

Use of Media in Forensic Interviews of Children: Human Figure Drawings

A Bibliography



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Scope

This bibliography contains empirical literature including articles, books chapters, and reports covering use of human figure drawings as aids in forensic interviews of children. This bibliography is not comprehensive. All publications are English language. Links to open access publications are provided when possible.

Organization

The resources listed are in date descending order and alphabetically within each year of publication from years 1988-2022. Author abstracts are provided unless otherwise noted.

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Use of Media in Forensic Interviews: Human Figure Drawings

Vieth, V. (2022). Anatomical diagrams and dolls: Guidelines for their usage in forensic interviews and courts of law. *Mitchell Hamline Law Review*, 48(1).

[Full text](#)

This Article assists attorneys and judges by providing an overview of the extensive research on dolls, the small body of research on diagrams, and the position on using these tools that has been taken by major forensic interview training programs in the United States.¹⁵ The Article concludes with a summary of case and statutory law along with proposed guidelines for courts in considering this issue.

Dickinson, J. J., & Poole, D. A. (2017). The influence of disclosure history and body diagrams on children's reports of inappropriate touching: Evidence from a new analog paradigm. *Law and Human Behavior*, 41(1), 1-12. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/lhb0000208>

We tested a new paradigm for child eyewitness research that incorporates children's disclosure histories into analog study designs. Mr. Science—Germ Detective creates meaningful touching experiences and varied patterns of preinterview disclosures by convincing children that touching in the laboratory is potentially contaminating (germy). Children (N = 287, 4 to 8 years) heard that Mr. Science could no longer touch children's skin and then participated in an educational program involving 2 attempted touches. A week later, their disclosure histories were determined by a phone call that occurred a day before a forensic-style interview in the laboratory. This interview was delivered in 1 of 2 conditions: with early open-ended and more focused prompts delivered without a diagram (conventional-first condition) or with an initial diagram-assisted phase (diagram-first condition). Results confirmed that the new paradigm produces salient touches and performance patterns across open-ended and more focused questions that mirror well-known findings in eyewitness studies. A diagram made it easier for research assistants to elicit detailed reports of touching, but only among children 5 years and older who had not previously disclosed. Accuracy rates were comparable across interview conditions for early substantive phases but declined among older children when interviewers used diagrams to elicit additional reports late in interviews. These findings demonstrate that disclosure history is an important variable to include in analog study

designs and confirm that Germ Detective is a promising paradigm for initial tests of new interviewing strategies. (PsycINFO Database Record © 2017 APA, all rights reserved)

Hill, A. (2017). Dolls, diagrams and drawings: Interviewers' perspectives on visual aids in child witness interviews (Master's thesis). Victoria University of Wellington. 149 p.

[Full text](#)

In cases of child maltreatment child witnesses are often the sole sources of information about the suspected events, meaning their contribution to an investigation is critical. However, children may find recounting their experiences in sufficient detail challenging (Poole & Bruck, 2012). Visual aids are the tools (e.g. diagrams, drawings, and dolls) forensic interviewers often use in interviews to help children remember or describe their experiences and overcome children's social and cognitive limitations. Research evaluating these aids indicates that any gains in information, reported by children, are typically accompanied by significant increases in false details, thus compromising the accuracy of accounts (Brown, 2011). The purpose of this study was to establish the extent to which interviewers in New Zealand use visual aids with children, and their knowledge of relevant research and the national interviewing protocol. Thirty-one New Zealand Specialist Child Witness Interviewers completed a questionnaire that assessed how and why they use aids, and their knowledge of, and adherence to, the literature and protocols guiding interviewer practice with visual aids. Interviewers' responses indicated they used a range of aids, with both younger and older children, for a range of reasons, many of which have not been extensively researched. Generally, interviewers had poor knowledge of the existing research and protocol guidelines, and knowledge did not predict adherence to the recommendations. The findings identify the need to educate interviewers about the evidence-base surrounding various aids, as well as conducting research that more closely reflects how aids are used with children.

Bruck, M., Kelley, K., & Poole, D. A. (2016). Children's reports of body touching in medical examinations: The benefits and risks of using body diagrams. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 22(1), 1-11. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/law0000076>

In 3 sections of the same interview, children (N = 107, ages 3–8 years) were asked about body touches during previous medical examinations that included genital and anal touches for some children. First, in a free recall phase all children were asked to describe what had happened during

the medical procedures. In the second and third sections they answered questions about body touches in 2 conditions, with body diagrams (BDs) and without body diagrams (no-BDs), with the order of conditions counterbalanced. Within each interview condition, the children answered cued recall questions about touching and a set of recognition (yes-no) questions about touches to individual body parts. Cued recall with BDs elicited a greater number of correct sexual touch reports, but also more forensically relevant errors from the younger group. Cued-recall performance with BDs was largely identical to recognition performance without BDs. Taken together, the paucity of research on BDs and the current findings suggest 2 interim conclusions: (a) the use of BDs to elicit touch disclosures is not yet an evidence-based practice, and (b) there is a pressing need for research that examines promising approaches for encouraging accurate disclosures of abuse.

Lytle, N., London, K., & Bruck, M. (2015). Young children's ability to use two-dimensional and three-dimensional symbols to show placements of body touches and hidden objects. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology, 134*, 30-42.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2015.01.010>
[Full text](#)

In two experiments, we investigated 3- to 5-year-old children's ability to use dolls and human figure drawings as symbols to map body touches. In Experiment 1, stickers were placed on different locations of children's bodies, and the children were asked to indicate the locations of the stickers using three different symbols: a doll, a human figure drawing, and the adult researcher. Performance on the tasks increased with age, but many 5-year-olds did not attain perfect performance. Surprisingly, younger children made more errors on the two-dimensional (2D) human figure drawing task compared with the three-dimensional (3D) doll and adult tasks. In Experiment 2, we compared children's ability to use 3D and 2D symbols to indicate body touch as well as to guide their search for a hidden object. We replicated the findings of Experiment 1 for the body touch task; for younger children, 3D symbols were easier to use than 2D symbols. However, the reverse pattern was found for the object locations task, with children showing superior performance using 2D drawings over 3D models. Although children showed developmental improvements in using dolls and drawings to show where they were touched, less than two thirds of the 5-year-olds performed perfectly on the touch tasks. Both developmental and forensic implications of these results are discussed. © 2015 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Poole, D. A., Dickinson, J. J., Brubacher, S. P., Liberty, A. E., & Kaake, A. M. (2014). Deficient cognitive control fuels children's exuberant false allegations. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 118, 101-109. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2013.08.013>

In eyewitness studies as in actual investigations, a minority of children generate numerous false (and sometimes incredulous) allegations. To explore the characteristics of these children, we reinterviewed and administered a battery of tasks to 61 children (ages 4–9 years) who had previously participated in an eyewitness study where a man broke a “germ rule” twice when he tried to touch them. Performance on utilization, response conflict (Luria tapping), and theory of mind tasks predicted the number of false reports of touching (with age and time since the event controlled) and correctly classified 90.16% of the children as typical witnesses or exuberant (more than 3) false reporters. Results of a factor analysis pointed to a common process underlying performance on these tasks that accounted for 49% of the variability in false reports. Relations between task performance and testimony confirmed that the mechanisms underlying occasional intrusions are different from those that drive persistent confabulation and that deficient cognitive control fuels young children's exuberant false reports.

Teoh, Y. S., Pipe, M. E., Johnson, Z. H., & Lamb, M. E. (2014). Eliciting accounts of alleged child sexual abuse: How do children report touch?. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 23(7), 792-803. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2014.950400>

Investigative interviewers frequently question alleged victims of child sexual abuse about any touching or bodily contact that might have occurred. In the present study of forensic interviews with 192 alleged sexual abuse victims, between 4 and 13 years of age, we examined the frequency with which alleged victims reported bodily contact as “touch” and the types of prompts associated with “touch” reports. Even young alleged victims of sexual abuse reported bodily contact as “touch,” and they used the word “touch” more frequently in response to recall than recognition prompts. Regardless of age, children typically referred to “touch” before interviewers used this term, suggesting that even young children are able to report “touch” without being cued by interviewers.

Brown, D. A., Pipe, M.-E., Lewis, C., Lamb, M. E., & Orbach, Y. (2012). How do body diagrams affect the accuracy and consistency of children's reports of bodily touch across repeated interviews? *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 26*(2), 174-181. <https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.1828>

We examined the amount, accuracy, and consistency of information reported by 58 5- to 7-year-old children about a staged event that included physical contact/touching. Both 1 and 7 months following the event, children were asked both open and yes/no questions about touch [i] when provided with human body diagrams (HBDs), [ii] following instruction and practice using the HBDs, or [iii] without HBDs. Children interviewed with HBDs reported more information at 7 months, but a high proportion of inaccurate touches. Children seldom repeated touch-related information across the two interviews and did not incorporate errors made in the 1-month interview into their open-ended accounts 6 months later. Asking children to talk about innocuous touch may lead them to report unreliable information, especially when HBDs are used as aids and repeated interviews are conducted across delays that resemble those typical of forensic contexts. Copyright © 2011 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd

Lyon, T. D. (2012). Twenty-five years of interviewing research and practice: Dolls, diagrams, and the dynamics of abuse disclosure. *APSAC Advisor, Winter/Spring*, 14-19.

Salmon, K., Pipe M.-E., Malloy, A., & Mackay, K. (2012). Do non-verbal aids increase the effectiveness of 'Best Practices' verbal interview techniques? An experimental study. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 26*(3), 370-380. <https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.1835>

Two experiments examined the effectiveness of non-verbal interview aids as means of increasing the amount of information children report about an event under conditions designed to mimic their use in the field. In the first study, 27 5–7-year-old children took part in an event, and 7–10 days later were interviewed using the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Protocol interview followed by an opportunity to draw the event or complete puzzles and, in turn, a second verbal interview. New information was reported following both drawing and puzzles and accuracy declined in both conditions, but drawing did not differentially influence recall. In the second experiment, dolls or human figure diagrams were introduced to clarify children's (N = 53) reports of touch as recommended in by some professionals, with a verbal interview serving as a

control. Props did not increase the amount of information reported compared with best practice verbal techniques, but nor did they elevate errors. The findings support the use of a second recall attempt, but do not support the use of non-verbal aids, even when these are used following professional recommendations. Copyright © 2011 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Otgaar, H., Horselenberg, R., van Kampen, R., & Lalleman, K. (2011). Clothed and unclothed human figure drawings lead to more correct and incorrect reports of touch in children. *Psychology, Crime, & Law, 18*(7), 641-653.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1068316X.2010.532129>

The purpose of the current study was to examine the effect of clothed and unclothed human figure drawings (HFDs) on children's reports of touch. Eighty 4/5-year-olds and 80 9/10-year-olds participated in a staged event in which measurements of their body parts (e.g. waistline) were taken. Specifically, they were touched on 10 different locations. Immediately or three weeks after the event, they had to report where they had been touched. Half of the children received a clothed HFD while the other half was provided with an unclothed HFD to assist children in their recall. When we compared children's recall before and after the presentation of a HFD, we found that clothed and unclothed HFDs significantly decreased the accuracy of children's reports of touch. So, although children reported more correct touches after the presentation of a HFD, they were also more likely to include more incorrect information in their reports of touch.

Poole, C., & Dickinson, J. J. (2011). Evidence supporting restrictions on uses of body diagrams in forensic interview. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 35*(9), 659-669.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2011.05.004>

This study compared two methods for questioning children about suspected abuse: standard interviewing and body-diagram-focused (BDF) interviewing, a style of interviewing in which interviewers draw on a flip board and introduce the topic of touching with a body diagram. Children (N=261) 4-9 years of age individually participated in science demonstrations during which half the children were touched two times. Months later, parents read stories to their children that described accurate and inaccurate information about the demonstrations. The stories for untouched children also contained inaccurate descriptions of touching. The children completed standard or BDF interviews, followed by source-monitoring questions. Interview format did not significantly influence (a) children's performance during early interview phases, (b) the amount of

contextual information children provided about the science experience, or (c) memory source monitoring. The BDF protocol had beneficial and detrimental effects on touch reports: More children in the BDF condition reported experienced touching, but at the expense of an increased number of suggested and spontaneous false reports. The two props that are characteristic of BDF interviewing have different effects on testimonial accuracy. Recording answers on a flip board during presubstantive phases does not influence the quality of information that children provide. Body diagrams, however, suggest answers to children and elicit a concerning number of false reports. Until research identifies procedures and/or case characteristics associated with accurate reports of touching during diagram-assisted questioning, interviewers should initiate discussions about touching with open-ended questions delivered without a body diagram. Copyright © 2011 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Teoh, Y-S., Yang, P-J., Lamb, M. E., & Larsson, A. S. (2010). Do human figure drawings help alleged victims of sexual abuse provide elaborate and clear accounts of physical contact with alleged perpetrators? *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 24(2), 287-300.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.1564>

[Full text](#)

The present study examined whether the use of human figure diagrams (HFDs) within a well-structured interview was associated with more elaborate and clearer accounts about physical contact that had occurred in the course of an alleged abuse. The sample included investigative interviews of 88 children ranging from 4 to 13 years of age. Children were interviewed using the NICHD investigative interview protocol, and were then asked a series of questions in association with unclothed gender-neutral outline diagrams of a human body. A new coding scheme was developed to examine the types and clarity of touch-related information. Use of the HFDs was associated with reports of new touches not mentioned before and elaborations regarding the body parts reportedly touched. The HFDs especially helped clarify reports by the oldest rather than the youngest children. The clarity of children's accounts of touch was also greater when details were sought using recall prompts. Copyright © 2009 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Bruck, M. (2009). Human figure drawings and children's recall of touching. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied*, 15(4), 361-374. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017120>
[Full text](#)

In 2 studies, children ages 3 to 7 years were asked to recall a series of touches that occurred during a previous staged event. The recall interview took place 1 week after the event in Study 1 and immediately after the event in Study 2. Each recall interview had 2 sections: In 1 section, children were given human figure drawings (HFDs) and were asked to show where the touching took place; in the other section, the same questions were asked without the HFDs (verbal condition). Children were randomly assigned to 2 different conditions: HFD 1st/verbal 2nd or verbal 1st/HFD 2nd. There were 2 major findings. First, HFDs elicited more errors than the verbal condition when used to probe for information that the child had already been asked. Second, regardless of interview method, children had poor recall of the touches even when these occurred minutes before the interview. It is suggested that cognitive mechanisms involving memory and semantics underlie children's poor recall of touching in both verbal and HFD conditions.

Pipe, M. E., & Salmon, K. (2009). Dolls, drawing, body diagrams, and other props: Role of props in investigative interviews. In K. Kuehnle & M. Connell (Eds.), *The evaluation of child sexual abuse allegations: A comprehensive guide to assessment and testimony* (pp. 365–395). John Wiley & Sons Inc.

This chapter provides an overview of nonverbal interview aids and techniques that are sometimes used in investigative interviews, the theoretical and practical considerations relating to each, and the relevant laboratory-based and field research. Where there is an adequate research base, the pros and cons of each technique are highlighted. As shall be seen, however, the paucity of studies examining techniques as recommended for use in practice too often tempers strong conclusions, a problem first noted more than a decade ago. A conclusion that is emphasized throughout this chapter is that the effects of nonverbal techniques in investigative interviews depend on how they are used and the context in which they are used. Just as verbal techniques designed to elicit further information may be more or less helpful in eliciting disclosures and accurate detail in children's reports depending on the specifics of how the questions are framed and the context of their use, so too, nonverbal techniques need to be considered in the context of how they are presented and used.
(PsycINFO Database Record © 2016 APA, all rights reserved)

Russell, A. (2008). Out of the woods. A case for using anatomical diagrams in forensic interviews. *NCPCA Update*, 21(1), 2-6. Retrieved from http://www.ndaa.org/pdf/update_vol_21_no_1_2008.pdf

Many people have expressed concerns with utilizing anatomical diagrams in forensic interviews, citing issues of suggestibility in the interview process, traumatization of the child witness, or lack of evidence supporting the use of anatomical diagrams to enhance children's reports. This article clarifies some of the purposes of utilizing anatomical diagrams in a forensic interview for child abuse investigators and prosecutors and demonstrates the efficacy of anatomical diagrams in facilitating communication with children.

Brown, D. A., Pipe, M. E., Lewis, C., Lamb, M. E., & Orbach, Y. (2007). Supportive or suggestive: Do human figure drawings help –to 7- year old children to report touch? *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 75(1), 33-42. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.75.1.33>

The authors examined the accuracy of information elicited from seventy-nine 5- to 7-year-old children about a staged event that included physical contact–touching. Four to six weeks later, children's recall for the event was assessed using an interview protocol analogous to those used in forensic investigations with children. Following the verbal interview, children were asked about touch when provided with human figure drawings (drawings only), following practice using the human figure drawings (drawings with instruction), or without drawings (verbal questions only). In this touch-inquiry phase of the interview, most children provided new information. Children in the drawings conditions reported more incorrect information than those in the verbal questions condition. Forensically relevant errors were infrequent and were rarely elaborated on. Although asking children to talk about innocuous touch may lead them to report unreliable information, especially when human figure drawings are used as aids, errors are reduced when open-ended prompts are used to elicit further information about reported touches.

Willcock, E., Morgan, K., & Hayne, H. (2006). Body maps do facilitate children's reports of touch. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 20(5), 607-615. <https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.1212>

In two experiments, we assessed children's ability to use body maps to report where they were touched. Five- to 6-year-old children participated in a contrived event and were interviewed either immediately or after a delay. Overall, children's reports were incomplete and inaccurate. We

conclude that body maps do not facilitate children's reports of touch and should not be used in clinical or legal interviews with children of this age. Copyright © 2006 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Aldridge, J., Lamb, M. E., Sternberg, K. J., Orbach, Y., Esplin, P. W., & Bowler, L. (2004). Using human figure drawing to elicit information from alleged victims of child sexual abuse. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 72*(2), 304-316.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.72.2.304>

Ninety 4- to 13-year-old alleged victims of sexual abuse were interviewed by police officers using the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) investigative interview protocol, following which they were shown a human figure drawing and asked a series of questions. The drawing and associated questions elicited an average of 86 new forensically relevant details. They were especially productive with 4- to 7-year-olds, who provided an average of 95 additional details (27% of their total) after the drawing was introduced despite having previously “exhausted” their memories. Information elicited using the drawing may be less accurate, however, because recognition memory prompts predominated, so such drawings should only be introduced late in investigative interviews.

Hiltz, B., & Bauer, G. (2003). Drawings in forensic interviews of children. *APRI Update, 16*(3), 1-2. http://www.ndaa.org/pdf/update_vol16_no3.pdf

Forensic interviews and interview protocols are increasingly incorporating anatomical dolls, anatomical diagrams and/or drawings, as methods of enhancing a child’s disclosure. Various types of drawings can be used by the child, the interviewer or both at various stages of the interview process. Drawings are helpful for a variety of reasons, including assessment, investigation and potential prosecution. This article suggests several reasons to use drawings in forensic interviews, several types of drawings that may be helpful, and uses for drawings that would be inappropriate in a forensic setting.

American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (2002). Use of interview aids. In *Practice guidelines: Investigative interviewing in cases of alleged child abuse* (p.6). Chicago: Author.

- Holmes, L., & Finnegan, M. (2002). The use of anatomical diagrams in child sexual abuse forensic interviews. *American Prosecutors Research Institute Update*, 15, 1–5.
- 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). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
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- Steward, M. S., & Steward, D. S. (1996). Interviewing young children about body touch and handling. *Monograph series of the Society for Research on Child Development*, 61(4-5), 1-214.
- Jones, D. P. H., & McQuiston, M. G. (1988). The interview itself. In *Interviewing the sexually abused child* (pp. 24-35). Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing.