



The Child Centered Approach to Forensic Interviewing an Evidenced Based Interview Training Structure

Introduction:

Child maltreatment is both a public safety concern and, in many cases, a criminal matter. Effectively questioning a child suspected of being maltreated or witnessing a crime is perhaps the most challenging task facing a first responder. The “Child Centered Approach to Forensic Interviewing” is an evidenced based certificate training program designed to teach the foundational core knowledge competencies identified as critical for effective child forensic interviewing. In addition, onsite peer reviewed structured practicums are highly recommended when available. The development of the interview structure is only one part of the overall comprehensive training program.

The Rational:

The rational for the development of a child centered approach is anchored on the premise that a child’s willingness and competency to participate in the interview is greatly enhanced when the interview strategy is grounded on an informed understanding of the known facts, the child’s safety, emotional, cognitive, and developmental abilities. Effective interviewing requires prudent trained professionals who are active listeners, patient and can maintain unbiased objectivity and neutrality. Properly trained and credentialed professionals provide child victims and the public reasonable assurances of credibility, objectivity, and unbiased professionalism. At the center of the child centered approach is the need for a coordinated community response by a multi-disciplinary team of professionals and trusted members of the child’s family when applicable

The Empirical Evidence:

The Evidence-Centered Design (ECD) is a construct used in development of this evidenced based competency training curriculums. This interview structure was designed in accordance with the universally accepted Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, developed jointly by the: American Education Research Association (AERA), the American Psychological Association (APA) and the National Council on Measurements in Education (NCME).

This interview structure is one part of a more comprehensive 40-hour online training course curriculum offered by NACCFI. The Child Centered Approach to Forensic Interviewing is a certificate training course that covers all the knowledge competencies identified as critical to effective child forensic interviewing by over 700 actively practicing professionals who responded to two separate practice job analysis. This Interview Structure is only one part of a much more comprehensive credentialing training program.

The NACCFI Child Centered Approach to Forensic Interviewing Structure

- 1. Pre-Interview preparations.*
- 2. Information gathering with team members.*
- 3. Collaboration with team members.*
- 4. Proper introductions with the child.*
- 5. Rapport building assessments.*
- 6. About competency truth lie assessments.*
- 7. Responding to resistance.*
- 8. Introduce mutual ground rules.*
- 9. Explore the allegation sequentially.*
- 10. Question typology used sequentially.*
- 11. Corroborate with rich sensory details.*
- 12. Clarify any ambiguities, misconceptions, or inconsistencies.*
- 13. Review for alternative hypothesis.*
- 14. Effectively close the interview.*
- 15. Post interview review and safety planning.*

Pre-Interview preparations:

- Coordinating a team approach.
- Selecting the interviewers if more than one.
- Preparing the child friendly interview location.
- Prepare and test the recording equipment.
- Identifying chain of custody responsibilities.

Information Gathering with team members:

- Source monitoring of the information.
- Reviewing all the information, the evidence, and all known facts prior to the interview.
- Meet with non-offending caretakers if available or necessary.
- Be aware of family power dynamics.
- Siblings or other child witnesses should be interviewed separately by other interviewers when available.
- Prepare the interview structure and recording instruments!
- Secure any needed props or interview aids (anatomical drawings, dolls, paper pads, crayons, water, snacks).
- Identify any conflicts of interest, inconsistencies or ambiguities in the reports, or any other plausible hypothesis for the reports.
- Identify any safety concerns for the child.
- Schedule the interview.

Proper introductions with the child:

- Welcome the child to this place and introduce yourself and others present in a warm friendly approach.
- Ask the child their names and how they want to be addressed, also say how you want to be addressed.
- Explain your role in an age-appropriate manner.
- Identify and explain that the interview is being recorded so we don't forget anything said.
- If there is evidence of trauma / take a pause, refer if needed, continue recording during pause.
- Younger children consider using a drawing to identify households and family members.
- If a disclosure is made, listen closely, follow with an open-ended prompt to continue to interview rules.

Rapport building assessments:

Build rapport based on a positive significant event.

Understand and respect cultural norms.

Use drawings to clarify family structure, locations with events if applicable.

Evidence of trauma makes appropriate referral.

Assess clarity of speech.

Ability to identify places, dates, and times episodically and chronologically.

Assess attention span and ability to remain focused.

About competency truth lie assessments:

Use when confusion, reliability or credibility of answers is in question.

When magical or fantastical responses are present.

Use only evidence informed methods.

Much better to conduct it early in the Interview.

Must be developmentally age appropriate.

A promise to tell the truth is not always a guarantee of the truth.

Use cautiously, a failed truth lie discussion may negatively impact the testimonial evidence.

A failed competency assessment will draw attention to the child's limitations and may reduce certainty in its outcome.

Responding to resistance:

Family, cultural and love loyalties are typically strong.

Ignoring resistance will not make it go away.

Validate feelings and concerns.

Assess safety concerns.

Address anger by allowing respectful ventilation.

Remain calm with a caring patient demeanor.

Use reflective listening.

Introduce mutual ground rules:

- Emphasize the importance of truth telling, only talk about things that are true.
- Give permission to say, I don't know.
- Give permission to say I don't understand.
- Give permission to say I don't want to talk about it.
- Encourage the child to correct or clarify ambiguities.
- Rehearse their use if appropriate.

Explore the allegation sequentially:

- The ideal scenario is that the child introduces the subject, the allegation, the source, all the people involved and all that it implies.
- Begin with an opened ended focused question. Do you know why you are here?
- If the child does not know, ask do you know what this is about?
- If the answer is no, ask has anyone explained to you why you are here?
- Has anyone told you what to say?
- Why do you think you are here?
- Has something happened recently at, (add location, school, home, bus friends' home, mall)
- Could it be about something someone said to, (a person, sibling, parent, doctor, teacher, friend)
- Could it be about something that happened to your, (sibling, friend, parent,)
- Tell me more about who, what, when where and how

Question typology used sequentially:

- Begin with open-ended invitational prompts.
- Follow with more focused open-ended prompts.
- Explore with cued focused prompts.
- Frequency and duration questions.
- Time segmented focused prompts.
- Less preferred direct questions.
- Less preferred leading questions or option posing questions.
- Less preferred misleading questions (when safety of others is necessary).
- Avoid tagged questions!

Corroborate with rich contextual and sensory details:

Get rich details related to events, times, places, persons, and locations.

What happened?

Who was present?

When did it happen?

Where did it happen?

How often did it happen?

First time last time.

Who else knows.

Has it happened to anyone else?

Where you told what to say, if yes by whom.

Ask for rich sensory details, what were you feeling, what was said to you, what did feel like, fully describe locations.

Clarify any ambiguities, inconsistencies, with invitational cued prompts:

Inconsistencies and ambiguities in reports must be addressed.

Many are communication errors that need clarification.

Use cued focused time segmented questions to clarify information.

Earlier you said that, can you explain that further.

I want to make sure I understand this correctly.

Are you certain that is correct.

I'm trying to understand how that happened, can you explain it again.

Review alternative hypothesis:

From an investigative, prosecutorial, and practical matter any indicators of a possible alternative hypothesis need to be addressed particularly when there are ambiguities, inconsistencies or competency issues.

The alternative hypothesis is some other plausible explanation to a reported event.

How likely is it that the allegation is not maltreatment.

How likely is it that the actions were accidental.

How likely is it that the allegations were fabricated,

Rule out parental alienation syndrome if suspected.

Was the allegation unduly influenced by someone.

How likely is it that the incident occurred but the responsible party has been misidentified.

Effectively closing the interview:

Thank the child for participating.

Validate if it was difficult.

Allow for any questions.

Don't over promise.

Ask if we missed any important information.

If you remember something else that is important, please let us know.

Provide some safety assurances if appropriate.

Follow-up interviews may be required.

Walk the child to the caregiver, and end with an amicable reassurance.

If the child reaches for a hug, respond appropriately.

Ensure that there is a safety plan in place for the child.

Post Interview review and safety planning:

Review Safety Plan.

Refer for counseling is appropriate.

Review strength and weakness of the interview.

Determine if more interviews are needed.

Establish chain of custody for the evidence.

Conclusions

The child forensic interview is often the only way an agency can access enough information to make a fact-based determination of whether child maltreatment has occurred. Forensic interviews are needed to develop effective safety plans and prevent possible future maltreatment of other children. Every person who is privileged to have the mandate to conduct a forensic interview has an ethical, legal, and professional responsibility to participate in continued advanced training, practice mentoring, credentialing, and peer review.

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