HIGHLIGHTING *THE FORENSIC INTERVIEWER'S TOOLKIT: CRAFTING EXPERTISE AT EVERY LEVEL*

Researchers focusing on the development of proficient forensic interviewing skills have found that consistent adherence to best practices requires systematic and cumulative training over time (Benson & Powell, 2015; Brubacher et al., 2022; Cederborg et al., 2021). A recent publication by the National Children's Advocacy Center, *The Forensic Interviewer's Toolkit: Crafting Expertise at Every Level,* outlines "a comprehensive framework for enhancing the proficiency of forensic interviewers" (Steele et al., 2025, p. 10).

Core Competencies and Specific Skills

The Forensic Interviewer's Toolkit identifies 4 core competencies and 54 specific skills. The competencies include:

- question typology
- protocol adherence
- social support
- critical thinking

Question Typology

Questions are forensic interviewers' most utilized tools. Being able to recognize different question types and understand their intended memory cueing and information-gathering functions is likely the most foundational skill to good interviewing. Under this competency, there are 17 specific skills.

Protocol Adherence

Forensic interview protocols and guidelines are developed to ensure that interviewers are competently

trained in an approach that incorporates current research and practice-informed techniques. Following a protocol or structure helps interviewers organize their information-gathering efforts and maintain consistency. It can also support legal defensibility. Under this competency, there are 8 skills.

Social Support

Early child forensic interview protocols focused primarily on enabling the cognitive demands of recalling and reporting details of experienced events. More recent research has demonstrated the benefits of incorporating elements of social support during all phases of the interview. Under this competency, there are 14 skills.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is an information-management process that involves systematically gathering, interpreting, and analyzing data to guide the best next steps. Forensic interviewers apply this process across multiple decision points, starting with the referral information received before the interview and continuing throughout their interaction with the child. Under this competency, there are 15 skills.

Skills and Levels of Each Competency

Each of the 54 skills is assigned to a core competency and designated as either level 1, 2, or 3 subskills. Level 1 skills are foundational abilities taught through initial forensic interview training programs. Level 2 and 3 skills are built on the foundation of level 1 skills. Acquiring level 2 and 3 skills develops over time and through a variety of learning modalities, such as peer review, self-review, mentoring, coaching, supervision, and classroom training. Rather than labeling interviewers by level, these stages are meant to help interviewers reflect on their own growth and identify where they currently fall along the continuum from level 1 to level 3.

Putting It Into Practice

The Forensic Interviewer's Toolkit is designed for both new and experienced interviewers as a resource to objectively assess current skills and identify areas for growth. It also covers key topics such as making accommodations for communication and engagement, developing core testifying skills, applying research, collaborating with the MDT, and utilizing skills-based coaching.

References

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