

**More Than One Interview:
Research-to-Practice**

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More Than One Interview – Research-to-Practice

History

The practice of limiting child witnesses or victims to a single forensic interview began with the development of Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) and the multi-disciplinary team (MDT) approach to handling alleged child abuse cases. This approach emphasized two key components: creating a child- and family-friendly environment and fostering collaboration among all investigative disciplines to share information, rather than conducting separate, potentially duplicative investigations. Since the forensic interview of the child is a crucial part of an investigation, efforts were made to minimize the number of times a child was questioned and to ensure specialized training for the professional conducting the interview. Attention was also given to providing a timely initial response and offering information and support to the child and family throughout the process.

A key goal of this approach was to reduce duplicative interviews of a child, which could lead to interview fatigue, system-induced trauma, and inconsistencies in the child's statements. However, over time, this goal evolved into a rigid rule and was adopted by the legal system and courts as an absolute best-practice principle in forensic interviewing.

Forensic interview specialists, as well as law enforcement and child protection investigators, soon recognized that the “one and done” approach was insufficient for some children. Contributing factors could be child-specific—such as temperament, communication barriers, fatigue, or reluctance to discuss difficult topics—or case-related, including delayed disclosure, multiple abuse episodes, or varied forms of victimization. For many years, the research literature offered neither criteria for determining when multiple interviews were appropriate nor guidance on how to

properly conduct them. In early 2000, the National Children’s Advocacy Center (NCAC) developed, implemented, and conducted its own research on an extended forensic interview process, named the Forensic Evaluation Model to distinguish it from the single-session forensic interview. The Forensic Evaluation Model combined forensic and therapeutic approaches to offer greater comfort for the child and multiple opportunities to address concerning experiences. The Forensic Evaluation Model was designed to be conducted by a professional with a master’s degree and clinical licensure, with the intent of involving practitioners who had deeper knowledge of child development and the impact of trauma on abused children. However, the requirements for prerequisite training and experience in child forensic interviewing were not well defined, reflecting the state of the field at that time. Over time, the limitations of this model became clear. The merging of forensic and therapeutic strategies called into question the evidentiary reliability of the information obtained from a child. Additionally, many of the professionals conducting forensic evaluations had limited experience and little ongoing training in forensic interviewing of child witnesses. the research and guidance on the specialized practice of questioning child witnesses were not yet well developed. Over the past 20-plus years, however, substantial progress has been made, and our understanding of how best to question child witnesses has deepened considerably.

Research Review

Understanding the evolution of research on multiple and repeated forensic interviews requires a focused look at the studies most relevant to this topic. This review is neither comprehensive nor exhaustive; rather, it highlights research of greatest significance to examining the differences and implications of multiple/follow-up interviews and repeated interviews of children from the mid-1990s through 2021. Numerous studies exploring the effects of repeated interviews incorporated additional

variables into their designs, such as the introduction of misleading or inaccurate information between interviews, changes in interviewers, interviewer bias versus no bias, extended delays between interviews, and the use of props, drawings, or dolls. The body of research includes field studies, laboratory experiments, and literature reviews.

Repeated Interviews

Interview Transcript Analysis

Several studies have analyzed transcripts of interviews with alleged victims of abuse. Eisen et al. (2021) examined transcripts from interviews of alleged victims aged 3–16 who had two interviews within five days. They found that almost 40% of children with substantiated sexual abuse and over 50% of those with substantiated physical abuse denied the abuse in one or both interviews. The youngest children were most likely to be inconsistent in denials or disclosures across interviews. Waterhouse et al. (2016, 2019) found that two interviews elicited more detailed information from children than a single interview at both one and five weeks after the event. Cederborg et al. (2008) examined transcripts of interviews with children with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities, finding that more than 80% of the information reported in the repeated interviews was about new topics or was new information elaborating upon previously discussed topics, while there were contradictions in less than 1% of reported details. Santtila et al. (2004) incorporated elements such as the presence of a support person and the use of anatomically detailed dolls into the interviews, which led children to use more words and more descriptive language during the repeated interviews.

In a case study involving a child witness to an abduction, Orbach et al. (2012) analyzed interviewer notes from the initial interview and transcribed audiotapes from interviews two through six. Five interviews occurred within the first 11 days after the

incident, and the final interview took place four and a half months later. Their analysis showed that 80% of the new central details elicited across the five repeated interviews came from recall prompts, while 20% came from recognition prompts. The last three interviews produced an additional 15% new details, although none of the confirming details obtained in the final interview were central. In a literature review and presentation of interview transcripts from four cases illustrating why children may be interviewed multiple times, La Rooy et al. (2010), concluded that “when interviewers follow internationally recognized best-practice guidelines emphasizing open-questions and free memory recall, alleged victims of abuse should be interviewed more than once to ensure that more complete accounts are obtained” (p. 373).

Field Studies

Two field studies—Azad et al. (2014) and Brubacher and La Rooy (2014)—examined repeated interviews in cases of multiple incidents of abuse. Azad and colleagues conducted single-session interviews and repeated interviews of children who had witnessed violence. Children with no history of repeated violence gave more details when they participated in repeated interviews than when they were interviewed only once. In a case study of a child repeatedly abused over four years, Brubacher and La Rooy examined the child’s narrative of specific episodes or generic accounts, finding that the accounts were mostly generic across the three interviews and contained some details about individual incidents.

Studies using both real-time interviews and repeated interviews have found that children generally provide mostly the same information across interviews, though older children tend to be more consistent (Peterson et al., 2001). Other findings show that children reported more than 50% new forensically relevant details in the second interview (Katz & Hershkowitz, 2013) and that the second interview yielded nearly 25%

new information, including a higher proportion of central details (Hershkowitz & Terner, 2007).

Experimental Studies

Several experimental studies have incorporated additional elements. Stolzenberg et al. (2018) conducted repeated interviews both immediately after and one week after an event in which children were told to keep it a secret. Little difference was found across interviews, while questions inquiring about coaching elicited higher error rates, as well as attempts to maintain secrecy. Similarly, Saykaly et al. (2013) analyzed repeated interviews in which children aged 4-11 were told to lie about an event. In the first interview, significant verbal markers of deception were evident; however, in second and third interviews, these indications were not present. Analyses of hypermnesia and reminiscence were conducted by Odinet et al. (2013) in repeated interviews immediately and two days after an event; immediately and seven days after; and seven and nine days after. The number of errors increased across the interviews, but the relative accuracy of children's responses was not affected. Hypermnesia occurred without a decrease in the overall accuracy, while reminiscence was least apparent in the longest delayed interviews.

La Rooy et al. (2005) examined reminiscence—new details recalled in later interviews—and hypermnesia—the overall increase in total recall across interviews—in 5- and 6-year-olds who participated in repeated interviews conducted immediately, one day, and six months after an event. Reminiscence occurred consistently across interviews, though the number of new details was lower after a delay than when interviews took place immediately. Hypermnesia, however, was observed only in the interviews conducted immediately and one day after the event. Two additional studies incorporated human figure drawings (HFD), dolls, and other props during the interviews. Salmon and Pipe (2000) found that children interviewed

with props at three-day and one-year intervals recalled more information than children who drew or received verbal prompts only, particularly during the one-year interview. Human figure drawings were introduced by Brown et al. (2012) in repeated interviews with children aged 5–7 conducted one month and seven months after an event. At the seven-month interview, children using the drawings reported more information than in their first interview, but many of the touches they indicated on the drawings were inaccurate.

Brubacher et al. (2019) evaluated the effects of interviewer familiarity and social support on children’s reports across repeated interviews. In the first interview, they found that social support had no effect on the total number of details reported in either interview. In the second interview, children reported more transgressions to interviewers who were more familiar to them than to neutral interviewers.

Two studies examined repeated interviews of children experiencing multiple events versus a single event. In interviews conducted with children at a few weeks after an event, four months after, and one year after, Price et al. (2016) found that children who experienced a single event appeared more consistent across interviews than children who experienced a repeated event. Hubbard et al. (2016) interviewed children aged 4–10 three times one week after experiencing three events. They found that, although older children were more accurate in their recall, accuracy for all ages did not differ across the three interviews.

Quas et al. (2007) examined interviewer bias in repeated interviews with 3- to 5-year-old children. They found that children who were interviewed only once by a biased interviewer after a long delay made the most errors, with three-year-olds being especially likely to make false claims. In contrast, children who were interviewed multiple times—regardless of interviewer bias—were more accurate and less likely to make false claims. Szojka et al. (2022) conducted repeated interviews with children

aged 8-11 about an event. They found that children reported more details across two interviews than in a single interview, both at one week and five weeks after the event. Details that remained consistent were more accurate than reminisced details.

In a 1997 study, Powell and Thomson found that giving children aged 4-8 an interview one week after an event helped increase the number of correct details they recalled during a follow-up interview six weeks later.

Literature Reviews

Fivush and Schwarzmüller (1995) reviewed the literature on repeated questioning both within and across interviews and concluded that children's memories remained accurate across multiple recountings. Goodman and Quas (2008) reviewed repeated interview research in relation to event veracity, interview bias, and delay. They concluded from the available research to date that "when and how children are interviewed is at least as important for their accuracy as is how many times they are interviewed" (p. 386). La Rooy et al. (2009) provided an extensive review of the literature on repeated interviews, concluding that skepticism over the use of repeated interviews is unjustified, citing the body of literature showing children recall more details in subsequent interviews under numerous conditions.

Follow-Up Interviews

Three studies examined the role of interviewer support for children reluctant to disclose during an initial interview. Blasbalg et al. (2021) and Hershkowitz et al. (2021) conducted follow-up interviews with 202 children aged 3-14 who did not disclose during the first interview. Second interviews were conducted using supportive and non-supportive techniques. Over half of the children disclosed during the second interview, with a greater number of disclosures coming from the supportive interviewer group. Analysis revealed that interviewer support during the first interview predicted

children's cooperation during the rapport-building phase of the second session, which then predicted more disclosures. In three experiments, Waterhouse (2016) conducted follow-up interviews and examined transcripts. The review of transcripts found that the amount of support across first, second, and third interviews was similar, while many new details and very few contradictions were provided in the subsequent interviews. Additionally, in an analysis of mock jurors' perception of the child, the interview, and the case, multiple interviews resulted in more positive views of the child. Leander (2010) analyzed child interview transcripts, finding that subsequent interviews produced twice as many (new) central details as the first interview. More denials and avoidances were also produced during the first interviews compared to the second and third interviews. In a similar study, Szojka et al. (2020) examined transcripts and concluded that multiple interviews increased the completeness of children's testimony, containing an average of almost twice as much new information, including central details, as single interviews.

Duron and Remko (2020) provided a history of the single-session forensic interview, followed by considerations for use of the multi-session forensic interview (MSFI) based on research findings. Clarification of terms was presented along with case examples to assist with clarification between multiple sessions and subsequent sessions. They also reviewed the implementation of an MSFI at one Texas Children's Advocacy Center. Waterhouse et al. (2020) conducted a review of literature for gap analysis, finding that research is needed with older children/adolescents, as well as children with multiple needs or cases of repeated events. Further, the analysis suggested the need for more studies with longer delays between the event and the first interview.

Current Practice and Dilemma

Research to date has given practitioners support, as well as notes of caution, for use of a multiple interview model (La Rooy et al., 2010; Waterhouse et al., 2016, 2019). While literature provides endorsement, it gives limited guidance as to decision-making and implementation of a multi-session forensic interview process. Much discretion is left to the designated interviewer and investigative partners. Interviews of a child witness may be conducted in a variety of ways. The following provides a description of current practices.

Single-Session Forensic Interview

Many children demonstrate both cognitive and linguistic abilities and the motivation to participate in a forensic interview. Children who initiated the investigation by making an outcry to an adult and who received a helpful response can be further supported by a sensitive and skilled interviewer to provide adequate to robust information about their experiences (Cyr, 2022; Lamb et al., 2018; Poole & Dickinson, 2024). In such interviews, law enforcement and child protection investigators gain sufficient information from the child to complete additional components in their investigation and make appropriate decisions and recommendations. Most children will be able to recall and describe their experiences within a single-session interview.

Follow-Up Forensic Interview Sessions

Additional interview sessions may be needed for a variety of reasons. There is consensus that disclosure is a process (Alaggia, 2004; Alaggia et al. 2019; Lyon et al. 2025; McElvaney, 2015), and so a possibility exists that a child will not disclose all encoded information in a single session. This is especially true for children who have

experienced multiple forms and/or episodes of maltreatment (Leander, 2010; Waterhouse et al., 2016).

Children Needing More Time to Feel Comfortable

Early in the forensic interview, a subset of children may demonstrate shyness, anxiety, or fear about speaking freely with the interviewer. For these children, the interviewer must decide whether to continue through the pre-substantive phase of the interview at the typical pace (about 10 minutes) or consider the potential benefit of expanding the pre-substantive portion of the interview. Greater time spent in building rapport through engaging the child in conversation about non-abuse topics may allow a child to become more comfortable with the environment, the interviewer, and the process. A challenge for the interviewer is to continue using optimal questioning strategies and appropriate supportive statements while focusing on non-abuse topics (Goodman & Quas, 2008). A choice can be made to schedule a second interview to initiate the transition to the allegation-focused topic, or the interviewer and the investigative partners may choose to attempt the transition after a short break on the same day. Added time and comfort may give enough space and control for a child to address the topic of concern (Blasbalg et al., 2021; Brubacher & La Rooy, 2014; Hershkowitz et al., 2021; 2025).

Children Needing Extra Time in the Allegation Phase of the Forensic Interview

Alternatively, for other children, hesitancy to speak freely appears at the point of transition or during the substantive phase as children are asked to provide detail and clarification. Strategies for dealing with reluctance are varied and include options such as providing reassurance and encouragement and including more focused recall-based questions (such as open and specific 'wh' questions) (Ahern et al., 2015; Blasbalg et al., 2028; Lyon & Henderson, 2021). Allowing a child to write responses or

draw before explaining events or specific elements can be facilitative for some children (Katz & Hamama, 2013; Poole & Dickinson, 2024). Additionally, some children benefit from being allowed to control the pacing of the more challenging parts of the interview. Knowing this, a forensic interviewer and the investigative partners may elect to bring the child back for a follow-up interview or choose to “leave the door open” for the child to request another interview if they have more to share.

Interviewer-Initiated Follow-Up Interviews

Depending on the child’s age, emotional state, or fatigue, the forensic interviewer and the investigative team may observe that the child has reached their threshold for participation in the interview by becoming less informative, not seeming to process the questions and engage in a memory search, or asking questions such as “how much longer?” Rather than pursue the conversation, the interviewer may decide to schedule a second interview when the child is fresher and able to focus, hopefully resulting in a higher quality of information (Waterhouse, 2016, 2019). An older child may be included in the decision, either electing to take a somewhat longer break and then continue or choosing to return on another day. Younger children are less able to monitor their own needs, and so the decision is made by the investigative team and interviewer. The task of recalling and describing multiple abusive events may also trigger emotional distress, which can interfere with the child’s ability to focus on and describe abuse events and clarify details. The child may become fatigued or upset, indicating they are ready to be “done” before all topics have been discussed.

Questions Arising During the Investigation

Many forensic interviews are conducted at the very beginning of an investigation when little information is known beyond the initial report. A less frequent reason for a follow-up interview may be a request from law enforcement when

evidence emerges during their investigation, or conversations with another witness surface issues or raise questions not addressed in the first forensic interview. In such cases, the investigator may find it helpful to hear from the child to gain their perspective and information. The follow-up interview of the child is not duplicative, but rather picks up where the previous interview ended and focuses on the questions from the investigative team.

Child-Initiated Follow-Up Interviews

A child who disclosed during the initial forensic interview may not have shared everything about their maltreatment. This can occur for various reasons as well as in a variety of ways (McElvaney, 2015).

Reminiscence, a common psychological process in which one simply recalls additional details about a topic already discussed, can occur (La Rooy et al., 2005; La Rooy & Lamb, 2011). In some cases, a child may later make additional disclosures to a caregiver, therapist, or case worker and express willingness to talk to the interviewer again.

Alternatively, the child may have remembered the distressing acts but intentionally withheld disclosing them due to concerns about others' reactions, potential consequences, or feelings of embarrassment and shame.

At times, a child may have denied abuse and later be ready to talk about their experiences with the interviewer. This can occur because the family or life situation has changed or simply because of maturation.

Structured Forensic Interview Process

While participating in a forensic interview is challenging for most children, a neurodiverse child (perhaps with a developmental or cognitive processing disorder or disability) presents additional difficulties for the child and for the interviewer.

Additional time may help to create comfort and to establish a shared understanding of communication. Likewise, a child with a mental health diagnosis, extreme anxiety, or trauma may benefit from the interview taking place in more manageable chunks. The adapted structured forensic interview can be customized to fit the child's individual needs and abilities.

Complex Cases with Many Episodes of Abuse

Forensic interviewers occasionally find themselves interviewing a child who has delayed disclosing and consequently has experienced multiple episodes and possibly multiple forms of abuse over months or years. A subset of these children, once ready to talk, have a great deal of information they want to share. Forensic interviewers, cautioned not to interrupt a child's abuse narrative, can find it challenging to balance listening to everything that the child wants to share with the need to focus on specific episodes to gain the details necessary for investigators. Allowing the child to talk freely, while making note of episodic leads or cues to be revisited and explored, can be a time- and energy-consuming process. Offering the child the opportunity to meet more than once can help facilitate a full description of each recalled episode of abuse. A second meeting also allows for the possibility of reminiscence for any previously discussed episodes.

Decision-Making and Planning

There is no one-size-fits-all model for conducting more than one interview, as each case and child is individual. Rather, the forensic interviewer and the investigative partners work together to develop a plan that meets the needs of the child and protects the forensic integrity of the case. Below are key points in the interview process where critical thinking should be applied and important decisions made.

Pre-Interview Planning

Information about the child and the case may be limited when forensic interviews are conducted at the beginning of an investigation involving a child as a potential victim or witness. It is helpful for the forensic interviewer to have access to the law enforcement and child protection case referral information and any interactions prior to the interview at a Children's Advocacy Center (CAC). Contact between a CAC staff member (such as a family advocate or case manager) and a protective caregiver before the forensic interview can help gather additional information about the child's functioning and temperament. This information helps identify cases where the child may struggle to communicate with the interviewer or be reluctant to provide information because of community or family influences or possible concerns about consequences to the child and/or to others in the family.

Considerations for the interview:

- Age and developmental functioning
 - Difficulty with speaking, hearing, vision, physical mobility, sensory processing, which calls for accommodation.
 - Mental health diagnosis, concerns about self-harming behaviors.
 - Has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), Individualized Service Plan (ISP), or a 401 Plan, indicating recognized special needs or required supports that should be considered to tailor the interview approach appropriately and ensure the child's needs are met.
- Disclosure process (i.e., how the allegation came to the attention of the authorities)
 - Did the child make an outcry, and if so, to whom and in what context?
 - Did the concern originate from another source, such as medical evidence, a witness report, or electronic data?

- Is there evidence the child experienced a negative reaction following the disclosure?
- Can additional transitional prompts related to the allegation be planned?

Pre-Substantive Phase of the Interview

The goals of the pre-substantive phase of the interview are to increase comfort and orient the child to the differences between everyday conversations and a forensic interview. For the interviewer, the pre-substantive phase can give a snapshot of the child's linguistic style, ability, and comfort in providing narrative descriptions, and motivation to speak with the interviewer.

A child presenting as especially anxious, shy, or reluctant may benefit from additional time devoted to rapport building while still making use of recall-based questions.

Considerations for the interview:

- How open is the child to speaking with the interviewer?
- What can the interviewer learn about the child's linguistic style? What question format elicits narrative responses from the child in their own words?
- Does the child appear comfortable enough to proceed to the allegation phase? If not, are there adaptations that might be helpful?

Transitioning to the Allegation Topic

Unless the child transitions spontaneously during the pre-substantive portion of the interview, a standard transition question is "What are you here to talk about today?" A series of more focused inquiries about concerns, worries, or if something has happened to the child may be undertaken. If the child responds with descriptions

about experienced events, the interview proceeds. If not, the interviewer is faced with a decision about how to proceed.

During pre-interview planning, the forensic interviewer and investigative partners should have discussed additional prompts that may be used if the child does not respond to the open question based on preliminary case information. Additionally, during the pre-substantive portion of the interview, the child may make statements or ask questions that indicate concerns and/or sources of reluctance.

Considerations for the interview:

- Are there potential benefits to adding an interview session?
- Is there reliable information (outcry statements to professionals, medical evidence, prior system responses) that may be introduced in the interview?
- Are there indications from the child that they are committed to withholding information currently, and continuing the interview is not likely to be productive?
- Is the child in a safe enough environment that the investigative team feels they can suspend or close the case if the child is resistant?

Gathering Details and Clarification

Well-trained interviewers have a “toolbox” of evidence-based practices, which can assist a child in providing information (Saywitz et al., 2018). For children who have experienced multiple episodes of maltreatment, recalling and providing details about individual episodes can be cognitively tiring and/or emotionally overwhelming. The investigative team and the forensic interviewer may consider potential benefits of allowing more than one session for the allegation portion of the interview. Such decisions are made on a case-by-case basis by the entire investigative team. If the child is an adolescent, the team may consider involving them in the decision.

Additional sessions are not to be duplicative but focused on incidents or episodes not discussed previously. Reminiscence may occur, and the child may recall additional information about incidents previously discussed. Information introduced by the child can be allowed.

Recommendations for Child-or Investigator-Initiated Follow-Up Interviews

Pre-Forensic Interview Planning

The forensic interviewer and investigative partners meet to discuss the goals of the interview.

Pre-Substantive Phase

If the same forensic interviewer is used, they should focus on recent events or updates in the child's life—approaching it as a casual “check-in” rather than an intrusive “I want to learn about you” interview.

Interview instructions can be restated by asking the child if they remember “the rules for how we talk in this room.” Many children will be able to recall and state the instructions. If any are not recalled, the interviewer should restate that instruction.

Typically, another narrative practice is not needed, but this is left to the interviewer's discretion.

Allegation Phase

The transition statement or question is decided during pre-interview planning. While transition prompts can be more specific, they should still encourage the child to give narrative responses.

Child-Initiated

The interviewer can make a simple inquiry, such as “I understand that you asked to talk with me again. What's on your mind?”

Investigator-Initiated

The interviewer begins with a simple statement about the purpose of the interview. An example might be something like “Thank you for everything that you shared with me the last time we talked. I am not asking you to tell me all of that again. There were a few questions that we forgot to ask you last time. Is it okay if I ask those questions?”

Final Thoughts

Developing skilled and thoughtful forensic interviewers who are prepared to work with diverse children across a wide range of cases is a significant undertaking. Interviewers must be lifelong learners, continually expanding their “toolbox” of knowledge and practical skills. Multiple-session interviews represent one valuable tool within that toolbox. As science and practice evolve, we can expect continued growth in our understanding, along with more nuanced recommendations to guide both decision-making and practice.

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