

# KEY STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE PERFORMANCE OF CHILD FORENSIC INTERVIEWERS

Interviewing children is a complex and challenging task which requires initial training, practice-focused supervision, and ongoing education. To be a knowledgeable interviewer involves understanding current research on how to elicit accurate and reliable information from children; knowledge of child development, memory formation and retrieval, and cultural influences; as well as state and federal statutes related to child maltreatment.

Most forensic interviewers complete an introductory intensive, research-based training consisting of didactic instruction, observing desired behaviors and strategies, practice opportunities through structured activities and/or role-plays, and recommended readings of current research. While there are different interview structures and protocols used throughout the United States, trainings are typically delivered in a three-to-five-day block of time, spread across several separate meetings of one to three days, or online via distance learning.

## Experience Does Not Equal Appropriate Interviewing

The amount of interviewing experiences does not predict the quality of the interview. According to Lamb, et al, (2018), there was no association found between experience and performance in field studies. Some studies have even found that interviewers who have more experience conducting forensic interviews use less open-ended questions in simulated interviews.



## What are the Next Steps after Completion of an Initial Forensic Interviewing of Children Training?

The literature is clear that while training alone increases knowledge and consensus concerning best practice, forensic interviewers do not consistently adhere to evidence-based recommendations after completion of initial training. Meaningful, long-term improvements in the use of open-ended questions and the quality of information obtained from children occur when interviewers attend ongoing training and are provided with continuing opportunities for evaluation and feedback.



Studies consistently demonstrate that after attendance at a basic training, interviewers should be provided with continuing professional development, as well as intensive, specific, and objective supervision with both written and verbal feedback. Intermittent, intra-interview feedback versus feedback given at the end of an interview segment has been demonstrated to be the most effective in shaping practice.

## Methods of Feedback

- Supervision can be provided by an individual “who continues to practice as a forensic interviewer and who has an ability to continue to develop his/her knowledge through reading of research articles or understanding of evolving issues in the field.” (Steele, 2018, p. 7)

- Mentoring may be provided by a more experienced interviewer who can provide feedback and support; however, the mentor may not have the experience or knowledge to provide supervision.
- Consultation is usually provided, via contract, with an interviewer who can provide education, feedback, and support without an evaluative role.
- Peer review is the form of review most utilized by children’s advocacy centers and allows for skill improvement and reinforcement of best practice, as well as support and sharing of knowledge. Variables such as skill in giving and receiving feedback, interviewer skill and knowledge, and specificity of feedback will impact the quality of peer review. Unfortunately, there is no research supporting the effectiveness of peer review alone in creating behavioral changes or increasing knowledge and skills.
- Self-review is an opportunity for interviewers to review their own work, reflect on strengths and challenges, and identify areas for improvement. Forms can be utilized to evaluate question types, question utility, protocol adherence, or other areas of concern for the interviewer. All interviewers should regularly engage in self-review.

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## Resources

- [Mentoring and Consultation Groups for Child Forensic Interviewers](#)
- [Building Forensic Interviewing Skills Online Training](#)
- [Ongoing Supervision, Continued Training and Peer Review of Child Forensic Interviewers-A Bibliography](#)
- Review of Child Forensic Interviewers-
  - [Question Coding Form](#) -Adapted from Tom Lyon
  - [Interview Self-review Form](#) -Adapted from Cornerhouse Peer Review-Self Assessment

Visit the [Child Abuse Library Online \(CALiO™\)](#) to access the latest research on Forensic Interviewing. Or contact the National Children's Advocacy Center, Digital Information Librarian, Muriel Wells, at [mwells@nationalcac.org](mailto:mwells@nationalcac.org) for assistance.