

BEYOND “TELL ME MORE...”

Best Practice Guidelines

Forensic interviewing is a complex process that requires specialized skills and training. Over the last several decades of research, clear international consensus regarding what constitutes best practice in a forensic interview of a child has emerged. The use of open-ended questions is one of the defining features of a high-quality forensic interview. Following best practice guidelines minimizes the likelihood of errors and misunderstandings between the child and the interviewer. It also helps elicit information from a child that is likely more accurate and reliable. Most of the information recalled by the child should be in response to open, narrative-encouraging questions rather than closed questions which limit elaboration and specify the desired information. The central aim of all widely-used interview structures is to obtain an account of the child's experiences, in his/her own words, with as little prompting as possible.

Outcomes of Interview Determined by Wide Range of Factors

- Child's development level
- Timing and nature of the event to be remembered
- Contextual factors related to interview setting
- Questioning techniques utilized



Key Characteristics of an Appropriate Forensic Interview Question

1. Simple language
2. Absence of specific details or coercive techniques
3. Flexibility on the part of the child to choose what details to describe
4. Encouragement of narrative elaboration



Questions Which Elicit Narrative Elaboration

Interviewers are taught to ask open-ended questions and often utilize “Tell me more” or “Tell me everything about” throughout an interview. Regrettably, these questions can become repetitive and even grating when there is no deviation through the entirety of an interview.



Following is a list of alternatives to “Tell me more...” which encourages a child to provide narrative elaboration:

- “Talk to me about”
- “Help me understand”
- “Explain”
- “Describe”

- “You said [...]. Then what happened?” (Breadth questions ask child to provide more details about a pre-disclosed detail or event)
- “Give me some more information”
- “What happened from [one part of incident] to [another part of incident]”
- “Say some more about [...].”
- “Let’s go back to the part where...”
- Use of minimal encouragers

The elicitation of reliable and accurate information from a child is a complex process that depends on many interviewing skills. Phrasing questions in a way that maintains the flow of conversation and encourages the child to provide elaboration will assist in improving the quality of information obtained during a forensic interview.

References

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