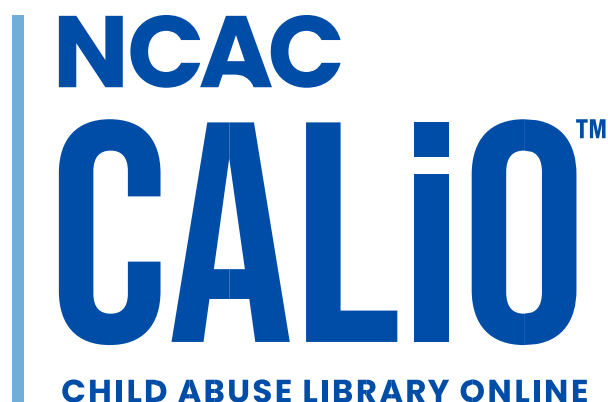




Use of Media in Forensic Interviews of Children: Props

A Bibliography

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Scope

This bibliography lists publications that discuss the use and implications of props as aids when conducting forensic interviews of children

Organization

Publications include articles, book chapters, reports, and research briefs and are listed in date descending order. Links are provided to full text publications when possible. However, this collection may not be complete. More information can be obtained in the Child Abuse Library Online.

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APSAC Taskforce. (2023). [Forensic interviewing of children](#) (pp. 18-19). The American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC).

These Guidelines are an update of the 2012 APSAC Practice Guidelines on “Interviewing in Cases of Suspected Child Abuse.” They reflect current knowledge about best practices related to forensic interviews and should be considered in conjunction with the 2018 APSAC Handbook on Child Maltreatment – 4th Edition.

Poole, D. A., & Bruck, M. (2012). [Divining testimony? The impact of interviewing props on children’s reports of touching](#). *Developmental Review*, 32(3), 165-180.
DOI:10.1016/j.dr.2012.06.007

There is a long-held assumption that objects help bridge the gap between what children know and what they can (or are willing to) explain. In this review, we present research on the extent to which two types of objects used as props in investigative interviews of children, anatomical dolls and body (human figure) diagrams, actually help children report accurate information about autobiographical events. We explain why available research does not instill confidence that props are the best solution to interviewing challenges, and we consider practitioners’ and policy-makers responses to this evidence. Finally, we discuss the types of developmental research that are necessary to advance the field of evidence-based interviewing of children.

Blandon-Gitlin, I., & Pezdek, K. (2009). Children's memory in forensic contexts: Suggestibility, false memory, and individual differences. In B. L. Bottoms, C. J. Najdowski, & Goodman, G. S. (Eds.), *Children as victims, witnesses, and offenders: Psychological science and the law* (pp. 57-80). Guilford Press.

When children come in contact with the legal system as victims or eyewitnesses, one of the challenges they face is the expectation to provide accurate and complete accounts of events. This is especially important in sexual abuse cases in which children's testimony is often the only evidence against the alleged perpetrator. Much of the psychological research prompted by the preschool abuse cases of the 1980s (see Wood, Nathan, Nezworski, & Uhl, Chapter 5, this volume) revealed that children, in particular young children, are especially susceptible to misleading suggestions and memory distortion, which can significantly affect the accuracy of their accounts. More recent research, however, has shown that under many conditions children can be reliable witnesses and provide accounts of events that are accurate and useful to investigators. In this chapter, the current literature on children's memory abilities is reviewed, with a focus on research examining forensically relevant factors that increase or reduce children's suggestibility and memory distortion. We also review recent evidence on individual differences found to be useful in predicting children's witness abilities. We believe that children's experiences in the legal system and the usefulness of their accounts can be greatly enhanced if forensic investigators have an understanding of how social-cognitive factors affect children's memories of autobiographical events.

Poole, D. A., Bruck, M., & Pipe, M.-E. (2009). [Forensic interviewing aids: Do props help children answer questions about touching?](#) *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 20(1), 11-15. DOI:10.1177/0963721410388804

The belief that props help children report abuse has fostered the widespread use of anatomical dolls and body diagrams in forensic interviews. Yet studies involving alleged abuse victims, children who have experienced medical examinations, and children who have participated in staged events have failed to find consistent evidence that props

improve young children's ability to report key information related to bodily contact. Because props elevate the risk of erroneous touch reports, interviewers need to reconsider the belief that props are developmentally appropriate in forensic interviews, and researchers need to explore new approaches for eliciting disclosures of inappropriate touching.

Strange, D., Hayne, H., & Garry, M. (2008). A photo, a suggestion, a false memory. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 22*(5), 587-603. DOI:10.1002/acp.1390

We examined the effect of photographs on children's memories for events that did and did not happen. Over three interviews, 10-year olds saw three true photos and one false photo. Half the children saw a doctored photo of themselves and other family members in a hot air balloon, while the remaining half saw only the hot air balloon. At each interview, children reported what they could remember about each event, rated their confidence that the events really happened and rated how much they could remember. Children who saw the photo showing themselves in the balloon developed more false memories than those who saw only the balloon, but when children in either condition developed false memories, they were equally confident that the event was real. These data highlight a potential problem with the use of photographs as tools in therapy.

Faller, K. C. (2007). Media for interviewing children. In K. C. Faller (Ed.), *Interviewing children about sexual abuse: Controversies and best practices* (pp. 110-141). Oxford University Press.

In this chapter, media for communicating with children during interviews are discussed. The terms "tools," "props," and "interview aids" are also used to refer to media. The advantages and disadvantages of using media are described, and relevant research and practice related to anatomical dolls, anatomical drawings, and free drawings are covered. These three are not the only media that professionals can use. For example,

interviewers may use dolls without private body parts (Britton & O’Keefe, 1991; Samra & Yuille, 1996), a dollhouse (Faller, 1993), or other props to facilitate communication with children. Anatomical dolls, drawings, and free drawings appear to be used most widely (eg, Conte, Sorenson, Fogarty, & Dalla Rosa, 1991). Moreover, there is research on both anatomical dolls and anatomical drawings that professionals can use to guide practice. Although there is also some research on free drawings, it is less directly relevant to interview practice.

Goodman, G. S., & Melinder, A. (2007). Child witness research and forensic interviews of young children: A review. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 12(1), 1-19.
DOI:10.1348/135532506X156620

In this article, we provide an introduction to child eyewitness memory issues that are frequently discussed and debated, both within the research and practice communities. We review several of the central areas of research on child eyewitness memory and some of the most promising protocols aimed at standardizing and improving child forensic interviews. We focus primarily on memory in young children, because they pose particular challenges. Research on the use of props and external cues to prompt young children’s memory is discussed. We also review research on professionals’ knowledge and attitudes about children as witnesses. It is concluded that we must guard against overly negative or overly optimistic views of children’s abilities.

Salmon, K., Yao, J., Bernsen, O., & Pipe, M-E. (2007). Does providing props during preparation help children to remember a novel event? *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 97(2), 99-116. DOI:10.1016/j.jecp.2007.01.001

We investigated the conditions under which preparatory information presented 1 day before a novel event influenced 6-year-olds’ recall 1 week later. Children were assigned to one of six experimental conditions. Three conditions involved preparatory information

that described the event accurately but differed according to the presence and type of props (verbal, real props, and toy props). In two conditions, which also differed according to whether verbal information was supplemented with real props, half of the preparatory information described the event accurately, whereas the other half was thematically similar to, but inconsistent with, the event (misleading verbal and misleading props). Compared with the attentional control condition, all forms of preparation that described the event accurately increased correct recall. Preparation that included props improved photograph recognition. When half of the accurate information was replaced by misleading information, the positive benefit on recall was reduced, and when misleading props accompanied the misleading information, errors increased. The potential underlying mechanisms and implications for pediatric settings are discussed.

Nigro, G. N., & Wolpow, S. I. (2004). Interviewing young children with props: Prior experience matters. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 18*(5), 549–565.
DOI:10.1002/acp.1004

This study investigated the effects of prior experience with props used during an interview on young children's recall of an event. In a one-way design, we interviewed 4-year-old children 1 to 2 days after they participated in a staged event. One group of children played with toy replicas of items from the event prior to an interview with the toy props. Another group matched toy replicas to real items from the event prior to an interview with the toy props. A third group coloured before an interview with the toy props, and a fourth coloured before an interview with the real items. Finally, a fifth group coloured before an interview with no props, only verbal cues about the items that had been present. Results indicated that the condition in which children played with toy props prior to the interview had the lowest verbal accuracy during the interview. Children who saw toys for the first time during the interview behaviourally enacted the highest volume of correct information about the event. Implications for interviewing children are discussed.

Salmon, K., & Irvine, P. (2002). Photograph reminders and young children's event reports: The influence of timing. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 7(2), 173-186.
DOI:10.1348/135532502760274783

We compared the influence on preschoolers' event recall of photograph reminders presented at different points between the event and the interview. Seventy-seven children aged 3.5-4.5 years participated in a quasi-medical event and were interviewed 10 weeks later. The children were allocated to one of three reminder conditions: early reminder (3 or 4 days after the event); late reminder (24 hours before the interview); and reminder-at-interview (at the beginning of the interview). There were two control groups: no reminder and reminder only (children who did not take part in the event but received the reminder at the beginning of the interview). The photograph reminder did not facilitate recall relative to no reminder. Nonetheless, the event reports of children in the late reminder condition contained a greater proportion of information consistent with the event than of those in the no-reminder and reminder-at-interview conditions, and a strong trend toward reporting more event-consistent information than of those in the early reminder condition. Notably, children in the reminder-only condition reported moderate amounts of information consistent with the event, including event-consistent information that was not present in the reminder photographs. A photograph reminder presented 24 hours before the interview enhances children's recall to a greater extent than reminders presented at other points. Photographs may not be optimal reminders for preschoolers, however. The impact of reminders may be masked when children have scripted knowledge relevant to the event.

Salmon, K. (2001). Remembering and reporting by children: The influence of cues and props. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 21(2), 267-300. DOI:10.1016/S0272-7358(99)00048-3

Until recently nonverbal props received little experimental attention in spite of the wide use of props such as toys and drawing in child clinical contexts. This article reviews

research investigating the effectiveness of props as means of facilitating children's recall and reporting of past events. In the first section, developmental and theoretical considerations influencing effectiveness of various kinds of props as aids to the retrieval and communication of information are outlined. Thereafter, findings of empirical research are reviewed for real props from the event, toys including dolls, drawing, context reinstatement, and photographs. Research findings suggest that a range of factors influence the extent to which props facilitate children's reports of past events, including specificity of the information provided by the prop, the way the prop is presented during the interview, delay between the event and interview and, critical to these factors, the age of the child. Areas requiring future theoretical and research attention are identified.

Wesson, M., & Salmon, K. (2001). Drawing and showing: helping children to report emotionally laden events. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 15*(3), 301–320.
DOI:10.1002/acp.706

This study examined the effectiveness of drawing and re-enactment as means of facilitating children's verbal reports about emotionally laden events. Sixty children, aged 5 and 8 years, were interviewed about times when they had felt happy, sad and scared in one of three interview conditions; drawing, in which they were asked to draw and tell, re-enactment, in which they were asked to re-enact and tell, or verbal, in which they were simply asked to tell. For children of both age groups, drawing and re-enactment enhanced the amount of information reported relative to a verbal interview. Further, drawing and re-enactment elicited a greater number of items of descriptive information than did the verbal interview. The possible mechanisms underlying these findings and their implications for interviewing children in clinical contexts are discussed.

Salmon, K., & Pipe, M.-E. (2000). Recalling an event one year later: the impact of props, drawing and a prior interview. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 14*(2), 99–120.
DOI:10.1002/(SICI)1099-0720(200003/04)14:2<99::AID-ACP639>3.0.CO;2-5

One hundred and one 5-year-old children were interviewed about a routine health assessment carried out at school following delays of both 3 days and 1 year or 1 year only. Children were interviewed with prototypical medical items and a doll (*props*), with verbal prompts only (*verbal*), or with drawing (*drawing*). There was a decrease in both the amount and the accuracy of the information children reported over the 1-year delay, but no effect of the prior (3-day) interview. Children interviewed with props recalled more information than those asked to draw or interviewed with verbal prompts only, particularly at the long delay. Correct information was more likely to be repeated across interviews than were errors, and, whereas information repeated across interviews was highly reliable, information introduced for the first time after 1 year was not, particularly when children drew. These findings have important implications in applied contexts such as when children are called upon to provide testimony following very long delays.

Bourg, W., Broderick, R., Flagor, R., Kelly, D. M., Ervin, D. L., & Butler, J. (1999). Using anatomical dolls and other tools. In *A child interviewer's guidebook* (pp. 121-136). Sage Publications, Inc.

The purpose of these guidelines is to promote consistency in the quality of care provided to children when they are evaluated for possible abuse. The authors feel that the best method for improving child interviewing is to ensure that interviewers receive training in integrating research and clinical practice. These guidelines were written as part of a training package designed to provide child abuse evaluators with essential educational resources. The recommendations contained in this book are tailored to child evaluations that concentrate on (1) eliciting reliable statements about possible abuse and (2) maximizing the amount of information gained from the child, given the child's age, circumstances, and readiness to talk. These guidelines are intended for use among

professionals working in child abuse assessment centers, although they may be useful in other settings.

Aschermann, E., Dannenberg, U., & Schulz, A-P. (1998). Photographs as retrieval cues for children. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 12(1), 55–66. DOI:10.1002/(SICI)1099-0720(199802)12:1<55::AID-ACP490>3.0.CO;2-E

The aim of this study was to evaluate photographs as an alternative type of retrieval aid suitable for pre-school children. Fifty-seven children (age 3;7–6;8 years) participated in a fishing game. Ten days later the children were questioned about the situation under three conditions: group 1 was interviewed only with a context-reinstatement instruction. Group 2 additionally received photos relevant to the game as well as distractor items. Group 3 received both of these aids and was trained in the use of photos. In the photo groups more correct details were remembered compared to the control group. Accuracy in both photo groups was also enhanced by props. These results show that multiple-choice photos combined with a reinstate context instruction are an effective retrieval aid for young children.

Priestley, G., & Pipe, M.-E. (1997). Using toys and models in interviews with young children. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 11(1), 69–87. DOI:10.1002/(SICI)1099-0720(199702)11:1<69::AID-ACP426>3.0.CO;2-V

The present study examined the conditions under which toys and model items facilitate children's accounts of personally experienced events. In three experiments, 109 five- to six-year-old children were interviewed about an event in which they had participated. Experiment 1 varied the similarity of the props to the items from the event while Experiments 2 and 3 varied the number of model items and the method of their presentation. Results showed that increasing the physical similarity of the props to items from the event, adding spatial layout cues, or increasing the number of props provided

enhanced the facilitative effects of props on children's accounts. The implications of these results for interviewing children in clinical and legal contexts are discussed.

Salmon, K., & Pipe, M.-E. (1997). Props and children's event reports: the impact of a 1-year delay. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 65(3), 261-292.
DOI:10.1006/jecp.1996.2362

Three- and 5-year-old children took part in a quasi-medical event in which the child and an adult stranger examined a "sick" teddy bear. Three days and 1 year after the event, children were interviewed in one of three interview conditions; with real items from the event (real props); with toy representations of those items (toy props); or with verbal prompts (no props). After 3 days, both toys and real items facilitated children's reports compared to verbal prompts, but children interviewed with toy props were less accurate than those interviewed with either real items or verbal prompts. After 1 year, the reports of children interviewed with real items remained more accurate than those of children interviewed with toys, although real items did not differentially protect recall from forgetting compared to either toys or verbal prompts. The report of the older children were as accurate at the 1-year delay as at the 3-day delay, whereas the reports of the younger children were particularly susceptible to errors. Correct information was more likely to be repeated across interviews than were errors. New information introduced for the first time after 1 year was highly unreliable for both age groups, whereas that repeated across interviews was highly reliable.

Steward, M. S., Steward, D. S., Farquhar, L., Myers, J. E., Reinhart, M., Welker, J., Joye, N., Driskill, J., Morgan, J., McGough, L. S., Bruck, M., Ceci, S. J., Ornstein, P. A. (1996). Interviewing young children about body touch and handling. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 61(4-5), 1-232. DOI:10.2307/1166205

Children aged 3-6 years were interviewed following a scheduled pediatric clinic visit to assess the efficacy of two independent variables—interview strategy and number of interviews—on the

accuracy, completeness, and consistency of children's reports. Four experimental interviews were created—a verbal interview and three interviews enhanced with anatomically detailed cues (dolls, line drawings, and computer graphics), photographs, and props. Initially, 130 children were interviewed after the clinic event. One month later, 124 were interviewed again, and 74 were interviewed a third time after 6 months. Children's reports were compared to videotapes and medical records of their pediatric visit in order to create three dependent reporting variables—accuracy, completeness, and consistency.

Gee, S., & Pipe, M.-E. (1995). Helping children to remember: The influence of object cues on children's accounts of a real event. *Developmental Psychology*, 31(5), 746–758. DOI:10.1037/0012-1649.31.5.746

The authors examined the effects of reinstating objects from an event on 6- and 9-year-old children's reports of the event in which they had either participated or observed. Half of the 95 children were interviewed twice, 10 days and 10 weeks after the event (Group 1), and the remaining children were interviewed a single time, 10 weeks after (Group 2). Following free recall, prompted recall and direct questions were accompanied by objects from the event and distractors for half the children. The effect of the delay on free recall was ameliorated by the prior interview for older but not younger children. Objects attenuated age differences in prompted recall for participants and enhanced accuracy in response to questions. Objects also led to more errors at the long delay. Analyses based on signal detection theory indicated that both response strategy and memory-related factors contributed to developmental changes in compliance with misleading questions.

Salmon, K., Bidrose, S., & Pipe, M. E. (1995). Providing props to facilitate children's event reports: A comparison of toys and real items. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 6(1), 174-194. DOI:10.1006/jecp.1995.1037

Compared toys and real items as props for facilitating children's reporting of an event. Indicates that the effects of props depend on the nature of the items and the age of the children with whom they are used. Suggests that real items may provide one means of supporting recall, to enable children to provide their most complete and accurate reports.

Pipe, M.-E., & Wilson, C. (1994). Cues and secrets: Influences on children's event reports. *Developmental Review*, 30(4), 664-680. DOI:10.1037/0012-1649.30.4.515

Eighty-eight pairs of children were interviewed about a contrived interaction with an adult under one of four conditions: no cues, context cues, relevant cues, and irrelevant cues. Although relevant cues facilitated recall, accuracy did not differ across cue conditions. Younger children were less likely to report an accident they were asked to keep secret than were older children.

Pipe, M.-E., Gee, S., & Wilson, J. C. (1993). Cues, props and context: Do they facilitate children's event reports? In G. S. Goodman & B. L. Bottoms (Eds.), *Child victims, child witnesses: Understanding and improving testimony* (pp. 25-45). Guilford Press.

O'Callaghan, G., & D'Arcy, H. (1989). Use of props in questioning preschool witnesses. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 41(2), 187-195. DOI:10.1080/00049538908260082

This study compared the effectiveness of different techniques for eliciting complete and accurate eyewitness reports from preschool children, with particular interest in the efficacy of props as concrete retrieval cues. Props were model replicas of the setting, characters, and objects depicted in a short video segment simulating an eyewitness

event. Thirty-two 4-year-olds were assigned to one of four conditions: free recall, free recall with props, questioning, or questioning with props. Use of props increased the quantity of responses for both free recall and questioning, but led to more inaccuracy under the free recall condition. This adverse effect was more evident for memory of actions than for descriptions or dialogue. The study provides pilot data for future research examining the reliability of accounts from very young children and offers some advice to practitioners working with very young witnesses.