



Forensic Interviews at Trial

A Bibliography

December 2024

**Championing and Strengthening the
Global Response to Child Abuse**

nationalcac.org | 256-533-KIDS(5437) | 210 Pratt Avenue NE, Huntsville, AL 35801

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Preferred citation: National Children's Advocacy Center. (2024). Forensic Interviews at Trial: A Bibliography. Huntsville, AL: Author.

This project was supported by a grant awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

Scope

This bibliography includes literature significant to the forensic interviewer and prosecutor in a trial setting. The literature covers multiple aspects of evidenced-based practice in child forensic interviewing, defensible practice and testimony, the progressions of children's experiences related to maltreatment, and aspects of disclosure. Literature commonly used as a basis of jury education regarding false allegations of abuse within custody/divorce, recantation, retaliation, and lack of physical evidence are also included.

Organization

Publications include articles, book chapters, reports, and research briefs and are arranged in date descending order under the topics listed below. 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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Forensic Interviews at Trial

A Bibliography

Evidence-Based Practice in Forensic Interviewing

Fernandes, D., Gomes, J. P., Albuquerque, P. B., & Matos, M. (2024). [Forensic interview techniques in child sexual abuse cases: A scoping review](#). *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 25(2), 1382–1396. DOI:10.1177/15248380231177317

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is widely recognized as a global public health problem with negative consequences for victims, their families, and society. The child's testimony is essential to the case outcome, given the frequent absence of physical or biological evidence of the abusive acts. Thus, the child forensic interview plays a decisive role in criminal investigation. The present scoping review aims to identify and describe the judicial procedures for collecting CSA victims' testimony using an evidence-based approach and a structured methodology. The review followed Preferred Reporting Items of Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis-Scoping Review guidelines. Studies were identified through manual reference checking and in four electronic databases: PsycARTICLES, PubMed, SCOPUS, and Web of Science. In all, 146 studies were identified according to the defined inclusion criteria, that is, empirical studies identifying judicial procedures to collect CSA victims' testimony, published in English or Portuguese. In total, 30 different forensic interview procedures to collect the child victim's testimony were found. The National Institute for Child Health and Human Development investigative interview protocol was the most frequently mentioned. Despite the variety of protocols, it was possible to conclude that they have a similar general structure. This review also identified gaps in interviewing practices with CSA victims. The scoping review corroborates the importance of forensic interviews with CSA victims, stating its implications for criminal investigation, the legal system, and the child's recovery process.

Friend, O. W., Nogalska, A. M., & Lyon, T. D. (2024). [The utility of direct questions about actions with the hands in child forensic interviews](#). *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 30(2), 121–131. DOI:10.1037/law0000426

This study evaluated the utility of asking direct hands questions (“what did he do with his hands” and “what did you do with your hands”) during forensic interviews with 197 five- to 17-year-old children disclosing sexual abuse. Interviewers had been previously trained to engage children in narrative practice, maximize their use of invitations and directives, and minimize their use of option-posing questions. We examined the extent to which direct hands questions elicited novel information about force, duress, resistance, and the nature of touch and body mechanics. Fifty-nine percent of children’s responses to the direct hands questions elicited novel details. Age, child productivity, and time spent on narrative practice exhibited few relations with novelty. The number of prior invitations was consistently negatively related to novelty; when more invitations were asked, the hands questions were less likely to elicit novel information. Direct questions about hands may supplement invitations in eliciting legally significant details about child sexual abuse

APSAC Taskforce, (2023). [Forensic interviewing of children](#).

Henderson, H., Sullivan, C. E., Wylie, B. E., Stolzenberg, S. N., Evans, A. D., & Lyon, T. D. (2023). [Child witnesses productively respond to "How" questions about evaluations but struggle with other "How" questions](#). *Child Maltreatment*, 28(3), 417–426. DOI:10.1177/10775595231175913

Child interviewers are often advised to avoid asking “How” questions, particularly with young children. However, children tend to answer “How” evaluative questions productively (e.g., “How did you feel?”). “How” evaluative questions are phrased as a “How” followed by an auxiliary verb (e.g., “did” or “was”), but so are “How” questions requesting information about method or manner (e.g., “How did he touch you?”), and “How” method/manner questions might be more difficult for children to answer. We examined 458 5- to 17-year-old children questioned about sexual abuse, identified 2485

“How” questions with an auxiliary verb, and classified them as “How” evaluative ($n = 886$) or “How” method/manner ($n = 1599$). Across age, children gave more productive answers to “How” evaluative questions than “How” method/manner questions. Although even young children responded appropriately to “How” method/manner questions over 80% of the time, specific types of “How” method/manner questions were particularly difficult, including questions regarding clothing, body positioning, and the nature of touch. Children’s difficulties lie in specific combinations of “How” questions and topics, rather than “How” questions in general.

Lyon, T. D., & Henderson, H. (2021). [Increasing true reports without increasing false reports: Best practice interviewing methods and open-ended wh-questions.](#) *APSAC Advisor*, 33(1), 29-39.

A consensus has emerged among forensic interviewers that narrative practice rapport building, introducing the allegation with a “why” question about the reason for the interview, and eliciting allegation details with invitations (broad free recall questions) constitute best practice. These methods are favored because they increase true reports with little risk of increasing false reports. We discuss how interviewers can maintain this balance with open-ended wh- questions designed to elicit details often missing from children’s narratives. Conversely, we show that recognition questions (including yes/no and forced-choice questions) pose risks of impairing children’s productivity and accuracy, and discuss how future research can find ways of replacing recognition questions with open-ended wh- questions.

Pichler, A. S., Sharman, S. J., Powell, M., Westera, N., & Goodman-Delahunty, J. (2020). Association between interview quality and child sexual abuse trial outcome. *Journal of Family Violence*, 35, 395–403. DOI:10.1007/s10896-019-00051-5

Child witness interviews frequently comprise the central evidence in child sexual assault prosecutions. The aim of the present study was to explore the association between interview quality, interview inconsistencies raised during cross-examination, and trial outcome, while taking into account the strength of the prosecution case. Sixty-nine interviews of child complainants (56 female; aged 6–18 years) were coded for quality (proportion of open-ended questions, interviewer compliance with best-practice, and evidential categories sought). Corresponding trial transcripts were coded for indicators of case strength including number of victims and corroborating evidence (e.g., DNA, eyewitnesses). Cross-examination transcripts were coded for inconsistencies within the child witness interview or between this interview and another statement by the same complainant. After controlling for number of victims and corroborative evidence, interview quality was not associated with trial outcomes. The strongest predictor of verdict was the number of victims: the greater the number of victims, the more likely the defendant was to be convicted of at least one count. The number of inconsistencies was marginally associated with outcome: the greater the number of inconsistencies, the more likely the defendant was to be acquitted. The findings highlight the importance of examining the trial as a whole when investigating the relationship between the child witness interviews and the legal process. Future studies are necessary to replicate these findings, ideally with interviews ranging in quality on key indicators of best-practice interviewing.

Davies J. (2019). [Developing a model for evidence-based clinical forensic interviewing](#). *International Journal of Forensic Mental Health*, 18(1), 3-11.
DOI:10.1080/14999013.2018.1508096

Much of the work undertaken in forensic settings, such as diagnosis, formulation, and judgements about treatment and placement are based on information gathered through clinical forensic interviewing. Despite this, the evidence base on which clinical forensic interviewing is founded is extremely limited. This article is divided into two sections. The first section examines the nature of interviewing and introduces this area of practice. Drawing on some of the research undertaken with specific forms of interview such as those for diagnosis and investigative purposes allows factors such as the evidence concerning interview quality, interview effectiveness, underlying competencies and methods for skills training to be outlined. The second part of the article, which provides the main focus, describes a forensic clinical interview framework which seeks to draw together a broad range of considerations and areas for research in relation to the clinical forensic interview. This framework is explicitly intended to provoke and guide practitioners and researchers in the pursuit of evidence-based interviewing.

Lamb, M. E., Brown, D. A., Hershkowitz, I., Orbach, Y., & Esplin, P. W. (2018). *Tell me what happened: Questioning children about abuse* (2nd ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.

Saywitz, K.J., Lyon, T. D., & Goodman, G.S. (2018). Interviewing children. In J. B. Kilka & J. R. Conte (Eds.), *The APSAC handbook on child maltreatment* (4th ed., pp. 310-329). Sage.

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

Saywitz, K. J., Larson, R. P., Hobbs, S. D., & Wells, C. R. (2015). Developing rapport with children in forensic interviews: Systematic review of experimental research. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 33(4), 372–389. DOI:10.1002/bsl.2186

The vast majority of guidelines recommend that developing rapport with children is essential for successful forensic child interviewing; however, the question remains as to whether there is a sufficient body of scientific research to generate evidence-based guidelines for developing rapport with children in legal contexts. To answer this question, we conducted a systematic review of the literature to identify experimental studies of the effects of rapport-building methods on the reliability of children's reports. Independent raters applied 12 exclusion criteria to the 2,761 potentially relevant articles located by electronic and hand searches of the literature. Experimental studies were few. Although studies to date are a beginning, the overall scientific base is weak regarding even basic issues such as how to best define rapport and the efficacy of common rapport-building techniques. This systematic review highlights what we know, what we do not know, and how much more we need to know to create evidence-based best practice. Recommendations for reshaping the research agenda are discussed.

Brubacher, S. P., Malloy, L. C., Lamb, M. E., & Roberts, K. P. (2013). How do interviewers and children discuss individual occurrences of alleged repeated abuse in forensic interviews?. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 27(4), 443–450. DOI:10.1002/acp.2920

Police interviews (n = 97) with 5- to 13-year-olds alleging multiple incidents of sexual abuse were examined to determine how interviewers elicited and children recounted specific instance of abuse. Coders assessed the labels for individual occurrences that arose in interviews, recording who generated them, how they were used and other devices to aid particularisation such as the use of episodic and generic language. Interviewers used significantly more temporal labels than did children. With age, children were more likely to generate labels themselves, and most children generated at least one label. In 66% of the cases, interviewers ignored or replaced children's labels, and when

they did so, children reported proportionately fewer episodic details. Children were highly responsive to the interviewers' language style. Results indicate that appropriately trained interviewers can help children of all ages to provide the specific details often necessary to ensure successful prosecution. Copyright © 2013 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd

Brubacher, S. P., & La Rooy, D. (2013). Witness recall across repeated interviews in a case of repeated abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 38(2), 202–211.
DOI:10.1016/j.chiabu.2013.06.010

In this illustrative case study we examine the three forensic interviews of a girl who experienced repeated sexual abuse from ages 7 to 11. She disclosed the abuse after watching a serialized television show that contained a storyline similar to her own experience. This triggered an investigation that ended in successful prosecution of the offender. Because this case involved abuse that was repeated on a weekly basis for 4 years we thus investigated the degree to which the child's narrative reflected specific episodes or generic accounts, and both the interviewer's and child's attempts to elicit and provide, respectively, specific details across the 3 interviews collected in a one month period. Across the 3 interviews, the child's account was largely generic, yet on a number of occasions she provided details specific to individual incidents (episodic leads) that could have been probed further. As predicted: earlier interviews were characterized more by episodic than generic prompts and the reverse was true for the third interview; the child often responded using the same style of language (episodic or generic) as the interviewer; and open questions yielded narrative information. We discuss the importance of adopting children's words to specify occurrences, and the potential benefits of permitting generic recall in investigative interviews on children's ability to provide episodic leads. Despite the fact that the testimony was characterized by generic information about what usually happened, rather than specific episodic details about individual occurrences, this case resulted in successful prosecution.

Macleod, E., Gross, J., & Hayne, H. (2013). The clinical and forensic value of information that children report while drawing. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 27(5), 564-573. DOI:10.1002/acp.2936

Drawing is commonly used in clinical interviews to help children talk about their experiences. Research has shown that drawing increases the amount of information that children report about some emotional experiences. Here, we aimed to investigate the use of drawing in interviews about other, clinically relevant emotions, and the clinical and forensic relevance of the information that children report while drawing. To do this, sixty 5- to 6- and 11- to 12-year-olds drew and told, or told, about prior experiences that had made them feel happy, angry, proud (confident), and worried (nervous). For all emotions, drawing and telling increased the amount of forensically relevant, episodic details (e.g., who was there and what happened) that children reported relative to telling alone. In contrast, drawing and telling did not alter the amount of information that children reported about clinically relevant details (e.g., thoughts and emotions). We discuss the implications of these findings for using drawing in interviews with children.

Poole, D. A., & Dickinson, J. J. (2013). Comfort drawing during investigative interviews: Evidence of the safety of a popular practice. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 38(2), 192-201. DOI:10.1016/j.chiabu.2013.04.012

This study evaluated the impact of comfort drawing (allowing children to draw during interviews) on the quality of children's eyewitness reports. Children ($N = 219$, 5 to 12 years) who had participated in an earlier memory study returned 1 or 2 years later, experienced a new event, and described these events during phased, investigative-style interviews. Interviewers delivered the same prompts to children in the no drawing and drawing conditions but provided paper and markers in the drawing condition, invited these children to draw, and periodically asked if they would like to make another picture. Most children in the drawing condition were interested in using the materials, and measures of eyewitness performance were sensitive to differences in cognitive ability (i.e., age) and

task difficulty (i.e., delay between the remote event and interview). Comfort drawing had no overall impact as evidenced by nonsignificant main effects of condition across 20 performance measures, although more of the younger children reported experienced touching in the drawing than no drawing condition. The children successfully divided attention between voluntary drawing and conversations about past events. Importantly, comfort drawing did not impair the amount of information recalled, the accuracy of children's answers, or even the extent to which interviewers needed to prompt for answers. Due to the large number of analyses, the benefit of drawing for younger, touched children requires replication. Comfort drawing poses no documented risks for typically-developing school-aged children, but the practice remains untested for younger children and those with cognitive impairments.

American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (2012). [*Practice guidelines: Forensic interviewing in cases of suspected child abuse.*](#)

Brubacher, S. P., Roberts, K. P., & Powell, M. (2012). [*Retrieval of episodic versus generic information: Does the order of recall affect the amount and accuracy of details reported by children about repeated events?*](#) *Developmental Psychology*, 48(1), 111-122. DOI:10.1037/a0025864

Children (N = 157) 4 to 8 years old participated 1 time (single) or 4 times (repeated) in an interactive event. Across each condition, half were questioned a week later about the only or a specific occurrence of the event (depth first) and then about what usually happens. Half were prompted in the reverse order (breadth first). Children with repeated experience who first were asked about what usually happens reported more event-related information overall than those asked about an occurrence first. All children used episodic language when describing an occurrence; however, children with repeated-event experience used episodic language less often when describing what usually happens than did those with a single experience. Accuracy rates did not differ between conditions. Implications for theories of repeated-event memory are discussed.

Hershkowitz, I., Lamb, M. E., Orbach, Y., Katz, C., & Horowitz, D. (2012). The development of communicative and narrative skills among preschoolers: Lessons from forensic interviews about child abuse. *Child Development*, 83(2), 611-622. DOI:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2011.01704.x

This study examined age differences in 299 preschoolers' responses to investigative interviewers' questions exploring the suspected occurrence of child abuse. Analyses focused on the children's tendencies to respond (a) at all, (b) appropriately to the issue raised by the investigator, and (c) informatively, providing previously undisclosed information. Linear developmental trends characterized all types of responding. When the types of prompts were considered, 3- to 4-year-olds responded slightly more informatively to specific (directive) recall prompts than to open-ended prompts whereas children aged 5 and older were more responsive to open-ended recall prompts. The findings suggest that even 3-year-olds can provide information about experienced events when recall processes are activated, although the ability to provide narrative responses to open-ended recall prompts only becomes reliable later in development.

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 policymakers 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.

Lamb, M., La Rooy, D. J., Malloy, C., & Katz, C. (Eds.), (2011). *Children's testimony: A handbook of psychological research and forensic practice*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Smith, K., & Milne, R. (2011). Planning the interview. In M. E. Lamb, D. J. La Rooy, L. C. Malloy, & C. Katz (Eds.), *Children's testimony: A handbook of psychological research and forensic practice* (2nd ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.

Cordisco Steele, L., & National Children's Advocacy Center. (2010). [Narrative practice \(What is it and why is it Important?\): A Research-to-Practice summary](#). National Children's Advocacy Center.

Hershkowitz, I. (2009). Socioemotional factors in child sexual abuse investigations. *Child Maltreatment*, 14(2), 172-181. DOI:10.1177/1077559508326224

Two socioemotional factors were explored in association with children's production of forensic information during sexual abuse investigations: rapport building and interviewer's support. The study tested to what extent (a) the length and questioning style in the rapport-building session and (b) the level of support interviewers provided to the children, were associated with the amount of forensic details children provided in their investigation. These associations were explored for more talkative and less talkative children as well as for children of two age groups (4-6 and 7-9 years). A total of 71 forensic interviews of alleged victims of child sexual abuse were subject to a detailed psycholinguistic analysis. Results suggest that richer information in the child's responses is associated with a short and open style rapport-building session as well as with a higher level of interviewer's support. This association is especially marked for less talkative children who might be in special need of support and for whom the rapport with the interviewer might be more meaningful.

Saywitz, K. J., & Camparo, L. B. (2009). Contemporary child forensic interviewing: Evolving consensus and innovation over twenty-five years. In B. L. Bottoms, C. J. Najdowski, & G. S. Goodman (Eds.), *Children as victims, witnesses, and offenders* (pp. 102–127). The Guilford Press.

Lyon, T. D., Malloy, L. C., Quas, J. A., & Talwar, V. A. (2008). [Coaching, truth induction, and young maltreated children's false allegations and false denials](#). *Child Development*, 79(4), 914–929. DOI:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2008.01167.x

This study examined the effects of coaching (encouragement and rehearsal of false reports) and truth induction (a child-friendly version of the oath or general reassurance about the consequences of disclosure) on 4- to 7-year-old maltreated children's reports ($N = 198$). Children were questioned using free recall, repeated yes – no questions, and highly suggestive suppositional questions. Coaching impaired children's accuracy. For free-recall and repeated yes – no questions, the oath exhibited some positive effects, but this effect diminished in the face of highly suggestive questions. Reassurance had few positive effects and no ill effects. Neither age nor understanding of the meaning and negative consequences of lying consistently predicted accuracy. The results support the utility of truth induction in enhancing the accuracy of child witnesses' reports.

Davis, S. L., & Bottoms, B. L. (2002). The effects of social support on the accuracy of children's reports: Implications for the forensic interview. In M. L. Eisen, J. A. Quas, & G. S. Goodman (Eds.), *Memory and suggestibility in the forensic interview* (pp. 437–458). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Haynes, R. B., Devereaux, P. J., & Guyatt, G. H. (2002). [Physicians' and patients' choices in evidence based practice: Evidence does not make decisions, people do](#). *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, 324(7350), 1350. DOI:10.1136/bmj.324.7350.1350

Talwar, V., Lee, K., Bala, N., & Lindsay, R. C. L. (2002). Children's conceptual knowledge of lying and its relation to their actual behaviors: Implications for court competence examinations. *Law and Human Behavior*, 26(4), 395-415.
DOI:10.1023/A:1016379104959

Child witnesses must undergo a competence examination in which they must show appropriate conceptual understanding of lying and truth-telling, and promise to tell the truth. Three experiments ($Ns = 123, 103, 177$) were conducted to address the assumptions underlying the court competence examination that (1) children who understand lying and its moral implications are less likely to lie and (2) discussing the conceptual issues concerning lying and having children promising to tell the truth promotes truth-telling. Both measures of lying and understanding of truth- and lie-telling were obtained from children between 3 and 7 years of age. Most children demonstrated appropriate conceptual knowledge of lying and truth-telling and the obligation to tell the truth, but many of the same children lied to conceal their own transgression. Promising to tell the truth significantly reduced lying. Implications for legal systems are discussed.

Peterson, C., Dowden, C., & Tobin, J. (1999). Interviewing preschoolers: Comparisons of yes/no and wh-questions. *Law and Human Behavior*, 23(5), 539-555.
DOI:10.1023/A:1022396112719

This study investigated the influence of question format on preschool-aged children's errors, their response accuracy, and their tendency to say "I don't know" when given non-misleading questions in a neutral, unbiased context. Children (3 to 5 years old) participated in a craft-making session that included a staged "accident" with two experimenters differing in gender and appearance; the environment also had several distinctive features. One week later children were interviewed about actions, participants, and environment; questions were yes/no format with the veridical response "yes" ("yes" questions), yes/no format with the veridical response "no" ("no" questions), and specific wh- format questions. Question format substantially influenced children's responses: they were most likely to make errors if asked "no" questions, and were unlikely to answer either

yes/no question with "I don't know." In contrast, children spontaneously and frequently said "I don't know" to wh- questions about content they did not recall (environment), but not about content that was well recalled (actions). Implications of question format for reliability of eyewitness testimony by preschoolers are discussed.

Sternberg, K. J., Lamb, M. E., Hershkowitz, I., Yudilevitch, L., Orbach, Y., Esplin, P. W., & Hovav, M. (1997). Effects of introductory style on children's abilities to describe experiences of sexual abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 21(11), 1133-1146.
DOI:10.1016/S0145-2134(97)00071-9

The goal of this study was to evaluate the relative effectiveness of two rapport-building techniques for eliciting information from children who made allegations of sexual abuse. Fourteen interviewers conducted 51 investigations of child sexual abuse with children ranging from 4.5 to 12.9 years of age. In 25 of the investigations, interviewers used a script including many open-ended utterances to establish rapport, whereas in 26 of the investigations the same interviewers used a rapport-building script involving many direct questions. Both rapport-building scripts took about 7 minutes to complete. All children were asked the same open-ended question to initiate the substantive phase of the interview. Children who had been trained in the open-ended condition provided 2 1/2 times as many details and words in response to the first substantive utterance as did children in the direct introduction condition. Children in the open-ended condition continued to respond more informatively to open-ended utterances in the later (unscripted) portion of the interview. Two-thirds of the children mentioned the core details of the incident in their responses to the first substantive utterance and a further 20% mentioned core details more vaguely. These results demonstrate that children respond more informatively to an open-ended invitation when they have previously been trained to answer such questions rather than more focused questions. These results demonstrate the sensitivity of children to the goals and expectations of forensic interviewers. Structured interview protocols also increase the amount of information provided by young interviewees.

Cognitive Development and Language

Wylie, B. E., Stolzenberg, S. N., & Evans, A. D. (2024). Describing coercion in the courtroom: The influence of language and maltreatment severity on jurors' perceptions of child witnesses. *Child Maltreatment*, 29(4), 648–660.
DOI:10.1177/10775595231210015

Regardless of compliance to coercion by an alleged perpetrator, child maltreatment is abuse in any form. However, the extent to which coercion is described as an obligation (mandatory compliance) or permission (optional compliance) is legally relevant. The present investigation examined how attorneys question children about coercion and how children describe coercion in courtroom investigations of alleged child sexual abuse, and whether such language influences jurors' perceptions of children's testimony. Study 1 assessed 64 transcripts of children's testimonies and revealed that both attorneys and children use coercive language. Problematically, terms of permission were used when describing sexual abuse, potentially implying compliance was optional. Study 2 presented 160 adults with transcript excerpts, varied by coercive language (obligation or permission) and maltreatment type (sexual abuse or punishment). Coercive language influenced perceptions of coercion and whether the adult was to blame. Maltreatment type influenced perceptions of severity, credibility, and verdict. Overall, coercive language and maltreatment type influence perceptions of how the event unfolded.

National Children's Advocacy Center. (2016). [*Getting the details: Gathering episodic information in cases of repeated abuse: A Research-to-Practice summary*](#).

Lamb, M. E., Malloy, L. C., Hershkowitz, I., & La Rooy, D. (2015). Children and the law. In M. E. Lamb (Vol. ed.), R. M. Lerner (Series ed.), *Handbook of child psychology and developmental science: Social, emotional, and personality development* (Vol. 3, 7th ed.). Wiley.

Roberts, K. P., Brubacher, S. P., Drohan-Jennings, D., Glisic, U., Powell, M. B., & Friedman, W. J. (2015). Developmental differences in the ability to provide temporal information about repeated events. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 29*(3), 407-417.
DOI:10.1002/acp.3118

Children (n = 372) aged 4–8 years participated in one or four occurrences of a similar event and were interviewed 1 week later. Compared with 85% of children who participated once, less than 25% with repeated experience gave the exact number of times they participated, although all knew they participated more than once. Children with repeated experience were asked additional temporal questions, and there were clear developmental differences. Older children were more able than younger children to judge relative order and temporal position of the four occurrences. They also demonstrated improved temporal memory for the first and last relative to the middle occurrences, while younger children did so only for the first. This is the first systematic demonstration of children's memory for temporal information after a repeated event. We discuss implications for theories of temporal memory development and the practical implications of asking children to provide temporal information.

Tener, D., Walsh, W. A., Jones, L. M., & Kinnish, K. (2014). "It all depends on the guy and the girl": A qualitative study of youth experiences with statutory victimization relationships. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 23*(8), 935-956.
DOI:10.1080/10538712.2014.960635

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine youths' perceptions of statutory victimization relationships and youths' experience interacting with professionals. In-person qualitative interviews were conducted with 22 youths identified as statutory rape victims by two child advocacy centers. Using grounded theory, interviews were coded thematically using constant comparison analysis. The discussion of the relationship dynamics suggested a great deal of variation. Some youths described the relationships in exploitive terms. However, more typically, the interviewed youth described the relationship as reciprocal, even some time after it had ended. The professional

intervention often resulted in feelings of helplessness for the youth. The results suggest creative and flexible protocols are needed for handling these cases that recognize adolescents' developing autonomy.

Walker, Anne G. (2013). *Handbook on questioning children: A linguistic perspective*. American Bar Association.

Woolley, J. D., & Ghossainy, M. E. (2013). [Revisiting the fantasy–reality distinction: Children as naïve skeptics](#). *Child Development*, 84(5), 1496–1510. DOI:10.1111/cdev.12081

Far from being the uncritical believers young children have been portrayed as, children often exhibit skepticism toward the reality status of novel entities and events. This paper reviews research on children's reality status judgments, testimony use, understanding of possibility, and religious cognition. When viewed from this new perspective it becomes apparent that, when assessing reality status, children are as likely to doubt as they are to believe. It is suggested that immature metacognitive abilities are at the root of children's skepticism, specifically that an insufficient ability to evaluate the scope and relevance of one's knowledge leads to an over-reliance on it in evaluating reality status. With development comes increasing ability to utilize a wider range of sources to inform reality status judgments.

Hershkowitz, R., Lamb, M. E., Orbach, Y., Katz, C., & Horowitz, D. (2012). The development of communicative skills among preschoolers: Lessons from forensic interviews about child abuse. *Child Development*, 83(2), 611–622. DOI:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2011.01704.x

This study examined age differences in 299 preschoolers' responses to investigative interviewers' questions exploring the suspected occurrence of child abuse. Analyses focused on the children's tendencies to respond (a) at all, (b) appropriately to the issue

raised by the investigator, and (c) informatively, providing previously undisclosed information. Linear developmental trends characterized all types of responding. When the types of prompts were considered, 3- to 4-year-olds responded slightly more informatively to specific (directive) recall prompts than to open-ended prompts whereas children aged 5 and older were more responsive to open-ended recall prompts. The findings suggest that even 3-year-olds can provide information about experienced events when recall processes are activated, although the ability to provide narrative responses to open-ended recall prompts only becomes reliable later in development.

Wandrey, L., Lyon, T. D., Quas, J. A., & Friedman, W. F. (2012). [Maltreated children's ability to estimate temporal location and numerosity of placement changes and court visits](#). *Psychology, Public Policy & Law*, 18(1), 79-104. DOI:10.1037/a0024812

Research examining children's temporal knowledge has tended to utilize brief temporal intervals and singular, neutral events, and is not readily generalizable to legal settings in which maltreated children are asked temporal questions about salient, repeated abuse that often occurred in the distant past. To understand how well maltreated children can describe temporal location and numerosity of documented, personal experiences, we assessed 167 6- to 10-year-old maltreated children's temporal memory for changes in their living arrangements and prior visits to court. Small percentages of children were capable of providing exact temporal location information (age, month, or season) regarding their first or last placement or court experience, or numerosities for placements or court visits. Greater knowledge of current temporal locations did not predict better performance. However, older children's performance for several temporal judgments was better than chance, and their reports were not largely discrepant from the truth. Findings suggest caution when questioning maltreated children about when and how many times prior events occurred.

Ahern, E. C., Lyon, T. D., & Quas, J. A. (2011). [Young children's emerging ability to make false statements](#). *Developmental Psychology*, 47(1), 61–66. DOI:10.1037/a0021272

This study examined the origins of children’s ability to make consciously false statements, a necessary component of lying. Children 2 to 5 years of age were rewarded for claiming that they saw a picture of a bird when viewing pictures of fish. They were asked outcome questions (“Do you win/lose?”), recognition questions (“Do you have a bird/fish?”), and recall questions (“What do you have?”), which were hypothesized to vary in difficulty depending on the need for consciousness of falsity (less for outcome questions) and self-generation of an appropriate response (more for recall questions). The youngest children (2½ to 3½ years old) were above chance on outcome questions, but it was not until age 3½ that children performed above chance on recognition questions or were capable of maintaining false claims across question types. Findings have implications for understanding the emergence of deception in young children.

Davies, D. (2011). *Child development: A practitioner’s guide* (3rd ed.). Guilford Press.

Lamb, M. E., Malloy, L. C., & La Rooy, D. J. (2011). Setting realistic expectations: Developmental characteristics, capacities and limitations. In M. E. Lamb, D. J. La Rooy, L. C. Malloy, & C. Katz (Eds.), *Children’s testimony: A handbook of psychological research and forensic practice*, (2nd ed., pp.15–48). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

La Rooy, D. J., Malloy, L. C., & Lamb, M. E. (2011). Assessing the competency of child witnesses: Best practice informed by psychology and law. In M. E. Lamb, D. J. La Rooy, L. C. Malloy, & C. Katz (Eds.), *Children’s testimony: A handbook of psychological research and forensic practice*, (2nd ed., pp. 49–68). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

National Institute of Mental Health (2011). [*The teen brain: Still under construction*](#).

Carrick, N., Quas, J. A., & Lyon, T. (2010). [*Maltreated and nonmaltreated children's evaluations of emotional fantasy*](#). *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 34(2), 129–134. DOI:10.1016/j.chiabu.2009.02.009

Leander, L., Christianson, S. A., & Granhag, P. A. (2008). Internet-initiated sexual abuse: Adolescent victim's reports about on- and off-line sexual activities. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 22(9), 1260–1274. DOI:10.1002/acp.1433

The purpose of the present study was to investigate how adolescent girls, who had been sexually (*on-* and *off-*line) deceived and abused by an Internet hebephile, reported about these acts. As we had access to documentation of 68 girls' conversations (i.e. chat logs) and involvement with the perpetrator, we were able to gauge what the victims reported during the police interview against this detailed documentation. In contrast with findings from previous research, the majority of victims reported about the *off-*line activities (real-life meetings) with the perpetrator. However, the victims omitted and/or denied more of the *on-*line activities, specifically the more severe sexual *on-*line acts (sending nude photos and participating in sexual web shows). There is probably a gap between what the victims reported and what they presumably remembered about the *on-*line activities. Factors that might have affected the victims' pattern of reports are discussed. Copyright © 2008 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Almerigogna, J., Ost, J., Bull, R., & Akehurst, L. (2007). A state of high anxiety: How non supportive interviewers can increase the suggestibility of child witnesses. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 21(7), 963–974. DOI:10.1002/acp.1311

The present study examined the effects of state and trait anxiety on 8–11 years old children's susceptibility to misleading post-event information. Participants' state and trait anxiety were measured, after which they watched an extract from a children's movie.

They were then individually interviewed using either a supportive or a non-supportive style. During the interviews, the children were asked 14 questions about the movie, seven of which were control and seven contained misleading information. After the interview, their state anxiety was measured again. Results showed that participants interviewed in a non-supportive style were more likely to provide incorrect answers to misleading questions. Furthermore, participants who scored highly on both trait and post-interview state anxiety measures more often responded incorrectly to misleading questions. Also, pre-to post-interview changes in state anxiety were correlated with more incorrect responses to misleading questions. Copyright © 2006 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Faller, K. C. (2007). Coaching children about sexual abuse: A pilot study of professionals' perceptions. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 31(9), 947-959.
DOI:10.1016/j.chiabu.2007.05.004

Orbach, Y., & Lamb, M. E. (2007). Young children's references to temporal attributes of allegedly experienced events in the course of forensic interviews. *Child Development*, 78(4), 1100-1120. DOI:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2007.01055.x

Developmental differences in references to temporal attributes of allegedly experienced events were examined in 250 forensic interviews of 4- to 10-year-old alleged victims of sexual abuse. Children's ages, the specific temporal attributes referenced, and the types of memory tapped by the interviewers' questions significantly affected the quantity and quality of temporal references produced. The findings documented age-related increases in 4- to 10-year-olds' references to temporal attributes, using the appropriate relational terminology, both spontaneously and in response to temporal requests. More references to temporal attributes were elicited from recall than from recognition memory, highlighting spontaneous reporting capabilities. Implications for theories concerning the developing understanding of temporal concepts and for the design of effective, age-appropriate, forensic interview techniques are discussed.

Friedman, W. J., & Lyon, T. D. (2005). Development of temporal-reconstructive abilities. *Child Development, 76*(6), 1202-1216. DOI:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2005.00844.x-ii

In a study of the ability to reconstruct the times of past events, 86 children from 4 to 13 years recalled the times of 2 in-class demonstrations that had occurred 3 months earlier and judged the times of hypothetical events. Many of the abilities needed to reconstruct the times of events were present by 6 years, including the capacity to interpret many temporally relevant cues, but there were substantial changes well into middle childhood in the availability of temporally useful episodic information. Children were poor at remembering the events' proximity or order with respect to a major holiday, but the order of the 2 target events was well recalled by 6 years.

Imhoff, M. C., & Baker-Ward, L. (1999). Preschoolers' suggestibility: Effects of developmentally appropriate language and interviewer supportiveness. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 20*(3), 407-429. DOI:10.1016/S0193-3973(99)00022-2

Three- and four-year-old children were interviewed about a personally experienced event after a 2-week delay. Children were interviewed with one of four alternative interview protocols that differed with regard to degree of interviewer support and language appropriateness. Accuracy of responses to direct questions concerning event features was scored, and answers to misleading questions were coded as an indicator of suggestibility. Individual difference measures of language ability, temperament, task engagement, and parenting attitudes were also collected. The results indicate that interviewers can increase young preschoolers' resistance to suggestibility by using language that is easily comprehensible to young children. Language appropriateness was not as important for the older children and the degree of support did not influence suggestibility for either the younger or the older children. Furthermore, individual difference measures were not related to accuracy for direct questions or suggestibility.

Peterson, C., Dowden, C., & Tobin, J. (1999). Interviewing preschoolers: Comparisons of yes/no and wh- questions. *Law and Human Behavior*, 23(5), 539-555.
DOI:10.1023/A:1022396112719

This study investigated the influence of question format on preschool-aged children's errors, their response accuracy, and their tendency to say "I don't know" when given non-misleading questions in a neutral, unbiased context. Children (3 to 5 years old) participated in a craft-making session that included a staged "accident" with two experimenters differing in gender and appearance, the environment also had several distinctive features. One week later children were interviewed about actions, participants, and environment; questions were yes/no format with the veridical response "yes" ("yes" questions), yes/no format with the veridical response "no" ("no" questions), and specific wh- format questions. Question format substantially influenced children's responses: they were most likely to make errors if asked "no" questions, and were unlikely to answer either yes/no question with "I don't know." In contrast, children spontaneously and frequently said "I don't know" to wh- questions about content they did not recall (environment), but not about content that was well recalled (actions). Implications of question format for reliability of eyewitness testimony by preschoolers are discussed.

Defensible Practice and Testimony

Szojka, Z. A., Moussavi, N., Burditt, C., & Lyon, T. D. (2023). [Attorneys' questions and children's responses referring to the nature of sexual touch in child sexual abuse trials](#). *Child Maltreatment*, 28(3), 438–449. DOI:10.1177/10775595231161033

Eliciting clear descriptions of sexual body parts and abusive touch in child sexual abuse trials is challenging because of children's immaturity and embarrassment. This study examined references to sexual body part knowledge and sexual touch in attorneys' questions and 5- to 10-year-old children's responses ($N = 2,247$) in 113 child sexual abuse trials. Regardless of children's age, attorneys and children primarily used unclear colloquialisms to refer to sexual body parts. Questions asking children to name sexual body parts elicited more uninformative responses than questions about the function of sexual body parts. In turn, questions about the function of sexual body parts were more likely to increase the specificity of body part identifications than questions about the location of sexual body parts. Attorneys predominantly used option-posing (yes-no and forced choice) questions to ask about sexual body part knowledge, the location of touch, the method or manner of touching, skin-to-skin contact, penetration, and how the touching felt. Generally, wh- questions were no more likely than option-posing questions to elicit uninformative responses, and consistently elicited more child-generated information. The results question the legal assumption that children's uninformative responses when testifying about sexual abuse should be overcome by asking option-posing questions.

Principe, G. F., & London, K. (2022). How parents can shape what children remember: Implications for the testimony of young witnesses. *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition*, 11(3), 289–302. DOI:10.1037/mac0000059

Forensic investigations involving children carry heavy consequences and often present immense challenges. Most child maltreatment allegations first occur in an informal setting, where young witnesses discuss legally relevant information with parents before

official interviews. After decades of developmental research on how various qualities of formal interviews can shape children's forensic reports, a growing body of work examining parent-child memory-sharing exchanges demonstrates that informal conversations with others outside of investigative interviews are a powerful source of mnemonic influence. Not only can suggestions offered by parents intrude into children's later independent accounts, they also can lead children to make novel and elaborate reports of nonoccurring events. Despite the potency of parental conversations on children's recollections, children typically fail to recognize parents as the source of memory errors. We offer suggestions for future research and legal practice.

Poole, D. A., & Dickinson, J. J. (2011). Evidence supporting restrictions on uses of body diagrams in forensic interviews. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 35(9), 659-669.
DOI: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.

Wright, D. B., Hanoteau, F., Parkinson, C., & Tatham, A. (2010). Perceptions about memory reliability and honesty for children of 3 to 18 years old. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 15(2), 195–207. DOI:10.1348/135532508X400347

To examine the relationship between perceived memory characteristics and age. Participants rated the reliability and honesty of children's memory for one of two events. The children's ages varied from 3- to 18-years-old. Participants (N = 612) believed that memory reliability increased with age, but the observed effect was non-linear. Perceived reliability increased rapidly for children from 3 to 6 years. After this, male participants believed memory reliability increased but less than in early childhood. Female participants did not think memory reliability increased in middle childhood and adolescence. Further effects involving type of event, age of participant, and the gender of the eyewitness were observed for honesty and the relationship between these attributes and beliefs in guilt. These findings stress the need for more research on development trends of memory in middle childhood and adolescence.

Blandón-Gitlin, I., & Pezdek, K. (2009). Children's memory in forensic contexts. In B. L. Bottoms, C. J. Najdowski, & G. S. Goodman (Eds.), *Children as victims, witnesses, and offenders* (pp. 57–80). The Guilford Press.

Bruck, M., & Ceci, S. J. (2009). Reliability of child witnesses' reports. In J. L. Skeem, K. S. Douglas, & S. O. Lilienfeld (Eds.), *Psychological science in the courtroom* (pp. 149–171). The Guilford Press.

London, K., Bruck, M., Wright, D. B., & Ceci, S. J. (2008). Review of the contemporary literature on how children report sexual abuse to others: Findings, methodological issues, and implications for forensic interviewers. *Memory, 16*(1), 29–47. DOI:10.1080/09658210701725732

Methods used during forensic interviews with children are driven by beliefs about how children recall and report child sexual abuse (CSA) to others. Summit (1983) proposed a theory (*Child Sexual Abuse Accommodation Syndrome*) contending that, due to the specific traumatic characteristics of CSA, children will often delay disclosing abuse or altogether fail to disclose during childhood, deny abuse when asked, and often recant abuse allegations. His theory has had a tremendous impact on the field of CSA forensic evaluations, despite its dearth of empirical support. In this paper, we review and critique the contemporary literature from two main sources: retrospective accounts from adults reporting CSA experiences and studies of children undergoing forensic evaluation for CSA. We conclude that data support the notion that children often delay abuse disclosure, but that among valid abuse cases undergoing forensic evaluation, denial and recantation are not common. Methodological and implications are discussed.

Lamb, M. E., Orbach, Y., Hershkowitz, I., Esplin, P. W., & Horowitz, D. (2007). [A structured forensic interview protocol improves the quality and informativeness of investigative interviews with children: A review of research using the NICHD Investigative Interview Protocol](#). *Child Abuse & Neglect, 31*(11–12), 1201–1231. DOI:10.1016/j.chiabu.2007.03.021

To show how the results of research on children's memory, communicative skills, social knowledge, and social tendencies can be translated into guidelines that improve the quality of forensic interviews of children. We review studies designed to evaluate children's capacities as witnesses, explain the development of the structured NICHD Investigative Interview Protocol, and discuss studies designed to assess whether use of the Protocol enhances the quality of investigative interviews. Controlled studies have

repeatedly shown that the quality of interviewing reliably and dramatically improves when interviewers employ the NICHD Protocol. No other technique has been proven to be similarly effective. Use of the structured NICHD Protocol improves the quality of information obtained from alleged victims by investigators, thereby increasing the likelihood that interventions will be appropriate.

Quas, J. A., Davis, E. L., Goodman, G. S., & Myers, J. E. (2007). [Repeated questions, deception, and children's true and false reports of body touch](#). *Child Maltreatment*, 12(1), 60–67. DOI:10.1177/1077559506296141

Four- to 7-year-olds' ability to answer repeated questions about body touch either honestly or dishonestly was examined. Children experienced a play event, during which one third of the children were touched innocuously. Two weeks later, they returned for a memory interview. Some children who had not been touched were instructed to lie during the interview and say that they had been touched. Children so instructed were consistent in maintaining the lie but performed poorly when answering repeated questions unrelated to the lie. Children who were not touched and told the truth were accurate when answering repeated questions. Of note, children who had been touched and told the truth were the most inconsistent. Results call into question the common assumption that consistency is a useful indicator of veracity in children's eyewitness accounts.

London, K., Bruck, M., Ceci, S. J., & Shuman, D. W. (2005). Disclosure of child sexual abuse: What does the research tell us about the ways that children tell?. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 11(1), 194–226. DOI:10.1037/1076-8971.11.1.194

The empirical basis for the child sexual abuse accommodation syndrome (CSAAS), a theoretical model that posits that sexually abused children frequently display secrecy, tentative disclosures, and retractions of abuse statements was reviewed. Two data sources were evaluated: retrospective studies of adults' reports of having been abused

as children and concurrent or chart-review studies of children undergoing evaluation or treatment for sexual abuse. The evidence indicates that the majority of abused children do not reveal abuse during childhood. However, the evidence fails to support the notion that denials, tentative disclosures, and recantations characterize the disclosure patterns of children with validated histories of sexual abuse. These results are discussed in terms of their implications governing the admissibility of expert testimony on CSAAS.

Melnik, L., & Bruck, M. (2004). Timing moderates the effects of repeated suggestive interviewing on children's eyewitness memory. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 18(5), 613–631. DOI:10.1002/acp.1013

The relative role of the timing and repetition of misinformation on the accuracy of children's recall was examined in two experiments. Kindergarten children participated in a magic show and about 40 days later had a memory test. Between the magic show and the memory test, the children were suggestively interviewed either one time in a relatively 'early' interview (temporally closer to the magic show than the memory test) or a relatively 'late' interview (closer to the memory test than the magic show), or in both suggestive interviews. The timing of the suggestive interviewing was manipulated so that the interview was temporally distant from the event or memory test or temporally close to the event or memory test. Repeated interviewing heightened misinformation effects only when the children received the two interview sessions temporally close to the event and memory test. Copyright © 2004 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Pipe, M. E., Lamb, M. E., Orbach, Y., & Esplin, P. W. (2004). Recent research on children's testimony about experienced and witnessed events. *Developmental Review*, 24(4), 440–468. DOI:10.1016/j.dr.2004.08.006

Research on memory development has increasingly moved out of the laboratory and into the real world. Whereas early researchers asked whether confusion and susceptibility to

suggestion made children unreliable witnesses, furthermore, contemporary researchers are addressing a much broader range of questions about children's memory, focusing not only on children's frailties but also on their competencies. In this review, we emphasize work on factors that promote the retrieval and accurate recounting of experienced or witnessed events and the implications of these findings for forensic interview practices. Research shows that children are capable of providing accurate information about their experiences, although their ability to convey the information is affected not only by the qualities of their memories, but also by the types of retrieval mechanisms employed and the quality of the communication between them and their interlocutors. We thus discuss several characteristics of to-be-remembered events that affect memory and are relevant to children's recall in applied settings; retrieval conditions and their effects on the amount and accuracy of the information that children report; and research on investigative interviews conducted in forensic contexts. Because many of the variables that influence memory are age-related, developmental changes in children's ability to accurately report, and recount their experiences are highlighted.

Lyon, T. D. (2002). Applying suggestibility research to the real world: The case of repeated questions. *Law & Contemporary Problems*, 65(1), 97-126.
DOI:10.2307/1192367

Saywitz, K. J., Goodman, G. S., & Lyon, T. D. (2002). Interviewing children in and out of court. In J. E. B. Meyers, L. Berliner, J. Briere, C. T. Hendrix, C. Jenny, & T. A. Reid (Eds.), *The APSAC handbook on child maltreatment* (2nd ed., pp. 349-377). Sage.

Leichtman, M. D., & Ceci, S. J. (1995). The effects of stereotypes and suggestions on preschoolers' reports. *Developmental Psychology*, 31(4), 568-578.
DOI:10.1037/0012-1649.31.4.568

Children's (N = 176) reported memories of a strange man's visit were studied. Three- to 6-year-olds were interviewed repeatedly after the event in one of the following conditions: (a) control, in which no interviews contained suggestive questions; (b) stereotype, in which children were given previsit expectations about the stranger; (c) suggestion, in which interviews contained erroneous suggestions about misdeeds committed by the stranger; and (d) stereotype plus suggestion, in which children were given both pre- and postvisit manipulations. Results from open-ended interviews after 10 weeks indicated that control participants provided accurate reports, stereotypes resulted in a modest number of false reports, and suggestions resulted in a substantial number of false reports. Children in the stereotype-plus-suggestion group made high levels of false reports. All experimental conditions showed dramatic developmental trends favoring older children. (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2012 APA, all rights reserved)

Saywitz, K. J., & Snyder, L. (1993). Improving children's testimony with preparation. In G. S. Goodman, & B. L. Bottoms (Eds.) *Child victims, child witnesses: Understanding and improving testimony* (pp. 117-146). Guilford Press.

Rudy, L., & Goodman, G. S. (1991). Effects of participation on children's reports: Implications for children's testimony. *Developmental Psychology*, 27(4), 527-538.
DOI:10.1037/0012-1649.27.4.527

Effects of participation on children's reports of a real-life event were examined. Same-age pairs of 4- and 7-yr-olds entered a trailer occupied by an unfamiliar man. One child participated in a set of games with the man, and the other sat and watched. 10-22 days later, children were individually questioned about the event. Free recall and answers to specific questions were related to age but unrelated to participation. However,

participation lowered susceptibility to suggestion. Age differences in overall suggestibility were not found, but older compared with younger children were less suggestible about actions that took place. Regardless of age, however, children evidenced few commission errors to false suggestions about actions relevant to child abuse allegations.

Saywitz, K. J., Goodman, G. S., Nicholas, E., & Moan, S. F. (1991). Children's memories of a physical examination involving genital touch: Implications for reports of child sexual abuse. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 59(5), 682-691.

Evaluation of child sexual abuse often necessitates interviewing children about genital touch, yet little scientific research exists on how best to obtain children's reports of genital contact. To examine this issue, 72 5- and 7-yr-old girls experienced a standardized medical checkup. For half of the children, the checkup included a vaginal and anal examination (genital condition); for the other half, the checkup included a scoliosis examination instead (nongenital condition). S's memories were later solicited through free recall, anatomically detailed doll demonstration, and direct and misleading questions. Majority of Ss in the genital condition revealed vaginal and anal contact only when asked directly about it. Ss in the nongenital condition never falsely reported genital touch in free recall or doll demonstration; when asked directly, the false report rate was low. Significant age differences in free recall and doll demonstration, found only in the nongenital condition, implicated socioemotional factors as suppressing the reports of older Ss who experienced genital contact.

Using Experts in Trial: Sexual Abuse and Child Abuse Cases

Denne, E., Stolzenberg, S. N., & Neal, T. M. (2021). [The effects of evidence-based expert testimony on perceptions of child sexual abuse involving recantation](#). *PloS one*, 16(8), e0254961. DOI:10.1371/journal.pone.0254961

Child sexual abuse (CSA) cases involving recantation invoke concerns about children's reliability. Expert testimony can help explain the complexities of these cases. Experts have historically relied on Child Sexual Abuse Accommodation Syndrome (CSAAS), yet this is not science-based. In a CSA case involving recantation, how would evidence-based testimony affect perceptions of child credibility when compared to CSAAS? Across 2 studies, we test the effects of expert testimony based on evidence-based science, nonscientific evidence, and experience-based evidence on outcomes in CSA cases involving recantation. Evidence-based testimony led to higher perceptions of credibility and scientific rigor of the evidence when compared to CSAAS testimony. Evidence-based testimony also led to more guilty verdicts when compared to the control. In sum, jurors had some ability to detect evidence strength, such that evidence-based expert testimony was superior to CSAAS testimony in many respects, and consistently superior to experience-based testimony in these cases.

Lyon, T. D., Williams, S., & Stolzenberg, S. N. (2020). [Understanding expert testimony on child sexual abuse denial after New Jersey v. J.L.G.: Ground truth, disclosure suspicion bias, and disclosure substantiation bias](#). *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 38(6), 630–647. DOI:10.1002/bsl.2490

The New Jersey Supreme Court held in *New Jersey v. J.L.G.* (2018) that experts can no longer explain to juries why sexually abused children might deny abuse. The court was influenced by expert testimony that “methodologically superior” studies find lower rates of denial. Examining the studies in detail, we argue that the expert testimony was flawed due to three problems with using child disclosure studies to estimate the likelihood that abused children are reluctant to disclose abuse: the ground truth problem, disclosure

suspicion bias, and disclosure substantiation bias. Research identifying groups of children whose abuse can be proven without reliance on disclosure reveals that denial of sexual abuse is common among abused children.

Melinder, A., & Magnussen, S. (2015). Psychologists and psychiatrists serving as expert witnesses in court: what do they know about eyewitness memory?. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 21(1), 53–61. DOI:10.1080/1068316X.2014.915324

Expert witnesses have various tasks that frequently include issues of memory. We tested if expert witnesses outperform other practitioners on memory issues of high relevance to clinical practice. We surveyed psychiatrists and psychologists who reported serving as expert witnesses in court ($n = 117$) about their knowledge and beliefs about human memory. The results were compared to a sample of psychiatrists and psychologists who had never served as expert witnesses ($n = 819$). Contrary to our expectations, the professionals serving as expert witnesses did not outperform the practitioners who never served. A substantial minority of the respondents harbored scientifically unproven ideas of human memory on issues such as the memory of small children, repression of adult traumatic memories, and recovered traumatic childhood memories. We conclude that the expert witnesses are at risk of offering bad recommendations to the court in trials where reliability of eyewitness memory is at stake.

Bruck, M., & Ceci, S. J. (2013). Expert testimony in a child sex abuse case: Translating memory development research. *Memory*, 21(5), 556–565. DOI:10.1080/09658211.2013.769606

In this paper we describe a custody case that centred on allegations of child sexual abuse. A pair of preschool-aged sisters accused their biological father of various sexual acts, though their allegations were made under problematic conditions and were contradicted by other statements they made. In an affidavit written by one of us (MB), we

describe the relevant memory development research in the course of presenting the court with a scientific analysis. We find compelling evidence of multiple risk factors in the way the daughters' recollections were elicited. Although the "ultimate question" of guilt is beyond our purview, our identification of risks was instrumental in the legal system's decision that the children's allegations were not valid. We put this analysis forward as an example of evidence-based testimony in which scientific findings from the memory literature can be used to frame an expert's analysis.

Goodman-Delahunty, J., Cossins, A., & O'Brien, K. (2010). Enhancing the credibility of complainants in child sexual assault trials: The effect of expert evidence and judicial directions. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 28(6), 769–783.
DOI:10.1002/bsl.936

This study investigated the knowledge and misconceptions of jury-eligible citizens about children's reliability as witnesses and responses to child sexual assault (CSA), and examined the influence of expert evidence and judicial directions in challenging common misconceptions. Community volunteers ($N = 130$) read one of five versions of a simulated jury trial, and completed a pre- and post-trial questionnaire to provide measures of their knowledge of children's responses to sexual abuse, perceptions of victim credibility, and verdict. Results revealed that endorsement of CSA misconceptions negatively impacted ratings of complainant credibility and verdicts. Judicial directions provided before the child complainant testified enhanced complainant credibility, which in turn predicted guilty verdicts. Comparisons of the effectiveness of two procedural legal mechanisms to manage juror misconceptions and improve knowledge about CSA provide guidance for future researchers investigating ways to increase fairness in cases of CSA.

Klettke, B., Graesser, A.C. and Powell, M.B. (2010), Expert testimony in child sexual abuse cases: The effects of evidence, coherence and credentials on juror decision making. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 24(4), 481-494. DOI:10.1002/acp.1565

Psychological experts have been used increasingly to testify in child sexual abuse cases, yet little research has investigated what specific factors make experts effective. This study examined the potential effects that credentials, evidence strength and coherence may have on juror decision making. Sixty-four mock jurors read cases of child sexual abuse, followed by experts' testimony and rated guilt of the defendant, effectiveness of the expert testimony and credibility of the victim. Evidence strength and coherence of the testimony affected all dependent variables, and the interaction was significant. Guilt ratings of the defendant were lower and the victim was rated as less credible when both evidence strength and coherence were low. The credentials of the expert, however, had negligible impact. These findings indicate that experts can be effective and impact jurors when testimony is either high in coherence or high in evidence.

Frasier, L. D. & Makoroff, K. L. (2006). Medical evidence and expert testimony in child sexual abuse. *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, 57(1), 41-50. DOI:10.1111/j.1755-6988.2006.tb00113.x

Expert medical testimony in child sexual abuse cases can be critical to the outcome of a legal case. This article will review the development of the medical knowledge and clinical expertise in child sexual abuse. Since the passage of mandatory child abuse reporting laws, the forensic medical examination of a child for evidence of sexual abuse has become standard. Until recently, many myths regarding female genital anatomy existed but were based primarily on dogma and lack of empirical research. Over the past 25 years, many research studies and accumulating clinical evidence have expanded medical knowledge and debunked old myths. Physical evidence, even in cases of alleged genital or anal penetration is rare. Sexually transmitted infections are also uncommon and often require medical interpretation as to their significance in a prepubertal child.

Specialized medical knowledge, training, and clinical expertise have developed in order to evaluate children presenting with allegations of sexual abuse. Such medical expertise provides invaluable service to courts. We review criteria for evaluating such expertise in light of current medical practice.

Gumpert, C. H., Lindblad, F., & Grann, M. (2002). A systematic approach to quality assessment of expert testimony in cases of alleged child sexual abuse. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 8(1), 59–75. DOI:10.1080/10683160208401809

The evaluation of suspected child sexual abuse is one of the most complicated forensic assessments. This paper describes a method of translating guidelines concerning written expert testimony on child sexual abuse into a quality assessment protocol – the Structured Quality assessment of eXpert testimony, SQX-12 – thereby creating an evaluative tool to assess written expert testimony regarding child sexual abuse. The proposed tool consists of 12 items referring to different quality aspects of written expert testimony. Interrater reliability and some preliminary metric properties were found to be promising. It is concluded that the SQX-12 may provide a small, first step towards the conceptualisation of quality in forensic reports regarding child sexual abuse.

Kovera, M. B., & Borgida, E. (1997). Expert testimony in child sexual abuse trials: The admissibility of psychological science. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 11(7), S105–S129. DOI:10.1002/(SICI)1099-0720(199712)11:7<S105::AID-ACP529>3.0.CO;2-%23

The authors describe a research programme investigating whether psychological evidence about child sexual abuse and child witnesses meets several criteria for admissibility in US courts: (a) general acceptance within the scientific community, (b) helpfulness to the jury, and (c) whether its probative value outweighs its prejudicial value. Responses from a survey of child sexual abuse experts suggest that they agree about the research findings in three areas: the demographic characteristics of sexually abused

children, child sexual abuse accommodation syndrome (Summit, 1983), and children's cognitive capabilities. Survey responses from college students and community members indicate that they may be especially helped by expert testimony on children's memory. Laypersons may also benefit from a discussion of the paucity of research on offender characteristics and the wide variety of responses to sexual victimization. Data from a survey and a trial simulation suggest that expert testimony on child sexual abuse will not be prejudicial to the defendant. Implications for expert witnesses are discussed.

Lyon, T. D., & Koehler, J. J. (1996). Relevance ratio: Evaluating the probative value of expert testimony in child sexual abuse cases. *Cornell Law Review*, 82, 43.

Crowley, M. J., O'Callaghan, M. G., & Ball, P. J. (1994). The juridical impact of psychological expert testimony in a simulated child sexual abuse trial. *Law and Human Behavior*, 18(1), 89–105. DOI:10.1007/BF01499146

Investigated the impact of expert testimony about cognitive development in children on jury decisions. 24 gender-balanced panels, each of 6 adult mock jurors, viewed a videotaped simulation of a criminal court trial in which age of the child victim/witness (6, 9, or 12 yrs), sex of the child, and presence or absence of expert testimony were manipulated. There were significant main effects for exposure to expert testimony on jurors' ratings of the child on the factors addressed by the expert: memory expertise, susceptibility to suggestion, and reality monitoring ability. Jurors rated the expert testimony highly in terms of its helpfulness and impartiality. There were no significant main effects for child credibility ratings according to age or sex of the child victims, but juror gender polarization effects were noted, with females significantly more likely to rate the child's credibility higher and to find the defendant guilty.

Horner, T. M., Guyer, M. J., & Kalter, N. M. (1993). Clinical expertise and the assessment of child sexual abuse. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 32(5), 925-933. DOI:10.1097/00004583-199309000-00006

Mental health specialists (N=48) were surveyed as to (1) their estimates of the likelihood that a 3-year-old child had been sexually molested (as alleged by her mother in the context of a child custody dispute) by her father, and (2) their recommendations, given their estimates, as to child visitation/custody. Method: Specialists heard a detailed presentation of the court-appointed clinician's findings in this case, which included parent interviews and videotaped child-parent interaction sequences. Results: The array of estimated likelihoods was extreme despite that all the clinicians heard the same case. Recommendations to the court strongly tended toward restriction of child-father contact, even when estimates of the likelihood of abuse were low. Conclusions: Courts should be highly cautious in relying on clinical experts in child custody cases entailing allegations of child sexual abuse. Practitioners should be candid with courts concerning the absence of diagnostic precision in such cases.

Myers, J. E. (1993). Expert testimony regarding child sexual abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 17(1), 175-185. DOI:10.1016/0145-2134(93)90017-Y

Expert testimony plays an important role in child sexual abuse litigation in criminal, juvenile, and family courts. This article discusses legal issues relating to expert testimony, including: (a) when expert testimony is permitted, (b) qualifications of expert witnesses on child sexual abuse, (c) permissible bases supporting expert testimony, (d) expert testimony on ultimate factual and legal issues, (e) the reasonable certainty standard of expert testimony, (f) the inappropriateness of equating clinical decision making with the legal degrees of proof, and (g) application of the doctrine of res judicata in litigation regarding child sexual abuse in family court. The article also provides a summary of contemporary case law regarding expert testimony offered in child sexual abuse litigation.

Morison, S., & Greene, E. (1992). Juror and expert knowledge of child sexual abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 16(4), 595–613. DOI:10.1016/0145-2134(92)90075-3

Mental health professionals with expertise in child sexual abuse (CSA) often testify as expert witnesses in court. There is significant controversy over the admissibility of this type of evidence. To be admissible, the testimony of an expert must be beyond the common knowledge of the jury and based on information generally considered to be reliable within the professional community in which it is used. To date, no empirical data have existed to allow courts to make an informed judgement as to the extent of either juror knowledge or professional acceptance of CSA data. The present study addresses this issue. Jurors and experts completed a questionnaire designed to reveal their understanding of CSA. Results indicate that experts demonstrated strong consensus on 29 of 40 items included in the questionnaire, and that relative to experts, jurors have limited knowledge of these issues. These results suggest that many of the scientific findings concerning CSA are reliable and that the information is often beyond the common knowledge of the jury. These findings argue for the use of expert testimony in select cases of child sexual abuse.

Myers, J. E., Bays, J., Becker, J., & Berliner, L. (1989). [Expert testimony in child sexual abuse litigation](#). *Nebraska Law Review*, 68, 1.

McCord, D. (1986). Expert psychological testimony about child complainants in sexual abuse prosecutions: A foray into the admissibility of novel psychological evidence. *Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology*, 77(1), 1–68. DOI:10.2307/1143590

Progression of Experiences

Weiss, K. J., & Alexander, J. C. (2013). [Sex, lies, and statistics: Inferences from the child sexual abuse accommodation syndrome](#). *Journal of American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law*, 41(3), 412-420.

Victims of child sexual abuse often recant their complaints or do not report incidents, making prosecution of offenders difficult. The child with sexual abuse accommodation syndrome (CSAAS) has been used to explain this phenomenon by identifying common behavioral responses. Unlike PTSD but like rape trauma syndrome, CSAAS is not an official diagnostic term and should not be used as evidence of a defendant's guilt or to imply probative value in prosecutions. Courts have grappled with the ideal use of CSAAS in the evaluation of child witness testimony. Expert testimony should be helpful to the jurors without prejudicing them. The New Jersey Supreme Court ruled recently that statistical evidence about CSAAS implying the probability that a child is truthful runs the risk of confusing jury members and biasing them against the defendant. We review the parameters of expert testimony and its admissibility in this area, concluding that statistics about CSAAS should not be used to draw inferences about the victim's credibility or the defendant's guilt.

Alaggia, R. (2004). Many ways of telling: Expanding conceptualizations of child sexual abuse disclosure. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 28(11), 1213-1227.
DOI:10.1016/j.chiabu.2004.03.016

The aim of this study was to explore influences that inhibit or promote child sexual abuse (CSA) disclosure. Face-to-face in-depth interviews of 24 female and male survivors of CSA were conducted, using the Long-Interview method to trace disclosure processes. Verbatim transcriptions of the interviews were analyzed by hand and by using a computerized data analysis system (N*Vivo). The results of this investigation identified several patterns of disclosure. Prolonged engagement, persistent observation, negative case analysis, and peer debriefing were among the techniques used to ensure the

trustworthiness of data. Through analysis of the interview data, previously undefined dimensions of disclosure emerged. First, three frequently used categories of accidental, purposeful, and prompted/elicited' disclosure types accounted for 42% of disclosure patterns in the study sample. However, over half the disclosure patterns described by research participants did not fit these previously established definitions. Results of the study facilitated expanding conceptualization of additional disclosure patterns to include behavioral and indirect verbal attempts, disclosures intentionally withheld, and disclosures triggered by recovered memories. The author concludes that these supplementary definitions integrate complex facets of disclosure derived within the context of human development, memory and environmental influences. This expanded conceptualization provides professionals with a broader framework to understand and respond to child victims and adult survivor's disclosures more effectively.

Lyon, T. D. (2002). Scientific support for expert testimony on Child Sexual Abuse Accommodation Syndrome. In J. R. Conte (Ed.), *Critical issues in child sexual abuse* (pp. 107-138). Sage. DOI:10.4135/9781483328645.n4

Myers, J. E. B. (2002). Expert testimony. In J. E. B. Myers, L. Berliner, J. Briere, C. T. Hendrix, C. Jenny, & T. A. Reid (Eds.), *The APSAC handbook on child maltreatment* (2nd ed., pp. 319-340). Sage.

Bruck, M., Ceci, S. J., Francoeur, E., & Barr, R. (1995). "I hardly cried when I got my shot!" Influencing children's reports about a visit to their pediatrician. *Child Development*, 66(1), 193-208. DOI:10.1111/j.1467-8624.1995.tb00865.x

We examined, in 2 phases, the influence of postevent suggestions on children's reports of their visits to a pediatrician. Phase 1 examined the effect of giving one of 3 types of feedback to 5-year-old children immediately following their Diphtheria Pertussis Tetanus (DPT) inoculation. Children were given pain-affirming feedback (the shot hurt), pain-

denying feedback (the shot did not hurt), or neutral feedback (the shot is over). 1 week later, they did not differ in their reports concerning how much the shot hurt or how much they cried. In Phase 2, the same children were visited approximately 1 year after their inoculation. During 3 separate visits, they were either given additional pain-denying or neutral feedback. They were also given misleading or nonmisleading information about the actions of the pediatrician and the assistant. Children given pain-denying feedback reported that they cried less and that the shot hurt less than did children given neutral feedback. Those who were given misleading information about the actions of the assistant and the pediatrician made more false allegations about their actions than did children who were not given this information. These results challenge the view that suggestibility effects are confined to peripheral, nonaction events; in this study children's reports about salient actions involving their own bodies in stressful conditions were influenced.

Ceci, S. J., Loftus, E. F., Leichtman, M. D., & Bruck, M. (1994). The possible role of source misattributions in the creation of false beliefs among preschoolers. *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis*, 42(4), 304-320.
DOI:10.1080/00207149408409361

In this article the authors examine one possible factor in the creation of false beliefs among preschool-aged children, namely, source misattributions. The authors present the results from an ongoing program of research which suggest that source misattributions could be a mechanism underlying children's false beliefs about having experienced fictitious events. Findings from this program of research indicate that, although all children are susceptible to making source misattributions, very young children may be disproportionately vulnerable to these kinds of errors. This vulnerability leads younger preschoolers, on occasion, to claim that they remember actually experiencing events that they only thought about or were suggested by others. These results are discussed in the context of the ongoing debate over the veracity and durability of delayed reports of

early memories, repressed memories, dissociative states, and the validity risks posed by therapeutic techniques that entail repeated visually guided imagery inductions.

Summit, R. C. (1992). Abuse of the child abuse accommodation syndrome. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 1(4), 153-163. DOI:10.1300/J070v01n04_13

Summit, R. C. (1983). The child abuse accommodation syndrome. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 7(2), 177-193. DOI:10.1016/0145-2134(83)90070-4

Child victims of sexual abuse face secondary trauma in the crisis of discovery. Their attempts to reconcile their private experiences with the realities of the outer world are assaulted by the disbelief, blame and rejection they experience from adults. The normal coping behavior of the child contradicts the entrenched beliefs and expectations typically held by adults, stigmatizing the child with charges of lying, manipulating or imagining from parents, courts and clinicians. Such abandonment by the very adults most crucial to the child's protection and recovery drives the child deeper into self-blame, self-hate, alienation and revictimization. In contrast, the advocacy of an empathic clinician within a supportive treatment network can provide vital credibility and endorsement for the child. Evaluation of the responses of normal children to sexual assault provides clear evidence that societal definitions of "normal" victim behavior are inappropriate and procrustean, serving adults as mythic insulators against the child's pain. Within this climate of prejudice, the sequential survival options available to the victim further alienate the child from any hope of outside credibility or acceptance. Ironically, the child's inevitable choice of the "wrong" options reinforces and perpetuates the prejudicial myths. The most typical reactions of children are classified in this paper as the child sexual abuse accommodation syndrome. The syndrome is composed of five categories, of which two define basic childhood vulnerability and three are sequentially contingent on sexual assault: (1) secrecy, (2) helplessness, (3) entrapment and

accommodation, (4) delayed, unconvincing disclosure, and (5) retraction. The accommodation syndrome is proposed as a simple and logical model for use by clinicians to improve understanding and acceptance of the child's position in the complex and controversial dynamics of sexual victimization. Application of the syndrome tends to challenge entrenched myths and prejudice, providing credibility and advocacy for the child within the home, the courts, and throughout the treatment process. The paper also provides discussion of the child's coping strategies as analogs for subsequent behavioral and psychological problems, including implications for specific modalities of treatment.

Predictors of Disclosure/Impediments to Disclosure

National Children's Advocacy Center. (2024). [*Disclosure of child abuse: A bibliography*](#)

National Children's Advocacy Center. (2023). [*Emotional barriers to children's disclosures of abuse: A bibliography*](#).

Winters, G. M., Colombino, N., Schaaf, S., Laake, A. L., Jeglic, E. L., & Calkins, C. (2020). Why do child sexual abuse victims not tell anyone about their abuse? An exploration of factors that prevent and promote disclosure. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 38(6), 586–611. DOI:10.1002/bsl.2492

Disclosure rates of child sexual abuse (CSA) to both social supports and law enforcement are concerningly low, although more research is needed to understand factors that impact disclosure. Thus, the present study examined rates of informal (i.e., to a social support) and formal (i.e., to law enforcement) disclosure of CSA, as well as victims' self-reported experiences with telling others about their own abuse and their perceptions of the overall advantages and disadvantages of disclosure. In all, 76 undergraduate women (who collectively experienced 105 instances of abuse) participated in a semi-structured interview regarding their history of CSA. Results revealed that approximately 50% of cases involved the victim informally disclosing, and only 10% of cases being formally disclosed to authorities. The quantitative and qualitative data shed light on a number of factors that lead victims to not disclose, as well as the identification of factors that may promote a victim to share their abuse with others. The implications for improved prevention and responses to CSA disclosure are discussed.

Lahtinen, H. M., Laitila, A., Korkman, J., & Ellonen, N. (2018). Children's disclosures of sexual abuse in a population-based sample. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 76, 84-94.
DOI:10.1016/j.chiabu.2017.10.011

Most previous studies on disclosing child sexual abuse (CSA) have either been retrospective or focused on children who already have disclosed. The present study aimed to explore the overall CSA disclosure rate and factors associated with disclosing to adults in a large population-based sample. A representative sample of 11,364 sixth and ninth graders participated in the Finnish Child Victim Survey concerning experiences of violence, including CSA. CSA was defined as having sexual experiences with a person at least five years older at the time of the experience. Within this sample, the CSA prevalence was 2.4%. Children reporting CSA experiences also answered questions regarding disclosure, the disclosure recipient, and potential reasons for not disclosing. The results indicate that most of the children (80%) had disclosed to someone, usually a friend (48%). However, only 26% had disclosed to adults, and even fewer had reported their experiences to authorities (12%). The most common reason for non-disclosing was that the experience was not considered serious enough for reporting (41%), and half of the children having CSA experiences did not self-label their experiences as sexual abuse. Relatively few children reported lacking the courage to disclose (14%). Logistic regression analyses showed that the perpetrator's age, the age of the victim at the time of abuse, and having no experiences of emotional abuse by the mother were associated with disclosing to an adult. The results contribute to understanding the factors underlying children's disclosure patterns in a population-based sample and highlight the need for age-appropriate safety education for children and adolescents.

Morrison, S. E., Bruce, C., & Wilson, S. (2018). Children's disclosure of sexual abuse: A systematic review of qualitative research exploring barriers and facilitators. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 27(2), 176–194. DOI:10.1080/10538712.2018.1425943

This study evaluates and synthesizes qualitative evidence addressing factors affecting a child's decision to disclose an experience of sexual abuse. Childhood sexual abuse is a devastating crime, with long-term negative impacts. Understanding the factors that affect a child's decision to disclose is vital. Disclosure enables access to support and protection, both therapeutically and legally. A systematic review was conducted focusing on factors affecting a child's decision to disclose an experience of sexual abuse. Seven studies were identified, quality appraisal undertaken, and meta-ethnography used to synthesize the studies. Six new super-ordinate themes were developed: Fear of what will happen; Others' reactions: fear of disbelief; Emotions and impact of the abuse; An opportunity to tell; Concern for self and others; and Feelings toward the abuser. Themes indicated the importance of support, structure, and opportunity to facilitate disclosure and should be utilized by agencies to develop practices that facilitate disclosures.

McElvaney, R., Greene, S., & Hogan, D. (2014). To tell or not to tell? Factors influencing young people's informal disclosures of child sexual abuse. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 29(5), 928–947. DOI:10.1177/0886260513506281

The aim was to understand the factors influencing informal disclosure of child sexual abuse experiences, taking account of dynamics operating prior to, during, and following disclosure. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 22 young people who experienced child sexual abuse and 14 parents. Grounded theory methodology informed the study. The key factors identified as influencing the disclosure process included being believed, being asked, shame/self-blame, concern for self and others, and peer influence. Many young people both wanted to tell and did not want to tell. Fear of not being believed; being asked questions about their well-being; feeling ashamed of what happened and blaming themselves for the abuse, for not telling, and for the

consequences of disclosure; concern for how both disclosure and nondisclosure would impact on themselves and others; and being supported by and yet pressurized by peers to tell an adult, all illustrate the complex intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics reflecting the conflict inherent in the disclosure process. These findings build on previous studies that emphasize the dialogic and interpersonal dynamics in the disclosure process. Both intrapersonal and interpersonal influencing factors need to be taken account of in designing interventions aimed at helping children tell. The importance of asking young people about their psychological well-being and the role of peer relationships are highlighted as key to how we can help young people tell.

Schonbucher, V., Maier, T., Mohler-Kuo, M., Schnyder, U., & Landolt, M. (2012). Disclosure of child sexual abuse by adolescents: A qualitative in-depth study. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 27*(17), 3486–3513. DOI:10.1177/0886260512445380

This qualitative study aimed to study the process of disclosure by examining adolescents from the general population who had experienced child sexual abuse (CSA). Twenty-six sexually victimized adolescents (23 girls, 3 boys; age: 15–18 years) participated in a qualitative face-to-face in-depth interview on different aspects of disclosure. A qualitative content analysis was conducted following Mayring and using the qualitative data analysis program Atlas.ti. In addition, quantitative correlation analyses were calculated to identify factors associated with disclosure. Less than one third of participants immediately disclosed CSA to another person. In most cases, recipients of both immediate and delayed disclosure were peers. More than one third of participants had never disclosed the abuse to a parent. Main motives for nondisclosure to parents were lack of trust or not wanting to burden the parents. Factors that correlated positively with disclosure were extrafamilial CSA, single CSA, age of victim at CSA, and having parents who were still living together. Negative associations with disclosure were found for feelings of guilt and shame and the perpetrator's age. Many adolescent survivors of CSA have serious concerns about disclosure to their parents and consider friends as

more reliable confidants. These findings have two main implications for prevention: (1) In order to facilitate disclosure to parents, the strengthening of the child–parent relationship should be given specific attention in prevention programs, and (2) prevention programs should aim at teaching adolescents how they can help a victim if they become a recipient of disclosure.

Hunter, S. V. (2011). Disclosure of child sexual abuse as a life-long process: Implications for health professionals. *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*, 32(2), 159–172. DOI:10.1375/anft.32.2.159

One of the aims of this research project was to develop a fuller understanding of the process of disclosure of child sexual abuse. Face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted with 22 men and women aged 25 to 70 years old, who had an early sexual experience at the age of 15 or under with someone of 18 or over. Narrative inquiry methodology was used and data was analysed using Rosenthal and Fischer-Rosenthal's (2004) process of data analysis. Disclosure can be conceptualised as a complex and life-long process, and most participants did not make a selective disclosure until adulthood. The findings extend Alaggia's (2004) model of disclosure to include the life stage and the person to whom the disclosure is being made. The main barriers to disclosure and possible gender differences are discussed. Family therapists need to manage the challenges inherent in disclosure of child sexual abuse at any age.

Schaeffer, P., Leventhal, J. M., & Asnes, A. G. (2011). Children's disclosures of sexual abuse: Learning from direct inquiry. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 35(5), 343–352. DOI:10.1016/j.chiabu.2011.01.014

Published protocols for forensic interviewing for child sexual abuse do not include specific questions about what prompted children to tell about sexual abuse or what made them wait to tell. We, therefore, aimed to: (1) add direct inquiry about the process of a child's

disclosure to a forensic interview protocol; (2) determine if children will, in fact, discuss the process that led them to tell about sexual abuse; and (3) describe the factors that children identify as either having led them to tell about sexual abuse or caused them to delay a disclosure. Forensic interviewers were asked to incorporate questions about telling into an existing forensic interview protocol. Over a 1-year period, 191 consecutive forensic interviews of child sexual abuse victims aged 3–18 years old in which children spoke about the reasons they told about abuse or waited to tell about abuse were reviewed. Interview content related to the children's reasons for telling or for waiting to tell about abuse was extracted and analyzed using a qualitative methodology in order to capture themes directly from the children's words. Forensic interviewers asked children about how they came to tell about sexual abuse and if children waited to tell about abuse, and the children gave specific answers to these questions. The reasons children identified for why they chose to tell were classified into three domains: (1) disclosure as a result of internal stimuli (e.g., the child had nightmares), (2) disclosure facilitated by outside influences (e.g., the child was questioned), and (3) disclosure due to direct evidence of abuse (e.g., the child's abuse was witnessed). The barriers to disclosure identified by the children were categorized into five groups: (1) threats made by the perpetrator (e.g., the child was told (s)he would get in trouble if (s)he told), (2) fears (e.g., the child was afraid something bad would happen if (s)he told), (3) lack of opportunity (e.g., the child felt the opportunity to disclose never presented), (4) lack of understanding (e.g., the child failed to recognize abusive behavior as unacceptable), and (5) relationship with the perpetrator (e.g., the child thought the perpetrator was a friend). Specific reasons that individual children identify for why they told and why they waited to tell about sexual abuse can be obtained by direct inquiry during forensic interviews for suspected child sexual abuse. When asked, children identified the first person they told and offered varied and specific reasons for why they told and why they waited to tell about sexual abuse. Understanding why children disclose their abuse and why they wait to disclose will assist both professionals and families. Investigators and those who care for sexually abused children will gain insight into the specific barrier that the sexually abused child overcame

to disclose. Prosecutors will be able to use this information to explain to juries why the child may have delayed his or her disclosure. Parents who struggle to understand why their child disclosed to someone else or waited to disclose will have a better understanding of their child's decisions.

Lippert, T., Cross, T. P., Jones, L., & Walsh, W. (2009). [Telling interviewers about sexual abuse predictors of child disclosure at forensic interviews](#). *Child Maltreatment*, 14(1), 100–113. DOI:10.1177/1077559508318398

This study aims to identify characteristics that predict full disclosure by victims of sexual abuse during a forensic interview. Data came from agency files for 987 cases of sexual abuse between December 2001 and December 2003 from Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) and comparison communities within four U.S. states. Cases of children fully disclosing abuse when interviewed were compared to cases of children believed to be victims who gave no or partial disclosures. The likelihood of disclosure increased when victims were girls, a primary caregiver was supportive, and a child's disclosure instigated the investigation. The likelihood of disclosure was higher for children who were older at abuse onset and at forensic interview (each age variable having an independent effect). Communities differed on disclosure rate, with no difference associated with having a CAC. Findings suggest factors deserving consideration prior to a forensic interview, including organizational and community factors affecting disclosure rates.

Priebe, G., & Svedin, C. G. (2008). Child sexual abuse is largely hidden from the adult society: An epidemiological study of adolescents' disclosure. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 32(12), 1095–1108. DOI:10.1016/j.chiabu.2008.04.001

The aim of this study was to investigate disclosure rates and disclosure patterns and to examine predictors of non-disclosure in a sample of male and female adolescents with self-reported experiences of sexual abuse. A sample of 4,339 high school seniors (2,324

girls, 2,015 boys) was examined with a questionnaire concerning sexual experiences in this study with a focus on disclosure of sexual abuse (non-contact, contact or penetrating abuse, and including peer abuse). Of the sample, 1,505 girls (65%) and 457 boys (23%) reported experience of sexual abuse. The disclosure rate was 81% (girls) and 69% (boys). Girls and boys disclosed most often to a friend of their own age. Few had disclosed to professionals. Even fewer said that the incident had been reported to the authorities. Logistic regression showed that it was less likely for girls to disclose if they had experienced contact sexual abuse with or without penetration, abuse by a family member, only a single abuse occasion or if they had perceived their parents as non-caring. Boys were less likely to disclose if they studied a vocational program, lived with both parents or had perceived their parents as either caring and overprotective or non-caring and not overprotective. Disclosing sexual abuse is a complex process. Much is hidden from the adult society, especially from professionals and the legal system. Since peers are the most common receivers of abuse information, programs for supporting peers ought to be developed. Differences in disclosure patterns for girls and boys indicate that a gender perspective is helpful when developing guidelines for professionals.

Pipe, M. E., Lamb, M. E., Orbach, Y., & Cederborg, A. (Eds.). (2007). *Child sexual abuse: Disclosure, delay, and denial*. Lawrence Erlbaum.

London, K., Bruck, M., Ceci, S. J., & Shuman, D. W. (2005). Disclosure of child sexual abuse: What does the research tell us about the ways that children tell? *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 11(1), 194-226. DOI:10.1037/1076-8971.11.1.194

The empirical basis for the child sexual abuse accommodation syndrome (CSAAS), a theoretical model that posits that sexually abused children frequently display secrecy, tentative disclosures, and retractions of abuse statements was reviewed. Two data sources were evaluated: retrospective studies of adults' reports of having been abused as children and concurrent or chart-review studies of children undergoing evaluation or

treatment for sexual abuse. The evidence indicates that the majority of abused children do not reveal abuse during childhood. However, the evidence fails to support the notion that denials, tentative disclosures, and recantations characterize the disclosure patterns of children with validated histories of sexual abuse. These results are discussed in terms of their implications governing the admissibility of expert testimony on CSAAS.

Crisma, M., Bascelli, E., Paci, D., & Romito, P. (2004). Adolescents who experience sexual abuse: Fears, needs and impediments to disclosure. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 28(10), 1035–1048. DOI:10.1016/j.chiabu.2004.03.015

Understanding the impediments that prevented sexually abused adolescents from disclosure to their family or to professionals, and analyzing the responses they received when they did disclose. In depth anonymous interviews were conducted in Italy through a toll-free telephone line with 36 young people who experienced sexual abuse in adolescence. A qualitative analysis was carried out of the adolescents' feelings, fears and needs, and of the help received, if any. The main impediments to disclose to a family member were fear of not being believed, shame, and fear of causing trouble to the family. The main impediments for not seeking services were ignorance of the existence/functioning of protective agencies, wish to keep the secret, lack of awareness of being abused, mistrust of adults and professionals, and fear of the consequences of disclosure. When they did disclose to professionals, the teens received very limited support. Adolescents need to receive proper information about the risk of being sexually abused and about the help they can receive from their social network and protective agencies. There is a crucial need for appropriate training of professionals.

Goodman-Brown, T. B., Edelstein, R. S., Goodman, G. S., Jones, D. P. H., & Gordon, D. S. (2003). Why children tell: A model of children's disclosure of sexual abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 27(5), 525-540. DOI:10.1016/S0145-2134(03)00037-1

Objective: The present study investigated variables associated with delay of disclosure of child sexual abuse and tested a model of time to disclosure. **Method:** Data were obtained for 218 alleged child sexual abuse victims whose cases had been referred to District Attorneys' Offices. Five variables were posited to influence the delay between an abusive event and children's disclosure of that event to a reporting adult: child's age, gender, type of abuse experienced (intrafamilial or extrafamilial), perceived responsibility for the abuse, and fear of negative consequences of disclosure. These variables were used to create a model of factors influencing children's disclosure of sexual abuse. **Results:** Results indicated that age, type of abuse, fear of negative consequences, and perceived responsibility all contributed to predicting time to disclosure. There was significant support for the model, suggesting that children who were older, came from incestuous families, felt greater responsibility for the abuse, and feared negative consequences of disclosure took longer to disclose. **Conclusions:** Children's cognitive appraisal of others' tolerance of disclosure of child sexual abuse, and their own perceptions of responsibility for the abuse, are crucial to the decision to disclose. When evaluating children for possible sexual abuse, developmental, cognitive, and socio-emotional factors need to be taken into consideration.

Recantation

Hartman, D. T., Wang, Y., Wu, Y., Goldfarb, D., Vidales, D., Qin, J., Eisen, M. L., & Goodman, G. S. (2023). [Childhood sexual abuse: A longitudinal study of disclosures and denials](#). *Child Maltreatment*, 28(3), 462–475. DOI:10.1177/10775595231165335

In legal cases regarding child sexual abuse (CSA), children have various options, such as to disclose or deny maltreatment. When interviewed in adulthood, their accounts may be consistent with their childhood responses. Alternatively, denial in childhood could be followed in adulthood by disclosure (“deferred disclosure”), confirming previous suspicions. Or the adults could possibly recant. We conducted a longitudinal study of CSA disclosures and denials ($N = 99$; Time 1 [T1], 3- to 16-year-olds). T1 CSA disclosures and denials at a forensic unit were compared to the individuals’ responses 20 years later (Time 2 [T2], 22- to 37-years-old). We found that consistent disclosure was associated with being older at T1 and female. Deferred disclosure was significantly associated with greater T2 trauma-related symptoms. Corroboration and higher CSA severity predicted T2 recantation. Consistent denial was related to less severe CSA. Our findings add to knowledge about CSA disclosures, which affect legal pathways available to child victims.

Denne, E., Stolzenberg, S. N., & Neal, T. M. (2021). [The effects of evidence-based expert testimony on perceptions of child sexual abuse involving recantation](#). *PloS one*, 16(8), e0254961. DOI:10.1371/journal.pone.0254961

Child sexual abuse (CSA) cases involving recantation invoke concerns about children’s reliability. Expert testimony can help explain the complexities of these cases. Experts have historically relied on Child Sexual Abuse Accommodation Syndrome (CSAAS), yet this is not science-based. In a CSA case involving recantation, how would evidence-based testimony affect perceptions of child credibility when compared to CSAAS? Across 2 studies, we test the effects of expert testimony based on evidence-based science, nonscientific evidence, and experience-based evidence on outcomes in CSA cases involving recantation. Evidence-based testimony led to higher perceptions of credibility

and scientific rigor of the evidence when compared to CSAAS testimony. Evidence-based testimony also led to more guilty verdicts when compared to the control. In sum, jurors had some ability to detect evidence strength, such that evidence-based expert testimony was superior to CSAAS testimony in many respects, and consistently superior to experience-based testimony in these cases.

National Children's Advocacy Center. (2019). [Recantation in cases of child sexual abuse: A bibliography.](#)

Celik, G., Tahiroğlu, A., Yoruldu, B., Varmış, D., Çekin, N., Avci, A., Evliyaoğlu, N., & Nasiroğlu, S. (2018). Recantation of sexual abuse disclosure among child victims: Accommodation Syndrome. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 27(6), 612–621. DOI:10.1080/10538712.2018.1477216

Background: Disclosing the sexual abuse may be related on many individual and/or environmental factors in all age groups. The sociocultural context is the most influential factor of the disclosing process especially for those living in patriarchal cultural values. This study compares the impacts of sexual abuse and other sociodemographic variables between recanting and non-recanting victimized groups in Adana city from Turkey. Methods: The samples attending our department were divided into two groups: group 1 comprised victims who recanted their first abuse disclosure, and group 2 comprised victims who insisted on the veracity of their first report at further evaluations. The characteristics of the child, family, and abuser were compared between recanting victims and non-recanting victims by retrospective data. Results: Each group included 27 children, for a total of 54 subjects. All adverse social reactions after the sexual abuse, including keeping secrets and a repressive family attitude, were higher among group 1 victims than group 2 victims ($p < 0.0001$). Conclusions: Although they are victimized by protecting family integrity, victims may show a tendency to keep secrets and to not immediately disclose an abuse event.

Malloy, L. C. (2016). [Children's recantation of adult wrongdoing: An experimental investigation](#). *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 145, 11–21.
DOI:10.1016/j.jecp.2015.12.003

Child maltreatment cases often hinge on a child's word versus a defendant's word, making children's disclosures crucially important. There is considerable debate concerning why children recant allegations, and it is imperative to examine recantation experimentally. The purpose of this laboratory analogue investigation was to test (a) how often children recant true allegations of an adult's wrongdoing after disclosing and (b) whether children's age and caregiver supportiveness predict recantation. During an interactive event, 6- to 9-year-olds witnessed an experimenter break a puppet and were asked to keep the transgression a secret. Children were then interviewed to elicit a disclosure of the transgression. Mothers were randomly assigned to react supportively or unsupportively to this disclosure, and children were interviewed again. We coded children's recantations (explicit denials of the broken puppet after disclosing) and changes in their forthcomingness (shifts from denial or claims of lack of knowledge/memory to disclosure and vice versa) in free recall and in response to focused questions about the transgression. Overall, 23.3% of the children recanted their prior disclosures (46% and 0% in the unsupportive and supportive conditions, respectively). No age differences in recantation rates emerged, but 8- and 9-year-olds were more likely than 6- and 7-year-olds to maintain their recantation throughout Interview 2. Children whose mothers reacted supportively to disclosure became more forthcoming in Interview 2, and those whose mothers reacted unsupportively became less forthcoming. Results advance theoretical understanding of how children disclose negative experiences, including socio-motivational influences on their reports, and have practical implications for the legal system.

Malloy, L. C., Mugno, A. P., Rivard, J. R., Lyon, T. D., & Quas, J. A. (2016). [Familial Influences on recantation in substantiated child sexual abuse cases](#). *Child Maltreatment*, 21(3), 256–261. DOI:10.1177/1077559516650936

The underlying reasons for recantation in children's disclosure of child sexual abuse (CSA) have been debated in recent years. In the present study, we examined the largest sample of substantiated CSA cases involving recantations to date ($n = 58$ cases). We specifically matched those cases to 58 nonrecanters on key variables found to predict recantation in prior research (i.e., child age, alleged parent figure perpetrator, and caregiver unsupportiveness). Bivariate analyses revealed that children were less likely to recant when they were (1) initially removed from home postdisclosure and (2) initially separated from siblings postdisclosure. Multivariate analyses revealed that children were less likely to recant when family members (other than the nonoffending caregiver) expressed belief in the children's allegations and more likely to recant when family members (other than the nonoffending caregiver) expressed disbelief in the allegations and when visitations with the alleged perpetrator were recommended at their first hearing. Results have implications for understanding the complex ways in which social processes may motivate some children to retract previous reports of sexual abuse.

Hunter, S. A. (2015). Perceptions of the role of mothers in the disclosure and nondisclosure of child sexual abuse: A qualitative study. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 24(8), 887–907. DOI:10.1080/10538712.2015.1092005

One of the aims of this research was to develop an understanding of the role mothers were perceived to play during the process of disclosure of child sexual abuse. Using narrative inquiry methodology, face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted with 22 men and women who had an early sexual experience. Even though a mother's support and protection is known to be important, this study showed that many mothers were seen as unable to offer such support, which had an important influence on nondisclosure. The heterogeneity of perceptions of mothers among adults who experienced child sexual

abuse and gender differences are described. Health professionals need to manage complex relational dynamics between adult survivors and their mothers.

Lyon, T. D., & Ahern, E. C. (2011). Disclosure of child sexual abuse: Implications for Interviewing. In J. E. B. Meyers (Ed.), *The APSAC handbook on child maltreatment* (3rd ed., pp. 233–252). Sage.

London, K., Bruck, M., Wright, D. B., & Ceci, S. J. (2007). Review of the contemporary literature on how children report sexual abuse to others: Findings, methodological issues, and implications for forensic interviewers. *Memory*, 16(1), 29–47. DOI:10.1080/09658210701725732

Methods used during forensic interviews with children are driven by beliefs about how children recall and report child sexual abuse (CSA) to others. Summit (1983) proposed a theory (*Child Sexual Abuse Accommodation Syndrome*) contending that, due to the specific traumatic characteristics of CSA, children will often delay disclosing abuse or altogether fail to disclose during childhood, deny abuse when asked, and often recant abuse allegations. His theory has had a tremendous impact on the field of CSA forensic evaluations, despite its dearth of empirical support. In this paper, we review and critique the contemporary literature from two main sources: retrospective accounts from adults reporting CSA experiences and studies of children undergoing forensic evaluation for CSA. We conclude that data support the notion that children often delay abuse disclosure, but that among valid abuse cases undergoing forensic evaluation, denial and recantation are not common. Methodological issues and implications for forensic interviewers are discussed.

Malloy, L. C., Lyon, T. D., & Quas, J. A. (2007). Filial dependency and recantation of child sexual abuse allegations. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 46(2), 162–170. DOI:10.1097/01.chi.0000246067.77953.f7

Controversy abounds regarding the process by which child sexual abuse victims disclose their experiences, particularly the extent to which and the reasons why some children, once having disclosed abuse, later recant their allegations. This study examined the prevalence and predictors of recantation among 2- to 17-year-old child sexual abuse victims. Case files ($n = 257$) were randomly selected from all substantiated cases resulting in a dependency court filing in a large urban county between 1999 and 2000. Recantation (i.e., denial of abuse postdisclosure) was scored across formal and informal interviews. Cases were also coded for characteristics of the child, family, and abuse. A 23.1% recantation rate was observed. Multivariate analyses supported a filial dependency model of recantation, whereby abuse victims who were more vulnerable to familial adult influences (i.e., younger children, those abused by a parent figure and who lacked support from the nonoffending caregiver) were more likely to recant. An alternative hypothesis, that recantations resulted from potential inclusion of cases involving false allegations, was not supported. Results provide new insight into the process by which children reveal interpersonal trauma and have implications for debates concerning the credibility of child sexual abuse allegations and treatment in dependency samples.

Olafson, E., & Lederman, C. S. (2006). The state of the debate about children's disclosure patterns in child sexual abuse cases. *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, 57(1), 27–40. DOI:10.1111/j.1755-6988.2006.tb00112.x

In current research studies about the disclosure patterns of sexually abused children, experts agree that most victims delay disclosure for years, often until adulthood. Researchers disagree about disclosure rates and recantation rates among children during formal interviews. Studies of children who had not previously disclosed but are known through corroborative evidence to have been sexually abused show lower rates of

disclosure than do studies of children who had disclosed prior to the formal interview. Gradual disclosures among children are common, and more than a single interview may be necessary in some cases. Prior disclosure, level of support by non-offending parents, developmental level, and relationship to perpetrator affect children's rates of disclosure and their disclosure patterns. More research is necessary to clarify children's post-disclosure recantation rates and predictors.

Custody/Divorce/False Allegations

Sullivan, M. J., Pruett, M. K., & Johnston, J. R. (2024). Parent-child contact problems: Family violence and parental alienating behaviors either/or, neither/nor, both/and, one in the same?. *Family Court Review*, 62(1), 68-85. DOI:10.1111/fcre.12764

This article argues that in order to intervene effectively and ethically with children who are manifesting Parent-child contact problems (PCCPs) after parental separation, we begin by being mindful of what is normal about divorce transitions and use developmentally appropriate and culturally sensitive analysis to rule out children's common transitory reactions. It is then important to concurrently assess for both family violence (FV) and severe parental alienating behavior (PAB) on the part of both parents, which can co-occur in some cases. The article asserts that it is also important to consider common problematic parenting responses that may potentiate the PCCP but not necessarily rise to the level of abuse. FV is defined as a child's direct experience of physical, sexual, or psychological maltreatment and indirect exposure to sibling abuse and/or to intimate partner violence (IPV). PAB is defined as an ongoing pattern of unwarranted negative messages on the part of one parent that conveys that the child's other parent is disinterested, irrelevant, dangerous, and not to be trusted. Any one or all of these factors may contribute to a child's strident negativity and sustained rejection of one parent, these being defining features of a PCCP. This article proposes ethical principles and priorities for decision-making in these cases, considering the growing social science controversy about assessment and intervention for PCCPs. It concludes with an analysis of recent, contrasting policy approaches to PCCPs (e.g., Kayden's Law and the Joint Statement of the AFCC and NCJFCJ) and their potential impact on family justice system professionals and the families they serve.

Varavei, H., & Harman, J. J. (2024). [The illusory correlation between parental alienation and other forms of family violence](#). *International Journal of Social Welfare*. DOI:10.1111/ijsw.12692

There has been considerable public discourse around courts allegedly “dismissing” mother’s allegations of domestic violence and child abuse when a father alleges that he is being alienated from his children by their mother. The purpose of this project is to test whether this discourse is based on an illusory correlation. Published court decisions from 200 family court cases in Canada were sequentially selected if parental alienation was alleged to have happened to the father and abuse was alleged to have been perpetrated by the father. Independent coders recorded the investigative outcomes of the court cases regarding alienation and abuse, and whether the mother lost child custody. Results indicate that there is an illusory correlation between family court cases involving both allegations of abuse and parental alienation, and that mothers are generally not losing custody to abusive fathers in such rarely occurring cases.

Harman, J., Giancarlo, C., Lorandos, D., & Ludmer, B. (2023). [Gender and child custody outcomes across 16 years of judicial decisions regarding abuse and parental alienation](#). *Children and Youth Services Review*, 155, 107187. DOI:10.1016/j.chidyouth.2023.107187

There have been legislative efforts to control how child custody decisions are handled in family courts where allegations of abuse and of parental alienation (PA) are levied. The “findings” reported to support such legislation have been based on one unreviewed study with identified methodological issues (Harman & Lorandos, 2021). We tested six pre-registered hypotheses to determine whether there is empirical support for the “research findings” used to support these laws. Five-hundred PA cases were sequentially selected from 4,889 Canadian trial court decisions. Independent coders who were blind to the hypotheses coded all cases for details about custody and allegations of abuse. We failed to find support for the “findings” that have been used to support legislative changes. For example, this study focused only upon cases where PA was determined to actually have

occurred in at least one of the children in the family. It differs from Harman & Lorandos (2021) in that this study found that alienating mothers' claims of abuse against known "abusive" alienated fathers were not being discredited more often than they were for alienating fathers. The negative impact of failing to base legislation on a comprehensive consideration of the full scope of scientific evidence available (e.g., Kayden's Law in the reauthorized Violence Against Women's Act, 2022) is discussed.

Avieli, H. (2022). False allegations of domestic violence: A qualitative analysis of ex-partners' narratives. *Journal of Family Violence*, 37, 1391–1403. DOI:10.1007/s10896-021-00342-w

False allegation of violence and abuse is an under-recognized problem in custody disputes and divorce cases. However, only a handful of studies have investigated false allegations of domestic violence as a phenomenon in itself. Thus, the aim of the present study was to explore the experiences of individuals (male and female), who were recognized as falsely accused of domestic violence. An interpretive phenomenological analysis approach was utilized to analyze interviews conducted with 19 false allegation victims. Participants' interviews revealed three superordinate themes: (1) "I was the victim in this relationship:" False allegation as a form of lifelong intimate partner violence; (2) "I felt everything crashing down on me:" False allegation as a traumatic event; (3) "This battle has brought me to my knees:" A series of losses following false allegations. The findings may provide some qualitative insights into the experience of false allegation and its possible connection to coercive control in the context of partners' conflictual relationships. It is important for professionals to acknowledge false allegations as abusive tactics used within domestic violence situations as they cause considerable pain to the individuals involved.

Harman, J. J., & Lorandos, D. (2021). [Allegations of family violence in court: How parental alienation affects judicial outcomes](#). *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 27(2), 184–208. DOI:10.1037/law0000301

We tested a set of findings reported by Meier et al. (2019) related to the use of parental alienation as a legal defense in cases in which there are allegations of domestic violence and child abuse. A total of 967 appellate reports in which PA was found or alleged were sequentially selected from a legal database search. Nineteen research assistants blind to the study's hypotheses coded the reports for the variables used to test six preregistered hypotheses using a series of logistic and linear regression models. We failed to find any support for the conclusions made by Meier et al. Parents found (vs. alleged) to have alienated their children, regardless of their gender, had greater odds of losing parenting time, losing custody of their children, and losing their case. These findings held even when the accusing parent had been found to have been abusive. Losses or decreases in custody were not found when the (alleged) alienated parent was found to have been abusive. Results indicate that the majority of courts carefully weigh allegations of all forms of family violence in their determinations about the best interests of children. These findings, along with several others, raise concerns that the methodological, analytical, and statistical problems we detail about Meier's report that make her conclusions untrustworthy. Discussion focuses on the importance of using open science practices for transparent and rigorous empirical testing of hypotheses and the dangers of misusing scientific findings to mislead influential professionals who affect the well-being of millions of families.

Douglas, H., & Fell, E. (2020). Malicious reports of child maltreatment as coercive control: Mothers and domestic and family violence. *Journal of Family Violence*, 35(8), 827–837. DOI:10.1007/s10896-019-00128-1

Coercive control is increasingly recognized as fundamental to women's experiences of domestic and family violence (DFV). Systems abuse is also being increasingly recognized

by researchers as a tactic of coercive control in the context of DFV. This article explores the phenomenon of abusive partners or ex-partners making malicious false reports of child maltreatment to child protective services as an aspect of coercive control and systems abuse. The article draws on interviews with 65 women who have been victims of DFV, focusing on the experiences of 11 of the interviewees who have been maliciously reported, or received threats that they will be reported, to child protection services by an abusive ex-partner. Those interviewees who had been the victim of malicious reports of child maltreatment by an abusive partner or ex-partner experienced substantial negative impacts. The article concludes that improved investigation processes and investigating both parties, where the reporting party has been found to be a perpetrator of DFV, may better support victims of DFV and deter perpetrators from this form of abuse.

Meier, J. S. (2020). US child custody outcomes in cases involving parental alienation and abuse allegations: What do the data show?. *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, 42(1), 92-105. DOI:10.1080/09649069.2020.1701941

Family court and abuse professionals have long been polarized over the use of parental alienation claims to discredit a mother alleging that the father has been abusive or is unsafe for the children. This paper reports the findings from an empirical study of ten years of U.S. cases involving abuse and alienation claims. The findings confirm that mothers' claims of abuse, especially child physical or sexual abuse, increase their risk of losing custody, and that fathers' cross-claims of alienation virtually double that risk. Alienation's impact is gender-specific; fathers alleging mothers are abusive are not similarly undermined when mothers cross-claim alienation. In non-abuse cases, however, the data suggest that alienation has a more gender-neutral impact. These nuanced findings may help abuse and alienation professionals find some common ground.

Harman, J. J., Bernet, W., & Harman, J. (2019). Parental alienation: The blossoming of a field of study. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 28(2), 212–217. DOI:10.1177/0963721419827271

Parental alienation has been an unacknowledged and poorly understood form of family violence. Research on parental alienation and the behaviors that cause it has evolved out of decades of legal and clinical work documenting this phenomenon, leading to what could be considered a “greening,” or growth, of the field. Today, there is consensus among researchers as to what parental alienating behaviors are and how they affect children and the family system. We review the literature to detail what parental alienation is, how it is different from other parent–child problems such as estrangement and loyalty conflicts, and how it is perpetuated within and across different social systems. We conclude by highlighting research areas that need further investigation to develop and test effective solutions for ameliorating the devastating effects of parental alienation that, we posit, should be considered and understood not only as abusive to the child but also as a form of family violence directed toward both the child and the alienated parent.

Lowenstein, L. F. (2012). Child contact disputes between parents and allegations of sex abuse: What does the research say?. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 53, 194–203. DOI:10.1080/10502556.2012.663267

This article is written by a psychologist practicing in the area of clinical and forensic psychology. He has written widely in the area of child sex abuse, including a book entitled *Paedophilia*. He has dealt with many cases of parental alienation where sex abuse by one parent has been alleged. The object of this article is to try to provide a way of clarifying whether or not sexual abuse has occurred between an adult and a child, especially when implacable hostility exists between the parents who have parted. It is at such times that many custodial parents make allegations of sexual abuse against a now-absent parent, usually the father, to prevent access. It is important to protect children from actual sex abuse when it has occurred and to prevent this from reoccurring. It is, however, equally

important not to allow false sexual allegations against a former partner who might have done nothing wrong but carried out his role as a caring and loving parent. The appendices of the article consist of an inventory that can be used by practitioners to differentiate true from false sex abuse allegations especially in relation to parental alienation conflicts.

Tonmyr, L., Ouimet, C., & Ugnat, A. (2012). [A review of findings from the Canadian Incidence study of reported child abuse and neglect \(CIS\)](#). *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 103(2), 103–112. DOI:10.1007/BF03404212

This article critically assesses and reviews analyses derived from three cycles of the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS) published between 2001 and October 2011. Articles were retrieved from the Public Health Agency of Canada's data request records, which tracked database access and ensuing publications. The included articles were reviewed and appraised independently by the authors. Overall, 37 peer-reviewed articles using CIS data were included in the review. These articles revealed an increased likelihood of substantiation or placement if investigations 1) uncovered the presence of emotional or physical harm in a child, 2) involved older children, 3) identified the presence of risk indicators in caregivers, or 4) documented unstable or unsafe housing. A similar proportion of articles used a descriptive or multivariate approach to analyze CIS data, and strengths and limitations were identified. Researchers have analyzed and interpreted the CIS extensively, although several issues are understudied – such as neglect and emotional maltreatment – especially using multivariate approaches. We hope this review will contribute to helping address gaps in the CIS literature.

Lonsway, K. A., Archambault, J., & Lisak, D. (2009). [False reports: Moving beyond the issue to successfully investigate and prosecute non-stranger sexual assault.](#)

The issue of false reporting may be one of the most important barriers to successfully investigating and prosecuting sexual assault, especially with cases involving non-strangers. In this article, we will begin by reviewing the research on the percentage of false reports, and then go on to discuss some of the complex issues underlying societal beliefs and attitudes in this area.

Bala, N., Mitnick, M., Trocme, N., & Houston, C. (2007). Sexual abuse allegations and parental separation: Smokescreen or fire? *Journal of Family Studies*, 13(1), 26-56.
DOI:10.5172/jfs.327.13.1.26

If allegations of sexual abuse of a child are made after parents separate, the challenges of resolving custody and visitation issues are greatly increased, with the abuse allegations overshadowing other considerations. These are high conflict cases, and settlement may be very difficult (or inappropriate) to arrange. The involvement of a number of agencies and professionals, with overlapping responsibilities and potentially conflicting opinions, may complicate the resolution of these cases. A significant proportion of allegations of child abuse made in the context of parental separation are true, but this is a context with a relatively high rate of unfounded allegations. While some cases of untrue allegations are due to fabrication, more commonly unfounded allegations are made in good faith. Preexisting distrust or hostility may result in misunderstandings and unfounded allegations, especially in cases where the children involved are young and the allegations are reported through a parent. Some cases of unfounded allegations may be the product of the emotional disturbance of the accusing parent. This paper discusses how parental separation affects the making of child sexual abuse allegations, with particular emphasis on how separation may contribute to unfounded allegations. Recent research is reviewed, and national data from Canada on allegations of abuse and neglect when parents have separated is presented. Legal issues

that arise in these cases are discussed in the context of American and Canadian case law. The authors discuss factors that can help distinguish founded from unfounded cases. The paper concludes by offering some practical advice about the handling of this type of case by mental health professional, judges, and lawyers.

Johnson, T. C. (2005). Young children's problematic sexual behaviors, unsubstantiated allegations of child sexual abuse, and family boundaries in child custody disputes. *Journal of Child Custody*, 2(4), 111-126. DOI:10.1300/J190v02n04_09

Allegations of child sexual abuse are sometimes alleged based on a child's problematic sexual behaviors. When the allegations are unsubstantiated, child custody evaluators are asked to make recommendations regarding custody. Historically, it has been believed that if a child engages in problematic sexual behaviors it is strong evidence of child sexual abuse. Recent research finds that there are many reasons, other than overt sexual abuse, for children to engage in problematic sexual behaviors. This article outlines these reasons and provides a methodology for the evaluation of the boundaries in both parents' homes to assist in determining the possible etiology of the problematic sexual behaviors of the child. Suggestions are made regarding visitation and reunification if boundary concerns are found.

Johnson, J. R., Lee, S., Olesen, N. W., & Walters, M. G. (2005). Allegations and substantiations of abuse in custody-disputing families. *Family Court Review*, 43(2), 283-294. DOI:10.1111/j.1744-1617.2005.00029.x

In this study of 120 divorced families referred for child custody evaluations and custody counseling, multiple allegations of child abuse, neglect, and family violence were raised in the majority of cases. About half of the alleged abuse was substantiated in some way with one fourth involving abuse perpetrated by both parents. Different kinds of allegations were raised against mothers compared with fathers. Implications of these findings for

social policy, family court interventions, and the provision of coordinated services within the community are discussed.

Trocme, N., & Bala, N. (2005). False allegations of abuse and neglect when parents separate. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 29(12), 1333-1345.
DOI:10.1016/j.chiabu.2004.06.016

The 1998 Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS-98) is the first national study to document the rate of intentionally false allegations of abuse and neglect investigated by child welfare services in Canada. This paper provides a detailed summary of the characteristics associated with intentionally false reports of child abuse and neglect within the context of parental separation. A multistage sampling design was used, first to select a representative sample of 51 child welfare service areas across Canada. Child maltreatment investigations conducted in the selected sites during the months of October–December 1998 were tracked, yielding a final sample of 7,672 child maltreatment investigations reported to child welfare authorities because of suspected child abuse or neglect. Consistent with other national studies of reported child maltreatment, CIS-98 data indicate that more than one-third of maltreatment investigations are unsubstantiated, but only 4% of all cases are considered to be intentionally fabricated. Within the subsample of cases wherein a custody or access dispute has occurred, the rate of intentionally false allegations is higher: 12%. Results of this analysis show that neglect is the most common form of intentionally fabricated maltreatment, while anonymous reporters and noncustodial parents (usually fathers) most frequently make intentionally false reports. Of the intentionally false allegations of maltreatment tracked by the CIS-98, custodial parents (usually mothers) and children were least likely to fabricate reports of abuse or neglect. While the CIS-98 documents that the rate of intentionally false allegations is relatively low, these results raise important clinical and legal issues, which require further consideration.

American Prosecutors Research Institute, & National Center for the Prosecution of Child Abuse. (2004). *Investigation and prosecution of child abuse*. Sage.

Davies, G. M. (2004). Coping with suggestion and deception in children's accounts. In P. Granhag, & L. Stromwall (Eds.), *The detection of deception in forensic contexts* (pp. 148-171). Cambridge University Press. DOI:10.1017/CBO9780511490071.007

Faller, C. K. (2002). *Understanding and assessing child sexual maltreatment* (2nd ed.). Sage Publication.

Brown, T., Frederico, M., Hewitt, L., & Sheehan, R. (2001). The child abuse and divorce myth. *Child Abuse Review*, 10(2), 113-124. DOI:10.1002/car.671

When the authors of this article undertook a study into the way the Australian legal process managed child abuse allegations in custody and access disputes following partnership breakdown in de facto and legal marriages, they encountered what they came to think of as 'the child abuse and divorce myth'. The myth centred around a belief that child abuse allegations made during or after partnership breakdown were weapons fashioned to gain advantage in the marital war. Therefore, they were not real; therefore, they should not be taken seriously. Despite little previous research, these views were strongly held by both families and professionals. The article examines the myth, believed to be an international phenomenon, and shows, in detail, how the study's findings do not support it. In fact, the findings from this unique study contradict the myth in its totality and in its specific aspects. Thus, it is argued that the myth should be abandoned and a new knowledge base for professional intervention that recognizes the reality of this problem be adopted instead. As a result of the study, a new specialized intervention program for children involved in residence and contact disputes where child abuse was alleged is being trialed in the Family Court of Australia. Hopefully, the introduction of further

intervention programmes based on the reality of child abuse in these circumstances rather than on the myth will follow. Copyright © 2001 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Brown, T., Frederico, M., Hewitt, L., & Sheehan, R. (2000). Revealing the existence of child abuse in the context of marital breakdown and custody and access disputes. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 24(6), 849–859. DOI:10.1016/S0145-2134(00)00140-X

Child abuse in the context of legal and de facto marital breakdown has received little attention internationally. Many believe it does not exist in this context and regard it as just a “gambit in the divorce wars.” Recently, however, family courts in a number of countries have become concerned over the management of child abuse allegations in custody and access cases, known more commonly now as residence and contact cases. This article presents a unique research study, which investigated how the Family Court of Australia dealt with such cases. The study, covering all forms of child abuse, sought to discover who were the families bringing these problems to family courts, what precisely the abuse was and how the courts dealt with it. The study reviewed court records of some 200 families where child abuse allegations had been made in custody and access disputes in jurisdictions in two states, observed court proceedings and interviewed court and related services’ staff. The findings showed that these cases had become a core component of the court’s workload without any public or professional awareness of this change, that the abuse was real, that it was severe and serious, and that the courts and child protection services did not provide appropriate services to the families. A new specialized intervention system was developed based on the research and it is now being trialed and evaluated. The new intervention system contains features derived from the research findings that may be suitable internationally for implementation.

Oates, R. K., Jones, D. P., Denson, D., Sirotnak, A., Gary, N., & Krugman, R. (2000). Erroneous concerns about child sexual abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 24(1), 149-157.
DOI:10.1016/S0145-2134(99)00108-8

To assess the incidence and nature of concerns about sexual abuse, with particular reference to erroneous concerns of sexual abuse made by children. A review of case notes of all child sexual abuse reports to the Denver Department of Social Services over 12 months. Cases were put into four groups: substantiated, not sexual abuse, inconclusive and erroneous accounts by children. 551 cases were reviewed. Forty-three percent were substantiated, 21% were inconclusive and 34% were not considered to be abuse cases. There were 14 (2.5%) erroneous concerns emanating from children. They comprised three cases of allegations made in collusion with a parent, three cases where an innocent event was misinterpreted as sexual abuse and eight cases (1.5%) of false allegations of sexual abuse. Erroneous concern of sexual abuse from children are uncommon. The four categories of concern in this study, in contrast to the simple classification of substantiated and unsubstantiated, provide a means of encouraging open minded assessments of the typical concerns which a child protection agency receives.

Thoennes, N., & Tjade, P. G. (1990). The extent, nature, and validity of sexual abuse allegations in custody/visitation disputes. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 14(2), 151-163.
DOI:10.1016/0145-2134(90)90026-P

Using information from mail and telephone surveys and personal interviews with legal and mental health professionals who deal with child abuse cases, and empirical data from 12 domestic relations courts throughout the United States, the study concludes that only a small proportion of contested custody and visitation cases involve sexual abuse allegations. Records maintained by family court workers place the figure at less than 2%. A sample of 169 cases for which data were gathered from court counselors, family court, and CPS agency files also found that accusations were brought by mothers (67%) and fathers (28%) and third parties (11%). Fathers were accused in 51% of all cases, but

allegations were also made against mothers, mothers' new partners, and extended family members. In the 129 cases for which a determination of the validity of the allegation was available, 50% were found to involve abuse, 33% were found to involve no abuse, and 17% resulted in an indeterminate ruling. Four factors were significantly associated with the perceived validity of the abuse report: age of the victim, frequency of the alleged abuse, prior abuse/neglect reports, and the amount of time elapsing between filing for divorce and the emergence of the allegation.

Boat, B. W., & Everson, M. D. (1989). False allegations of sexual abuse by children and adolescents. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 28(2), 230–235. DOI:10.1097/00004583-198903000-00014

The frequency of false allegations of sexual abuse by children and adolescents is of significant legal and clinical importance. The rate of false allegations of sexual abuse is examined in a large sample of Child Protective Services (CPS) cases. The criteria used by CPS workers in judging the validity of allegations are considered, and the relationship between substantiation rates and attitudes about the trustworthiness of child reports of abuse is explored. Many professionals in the field of child sexual abuse are more skeptical of child and adolescent claims of sexual abuse than available research suggests is warranted.

Lack of Physical Evidence

Kellogg, N. D., Farst, K. J., & Adams, J. A. (2023). Interpretation of medical findings in suspected child sexual abuse: An update for 2023. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 145, 106283. DOI:10.1016/j.chiabu.2023.106283

Health care professionals who examine children who may have been sexually abused need to be able to recognize, and photo-document any physical signs, and to have access to expert reviewers, particularly when signs concerning for sexual abuse are found. Although the general consensus among practitioners is that children will show few signs of sexual abuse on examination, there is considerable variability and rates of positive exam findings among practitioners of different professions, practice settings, and countries. This review will summarize new data and recommendations regarding the interpretation of medical findings and sexually transmitted infections (STIs); assessment and management of pediatric patients presenting with suspected sexual abuse or assault; and testing and treating patients for STIs. Updates to a table listing an approach to the interpretation of medical findings are presented, and reasons for changes are discussed.

Mishori, R., Ferdowsian, H., Naimer, K., Volpellier, M., & McHale, T. (2019). [The little tissue that couldn't – Dispelling myths about the Hymen's role in determining sexual history and assault](#). *Reproductive Health*, 16, 74. DOI:10.1186/s12978-019-0731-8

Conclusions about women's and girls' sexual history are made in some settings based on assumptions about the hymen, a small membranous tissue with no known biological function, which typically occupies a portion of the external vaginal opening in females. Clinicians, however, continue to refer to changes in the hymen to assess for a history of consensual or nonconsensual sexual intercourse. We reviewed published evidence to dispel commonly held myths about the hymen and its morphology, function, and use as evidence in cases of sexual violence. An examination of the hymen is not an accurate or reliable test of a previous history of sexual activity, including sexual assault. Clinicians

tasked with performing forensic sexual assault examinations should avoid descriptions such as “intact hymen” or “broken hymen” in all cases, and describe specific findings using international standards and terminology of morphological features. We call on clinicians to consider the low predictive value of a hymen examination and to: 1) avoid relying solely on the status of the hymen in sexual assault examinations and reporting; 2) help raise awareness of this issue among their peers and counterparts in law enforcement and the judicial system; and 3) promote fact-based discussions about the limitations of hymenal examinations as part of clinical education for all specialties that address the sexual or reproductive health of women and girls.

Mathews, B., Lee, X. J., & Norman, R. E. (2016). Impact of a new mandatory reporting law on reporting and identification of child sexual abuse: A seven year time trend analysis. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 56, 62–79. DOI:10.1016/j.chiabu.2016.04.009

Child sexual abuse is widespread and difficult to detect. To enhance case identification, many societies have enacted mandatory reporting laws requiring designated professionals, most often police, teachers, doctors and nurses, to report suspected cases to government child welfare agencies. Little research has explored the effects of introducing a reporting law on the number of reports made, and the outcomes of those reports. This study explored the impact of a new legislative mandatory reporting duty for child sexual abuse in the State of Western Australia over seven years. We analyzed data about numbers and outcomes of reports by mandated reporters, for periods before the law (2006–2008) and after the law (2009–2012). Results indicate that the number of reports by mandated reporters of suspected child sexual abuse increased by a factor of 3.7, from an annual mean of 662 in the three year pre-law period to 2448 in the four year post-law period. The increase in the first two post-law years was contextually and statistically significant. Report numbers stabilized in 2010–2012, at one report per 210 children. The number of investigated reports increased threefold, from an annual mean of 451 in the pre-law period to 1363 in the post-law period. Significant decline in the

proportion of mandated reports that were investigated in the first two post-law years suggested the new level of reporting and investigative need exceeded what was anticipated. However, a subsequent significant increase restored the pre-law proportion, suggesting systemic adaptive capacity. The number of substantiated investigations doubled, from an annual mean of 160 in the pre-law period to 327 in the post-law period, indicating twice as many sexually abused children were being identified.

Anderson, B., Thimmesch, I., Aardsma, N., Terrell, M., Carstater, S., & Schober, J. (2014). The prevalence of abnormal genital findings, vulvovaginitis, enuresis and encopresis in children who present with allegations of sexual abuse. *Journal of Pediatric Urology*, 10(6), 1216-1221. DOI:10.1016/j.jpurol.2014.06.011

Objective: To assess the prevalence of vulvovaginitis, enuresis and encopresis in children who were referred for allegations of sexual abuse. Subjects: A retrospective chart review of 1280 children presenting for non-acute examination after allegations of sexual abuse during a 15-year time span. Interview documentation, physical examination documentation, urinalysis, urine and vaginal cultures were reviewed. Results: Of the 1280 children, 73.3% were female and 26.7% male. The ages of the children ranged from 6 months to 18 years (median age was 6 years). Interviews revealed that fondling contact was the most common allegation, followed by oral, vaginal, and anal penetration. Interviews also disclosed lower urinary tract symptoms, UTI, constipation, encopresis, and enuresis. Physical examination revealed no abnormal genital findings in 44.7% of cases. Examinations of the vagina noted: erythema (18.1%); hymenal notching (posterior 16.8%, anterior 4.4%); vulvovaginitis (14.0%); laceration or transection (0.6%); and bruising (0.4%). Examination of the anus noted: anal fissure/tear (14.9%); loss of anal tone (10.6%); reflex anal dilatation (9.2%); venous congestion (3.8%); and proctitis (0.9%). Vulvovaginitis was noted in 14% (131/936) and encopresis in 2.3% (21/936). Enuresis according to age was reported in 13% of 5–9 year olds, 14.7% of 10–16 year olds and 18.2% of 17–18 year olds suspected of being abused. Conclusion: Prevalence of vulvovaginitis and enuresis were

increased, and encopresis was decreased in children with allegations of sexual abuse when compared to the general pediatric population. Physicians should continue to be aware of the possibility of the presence of these conditions in children who have been sexually abused, and offer appropriate treatment.

Herman, S. (2010). The role of corroborative evidence in child sexual abuse evaluations. *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling*, 7(3), 189-212.
DOI:10.1002/jip.122

Published studies of forensic child sexual abuse (CSA) evaluations by mental health and medical professionals and paraprofessionals (MHPs) were analysed in order to evaluate two widely held assumptions. These related assumptions are (1) evidence that corroborates children's reports of sexual abuse is rare in forensic CSA evaluations; and (2) in the vast majority of evaluations, MHPs base their judgements about whether or not sexual abuse allegations are true on their assessments of children's reports of sexual abuse and other psychosocial data. Data from five chart review studies of a combined total of 894 forensic CSA evaluations provided sufficient information to assess the validity of these assumptions. Corroborative evidence was present in 36% of the 894 evaluations and in 54% of evaluations in which MHPs judged the allegations likely to be true, contradicting the first assumption. In the evaluations in which corroborative evidence was present, the presence or absence of a child's report of sexual abuse was only weakly associated with MHPs' judgements about the validity of the allegations (allegations in almost all corroborated cases were judged likely to be true, even in the absence of a child's report), partially contradicting the second assumption. Implications of this analysis for research and policy are discussed.

Hornor, G. (2010). A normal ano-genital exam: Sexual abuse or not?. *Journal of Pediatric Health Care*, 24(3), 145-151. DOI:10.1016/j.pedhc.2008.10.007

Sexual abuse is a problem of epidemic proportions in the United States. Pediatric nurse practitioners (PNPs) are at the forefront of providing care to children and families. The PNP is in a unique position to educate patients and families regarding sexual abuse and dispel common myths associated with sexual abuse. One such myth is that a normal ano-genital examination is synonymous with the absence of sexual abuse. This article will provide primary care providers, including PNPs, with a framework for understanding why a normal ano-genital examination does not negate the possibility of sexual abuse/assault. Normal ano-genital anatomy, changes that occur with puberty, and physical properties related to the genitalia and anus will be discussed. Photos will provide visualization of both normal variants of the pre-pubertal hymen and genitalia as well as changes that occur with puberty. Implications for practice for PNPs will be discussed.

Walsh, W. A., Jones, L. M., Cross, T. P., & Lippert, T. (2010). Prosecuting child sexual abuse: The importance of evidence type. *Crime & Delinquency*, 56(3), 436-454. DOI:10.1177/0011128708320484

Corroborating evidence has been associated with a decrease in children's distress during the court process, yet few studies have empirically examined the impact of evidence type on prosecution rates. This study examined the types of evidence and whether charges were filed in a sample of child sexual abuse cases ($n = 329$). Cases with a child disclosure, a corroborating witness, an offender confession, or an additional report against the offender were more likely to have charges filed, controlling for case characteristics. When cases were lacking strong evidence (confession, physical evidence, eyewitness), cases with a corroborating witness were nearly twice as likely to be charged. Charged cases tended to have at least two types of evidence, regardless of whether there was a child disclosure or not.

Anderst, J., Kellogg, N., & Jung, I. (2009). Reports of repetitive penile-genital penetration often have no definitive evidence of penetration. *Pediatrics*, 124(3), 403–409. DOI:10.1542/peds.2008-3053

The goals were to evaluate the association of definitive hymenal findings with the number of reported episodes of penile-genital penetration, pain, bleeding, dysuria, and time since assault for girls presenting for nonacute, sexual assault examinations. Charts of all girls 5 to 17 of age who provided a history of nonacute, penile-genital, penetrative abuse were reviewed. Interviews and examinations occurred over a 4-year period at a children's advocacy center. Characteristics of the histories provided by the subjects were examined for associations with definitive findings of penetrative trauma. Five hundred six patients were included in the study. Of the 56 children with definitive examination results, 52 had no history of consensual penile-vaginal intercourse and all were ≥ 10 years of age. Analysis was unable to detect an association between the number of reported penile-genital penetrative events and definitive genital findings. Eighty-seven percent of victims who provided a history of >10 penetrative events had no definitive evidence of penetration. A history of bleeding with abuse was more than twice as likely for subjects with definitive findings. Children <10 years of age were twice as likely to report >10 penetrative events, although none had definitive findings on examination. Most victims who reported repetitive penile-genital contact that involved some degree of perceived penetration had no definitive evidence of penetration on examination of the hymen. Similar results were seen for victims of repetitive assaults involving perceived penetration over long periods of time, as well as victims with a history of consensual sex.

Berkoff, M. C., Zolotor, A. J., Makoroff, K. L., Thackeray, J. D., Shapiro, R. A., & Runyan, D. K. (2008). Has this prepubertal girl been sexually abused?. *JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association*, 300(23), 2779–2792. DOI:10.1001/jama.2008.827

The legal and social sequelae of interpreting genital findings as indicative of sexual abuse are significant. While the absence of genital trauma does not rule out sexual abuse, the

physical examination can identify genital findings compatible with sexual abuse. Objectives: To determine the diagnostic utility of the genital examination in prepubertal girls for identifying nonacute sexual abuse. Data Sources: Published articles (1966–October 2008) that appeared in the MEDLINE database and were indexed under the search terms of *child abuse*, *sexual* or *child abuse* and either *physical examination*; *genitalia*; *female*, *diagnosis*; or *sensitivity and specificity*; and bibliographies of retrieved articles and textbooks. Study Selection: Three of the authors independently reviewed titles of articles obtained from MEDLINE and selected articles for full-text review. Data Extraction: Two authors independently abstracted data to calculate sensitivity, specificity, and likelihood ratios for the diagnosis of nonacute genital trauma caused by sexual abuse in prepubertal girls. Results: Data were not pooled due to study heterogeneity. The presence of vaginal discharge (positive likelihood ratio, 2.7; 95% confidence interval, 1.2–6.0) indicates an increased likelihood of sexual abuse. In the posterior hymen, hymenal transections, deep notches, and perforations prompt concerns for genital trauma from sexual abuse, but the sensitivity is unknown. Without a history of genital trauma from sexual abuse, the majority of prepubertal girls will not have a hymenal transection (specificity close to 100%). Conclusions: Vaginal discharge as well as posterior hymenal transections, deep notches, and perforations raise the suspicion for sexual abuse in a prepubertal girl, but the findings do not independently confirm the diagnosis. Given the broad 95% confidence intervals around the likelihood ratios for the presence of findings along with the low or unknown sensitivity of all physical examination findings evaluated, the physical examination cannot independently confirm or exclude nonacute sexual abuse as the cause of genital trauma in prepubertal girls.

Kellogg, N. D., Menard, S. W., & Santos, A. (2004). Genital anatomy in pregnant adolescents: "Normal" does not mean "nothing happened". *Pediatrics*, 113(1), e67-e69. DOI:10.1542/peds.113.1.e67

Many clinicians expect that a history of penile-vaginal penetration will be associated with examination findings of penetrating trauma. A retrospective case review of 36 pregnant adolescent girls who presented for sexual abuse evaluations was performed to determine the presence or absence of genital findings that indicate penetrating trauma. Historical information and photograph documentation were reviewed. Only 2 of the 36 subjects had definitive findings of penetration. This study may be helpful in assisting clinicians and juries to understand that vaginal penetration generally does not result in observable evidence of healed injury to perihymenal tissues.

Heger, A., Ticson, L., Velasquez, O., & Bernier, R. (2002). Children referred for possible sexual abuse: Medical findings in 2384 children. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 26(6), 645-659. DOI:10.1016/S0145-2134(02)00339-3

The goal of this study was to compare rates of positive medical findings in a 5-year prospective study of 2384 children, referred for evaluation of possible sexual abuse, with two decades of research. The prospective study summarizes demographic information, clinical history, relationship of perpetrators, nature of abuse, and clinical findings. The study reports on the results by patterns of referral and the medical examination. There were 2384 children evaluated in a tertiary referral center between 1985 and 1990 for possible sexual abuse. Children were referred after they disclosed sexual abuse, because of behavioral changes or exposure to an abusive environment, and because of possible medical conditions. A total of 96.3% of all children referred for evaluation had a normal medical examination; 95.6% of children reporting abuse were normal, 99.8% who were referred for behavioral changes or exposure to abuse were also normal. Of the 182 children referred for evaluation of medical conditions, 92% were found to be normal at the time of examination by the Child Advocacy Center. The remaining 15/182 (8%) that

were found to be abnormal were diagnosed with sexually transmitted diseases, acute or healed genital injuries, and were 17% (15/88) of the total cases found to have medical findings diagnostic of abuse. Interviews of the children indicated that 68% of the girls and 70% of the boys reported severe abuse, defined as penetration of vagina or anus. Penetration was associated with a higher percentage of abnormal findings in girls (6%) compared to 1% of the boys. The relationship of the abuser impacted on the severity of the abuse. Research indicates that medical, social, and legal professionals have relied too heavily on the medical examination in diagnosing child sexual abuse. History from the child remains the single most important diagnostic feature in coming to the conclusion that a child has been sexually abused. Only 4% of all children referred for medical evaluation of sexual abuse have abnormal examinations at the time of evaluation. Even with a history of severe abuse such as vaginal or anal penetration, the rate of abnormal medical findings is only 5.5%. Biological parents are less likely to engage in severe abuse than parental substitutes, extended family members, or strangers.

Questioning Children in Court

Cameron, M. N., Merriwether, E. P., Katzman, J., Stolzenberg, S. N., Evans, A. D., & McWilliams, K. (2024). [Attorneys' questions about time in criminal cases of alleged child sexual abuse](#). *Child Maltreatment*, 0(0). DOI:10.1177/10775595241271426

In cases of alleged child sexual abuse, information about the timing of events is often needed. However, published developmental laboratory research has demonstrated that children struggle to provide accurate and reliable testimony about time and there is currently a lack of field research examining how attorneys actually question child witnesses about time in court. The current study analyzed 130 trial transcripts from cases of alleged child sexual abuse containing a child witness between the ages of 5–17 years old to determine the frequency, style, and content of attorneys' questions and child responses about time. We found that attorneys primarily ask closed-ended temporal location questions (i.e., asking when an event took place using a temporal construct such as day, month, and year) to child witnesses. Additionally, children, of all ages, rarely said "I don't know" or expressed uncertainty in response to temporal questions. These findings are concerning as researchers find that children tend to struggle with temporally locating past events.

Denne, E., George, S. St., & Stolzenberg, S. N. (2023). [Developmental considerations in how defense attorneys employ child sexual abuse and rape myths when questioning alleged victims of child sexual abuse](#). *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 38(23–24), 11914–11934. DOI:10.1177/08862605231189512

Myths and misconceptions surrounding the nature of sexual assault play a role in shaping the perceptions of victims as credible and perpetrators as culpable. Defense attorneys often capitalize on myths in court as an element of their defense strategies. Researchers have established that myths about both rape generally, and child sexual abuse (CSA) specifically, appear with regularity in criminal trials of children who have made an

allegation of CSA. Yet no work has systematically and quantitatively examined the impact of a child's age on the probability that attorneys will ask a myth-consistent question in criminal trials of CSA. In the current study, we examine 6,384 lines of questioning across 134 criminal trials of CSA to assess whether defense attorneys employ developmentally sensitive strategies when asking children questions that draw upon myths about sexual violence (CSA myths: disclosure myths, extent of harm, a child's positive relationship with their perpetrator, and the presence of witnesses; Rape myths: force and resistance, motives to lie, victim precipitation, and character issues). We found that attorneys did not vary their use of CSA myths by the age of the child. However, the probability that a child would receive a rape myth-consistent line of questioning, increased with a child's age. This work suggests that attorneys are, at times, strategic in their use of myths and employ these adult rape myths in ways that are plausible, purposeful, and likely impactful. The strategic use of these questions may acknowledge young children's limited development but may place too great a demand on older children's developmental capacities. Prosecutors should be prepared to counterquestion these myths in redirect examination.

George, S. St., Denne, E., & Stolzenberg, S. N. (2022). Blaming children: How rape myths manifest in defense attorneys' questions to children testifying about child sexual abuse. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 37(17-18), NP16623-NP16646. DOI:10.1177/08862605211023485

Since rape myths were codified in 1980 (Burt, 1980), scholars have shown that individuals who endorse rape myths perceive victims as less credible and more responsible for rape and perpetrators as less responsible. Studies also show that rape myths hinder successful adjudication of rape cases by influencing juries' assessments of perpetrator guilt (Dinos et al., 2015). While most of this research focuses on sexual assaults involving adult victims, some scholars have found that victims as young as 12 are blamed for rape. If rape myths influence the perceptions of sex offenses even when victims are children, then defense attorneys in child sexual abuse (CSA) cases may be motivated to highlight rape myth in

CSA trials. In the current study, we conducted a content analysis of the cross-examinations of 122 children, aged 6 to 17, alleging CSA to determine if and how defense attorneys question children about rape myths. We looked for questions about force and resistance, motives to lie, victim precipitation, and character issues (e.g., habitual drug use). We found that defense attorneys commonly referenced rape myths in CSA trials. A total of 10% of all defense attorneys' lines of questioning referenced a rape myth, and attorneys asked 77% of children at least one rape myth line of questioning. Whether or not attorneys asked about different myths and the content of these questions varied by children's age. Our findings indicate that defense attorneys use rape myths strategically to undermine children's credibility in CSA trials, but they adapt (adult) rape myths in ways that are plausible in the CSA context. Policies formed to prevent the prejudicial impact of rape myths at sexual assault trials involving adults (e.g., rape shield laws) may not adequately prevent their impact in CSA trials. Prosecutors, therefore, should address rape myths at CSA trials.

Meier, J. S. (2022). [Denial of family violence in court: An empirical analysis and path forward for family law](#). *George Washington Law Journal*, 110, 835.

Sullivan, C., George, S. St., Stolzenberg, S. N., Williams, S., & Lyon, T. D. (2022). [Imprecision about body mechanics when child witnesses are questioned about sexual abuse](#). *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 37(13-14), NP12375-NP12397.
DOI:10.1177/0886260521997941

In child sexual abuse cases, a central part of the child's testimony is their description of the abuse episode. However, it is often difficult for children to describe the body mechanics of abuse, and miscommunications are likely to occur. In the present study, we examined questions about the mechanics of abuse in trial transcripts ($N = 63$) to identify sources of miscommunication ($N = 130$) between attorneys and children (5–12 years old, M age at trial = 9.44, $SD = 1.97$). We found that both attorneys and children used

imprecise language, which led to miscommunication. Specifically, the imprecise use of sexual terminology and the word “touch,” polarity items, broad open-ended questions, anaphora and elliptical questions, and “how” questions led to imprecision in attorneys’ questions. Imprecise attorney questions often elicited underinformative answers from children, including misinterpretations of the grain size (i.e., level of detail) requested. In response to these underinformative answers, attorneys at times asked highly focused and leading questions, which led to further miscommunications. Implications and recommendations for future research on how best to elicit details about the mechanics of abuse from children are discussed.

St George, S., Garcia-Johnson, A., Denne, E., & Stolzenberg, S. N. (2020). ["Did You Ever Fight Back?": Jurors' questions to children testifying in criminal trials about alleged sexual abuse](#). *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 47(8), 1032–1054.
DOI:10.1177/0093854820935960

The current study examined jurors’ questions to children in criminal trials assessing children’s allegations of sexual abuse, demonstrating a new avenue for studying how jurors think about, respond to, and assess evidence. We used qualitative content analysis to examine jurors’ questions to 134, 5- to 17-year-olds alleging sexual abuse in criminal trial testimonies. Five themes emerged: abuse interactions, contextual details of abuse, children’s reactions to abuse, children’s (delayed) disclosure, and case background details. Jurors often ask about abuse dynamics, the context surrounding abuse, and children’s disclosure processes, reflecting common misconceptions about child sexual abuse (CSA), such as whether it is credible to delay disclosure or maintain contact with an alleged perpetrator. This study improves our understanding of how jurors understand and evaluate children’s reports of alleged CSA, suggesting that jurors may struggle to understand children’s reluctance.

Myers, J. E. (2017). Cross-examination: A defense. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 23(4), 472-477. DOI:10.1037/law0000131

Some researchers criticize the practice of cross-examining child witnesses. A few critics go so far as to suggest that cross-examination undermines the search for truth. This essay takes issue with critics of cross-examination, and argues that, in the adversary system of justice, cross-examination serves vital functions. While the essay defends cross-examination, it acknowledges 2 important matters: First, developmentally inappropriate questions can undermine children's accuracy, and developmentally inappropriate questions abound in court. Second, cross-examination can undermine the accuracy of children's truthful testimony. A law is proposed to curtail developmentally improper questioning. The argument is made that the harm of occasional inaccuracy caused by cross-examination is outweighed by the benefit of cross-examination.

Andrews, S. J., Ahern, E. C., Stolzenberg, S. N., & Lyon, T. D. (2016). [The productivity of wh-prompts when children testify](#). *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 30(3), 341-349. DOI:10.1002/acp.3204

Wh- prompts (what, how, why, who, when, and where) vary widely in their specificity and accuracy, but differences among them have largely been ignored in research examining the productivity of different question types in child testimony. We examined 120 six- to 12-year-olds' criminal court testimony in child sexual abuse cases to compare the productivity of various wh- prompts. We distinguished among wh- prompts, most notably the following: what/how-happen prompts focusing generally on events, what/how-dynamic prompts focusing on actions or unfolding processes/events, what/how-causality prompts focusing on causes and reasons, and what/how-static prompts focusing on non-action contextual information regarding location, objects, and time. Consistent with predictions, what/how-happen prompts were the most productive, and both what/how-dynamic prompts and wh- prompts about causality were more productive than other wh- prompts. Prosecutors asked proportionally more what/how-

dynamic prompts and fewer what/how-static prompts than defense attorneys. Future research and interviewer training may benefit from finer discrimination among wh-prompts. Copyright © 2016 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Klemfuss, J. A., Cleveland, K. C., Lyon, T. D., & Quas, J. A. (2016). [Relations between attorney temporal structure and children's response productivity in cases of alleged child sexual abuse](#). *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 22(2), 228–241.
DOI:10.1111/lcrp.12096

Previous research has demonstrated that attorney question format relates to child witness' response productivity. However, little work has examined the extent to which attorneys provide temporal structure in their questions, and the effects of this structure on children's responding. The purpose of this study was to address this gap in the literature to identify methods by which attorneys increase children's response productivity on the stand without risking objections from opposing counsel for 'calling for narrative answers'. In this study, we coded criminal court transcripts involving child witnesses (5–18 years) for narrative structure in attorney questions and productivity in children's responses. Half of the transcripts resulted in convictions, half in acquittals, balanced across key variables: child age, allegation severity, the child's relationship to the perpetrator, and the number of allegations. Prosecutors and defense attorneys varied substantially in their questioning tactics. Prosecutors used more temporal structure in their questions and varied their questioning by the age of the child. These variations had implications for children's response productivity. Results indicate that temporal structure is a novel and viable method for enhancing children's production of case-relevant details on the witness stand.

Ahern, E. C., Stolzenberg, S. N., & Lyon, T. D. (2015). [Do prosecutors use interview instructions or build rapport with child witnesses?](#) *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 33(4), 476–492. DOI:10.1002/bsl.2183

This study examined the quality of interview instructions and rapport-building provided by prosecutors to 168 children aged 5–12 years testifying in child sexual abuse cases, preceding explicit questions about abuse allegations. Prosecutors failed to effectively administer key interview instructions, build rapport, or rely on open-ended narrative producing prompts during this early stage of questioning. Moreover, prosecutors often directed children's attention to the defendant early in the testimony. The productivity of different types of wh- questions varied, with what/how questions focusing on actions being particularly productive. The lack of instructions, poor quality rapport-building, and closed-ended questioning suggest that children may not be adequately prepared during trial to provide lengthy and reliable reports to their full ability.

Andrews, S. J., Lamb, M. E., & Lyon, T. D. (2015). The effects of question repetition on responses when prosecutors and defense attorneys question children alleging sexual abuse in court. *Law and Human Behavior*, 39(6), 559–570. DOI:10.1037/lhb0000152

This study examined the effects of repeated questions (n = 12,169) on 6- to 12-year-olds' testimony in child sexual abuse cases. We examined transcripts of direct- and cross-examinations of 120 children, categorizing how attorneys asked repeated questions in-court and how children responded. Defense attorneys repeated more questions (33.6% of total questions asked) than prosecutors (17.8%) and repeated questions using more suggestive prompts (38% of their repeated questions) than prosecutors (15%). In response, children typically repeated or elaborated on their answers and seldom contradicted themselves. Self-contradictions were most often elicited by suggestive and option-posing prompts posed by either type of attorney. Child age did not affect the numbers of questions repeated, the types of prompts used by attorneys to repeat questions, or how children responded to repetition. Most (61.5%) repeated questions were

repeated more than once and, as repetition frequency increased, so did the number of self-contradictions. “Asked-and-answered” objections were rarely raised (n = 45) and were more likely to be overruled than sustained by judges. Findings suggest that attorneys frequently ask children “risky” repeated questions. Both attorneys and the judiciary need more training in identifying and restricting the unnecessary repetition of questions.

Andrews, S. J., Lamb, M. E., & Lyon, T. D. (2015). Question types, responsiveness, and self-contradictions when prosecutors and defense attorneys question alleged victims of sexual abuse. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 29*, 253–261.
DOI:10.1002/acp.3103

We examined 120 trial transcripts of 6- to 12-year-old children testifying to sexual abuse. Age and attorney role were analyzed in relation to question types, children's responsiveness and self-contradiction frequency. A total of 48,716 question–response pairs were identified. Attorneys used more closed-ended than open-ended prompts. Prosecutors used more invitations (3% vs. 0%), directives, and option-posing prompts than defense attorneys, who used more suggestive prompts than prosecutors. Children were more unresponsive to defense attorneys than to prosecutors. Self-contradictions were identified in 95% of the cases. Defense attorneys elicited more self-contradictions than prosecutors, but nearly all prosecutors (86%) elicited at least one self-contradiction. Suggestive questions elicited more self-contradictions than any other prompt type. There were no associations with age. These findings suggest that neither prosecutors nor defense attorneys question children in developmentally appropriate ways.

Evans, A. D., Stolzenberg, S., Lee, K., & Lyon, T. D. (2014). [Young children's difficulty with indirect speech acts: Implications for questioning child witnesses](#). *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 32(6), 775–788. DOI:10.1002/bsl.2142

Prior research suggests that infelicitous choice of questions can significantly underestimate children's actual abilities, independently of suggestiveness. One possibly difficult question type is indirect speech acts such as "Do you know..." questions (DYK, e.g., "Do you know where it happened?"). These questions directly ask if respondents know, while indirectly asking what respondents know. If respondents answer "yes," but fail to elaborate, they are either ignoring or failing to recognize the indirect question (known as pragmatic failure). Two studies examined the effect of indirect speech acts on maltreated and non-maltreated 2- to 7 year-olds' post-event interview responses. Children were read a story and later interviewed using DYK and Wh- questions. Additionally, children completed a series of executive functioning tasks. Both studies revealed that using DYK questions increased the chances of pragmatic failure, particularly for younger children and those with lower inhibitory control skills. Copyright # 2014 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Klemfuss, J. Z., Quas, J. A., & Lyon, T. D. (2014). [Attorneys' questions and children's productivity in child sexual abuse criminal trials](#). *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 28(5), 780–788. DOI:10.1002/acp.3048

We investigated the links between questions child witnesses are asked in court, children's answers, and case outcome. Samples of acquittals and convictions were matched on child age, victim–defendant relationship, and allegation count and severity. Transcripts were coded for question types, including a previously under–examined type of potentially suggestive question, declarative questions. Children's productivity was conceptualized in a novel way by separating new from repeated content and by adjusting the definition based on the linguistic demands of the questions. Attorneys frequently used declarative questions, and disconcertingly, attorneys who used these and other suggestive questions more frequently were more likely to win their case. Open-ended and closed-ended

questions elicited similar levels of productivity from children, and both elicited more productivity compared with suggestive questions. Results highlight how conceptualization of questions and answers can influence conclusions, and demonstrate the important real-world implications of attorney questioning strategies on legal cases with child witnesses.

Stolzenberg, S. N. & Lyon, T. D. (2014). [How attorneys question children about the dynamics of sexual abuse and disclosure in criminal trials](#). *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 20(1), 19–30. DOI:10.1037/a0035000

Little is known about how the dynamics of sexual abuse and disclosure are discussed in criminal court. We examined how attorneys ask child witnesses in sexual abuse cases (N 72, 6 –16 years of age) about their prior conversations, both with suspects and with disclosure recipients. Prosecutors' questions were more open-ended than defense attorneys, but most questions asked by either attorney were yes/no questions, and children tended to provide unelaborated responses. Prosecutors were more inclined to ask about children's prior conversations with suspects than defense attorneys, but focused on the immediate abuse rather than on grooming behavior or attempts to silence the victim. Prosecutors were also more inclined to ask about children's motives for disclosing or for failing to disclose than defense attorneys, but in most cases, failed to ask. Both types of attorney asked children about prior disclosures, although defense attorneys were more inclined to ask children to recall specific content in particular disclosures. On average, children were asked about five disclosure recipients, and denied disclosing some information in 93% of cases. Attorneys exhibited little sensitivity to the age of the child in selecting their questions. The implications of the results for improving the process by which abuse cases are tried in court are discussed.

Zajac, R., O'Neill, S., & Hayne, H. (2012). Disorder in the courtroom? Child witnesses under cross-examination. *Developmental Review, 32*(3), 181-204.
DOI:10.1016/j.dr.2012.06.006

When a witness gives evidence in an adversarial criminal trial, there are two main questioning phases: direct examination and cross-examination. Special provisions are sometimes made for children to give direct evidence, but the majority of child witnesses are still cross-examined. While several decades of research have demonstrated how to elicit children's direct evidence in a manner that promotes completeness and accuracy, the cross-examination process directly violates many of these principles. Here, we outline the characteristics of cross-examination, particularly as it pertains to children, and we review research about its impact on children, their testimony, and their credibility. We consider options for reforming the cross-examination process and propose avenues for future research.

Lamb, M. E., Malloy, L. C., & La Rooy, D. J. (2011). Setting realistic expectations: Developmental characteristics, capacities and limitations. In M. E. Lamb, D. J. La Rooy, L. C. Malloy, & C. Katz (Eds.) *Children's testimony: A handbook of psychological research and forensic practice* (pp. 15-48). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
DOI:10.1002/9781119998495.ch2

Zajac, R., & Hayne, H. (2006). The negative effect of cross-examination style questioning on children's accuracy: Older children are not immune. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 20*(1), 3-16. DOI:10.1002/acp.1169

We present data suggesting that the negative effect of cross-examination style questioning on children's accuracy is not limited to young children. Using an identical paradigm to that used with 5- and 6-year-olds by Zajac and Hayne in 2003, we examined the effect of cross-examination style questioning on 9- and 10-year-olds' accounts of a prior staged event. Like younger children, 9- and 10-year-old children made frequent changes to their original responses during cross-examination style questioning. Although

9- and 10-year-old children were more likely to change incorrect responses than correct ones, they nonetheless changed over 40% of their correct responses, and cross-examination still exerted a significant negative effect on their overall accuracy levels. The present findings suggest that although older children appear to be somewhat less vulnerable to cross examination style questioning, they are still not immune to the negative effects of this process on the accuracy of their reports.

Zajac, R., Gross, J., & Hayne, H. (2003). Asked and answered: Questioning children in the courtroom. *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, 10(1), 199-209.
DOI:10.1375/pplt.2003.10.1.199

In the present experiment, we analysed court transcripts in which children aged 5 to 13 years provided the key evidence in sexual abuse trials. We developed two separate coding schemes for lawyers' questions and children's responses. Consistent with past research, defence lawyers conducting cross-examination asked a higher proportion of complex, grammatically confusing, credibility-challenging, leading, and closed questions than prosecution lawyers. In responding to defence lawyers' questions, child witnesses rarely asked for clarification and often attempted to answer questions that were ambiguous or did not make sense. Furthermore, over 75% of children changed at least one aspect of their testimony during the cross-examination process. These findings have important implications for the way in which children are examined in court.

Perry, N. W., McAuliff, B. D., Tam, P., Claycomb, L., Dostal, C., & Flanagan, C. (1995). When lawyers question children: Is justice served?. *Law and Human Behavior*, 19(6), 609-629. DOI:10.1007/BF01499377

Assessed the impact of some complex vs simple question forms frequently used by attorneys on the children's understanding of typical courtroom questions forms and the accuracy of children's responses. 15 males and 15 females from each of 4 student

populations (kindergarten, Grades 4 and 9, and college) viewed a videotaped incident and then responded to questions about the incident. Half the questions were asked in "lawyerese" (i.e., using complex question forms); the remaining half asked for the same information using simply phrased question forms of the same length. Lawyerese confused children, adolescents, and young adults alike. Questions that included multiple parts with mutually exclusive responses were the most difficult to answer; those that included negatives, double negatives, or difficult vocabulary also posed significant problems. Results suggest that complex question forms impede truth-seeking and should be prohibited in court. (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2014 APA, all rights reserved)