such as, "Can you tell me about the time daddy hit you?" only to have the child respond with "No." If the child is provided with the opportunity to refuse to answer a question, through inappropriate interviewer phrasing, it is difficult to subsequently take that option away. "Can you tell me...", "Do you want to tell me...", or "Is there anything..." questions can push interviewers into a corner on significant issues that require follow-up, but may damage the child's trust if pursued. It is preferable to be more explicit as in "tell me more...", "what else..?" and so on.

(3) **Giving Options** - If a child's response is unclear, it is tempting to offer the child options from which he or she can choose to provide the interviewer with a definitive answer. For example, an interviewer who is unclear as to the location of a strike may ask, "Did he hit you on your leg or on your arm?" However, when presented with option-posing questions, children may choose one of the presented options, regardless of the accuracy of their memories. A further concern is that when a limited number of options are presented, the interviewer cannot be sure that the correct option is presented. That is, the child may have been hit on the *elbow*, not consider this to be part of the arm, and respond with "No".

Part VI: Closing the Interview. Once it is clear that the interviewer has received the information s/he requires and/or that the child has disclosed everything he or

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she can, the interviewer can redirect the conversation to neutral topics again. Closing the interview with a positive and supportive tone allows the child to leave the interview feeling helpful and may prevent the child from developing an aversion to additional interviews, should they be necessary. After spending some time discussing non-allegation related issues, the interviewer can thank the child. The interviewer should not praise the child for the content of the information he or she provided, but rather for behaviour ("You sat very nicely during the time we were talking"), effort ("You seemed to be thinking very hard about all my questions"), or other non-content related reasons. Thanking the child for the content of the disclosure may leave the child feeling as though he or she provided the "right" information, which may make a later recantation more difficult if it is the right thing to do. The child should be asked if he or she has any questions for the interviewer, and the interviewer should be honest in his or her responses. Finally, the interviewer should explain to the child (honestly) what will happen next and provide the child (or guardian) with his or her contact information.

Recommendation 4: Use Developmentally-Appropriate Techniques

Children, as adults, are individuals with specific needs, strengths, and weaknesses. When structuring questions designed to elicit a narrative of the alleged incident(s), children's developmental level must be considered (see Saywitz & Camparo, 1998). Unfortunately, the extant research suggests that developmentally inappropriate, and often damaging, questions are commonplace when talking with children. For example, Park and Renner (1998) examined the testimony of 58 alleged victims of child sexual abuse and coded each transcript for 22 types of developmentally inappropriate questions. The authors found that developmentally inappropriate questions were asked of *all* 58 children.

Interviewers are responsible for understanding children's capabilities and for being aware of questioning techniques that may inappropriately influence children's responses or ability to respond. Children who are asked complex questions (e.g., that are age-inappropriate, syntactically complex, contain ambiguous referents like "it" and "she") provide less correct information and are more likely to make errors than children who are asked simple questions (Carter, Bottoms, & Levine, 1996). In one study, only 5 of 30 children who were questioned with complex questions requested clarification (9 of 900 questions; Carter et al., 1996). This difficulty with comprehending complex questions is particularly salient in kindergarten-age children (Perry, McAuliff, Tam, Claycomb, Dostal, & Flanagan, 1995), but children in grades

4 and 9, and even college students demonstrate difficulty. Importantly, Perry et al. (1995) found that young children were twice as likely to be able to answer simply phrased than complex questions, but that children often tried to answer questions that they did not understand - an unfortunately common finding in research with children (e.g., Hughes & Grieve, 1980; Pratt, 1990). Below we provide common examples of question types that children find challenging:

- (i) Multiple parts - "After you ate dinner, that is when he said that he would do that?"
- (ii) Negatives - "Did he not tell you that before you ate dinner?"
- (iii) Double-negatives - "Did he not tell you that he was not going to eat dinner?"
- (iv) Tagging - "He said that after you ate dinner, right?" (With the implied answer tagged onto the end of the question, the child has little choice, but to say "yes").

These questions would be challenging for any respondent, but difficulties are magnified in children.

There are also concepts that some children may be developmentally unprepared to discuss (see Saywitz & Camparo, 1998). There are particular communicative skills and concepts that develop throughout childhood that precede the ability to respond to particular types of questions. For example, questions related to time, distance, size, measurement, and number estimates are typically challenging for children under 10 years of age because they may have not yet developed an understanding of these (and other) concepts. This means that asking questions such as "How long were you in the room for?", "How many people were there?", or "What time was it when that happened?" may be inappropriate. Although children may understand the time of day that the incident occurred, they may be unable to comprehend and respond to a question phrased in that manner. It is often more effective to anchor time frames to events, "Were you in the room before lunchtime?" or "Did it happen before or after your birthday?". Another option would be to ask the child to describe everything that happened before the target incident, and everything that happened after. These questions are phrased more appropriately for the frame of reference that a young child understands.

Special Considerations

Cognitive Factors

Repeated Experiences. Children who have experienced events that recur over time (e.g., sexual abuse, domestic violence) pose special challenges to forensic interviewers. Legally, a report of a particular instance may be required for a complaint to proceed (*R. v. B. G.*, 1990).

However, eliciting recall of a particular incident may be challenging for children who have experienced many similar events. When an event recurs, a “script” develops in memory which represents what usually happens (e.g., Nelson, 1986). Scripts are cognitive shortcuts that are helpful when we organize our daily experiences (e.g., in the morning I shower, eat breakfast, and then leave for work). However, when children rely on scripts when reporting repeated experiences, there is typically not enough detail to develop an understanding of the precise details of the allegations, and more specific information is required. Interviewers must also avoid language that suggests that they are interested in hearing about the script for the event. Asking about “what happens” rather than “what happened” is likely to lead to recall that is based on the script rather than a particular instance.

A considerable limitation of script reliance is that details that vary across experiences are not represented in the script. These details that are unique to individual experiences are the precise details that distinguish one experience from another. When reporting individual instances of repeated events, children often err by inaccurately attributing these variable details to alternate instances or are simply unable to identify the accurate instance (e.g., Powell, Roberts, Ceci, & Hembrooke, 1999; Price, Connolly, & Gordon, 2006). That is, a child may be able to report that during *one of the incidents* the alleged perpetrator fondled the child’s genitals under her clothing, but she may not be able to identify the specific incident in which it occurred. Overwhelmingly, children who have experienced repeated events exhibit confusion about what occurred during individual instances of the repeated experiences, though they may accurately discriminate what they experienced from what they did not experience. These confusion-based errors are common for children who have experienced repeated events and should not necessarily be taken as indication of fabrication or lack of credibility (e.g., Powell et al., 1999; Price et al., 2006).

When trying to elicit recall of a particular instance, the interviewer should be clear about the instance being referred to. Asking about the incident the child “remembers best” is a good starting point. The first and last incidents will usually be remembered well (Powell, Thomson, & Ceci, 2003), so these are also reasonable options to target. Once recall about a specific incident has been elicited, it is best to use the child’s words when referring to incidents (e.g., the time in the shed, the time at grandma’s), to avoid confusion between the interviewer and child’s understanding of the target incident. During the interview, children may need reminders about the particular instance they are to be recalling at any given time.

Reliance on open-ended questions is especially critical in these cases to minimize confusion.

Traumatic Experiences. There is a considerable amount of controversy in the empirical literature over the influence of trauma on memory (e.g., Christianson, 1992; Defenbacher, Bornstein, Penrod, & McGorty, 2005). The evidence to date, however, suggests that though there may be differences in memory for stressful events and events that are not stressful, the same interviewing techniques are recommended for all events. That is, given that we do not have control over how such events are represented in memory, it is best to simply observe the same best practices for interviewing with all types of experiences. When an event has been traumatic, it is prudent to be especially sensitive to the emotions that a child may be experiencing when recounting such an event. Such emotions may interfere with the child’s ability to report his or her experiences and additional rapport and breaks from the interview may be required.

Developmental Delays/Challenges. Though researchers recognize the importance of potential differences in recall between children with and without special needs, the extant research has not yet developed enough to make specific recommendations for such children. For example, children with autism spectrum disorders have been found to require additional opportunities to report information than typically-developing children and to recall less information about an experience (Bruck, London, Landa, & Goodman, 2007). The recommendations outlined above are already designed to provide children with as much opportunity to disclose information as possible. Thus, the best-practice guidelines currently remain the most effective way to question all children.

Social Factors

Interviewer Characteristics. Both physical and interpersonal characteristics of interviewers have been found to influence children’s disclosure patterns. For example, when adults are perceived of as authoritative (e.g., wearing a uniform, engaging in formal interpersonal conduct) children may report information that is less accurate and be more suggestible (Ceci, Ross, & Toglia, 1987; Tobey & Goodman, 1992). Further, if the child perceives the interviewer to be knowledgeable about the event(s) in question, the child may become more susceptible to suggestion than if the child perceives the interviewer to be naïve (Waterman, Blades, & Spencer, 2004). Although it is not possible to control the child’s perceptions of the interviewer, it is a good idea to explicitly instruct the child that the interviewer was not there during the events in question and thus, does not know what happened. This will help reduce the child’s reliance on what he or she perceives to be interviewer knowledge when answering questions.

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Interview Environment. The physical environment in which the interview takes place can also influence children's comfort and willingness to openly recount their experiences. If a "soft interview room" is not available, investigators can try to remove distractions for both the child and the interviewer by conducting the interview in a clean, uncluttered space and try to avoid interruptions. This ensures that both parties are able to focus on the task at hand, which will encourage a more effective and efficient interview.

CONCLUSION

The recommendations offered in this paper are based on years of research on eliciting reports from young children, as well as our practical experience with investigative interviews. To implement these principles successfully requires practice and openness to receiving feedback on progress. Importantly, recent research on training professionals to interview children indicates that though interviewer knowledge typically increases with exposure to relevant research, without practice and feedback, interviewer behaviour does not appear to be influenced (e.g., Lamb, Sternberg, Orbach, Esplin, & Mitchell, 2002; Warren et al., 1999). Though commitment is required, the payoff in the amount and quality of information elicited should make the effort well worthwhile.

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