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Documenting the Child Forensic Interview

A Bibliography

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Scope

This bibliography lists publications concerning the importance of documentation of the child forensic interview.

Organization

Publications include articles, book chapters, reports, and research briefs and are arranged 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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Hawkes, M., Evans, J., & Reed, B. (2024). Caring records: Professional insights into child centered case note recording. *Archival Science*, *24*(2), 183-207. DOI:10.1007/s10502-023-09430-w

The consequences of poorly processed reports of child abuse and neglect, along with governance challenges in child protection systems, are well-documented. Recent research, inquiries and royal commissions emphasise the need for child-centered and participatory practices that support the rights and dignity of children and their families. However, the challenges of quality case recording in child protection systems and contexts remain unclear. This paper reports on the findings from a pilot study that interviewed ($n = 22$) and surveyed ($n = 56$) social work students and social work curriculum developers from Australian Universities and practitioners currently working in the Australian child protection service system. By capturing participants' professional insights, we aim to understand the embedded barriers to transforming child-centered systems by focusing on strengths and possibilities in current practices rather than reiterating deficiencies in recordkeeping. This paper reveals insights into how professionals working in the child protection system understand and are supported in child-centered case note recording and recordkeeping practices. It also identifies the possibilities for the crucial role that interdisciplinary collaboration and alignment between social work and recordkeeping informatics can play in transforming and supporting recordkeeping approaches and practices that prioritise and uphold the rights and dignity of the child.

Korkman, J., Otgaar, H., Geven, L.M., Bull, R., Cyr, M., Hershkowitz, I., Mäkelä, J.-M., Mattison, M., Milne, R., Santtila, P., van Koppen, P., Memon, A., Danby, M., Filipovic, L., Garcia, F.J., Gewehr, E., Gomes Bell, O., Järvilehto, L., Kask, K., . . . & Volbert, R. (2024). White paper on forensic child interviewing: Research-based recommendations by the European Association of Psychology and Law. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 1–44. DOI:10.1080/1068316X.2024.2324098

This white paper consists of evidence-based recommendations for conducting forensic interviews with children. The recommendations are jointly drafted by researchers in child interviewing active within the European Association of Psychology and Law and are focused on cases in which children are interviewed in forensic settings, in particular within investigations of child sexual and/or physical abuse. One particular purpose of the white paper is to assist the growing Barnahus movement in Europe to develop investigative practise that is science-based. The key recommendations entail the expertise required by interviewers, how interviews should be conducted and how interviewers should be trained. Interviewers are advised to use evidence-based interview protocols, engage in hypothesis-testing and record their interviews. The need to prepare the interview well and making efforts to familiarise the child with the interview situation and create rapport as well as acknowledging cultural factors and the possible need for interpretation is underscored, and a recommendation is made not to rely on dolls, body diagrams and the interpretation of drawings in the interviews. Online child interviewing is noted as showing promising results, but more research is warranted before conclusive recommendations can be made. Interviewers should receive specialised training and continuous feedback on their interviews.

Kretowicz, A. M., & Powell, M. B. (2024). Technology in the courtroom: Challenges with presenting children's evidence. *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*, *36*(3), 246–264. DOI:10.1080/10345329.2023.2253719

Legislation permits or requires the use of audio-visual recordings and closed-circuit television where child witnesses give evidence in certain matters. Since its introduction,

problems with the technology have been reported, such as poor audio-visual quality and connectivity issues, causing trial delays and exacerbating witness anxiety. This study analyses the perceptions of 18 professionals (n = 18) across 5 Australian jurisdictions (Queensland, the Northern Territory, the Australian Capital Territory, South Australia and Western Australia) who regularly work with the technology. We used non-directive prompts to determine what problems (if any) still exist in Australian courtrooms, the cause and impact of these problems, and potential solutions. Key themes emerged in the analysis. Problems were still commonplace, which included operator error, quality of the recordings, and issues with the recording technology and devices. The detrimental impacts of these problems included added stress to court employees and witnesses, extended and disrupted trial proceedings, poor quality evidence, and added costs of fixing problems. Tangible recommendations for change were provided by the participants, and the overall findings and their implications were discussed.

Williams, S., & McWilliams, K. (2024). "Just to jog my memory": An examination of forensic interviewers' note-taking behaviors and perceptions of notes with child witnesses. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *39*(21-22), 4626-4646. DOI:10.1177/08862605241243346

In the current study, we surveyed forensic interviewers (*N* = 137) on their note-taking practices, perceptions of note-taking, and note-taking training. Many forensic interviewers surveyed (81%) reported that they take notes during forensic interviews. Of those, the most common reason for note-taking was to assist with remembering what the interviewee reported during the interview (89%) and to guide the formulation of follow-up questions (87%). Note-taking style was also reported upon, with most respondents indicating that they write down keywords that may be used again in the interview (78%), as well as short utterances or sentences related to the presenting narrative (61%). Finally, the majority (50%) of respondents who take notes reported always taking notes, although 29% reported taking notes most of the time. Of those respondents

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who reported not taking notes during forensic interviews, the majority listed the reasons as being that it distracts the child from the interview (85%) and causes them to break eye contact with the child (46%). Overall, many respondents endorsed the benefits of note-taking to the interviewing process, whereas a small minority reported some perceived risks or concerns with note-taking during interviews. Perhaps most notably, forensic interviewers, both of whom take notes and those who do not, reported low rates of note-taking training and a desire for more information on note-taking practices within the field. These results underscore the need for further research and best practice guidelines regarding note-taking during forensic interviews.

APSAC Taskforce. (2023). *Forensic interviewing of children*. The American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children.

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. Based on practical experience and empirical research that began in the late 1980s, these guidelines are offered with the understanding that there is no single correct way to conduct a forensic interview. Best practices will continue to evolve and change as new research becomes available. They provide a framework for professionals who conduct forensic interviews and are not an all-inclusive guide.

Hannonen, J. (2023). Recorded interviews as evidence in child sexual exploitation and abuse-Barnahus model in Finland and Sweden. *International Journal of Criminal Justice*, *5*(1), 3-31.

The Nordic Barnahus model promotes child-friendly criminal procedure. An important aspect of the Barnahus model is that child victims of sexual exploitation or physical abuse do not testify in court, but an interview recorded in the pre-trial investigation is used as evidence instead. The criminal procedure in child sexual exploitation and abuse is very

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similar in Finland and Sweden. The children are interviewed conclusively in the pre-trial investigation, and they are not present in the trial. Ensuring the suspect's right to cross-examination in the pre-trial phase is a prerequisite for using recorded interviews as evidence. There is no direct contact between the defense and the child victim because the defense's questions are presented by the interviewer. The Finnish and Swedish Barnahus variations differ mostly in the legislative stance towards recorded interviews and the organization of Barnahaus activities. In Finland, using recorded interviews is strictly legislated whereas in Sweden the approach is more flexible case-by-case discretion.

Brown, D., Walker, D., & Godden, E. (2021). Tele-forensic interviewing to elicit children's evidence—Benefits, risks, and practical considerations. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law, 27*(1), 17–29. DOI:10.1037/law0000288

Tele-forensic interviewing (tele-FI; e.g., via video-conferencing software) may be an effective way of increasing the accessibility of skilled interviewers for children who are questioned as part of a criminal or care and protection investigation. The current coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has highlighted how critical it is that we have evidence-based procedures to draw upon when traditional face-to-face interviews cannot be used. In this article we discuss the benefits and risks associated with tele-FI, review the small number of studies that have examined its effectiveness for eliciting memory reports from adults and children, and discuss practical considerations that should inform planning for an interview. Tele-FI appears a promising avenue for creating resiliency within organizations, and overcoming factors that might otherwise undermine the reliability of children's evidence. Available research indicates children's memory reports elicited in tele-FIs are likely to be as good or better than those from face-to-face interviews, but a more comprehensive evidence-base is needed. Interviewers should be aware of how using this approach may influence their questioning strategies and engagement with children.

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Baker, M., Fessinger, M., McWilliams, K., & Williams, S. (2021). [The use of note-taking during forensic interviews: Perceptions and practical recommendations for interviewers](#). *Developmental Child Welfare*, *3*(1), 20-35. DOI:10.1177/25161032211002187

The disclosure process for children who have experienced maltreatment is often difficult. In an effort to support children in their disclosures, interviewers have increasingly turned to empirically-based interview protocols (i.e., questioning strategies) that both decrease the suggestibility of questions while also increasing the productivity of children's statements. Despite efforts to improve the structure of forensic interviews, interviewing support tools, such as note-taking, have received less empirical attention. To date, research examining interviewers' notes has primarily focused on the accuracy of such records for evidentiary reasons. Yet, note-taking may serve other purposes; for instance, the process of note-taking may increase the accuracy of interviewers' questions (i.e., use of child's words) and memory (i.e., follow-up questions and themes) throughout the interview. In the current review, we describe the limited forensic note-taking literature, as well as the potential strengths and weaknesses of note-taking during forensic interviews with children. We end by suggesting potential avenues of research to assist with the creation of practical guidelines for the use of notes during forensic interviews.

Rivard, J. R., & Schreiber Compo, N. (2017). Self-reported current practices in child forensic interviewing: Training, tools, and pre-interview preparation. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, *35*(3), 253-268. DOI:10.1002/bsl.2290

In child sexual abuse investigations, forensic interviewers within the Child Advocacy Center (CAC) model serve as neutral fact-finders for a team of professionals tasked with investigating and intervening in cases of alleged child sexual abuse. Although empirical evidence has led to the development of best-practice techniques and protocols, there is currently no universally adopted protocol in the field. The present research gathered detailed information from a national sample of real-world child forensic interviewers about their training and current practices, with a specific focus on assessing the

information interviewers typically review prior to conducting child forensic interviews. Most notably, the survey revealed a lack of uniformity in interviewing protocols adopted and pre-interview preparation practices. Although rare, some interviewers reported using an allegation-blind interviewing approach, highlighting the need for future research on this and other under-studied techniques.

National Children's Alliance. (2017). *Standards for accredited members*.
https://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/NCA-Standards-for-Accredited-Members-2017.pdf

Poole, D. A. (2016). *Interviewing children: The science of conversation in forensic contexts.* American Psychological Association. DOI:10.1037/14941-000

Whether as eyewitnesses or victims, children are often interviewed to provide evidence for forensic investigations. But strategies that may work for interviewing adults often do not work on children. Because of children's incomplete language development, their greater risk of retrieving inaccurate information in response to memory cues, and their desire to say what they think the interviewer wants to hear (whether truthful or not), their testimony can be unreliable. Sometimes, the interviewer's challenge is a child who does not want to talk at all. In *Interviewing Children: The Science of Conversation in Forensic Contexts*, Debra Poole introduces the science of interviewing children by explaining the problems that can arise when adults talk to children and how a forensic perspective mitigates these problems. She discusses child development considerations and presents a flexible approach to interviewing children. Through her descriptions of best practices, brief summaries of supporting research, example interview dialogs, answers to common questions from practitioners, and a final section for trainers and policymakers, Poole provides a roadmap for anyone working in a forensic context. This book is essential reading for those who interview children, supervise interviewers, review interview findings, or craft local policies about interviewing children.

Huuskonen, S., & Vakkari, P. (2015). Selective clients' trajectories in case files: Filtering out information in the recording process in child protection. *The British Journal of Social Work*, *45*(3), 792-808. DOI:10.1093/bjsw/bct160

The aim of the article is to explore how, why and what type of information social workers filter out from case records in child protection. Recording is understood as a process of four partially overlapping phases: encountering with the stakeholders, making notes, recording by a client information system and reading the case records. The data consist of social workers' and social work managers' interviews and social workers' observation and verbal accounts in natural work settings. The findings show that information was filtered out in each phase. The intentional reasons were often shaped by social context and norms. The unintentional reasons, instead, were often related to everyday realities at work. In the records, the information filtering manifested in wording the text, regulating the amount of details and, in some cases, omitting certain topics fully. The information gaps generated by filtering were faced and interpreted when the records were read. The role of the information system in reducing client information was minor compared to human actors.

Newlin, C., Cordisco Steele, L., Chamberlin, A., Anderson, J., Kenniston, J., Russell, A., Stewart, H., & Vaughn-Eden, V. (2015). Child forensic interviewing: Best practices. *OJJDP: Juvenile Justice Bulletin*. https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh176/files/pubs/248749.pdf

This bulletin consolidates the current knowledge of professionals from several major forensic interview training programs on best practices for interviewing children in cases of alleged abuse. The authors discuss the purpose of the child forensic interview, provide historical context, review overall considerations, and outline each stage of the interview in more detail.

Bertel, O. (2012). Let's go to the videotape: Why the forensic interviews of children in child protective cases should be video recorded. *Family Court Review*, *50*(2), 344-356. DOI:10.1111/j.1744-1617.2012.01454.x

Child sexual abuse is often difficult to prove due to a lack of physical evidence. In many instances, the only evidence is a child's statement given during a forensic interview. Forensic interviews are conducted to assess whether the child has been abused, to develop a plan to protect a child's safety pending trial, and to provide further investigative leads. Note taking by the interviewer is currently the primary method for documenting what takes place in a forensic interview. Research shows that this form of documentation is problematic because interviewers tend to omit abuse-related details in their notes. This Note suggests that federal law should require that forensic interviews of children in child sexual abuse cases be video recorded. State law can provide for a policy of video recording even in the absence of a federal law mandate. Video recording would better preserve the child's statements thereby improving the reliability of the information that is obtained during forensic interviews. The child's demeanor would also be fully captured on video as opposed to getting lost in an interviewer's notes.

Lamb, M., La Rooy, D., Malloy, L., & Katz, C. (2011). *Children's testimony: A handbook of psychological research and forensic practice (2nd ed.).* John Wiley & Sons.

Price, H. L., & Roberts, K. P. (2011). [The effects of an intensive training and feedback program on police and social workers' investigative interviews of children](#). *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science, 43*(3), 235-244.

In the present study, we assessed the effectiveness of an extensive training and feedback program with investigative interviewers of child victims of alleged abuse and neglect in a large Canadian city. Twelve investigative interviewers participated in a joint training initiative that lasted 8 months and involved classroom components and extensive weekly verbal and written feedback. Interviewers were significantly more likely to use open-

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ended prompts and elicited more information from children with open-ended prompts following training. These differences were especially prominent following a subsequent "refresher" training session. No negative effects of training were observed. Clear evidence was found of the benefits of an intensive training and feedback program across a wide variety of investigative interviews with children. Although previous research has found benefits of training with interviewers of child sexual assault victims, the current study extends these findings to a wide range of allegations and maltreatment contexts.

Russell, A. (2010). Documentation and assessment of children's forensic interview statements. *Widener Law Review, 16*, 305-333.

Cauchi, R., & Powell, M. B. (2009). An examination of police officers' notes of interviews with alleged child abuse victims. *International Journal of Police Science & Management, 11*(4), 505-515. DOI:10.1350/ijps.2009.11.4.147

This study provided a critical examination of handwritten records (notes) of interviews contained in a sample of 89 police case files about alleged child abuse. Some of the notes examined related to initial disclosure (complaint) interviews which were not electronically recorded and were meant to be recorded verbatim. Notes of electronically recorded interviews, which merely constituted a convenient summary of the case details, were also examined. Collectively, the analyses focused on the accessibility, completeness and accuracy of the notes, and the degree to which the interviewers' questions and witnesses' answers were differentiated. In relation to the disclosure interviews, a substantial proportion of these were not accessible. Of those where the notes were obtained, the detail recorded was not a complete record of conversation, and there was often poor delineation of questions and responses. Analysis of the electronically recorded interviews showed that these were not an entirely accurate summary of event details even though the note takers' sole task was to document the interview. The implications of these findings are discussed.

Powell, M. B. (2008). Designing effective training programs for investigative interviewers of children. *Current Issues in Criminal Justice, 20*(2), 189-208. DOI:10.1080/10345329.2008.12035804

'Best-practice' guidelines for conducting investigative interviews with children are well established in the literature, yet few investigative interviewers actually adhere to such guidelines in the field. One of the problems is that little discussion has focused on how such guidelines are learned and sustained by professionals. To address this concern, the current article reviews the key elements of interview training programs that are known to promote competent interviewing. These elements include: (i) the establishment of key principles or beliefs that underpin effective interviewing, (ii) the adoption of an interview framework that maximises narrative detail, (iii) clear instruction in relation to the application of the interview framework, (iv) effective ongoing practice, (v) expert feedback and (vi) regular evaluation of interviewer performance. A description and justification of each element is provided, followed by broad recommendations regarding how these elements can be implemented by police and human service organisations in a cost-effective manner.

Jones, L. M., Cross, T. P., Walsh, W. A., & Simone, M. (2005). Criminal investigations of child abuse the research behind "Best Practices". *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 6*(3), 254-268. DOI:10.1177/1524838005277440

This article reviews the research relevant to seven practices considered by many to be among the most progressive approaches to criminal child abuse investigations: multidisciplinary team investigations, trained child forensic interviewers, videotaped interviews, specialized forensic medical examiners, victim advocacy programs, improved access to mental health treatment for victims, and Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs). The review finds that despite the popularity of these practices, little outcome research is currently available documenting their success. However, preliminary research supports many of these practices or has influenced their development. Knowledge of this research

can assist investigators and policy makers who want to improve the response to victims, understand the effectiveness of particular programs, or identify where assumptions about effectiveness are not empirically supported.

Piolat, A., Olive, T., & Kellogg, R. T. (2005). Cognitive effort during note taking. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 19*(3), 291-312. DOI:10.1002/acp.1086

Note taking is a complex activity that requires comprehension and selection of information and written production processes. Here we review the functions, abbreviation procedures, strategies, and working memory constraints of note taking with the aim of improving theoretical and practical understanding of the activity. The time urgency of selecting key points and recording them while comprehending new information at the same time places significant demands on the central executive and other components of working memory. Dual- and triple-task procedures allow the measurement of the momentary cognitive effort or executive attention allocated to note taking. Comparative data show that note taking demands more effort than reading or learning. However, it requires less effort than the creative written composition of an original text.

Berliner, L., & Lieb, R. (2001). *Child sexual abuse investigations: Testing documentation methods.* Washington State Institute for Public Policy. https://www.wsipp.wa.gov/ReportFile/744

Lamb, M. E., Orbach, Y., Sternberg, K. J., Hershkowitz, I., & Horowitz, D. (2000). Accuracy of investigators' verbatim notes of their forensic interviews with alleged child abuse victims. *Law and Human Behavior, 24*(6), 699-708. DOI:10.1023/A:1005556404636

Verbatim contemporaneous accounts of 20 investigative interviews were compared with audiotaped recordings thereof. More than half (57%) of the interviewers' utterances along with 25% of the incident-relevant details provided by the children were not reported in the

"verbatim" notes. The structure of the interviews was also represented inaccurately in these accounts. Fewer than half (44%) of the details provided by the children were attributed to the correct eliciting utterance type. Investigators systematically misattributed details to more open rather than more focused prompts. These results underscore the superiority of electronic recording when the content and structure of investigative interviews must be preserved.