

# 15 PRINCIPLES FOR FORENSIC INTERVIEWERS, PART 2

One of most valuable contributions to emerge from research on interviewing children is the development of best practice standards and guidelines. Ongoing research informs interviewers about how children's memories develop, how children report events, threats to the accuracy of children's answers, and other information which can impact children's abilities to provide information during a forensic interview.

In an article written by Brubacher et al. (2019), the researchers reviewed transcripts from laboratory studies and real-world interviews and developed 15 principles which capture how children talk about events. Some of the principles will enforce your current knowledge base, while other principles may assist in further developing your forensic interviewing skills.

A summary of the last eight of the 15 principles are listed below:

## Principle 8

- Children's narratives may contain detail errors and young children have weaker filters for some types of errors

Implications

- Rely heavily on open-ended prompts
  - Facilitates lower rates of errors



## Principle 9

- Focused questions often yield less accurate responses than open-ended prompts

Implications

- Avoid asking about unnecessary details
- Follow focused questions with more open-ended prompts, when possible

## Principle 10

- Focused prompts do not always effectively cue memories

Implications

- Phrase prompts using simple, concrete words
- Avoid adding unnecessary words to prompts that might restrict meaning
- Ask follow-up questions to double-check their intent, when children appear to contradict themselves



## Principle 11

- Children’s styles of reporting are influenced by the interviewer’s styles of asking

### Implications

- Follow child’s lead, prompting generically when child discloses what commonly happens versus prompting for specific details when child discloses individual incidents
- Supplement a series of generic prompts with prompts about specific incidents
- Listen for episodic (specific) details spontaneously uttered by child

## Principle 12

- Some children recall more information in subsequent interviews

### Implications

- Build rapport and use open-ended prompts
- Facilitate reminiscence by allowing child to follow his/her own train of thought

## Principle 13

- Children who witness the same event will experience the event and recount the event differently

### Implications

- Use variety of open-ended prompts to encourage complete recounting of child’s experiences
- Use minimal encouragers to facilitate reporting of experiences
- Allow a break during the interview and follow with another opportunity to recall an event(s), this may elicit new details



## Principle 14

- Event narratives can get better or worse over time

### Implications

- Persist with open-ended prompts even if child has previously been interviewed or the event occurred a long time ago

## Principle 15

- False narratives can be detailed and coherent

### Implications

- Elicit detailed narratives with nonleading invitations
- Be open to alternative hypothesis

The principles discussed in the Brubacher et al. (2019) article reflect foundational development and cognitive abilities of children while highlighting the implications for forensic interviews.

## References

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