

**Child Sexual Abuse Investigations:
*Testing Documentation Methods***

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with
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January 2001



*Washington State
Institute for
Public Policy*

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Document Number 01-01-4102

Washington State Institute for Public Policy

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The authors wish to thank the Child Protective Services staff of Olympia, King Eastside, and Aberdeen for their willingness to experiment with documentation methods and to complete the extra tasks associated with data collection. In particular, we appreciate the leadership of Laura Hurtado-Webb, Tami Mistretta, Naomi Childs, Pat Barnhart, and Paul Evans. Laura Merchant from the Harborview Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress and Patricia Toth from the Criminal Justice Training Commission provided training to the CPS staff. Debra Fabritius from the Institute coded the data, and David Fine organized the data base. We are most grateful for the contributions of these individuals.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 1999 Legislature directed the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to establish three pilot projects involving child sexual abuse investigations (Chapter 389, Laws of 1999). The Child Protective Services (CPS) offices were to use written protocols and test different methods and techniques to conduct and preserve interviews with alleged victims of child sexual abuse. The Washington State Institute for Public Policy was directed to evaluate the projects.

Following the law's passage, DSHS asked for volunteer sites. The following sites were selected to test three documentation methods:

Aberdeen: *videotaping* through a Children's Advocacy Center.

Olympia: *audiotaping*.

King Eastside: *teaming of social workers*, using near-verbatim documentation, one person to conduct the interview, and one to take notes.

The study sample consisted of all cases accepted in these offices for investigation of child sexual abuse between January 1, 2000, and October 31, 2000, where a CPS worker conducted or observed the interview. Ninety-two cases met these criteria and had data forms available for analysis.

The Aberdeen site had few referred cases during the study period (10); therefore, the Olympia *audiotaping* and Aberdeen *videotaping* results were combined and labeled "*electronic recording*."

Major Findings

Interview Quality

- The interviews were conducted with *objectivity*, and no evidence of systematic bias was found.
- Interviewers can learn methods to *increase the objectivity* of their interviews.

Near-Verbatim Documentation of Interviews

- The skill of documenting interviews in a near-verbatim fashion can be learned and offers a significant improvement over narrative summaries. In comparison to *electronic recording*, however, this documentation method is *inferior*.
- Using a *two-person team* of CPS workers to facilitate near-verbatim documentation is *not feasible* and does not improve the quality of documentation.

Electronic Recording

- Electronic recording is *feasible, well accepted* by interviewers, and has *only minor impact* on children's reactions to the interview or the comfort of interviewers.
- To the extent that a complete record of questions and answers is necessary to evaluate the credibility of statements, electronic recording is clearly the most efficient and reliable method of documentation.
- Almost *five times as many interview questions* were documented using electronic recording as compared with near-verbatim documentation.
- Transcripts of interviews allow other investigators and persons with an interest in the case to *evaluate* whether interviewers are using proper interviewing techniques. Additionally, they are an *invaluable tool for supervisors* to use in assessing performance and giving corrective education.
- *High quality recording equipment and transcription services* are necessary for electronic documentation. If the equipment or the transcription does not accurately capture the questions asked and answers given, the advantages of electronic recording are diminished.

The Investigative Context

- Many cases referred to CPS for investigation of child sexual abuse allegations are prompted by concerns about children who may be exhibiting unusual behavior or have contact with suspected or known sexual offenders. Under these circumstances, it is *especially difficult to conduct an open-ended interview* and also assess the child's safety.
- Many *families in the study sample had previous CPS referrals* for abuse or neglect and frequently had other problems that complicated the investigator's determination about possible sexual abuse.

SETTING THE CONTEXT: STATE ACTIONS, DEBATE, AND RESEARCH

Washington State professionals involved in interviewing children about possible sexual abuse have long recognized the importance of interview techniques. Information about the social and emotional forces that inhibit actually abused children from reporting, and sometimes lead non-abused children to acquiesce falsely, as well as the increased awareness of how interviews may influence memory for events is well known to Child Protective Services (CPS), law enforcement, and prosecutors. The state's professionals have placed a substantial focus on incorporating this knowledge into daily practice.

Training on Interview Techniques. For the past four years, formal training has been provided through a collaborative effort by the Children's Administration (CA), the Criminal Justice Training Commission, the Washington State Association of Prosecuting Attorneys, and the Harborview Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress. In addition, professionals are encouraged to acquire training through other state and out-of-state opportunities. The Children's Justice Conference, a large annual statewide conference supported by federal funds passed through the CA, brings national experts to Washington with many workshops focused on subjects related to interviewing.

Policy Development. At a policy level, Washington State has pursued projects to examine and promote improved interviewing practice and case handling. In 1994, Harborview carried out a project supported by the CA entitled "Interviewing Child Witnesses: Evaluating Innovations." One component included a survey of professionals across the state. Results revealed that, on average, child sexual abuse allegations resulted in two formal investigative interviews, with a majority of involved professionals expressing the belief that interviews were carried out in a fair fashion.¹ Not surprisingly, defense lawyers were less likely to be satisfied with the process.

1997–1999 Legislation. In 1997, the Legislature directed the Washington State Institute for Public Policy to summarize research on interviewing alleged victims of child sexual abuse, describe the arguments for and against videotaping of interviews, and review interview documentation and case coordination practices in Washington, other states, and countries.²

Most recently, the 1999 Legislature mandated that all counties in the state publish their protocol for responding to cases of child sexual abuse and address professional roles, case coordination, and interviewing procedures.³ In addition, DSHS's written records for cases involving child sexual abuse were required to, at a minimum, be a "near verbatim record for the disclosure interviews" (RCW 26.44.035).

¹ Available from Harborview Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress, 325 Ninth Avenue, MS: 359947, Seattle, WA 98104; (206) 521-1800.

² Roxanne Lieb, Lucy Berliner, and Patricia Toth, *Protocols and Training Standards: Investigating Allegations of Child Sexual Abuse*, Olympia, WA: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, January 1997.

³ *Guidelines for Child Sexual Abuse Investigation Protocols: Washington State*, Olympia, WA: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, December 1999.

The Debate in Washington

The specific question of documentation methods for interviews with children about possible sexual abuse has been contentious in Washington for many years. Defense lawyers have long advocated videotaping as the only means by which interview credibility can be evaluated. Prosecutors have countered that videotaping inappropriately shifts the focus from children's reports onto a dissection of the interviewer's questioning methods. They argue that efforts to protect children and the community would be unfairly handicapped by exaggerating the influence of interviewers and undermining credibility of children for whom reporting abuse is often difficult. In addition, concerns are raised about the feasibility and cost of videotaping, as well as the potential impact of electronic failures.

Both positions reflect legitimate considerations. The accumulation of empirical evidence has established that *how questions are asked* in investigative interviews does influence the probability of an accurate answer, not only with children but with adults as well. Without documentation, it is difficult to know how much weight should be placed on statements about abuse. At the same time, this body of knowledge has clearly established that simply because direct or leading questions are used does not mean that responses are inaccurate. Even very young children can often resist misleading suggestive questions and give accurate answers. Because defense lawyers are obligated by their role to be advocates for accused persons, they can, in any individual case, highlight minor deviations from "gold standard" practice and cast doubt on a child's veracity. A videotaping experiment in Spokane in the early 1990s played a significant role in the state's discussion of this topic. The multi-disciplinary team in Spokane ultimately abandoned videotaping after unsuccessful prosecutions were attributed to excessive focus on the interview method rather than the cases' total evidence and testimony.

OFCO Recommendations

In the mid-1990s, the importance of interview documentation resurfaced following inquiries into Wenatchee cases associated with a series of CA interventions and criminal prosecutions for child sexual abuse. Specifically, the Office of the Family and Children's Ombudsman (OFCO) investigated the activities of the CA with regard to these cases. A major finding of their 1999 report was:

OFCO has found that current law and DSHS documentation policies are not sufficient to ensure that child interviews are documented in a manner that permits meaningful external review.

The report recommended:

CPS social workers be required to document child interviews in a verbatim or near-verbatim manner that captures which questions are asked, in what order, and the exact answers given to the questions. The exact language is critical for effective forensic evaluation and for any external review.

Substantial consensus now exists in the field that interviews of children suspected of having been sexually abused are best documented using a method that allows others to evaluate the interview process, as well as the children's statements. It is important, however, to place documentation into an appropriate context. Interviews with children about alleged sexual abuse have been singled out as of particular importance to the public and the legislature. This attention has created the unfortunate impression that statements of children of all ages about sexual abuse are particularly suspect and require special procedures, as compared with statements of children about other forms of abuse, as well as the statements of adults about other crimes. Professionals charged with the responsibility of protecting sexually abused children are understandably concerned about the policies that unjustifiably reinforce biases against children reporting sexual abuse.

Scientific Evidence. The scientific body of knowledge about interview practices *does not apply* specifically to sexual abuse reports. Because of the nature of this type of abuse, it has been differentially applied to sexual abuse reports. Investigating allegations or suspicions about sexual abuse is especially dependent on statements by children, because independent corroboration of these acts is rare. There is no evidence that children reporting sexual abuse are less truthful or more susceptible to influence than children reporting any other form of abuse or crime.

While the scientific literature has shown that young children are especially vulnerable to interview influences, there is no evidence that older children or adolescents, as a group, differ from adults in their capacity to give accurate accounts of experiences. In fact, older adults appear to share similarities of some memory weaknesses with very young children. It is, therefore, important to consider the policy implications about interview documentation that apply only to children who may have been sexually abused. Children who have actually been sexually abused should not be at a greater disadvantage in terms of protection and justice than children or adults who have been victimized in other ways.

This study of interview documentation methods, therefore, should be interpreted not as commentary on sexual abuse reports and investigations *per se* but instead be considered more generally, in terms of interviews with children about possible abuse experiences. The results may also apply to interviews with teenagers and adults who are victims or witnesses to crimes.

PILOT PROJECT STUDY DESIGN

Three offices of the Division of Children and Family Services' volunteered to participate in the pilot study of documentation methods. The sites and the planned documentation methods were as follows:

- *King Eastside (Bellevue)*: Two Child Protective Services (CPS) workers were to share responsibilities, with one interviewing the child while the other took near-verbatim notes using a laptop computer. Workers were to confer after the interview as a form of peer consultation and then enter the documentation by remote access into the agency's information system.
- *Olympia*: Interviews were to be audiotaped whether the CPS worker or the law enforcement investigator conducted the interview. Transcripts of the interview were to be produced by either CPS or by law enforcement and entered into CPS's official record.
- *Aberdeen*: The Grays Harbor Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) was recently established in the community, and children were to be transported there for a videotaped interview. The CPS worker or child interviewer hired by the CAC was to conduct the interview, which was to be transcribed for the official CPS record.

Staff in the pilot sites were given additional training on proper interview techniques. The Children's Administration contracted with Laura Merchant of the Harborview Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress. Patricia Toth from the Criminal Justice Training Commission contributed her expertise. A guide was developed by these experts to help interviewers recall key interview components and techniques (see Appendix II).

The pilot project raised new legal issues for CPS staff, thus the sites sought advice from the division's Assistant Attorney General. The questions and answers related to documentation are summarized below:⁴

- ***Is it necessary to obtain parental consent or the child's permission prior to taping an investigative interview with a child?*** Staff may tape the interview without parental consent as long as the child is made aware that the interview is being taped and the child's verbal consent is at the onset on tape. As in other CPS situations, parental notification regarding the interview must occur as early as possible after the interview.
- ***Where should tapes be stored and for how long? Are they subject to disclosure and discovery?*** The tapes should be stored in the family's case file or a separate file for the same length of time as other files (six years). Tapes are subject to public disclosure and discovery.
- ***Must CPS take near-verbatim notes in child interviews when another agency takes the lead in the interview and records it?*** CPS should take near-verbatim notes unless it has an agreement with another agency that CPS will receive a copy of that agency's documentation for the department's file.

⁴ See *Investigative Interview Pilot Projects: Report to the Legislature*, Children's Administration, December 2000. Available from Marianna Conner (360) 902-7911.

Study Aims

- Describe the *characteristics of cases* accepted by the sites for investigation of possible sexual abuse.
- Describe the *interview process, reactions* of children and the reported *impact of the documentation method* on children and interviewers across sites.
- Determine the *adherence to interview guidelines*.
- Report the *outcomes of sexual abuse investigations* and whether any connections can be established between these outcomes and documentation methods.
- Compare the *costs* of different documentation methods.
- Ascertain the *opinions of other professionals* about the quality of interviews.

Time Frame and Procedures

In each site, the sample consisted of *all cases accepted for investigation* of sexual abuse between January 1, 2000, and October 31, 2000, *where the CPS worker conducted or observed the interview*. Cases were included whether or not the planned form of interview documentation was used.

All cases that met the study criteria were to be identified by an office supervisor. The assigned CPS worker completed two questionnaires. Other professionals who observed the interview or reviewed its documentation were interviewed by telephone.

Measurement Tools

Case Characteristics Form. Caseworkers or supervisors recorded demographic, abuse, and family characteristics and the investigation outcomes. The time spent on conferring and preparing the documentation (King Eastside) and the cost of transcription (Aberdeen and Olympia) was calculated.

Interview Rating Form. Caseworkers reported the length of the interview and rated whether they performed recommended interview components (e.g., introduce self and role, build rapport, establish ground rules, closure after interview); child's reaction to the interview; child and interviewer comfort level with the documentation method; interviewer confidence, preparedness, and comfort; whether a statement was made about abuse; and whether the interview clarified the concern about possible sexual abuse. A composite scale was created to measure child reactions.

Interview Coding Form. The study's principal investigator, Lucy Berliner, independently rated the interview documentation for adherence to interview guidelines and analyzed the types of questions, quality of interview, and whether the interview clarified concerns about possible sexual abuse.

As part of the interview rating, questions asked during the substantive portion of the interview (about possible sexual abuse) were counted and classified by type. This rating method was a modification of the coding scheme developed by Michael Lamb and his colleagues.⁵ Questions were classified as follows:

- Open-ended invitations;
- Clarifications of previously mentioned abuse-allegation information;
- Abuse suggestive; or
- Other types of questions (e.g., option posing, yes/no questions that were or were not clarifications of previous information, non-abuse focused suggestions, clumsy transitions).

Only those utterances directly pertaining to the substantive questioning about possible sexual abuse were coded. For example, questions and answers that diverged into unrelated subjects or involved other possible forms of abuse were not coded. Facilitative prompts (e.g., “unh unh,” “go on”) were not coded. An overall rating of interview quality was calculated using a framework proposed by Wood and Garven.⁶ This framework classifies investigative interviews on a continuum from proper to improper, as well as skillful to clumsy. “Improper” refers to interviews that contain biased or suggestive questions; “clumsy” refers to persistent failures to pursue or clarify information provided by the child.

Child Interview Satisfaction Survey. Professionals (e.g., detectives, prosecutors, other lawyers) who observed the interview were contacted by telephone and asked to assess the quality of the interview, as well their views about interviewing practice.

Results

Description of Cases. Approximately 140 cases were referred to the project during the study period. Of these cases, 92 could be used for analysis. Some cases were excluded because CPS workers had neither observed nor conducted the interview; additionally, a few involved children whose interviews did not focus on possible sexual abuse. In some cases, the interview documentation consisted of summaries or was so incomplete it could not be coded. Some referrals could not be coded because the rating forms were not completed by caseworkers or were not available to the researchers.

Since only two thirds of the cases could be used for analysis, the results may not be representative of all cases accepted for investigation during the study period.

Appendix I represents the statistical findings by topic area and office location.

⁵ *Quality of Interview Content Analysis of Investigative Interviews Codebook*, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), 2000.

⁶ J. Wood and S. Garven, “How Sexual Abuse Interviews Go Astray: Implications for Prosecutors, Police and Child Protection Services,” *Child Maltreatment* 5:109-118.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Overall, interviewers were found to approach the interviews with an open-minded interest in learning the truth. In no case did it appear that an interviewer had improperly formed an opinion that a child was abused prior to the interview and sought to confirm that view through a biased interview approach. Review of the interviews showed that interviewers were especially cautious in situations where children had made no prior statements about abuse and expended significant effort to clarify the facts when children did make statements about abuse. Independent ratings of the interviews found that, overall, they were not characterized by improper or clumsy interview techniques.

The official outcome of the investigations strongly supports this interpretation. Only 11 percent of cases were founded for sexual abuse and 9 percent for neglect (“founded” represents the caseworkers’ legal determination of the case). Only a small percentage of referrals resulted in children being placed out of the home or becoming the subject of dependency petitions during the study period. Very few cases resulted in the filing of criminal charges in this timeframe (8 percent).⁷ The fact that a majority of children either made no statements or denied being abused *when interviewed* (61 percent), further supports the conclusion that children were not pressured into making statements about abuse.

Investigation Context

Referrals Suggested Concerns. In a majority of cases, the children made no statements about possible abuse (60 percent) *prior to the investigative interview*. Cases are screened in and accepted for investigation based on information from referrals. In cases where there was no statement from the child, the person making the referral either reported concerning behavior by the child (sexualized behaviors or comments) or had information that strongly suggested or was definite that the person suspected of abuse had a history of abusing children. These situations included children living with someone identified by another child as an abuser. In at least two cases, convicted sex offenders were living with children, although when these children were interviewed, both denied having been abused. In addition, when one child is the subject of concern about sexual abuse, other children in the family were sometimes interviewed to rule out abuse. In about one fourth of cases, more than one child in a family was interviewed.

For those children with no prior statement, 90 percent either made no statement or denied abuse during the interview.

Family History With CPS. Many families of children in the sample had problems in addition to the referral concern about sexual abuse. Almost three quarters of the families had previous CPS referrals, and of those, most had more than one. In some cases, it was apparent that the family had been known to CPS for years and had been referred on many

⁷ Criminal charges could be filed after the study period. Some cases involved families with more than one child, where charges were filed regarding sexual abuse of one child and not the other(s).

occasions for various forms of abuse or neglect. In a significant percentage of cases (39 percent), neglect was noted as relevant to the current referral. The current investigation usually involved questions about the adequacy of supervision.

Custody/Visitation Issues. In a surprisingly high proportion of cases, custody/visitation issues were rated by caseworkers as relevant to the case (41 percent). These were typically situations where parents were divorced or separated and one parent was concerned about abuse by the other parent or by someone in the other parent's household. Many cases involved reports or concerns about abuse that occurred, or may have occurred, in the past. Children in these cases were often reporting that they had been abused when they were living with a parent, and the report related to concerns about other children now living with that individual.

The characteristics of cases across sites revealed some differences. For example, in King Eastside a significantly higher percentage of children were living with the person suspected of abuse, whereas in Olympia, more children were living with both biological parents, more of the suspected abusers were not parents or siblings, and custody/visitation issues were less often a concern.

Analysis of Interviews

Asking About Abuse. Interviewers varied in how directly they pursued the possibility of abuse during interviews. When children had made prior statements, most often they gave information in the interview that could be followed up with more specific questioning about the nature of the experience. In cases where children had not made statements about abuse, sometimes the children were specifically asked whether they had been abused, and in other cases, interviewers did not ask specific questions and instead made only a very general inquiry about feelings and safety. Interviewers sometimes introduced information from the referral before children had referenced it, presumably to help jog their memory or to encourage a narrative response. In most cases, the interviewers' conduct was rated as appropriate. For example, if the referral contained information that a child had exhibited sexualized behavior, made suspicious statements, or been exposed to pornography, it is accepted practice to bring up the topic when it is not volunteered by the child.

Overall, about 20 percent of the questions were rated as "suggestive of abuse"; the rates varied significantly by the pilot site. Most often these suggestive questions consisted of strategies such as asking children if anyone had done something upsetting to them or presenting information about good touch/bad touch and then asking the children if anything like that had occurred. No instances of the most egregious forms of suggestion (e.g., "he abused you, didn't he?") were found, although occasionally interviewers persisted in repeating questions even when children were not responsive.

Interview Format. It appeared that in most cases, CPS interviewers had adopted, at least to some extent, the standard interview guidelines they were taught (see Appendix II). The majority of interviews included the recommended components of introducing self and role, rapport building, and establishing ground rules. Adherence to these practices was more

often observed for CPS workers than for law enforcement. However, law enforcement investigators may not have had training in the guidelines that incorporate this approach.

On the other hand, only about half the interviews began with open-ended invitations to provide information. In addition, interviewers generally asked many specific questions as opposed to encouraging children to provide information on their own or to elaborate on previous statements. In most cases, however, the specific questions were follow-up clarifications regarding something previously said by the child. For example, the interviewer may have asked where something happened, who was present, or how many times it occurred after the child made a statement that something had happened. Some interviews reflected exemplary interview practice.

Rating the Interviews. Interviewers tended to rate their own interviews more positively than the principle investigator as to whether they accomplished the pre-substantive interview components and whether the interview began in an open-ended fashion. To some extent, this variation may have been caused by the documentation method rather than the actual interview practice. For example, the near-verbatim documentation usually only included a general summary of the initial portion of the interview and, in some cases, did not cover specific substantive opening questions, so these interviews were more difficult to independently evaluate. Many electronically recorded interviews started without an introduction, but it is very likely interviewers introduced themselves before the recording began.

Comparing Electronic and Near-Verbatim Documentation

Electronic Recording Advantages. As would be expected, electronic recording provided superior interview documentation. *Independent ratings of the interviews revealed large differences in the number of substantive questions asked in interviews that were electronically documented as compared with those documented using the near-verbatim method; almost five times as many questions were documented.* This finding strongly suggests that in this sample of cases, near-verbatim documentation was substantially less complete. This result may reflect CPS workers' new introduction to near-verbatim documentation, since the one interview conducted by a child interviewer from a prosecutor's office contained a comparable number of questions to the electronically documented interviews. It may be that special child interviewers who have been using the near-verbatim method for some time are more skilled at note taking and documentation.

Not only did electronically documented interviews contain more questions, the ratio of open-ended prompts was significantly higher, and the use of abuse-suggestive questions was significantly lower. It is not clear whether this finding indicates interviewers using near-verbatim were less skilled or whether the selection of questions to document was biased. It is possible that interviewers using near-verbatim do not accurately document the questions they ask. On the other hand, most of the near-verbatim cases were from one office, and specific factors may have influenced interviewer practice. Another possibility is that interviewers being electronically recorded are more conscious of how they ask questions and strive to adhere to recommended practices.

Children's Reactions. During previous debates about electronic recording in Washington, concerns were raised that audio and video recorders would increase children's discomfort during the interview. Caseworker ratings did not confirm this fear; children generally were not upset or afraid and were fairly comfortable, relaxed, and forthcoming during interviews regardless of documentation method. Ratings, however, did reveal small but significant differences in the distress of children who were electronically recorded. Electronic recording was associated with slightly more distress.

Caseworkers' Reactions. Caseworker ratings of their own comfort, confidence, and preparedness showed a similar pattern in that overall ratings were positive, although there were slight but significant differences between near-verbatim and electronic documentation. However, there were no differences in caseworker ratings of their own comfort with the documentation method. Caseworker satisfaction with the interview process (e.g., how well the interview went) was unrelated to documentation method. Both caseworker and independent ratings tended to conclude that the interview did not fully clarify the concern about possible sexual abuse, regardless of documentation method.

Documentation Costs. The most reliable cost figures were available for the audiotaping project in Olympia. Approximately \$3,700 was spent for seven micro-cassette recorders, one micro-cassette transcriber (makes copies of micro-cassettes), rechargeable batteries, battery chargers, and a storage cabinet for the cassettes. In addition, transcription costs averaged \$300 to \$400 per month for an average of four or five cases per month requiring transcription.

Early in the project, the transcripts from Olympia included numerous sections marked as inaudible when the transcribers could not understand words on the tape. In these cases, the value of the transcript was reduced. Transcript quality did improve over time as transcription services were more carefully selected.

Data regarding the time needed to transcribe the interview was missing for the Aberdeen cases and a majority of Olympia cases. When this information was available (20 cases), the average was 116 minutes with a range of 20 to 180 minutes.

The original research plan was to compare the costs of additional staff time in the King Eastside site with the transcription costs associated with audio and videotaping. However, it was often not feasible to use two caseworkers in the King Eastside office, and therefore, there was limited data available regarding the staff time expended on these cases. For those cases where data was available and two workers shared the duties, an average of 35 minutes was spent in post-interview discussion with a range of 10 to 90 minutes. This calculation did not include the length of time professional staff spent entering records into the information system.

Other Observations

Comparing Audiotaping and Videotaping. This study could not make meaningful comparisons between audiotaping and videotaping. The presumed advantage of videotaping is the opportunity to observe children's reactions and behaviors as a

supplement to verbatim documentation of questions. In this regard, this advantage would have to be determined if and when others view the videotapes for purposes of legal determinations. During the study period, no videotaped interviews in the sample were used for that purpose.

Because so few cases were referred from CPS for further legal action, the survey of other professionals viewing or using the case documentation was possible in only a small number of cases. In most instances, the person who was contacted was present during the interview and had not reviewed the documentation. Most respondents reported that the interview was conducted with objectivity and performed with reasonable skill. When asked who they considered to be an expert in interviewing children, most singled out professionals they work with in their community. It appears that for this skill area, interviewers are influenced most by persons they work with directly, as opposed to relying on authors or researchers.

In Aberdeen, the need to transport the child to the Children's Advocacy Center for videotaping occasionally resulted in two interviews. In these instances, CPS staff first conducted a screening interview to resolve safety issues, and later transported the child to the CAC for the videotaped interview.

As discussed earlier, there were a few significant differences between videotaped and audiotaped interviews in child comfort and interviewer confidence. Videotaped interviews were associated with the highest levels of overall distress for the children and lowest levels of caseworkers' sense of confidence, comfort, and preparedness. This result suggests that interviewers may have been more self-conscious in the videotape setting and more concerned about the potential impact on the children.

Professional Collaboration. The degree of system collaboration varied significantly between sites. In Olympia, joint interviewing with law enforcement was the norm; in fact for more than a quarter of cases, law enforcement conducted the interviews while CPS observed. In Aberdeen, all cases included in the study involved videotaped interviews that took place at the Child Advocacy Center. In contrast, all but one interview in King Eastside was conducted by CPS, with law enforcement sometimes present. King Eastside cases also differed from the other sites in that they rarely involved children who had made statements and never resulted in a confirmed case. Under these circumstances, CPS may be less likely to involve law enforcement.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Interview Protocol

The study found that most interviews of children by CPS and law enforcement about possible sexual abuse were conducted with objectivity. No evidence was found of systematic bias or interviewers pressuring children into making statements about sexual abuse. Interviewers appeared, in general, to be using the interview approach currently recommended by experts and presented in project-related training. This approach involves following a guide in which standard components are routinely covered before beginning the inquiry about possible sexual abuse. Although interviewers often did not rely on open-ended prompts to the degree recommended by the guide and instead used more specific questions, these questions usually emerged as follow-up clarifications of previously provided information. The most serious interviewing errors—suggestive questions—were relatively uncommon. In the electronically recorded interviews, suggestive questions were infrequent (12 percent of all questions) and almost never involved egregious types of suggestiveness.

Caseworkers' ratings of children's comfort, as well as their own, revealed little distress or discomfort. Caseworkers generally reported feeling prepared and confident in the interview. Interviewers using electronic recording reported slightly more distress for children and rated themselves as less comfortable and confident. These lower ratings may reflect the relatively recent use of electronic recording in Washington State.

Inconsistent Office Policies Regarding Investigation

Many cases involved situations where children had not made previous statements about abuse. Such cases present a dilemma for CPS investigators and law enforcement. Much disparity was found in how CPS investigators pursued referrals based on concerns about possible abuse. To some extent, this inconsistency may reflect a lack of consensus about what is expected of CPS in these situations. Clearly, the ideal is to correctly identify all abused children and end the abuse, while also accurately identifying all children who are not being abused and end the governmental intrusion. In situations where children have not made a previous statement about abuse, two kinds of errors are possible: (1) insufficient inquiry that leaves actually abused children in danger, and (2) too specific questioning that may result in false or mistaken reports and unwarranted governmental action.

It would appear that the state's Division of Children and Family Services' offices have inconsistent standards regarding when to accept cases for investigation of sexual abuse. The fact that the King Eastside site did not have a single confirmed case of sexual abuse during the study period suggests that the acceptance criteria in this office may differ from those in other offices. Consistency across interviews could be improved by increased guidance from managers.

Near-Verbatim Documentation Falling Short

Based on this research, caseworkers appear to be *falling far short in documenting all the questions asked, and responses, when they use the near-verbatim method*. It is clearly possible for investigators to learn to record interviews to a near-verbatim standard that closely resembles electronic documentation; some child interviewers are extremely proficient at this technique. This degree of accuracy, however, takes practice and training, not to mention time spent transcribing the notes after the interview.

Improving Interviewing Skills

Complete near-verbatim documentation or transcripts provide the best mechanism for supervision of workers, as well as complete legal documentation. As the OFCO report noted, it is unclear how supervisors and other consumers of interviews can evaluate interviewers' skills or an interview's quality without observing the interview or, at a minimum, reviewing documentation that fully captures the interview. In some cases, the brief interview summaries completed by caseworkers provided such sketchy information that it was impossible to determine whether the interview met standards for competent interviewing. With transcripts, the supervisors have a complete picture of interview practices. In addition, the interviewers can review their work and identify concrete targets for improvement.

Electronic Documentation Is Feasible

No obstacles to electronic documentation were found. Staff at the two sites using video and audiotaping appeared satisfied with this form of documentation, and no complaints or concerns were brought to the attention of the evaluation group. Establishing a Child Advocacy Center with video capability requires a major commitment on the part of a community and a substantial investment of resources. It may also create a situation where children are interviewed more than once because of CPS's need to determine child safety as soon as possible.

Given access to quality equipment and transcription services, it is feasible for CPS to audiotape investigative interviews in the field and/or their offices. Even with audiotaping capability, however, workers are likely to be in situations where near-verbatim documentation is the only option, suggesting that interviewers also need training in this method. Electronic documentation can be improved by having caseworkers summarize the introductions at the beginning of the tape, even if these topics are covered before the tape is turned on.

Recommendations

- If the Children's Administration continues to rely on near-verbatim documentation as the primary documentation technique, CPS workers need substantially more training and supervision in this method.
- Interview training that relies on up-to-date scientific research findings should be available to all investigative interviewers to further improve skills.
- Supervisors should routinely review case documentation, whether near-verbatim or transcripts, and provide corrective feedback to interviewers.
- Electronic recording is a feasible documentation method. Quality recording equipment and transcription services are necessary to implement this method.
- The Children's Administration should provide guidance to local offices about the criteria for accepting cases for investigation of possible sexual abuse.

APPENDIX I: STATISTICAL FINDINGS

Table 1
Child Characteristics

CHARACTERISTIC	ABERDEEN	KING EASTSIDE	OLYMPIA	TOTAL
Age	<i>N</i> = 10	<i>N</i> = 37	<i>N</i> = 45	<i>N</i> = 92
Average (range)	9 (3-16)	8.46 (2-17)	8.84 (2-15)	8.71 (2-17)
Preschool (< 7)	5 (56%)	14 (38%)	10 (23%)	29 (32%)
School Age (7-12)	2 (22%)	17 (46%)	29 (66%)	48 (53%)
Teen (13 +)	2 (22%)	6 (16%)	5 (11%)	13 (15%)
Gender	<i>N</i> = 10	<i>N</i> = 37	<i>N</i> = 45	<i>N</i> = 92
Male	2 (30%)	13 (35%)	11 (25%)	27 (29%)
Female	6 (70%)	24 (65%)	34 (75%)	64 (71%)
Ethnicity	<i>N</i> = 10	<i>N</i> = 37	<i>N</i> = 44	<i>N</i> = 91
African American	0	6 (16%)	6 (16%)	13 (14%)
Caucasian	8 (80%)	26 (70%)	33 (75%)	67 (74%)
Latino	2 (20%)	2 (6%)	1 (2%)	5 (6%)
Native American	0	0	1 (5%)	2 (2%)
Other	0	3 (8%)	1 (2%)	4 (4%)
Child Has Problems (None = 1/A lot = 7)	<i>N</i> = 10 2.16	<i>N</i> = 36 1.69	<i>N</i> = 43 2.09	<i>N</i> = 89 1.93

No statistically significant difference between sites.

Table 2
Family Characteristics

CHARACTERISTIC	ABERDEEN	KING EASTSIDE	OLYMPIA	TOTAL
Family Composition-Referral*	<i>N</i> = 9*	<i>N</i> = 37	<i>N</i> = 45	<i>N</i> = 91
Bio parents	2 (22%)	10 (27%)	19 (42%)	31 (34%)
Bio/step parent	1 (11%)	10 (27%)	5 (11%)	16 (18%)
Single parent	0	13 (35%)	10 (22%)	23 (25%)
Other	6 (67%)	4 (11%)	11 (25%)	21 (23%)
Family Composition-Abuse*	<i>N</i> = 9	<i>N</i> = 37	<i>N</i> = 45	<i>N</i> = 91
Bio parents	6 (67%)	14 (38%)	19 (42%)	39 (43%)
Bio/step parent	1 (11%)	6 (22%)	9 (20%)	18 (20%)
Single parent	2 (22%)	13 (5%)	10 (22%)	25 (27%)
Other	0	2 (5%)	7 (16%)	9 (10%)
Substance Abuse	<i>N</i> = 10	<i>N</i> = 34	<i>N</i> = 41	<i>N</i> = 85
Yes	2 (20%)	5 (15%)	0	7 (8%)
No	8 (80%)	29 (85%)	41 (100%)	78 (92%)
Divorce/Custody*	<i>N</i> = 9	<i>N</i> = 36	<i>N</i> = 43	<i>N</i> = 88
Yes	5 (56%)	19 (53%)	12 (28%)	36 (41%)
No	4 (44%)	17 (47%)	31 (72%)	52 (59%)
Domestic Violence	<i>N</i> = 9	<i>N</i> = 34	<i>N</i> = 40	<i>N</i> = 83
Yes	1 (11%)	3 (9%)	5 (13%)	6 (11%)
No	8 (89%)	31 (91%)	35 (87%)	74 (89%)
Physical Abuse	<i>N</i> = 9	<i>N</i> = 36	<i>N</i> = 40	<i>N</i> = 85
Yes	1 (11%)	2 (6%)	5 (13%)	8 (9%)
No	8 (89%)	34 (94%)	35 (87%)	77 (91%)
Neglect*	<i>N</i> = 10	<i>N</i> = 35	<i>N</i> = 40	<i>N</i> = 85
Yes	9 (90%)	6 (17%)	18 (45%)	33 (39%)
No	1 (10%)	29 (83%)	22 (55%)	52 (61%)

* = Statistically significant difference between sites.

Table 3
Subject Characteristics

CHARACTERISTIC	ABERDEEN	KING EASTSIDE	OLYMPIA	TOTAL
Subject Relationship*	<i>N</i> = 10	<i>N</i> = 35	<i>N</i> = 43	<i>N</i> = 88
Bio/adopt parent	5 (50%)	23 (66%)	13 (30%)	41 (47%)
Stepparent	1 (10%)	4 (11%)	6 (23%)	15 (17%)
Paramour	1 (10%)	1 (3%)	7 (16%)	9 (10%)
Sibling	2 (20%)	1 (3%)	4 (9%)	9 (10%)
Other	1 (10%)	4 (11%)	9 (21%)	14 (16%)
Age	<i>N</i> = 8	<i>N</i> = 31	<i>N</i> = 42	<i>N</i> = 80
Child	0	6 (6%)	3 (7%)	5 (6%)
Adolescent	0	0	7 (17%)	7 (9%)
Adult	8 (100%)	29 (96%)	32 (76%)	69 (85%)
Gender*	<i>N</i> = 10	<i>N</i> = 37	<i>N</i> = 45	<i>N</i> = 92
Male	7 (70%)	34 (92%)	43 (96%)	84 (91%)
Female	3 (30%)	3 (8%)	2 (4%)	8 (8%)
Lives With Child*	<i>N</i> = 10	<i>N</i> = 35	<i>N</i> = 44	<i>N</i> = 89
Yes	1 (11%)	21 (60%)	9 (21%)	31 (35%)
No	9 (89%)	14 (40%)	35 (79%)	58 (65%)

* = Statistically significant difference between sites.

Table 4
Legal Case Characteristics

CHARACTERISTIC	ABERDEEN	KING EASTSIDE	OLYMPIA	TOTAL
Prior CPS Referral	<i>N</i> = 10	<i>N</i> = 37	<i>N</i> = 45	<i>N</i> = 92
No	2 (20%)	13 (35%)	10 (22%)	25 (27%)
Yes	8 (80%)	24 (65%)	35 (78%)	67 (73%)
Number of prior referrals	<i>M</i> = 16 (2-30)	<i>M</i> = 3.5 (1-11)	<i>M</i> = 12 (1-34)	<i>M</i> = 9 (1-34)
Child Placed*	<i>N</i> = 10	<i>N</i> = 37	<i>N</i> = 44	<i>N</i> = 91
Yes	4 (40%)	0	9 (20%)	13 (14%)
No	6 (60%)	37 (100%)	35 (80%)	78 (86%)
Dependency Filed*	<i>N</i> = 10	<i>N</i> = 37	<i>N</i> = 44	<i>N</i> = 91
Yes	4 (40%)	0	4 (9%)	8 (9%)
No	6 (60%)	37 (100%)	40 (91%)	83 (91%)
Case Outcome*	<i>N</i> = 9	<i>N</i> = 37	<i>N</i> = 44	<i>N</i> = 90
Founded-Sexual Abuse	2 (22%)	0	8 (18%)	10 (11%)
Founded-Neglect	2 (22%)	2 (5%)	4 (9%)	8 (9%)
Inconclusive	2 (22%)	19 (52%)	16 (36%)	37 (41%)
Unfounded	3 (33%)	16 (43%)	16 (37%)	35 (39%)
Sexual Abuse Confirmed*	<i>N</i> = 10	<i>N</i> = 37	<i>N</i> = 44	<i>N</i> = 91
Yes	4 (40%)	0	10 (23%)	14 (15%)
No	6 (60%)	37 (100%)	34 (77%)	77 (85%)
Criminal Charges Filed	<i>N</i> = 7	<i>N</i> = 36	<i>N</i> = 44	<i>N</i> = 87
Yes	2 (29%)	0	5 (11%)	7 (8%)
No	5 (71%)	36 (100%)	39 (88%)	80 (92%)

* = Statistically significant difference between sites.

Table 5
Interview Characteristics

CHARACTERISTIC	ABERDEEN	KING EASTSIDE	OLYMPIA	TOTAL
Previous Statement by Child	<i>N</i> = 10	<i>N</i> = 37	<i>N</i> = 45	<i>N</i> = 92
Yes	7 (70%)	13 (35%)	17 (38%)	37 (40%)
No	3 (30%)	24 (65%)	28 (62%)	55 (60%)
Interview Length*	<i>N</i> = 2	<i>N</i> = 35	<i>N</i> = 31	<i>N</i> = 68
Average minutes	35 minutes	35 minutes	24 minutes	25 minutes
Conducted By*	<i>N</i> = 10	<i>N</i> = 37	<i>N</i> = 45	<i>N</i> = 92
CPS	10 (100%)	36 (97%)	32 (71%)	78 (85%)
Law Enforcement			13 (29%)	13 (14%)
Child Interviewer		1 (3%)		1 (1%)
Method of Documentation*	<i>N</i> = 10	<i>N</i> = 37	<i>N</i> = 45	<i>N</i> = 92
Near Verbatim		36 (97%)	6 (13%)	42 (46%)
Audio		1 (3%)	39 (87%)	40 (44%)
Video	10 (100%)			10 (10%)

* = Statistically significant difference between sites.

Table 6
Child Reactions to Interview

RESPONSES	NEAR VERBATIM		ELECTRONIC	
Negative Child Reactions*	<i>Before</i> 2.59	<i>After</i> 2.70	<i>Before</i> 3.66	<i>After</i> 3.48
Distress-Interview*	2.34		3.41	
Comfort-Documentation	5.75		5.63	

1 = Not at all; 7 = Very much.

* = Statistically significant difference by documentation type.

Table 7
Interviewer Self-Ratings of Interview

REACTIONS	NEAR VERBATIM	ELECTRONIC
Prepared*	6.39	5.90
Comfortable*	6.34	5.90
Confident*	6.41	5.88
Comfort/Documentation	6.13	6.33
Satisfied/Process	5.35	5.34

1 = Not at all; 7 = Very much.

* = Statistically significant difference by documentation type.

Table 8
Rating for Presence of Interview Components

COMPONENT	NEAR VERBATIM		ELECTRONIC	
	CPS	INDEPENDENT	CPS	INDEPENDENT
<i>Introduction of Self*</i>	1.22	2.39**	1.90	3.36**
<i>Rapport Building*</i>	1.39	1.88**	2.20	1.98
<i>Ground Rules* +</i>	1.45	3.44**	2.27	1.98
<i>Open-Ended Intro +</i>	1.76	4.18**	2.22	3.20
<i>Closure*</i>	1.45	2.26	2.39	2.67

1 = Accomplished; 7 = Not accomplished.

* = Statistically significant difference CPS by documentation type.

+ = Independent rating by documentation type.

** = CPS by independent rating.

Table 9
Independent Rating of Interview Characteristics

CHARACTERISTIC	NEAR VERBATIM		ELECTRONIC	
<i>Begin Open-Ended*</i>	N = 33		N = 46	
Yes	13	(39%)	29	(63%)
No	20	(61%)	17	(37%)
<i>Pre-Interview Intrusion</i>	N = 38		N = 46	
No	20	(53%)	17	(37%)
Yes, appropriate	16	(42%)	27	(59%)
Yes, inappropriate	2	(5%)	2	(5%)

* = Statistically significant difference by documentation type.

Table 10
Independent Rating of Types of Substantive Questions

TYPE OF QUESTIONS	NEAR VERBATIM	ELECTRONIC
<i>Open-Ended*</i>	M = 2 (13%)	M = 16 (24%)
<i>Direct Clarification*</i>	M = 8 (38%)	M = 41 (57%)
<i>Abuse Suggestive*</i>	M = 3 (31%)	M = 5 (12%)
<i>Specific/Clumsy*</i>	M = 2 (18%)	M = 5 (7%)
<i>Total # Questions*</i>	M = 14	M = 68

M = Average number; % = Percent of total questions.

* = Statistically significant difference by documentation type.

Table 11
Overall Independent Rating of Interviews

ERROR TYPE	NEAR VERBATIM	ELECTRONIC
<i>Improper</i> *	3.22	2.31
<i>Clumsy</i>	2.56	2.23

1 = Not at all; 7 = Great extent.

* = Statistically significant difference by documentation type.

Table 12
Rating of Interview Outcome

INTERVIEW CLARIFIED CONCERN	NEAR VERBATIM	ELECTRONIC
<i>CPS</i>	3.00	3.31
<i>Independent</i>	3.40	2.98

1 = Not at all; 7 = Very much.

No statistically significant difference by documentation type.

Table 13
Child Statements About Possible Sexual Abuse

RATER	DEFINITE	SUSPICIOUS	AMBIGUOUS	NONE/DENIAL
<i>CPS</i>	12 (8%)	18 (21%)	7 (8%)	50 (57%)
<i>Independent</i>	16 (18%)	12 (14%)	6 (7%)	53 (61%)

Table 14
Transcription/Review of Interview Time

KING EASTSIDE INTERVIEW REVIEW	OLYMPIA TRANSCRIPTION TIME
M = 35 minutes (N = 33)	M = 116 minutes (N = 20)

M = Average.

Note: For some cases in the sample, not all data fields were completed by CPS workers, and efforts by the researchers to retrieve the information were not successful. Thus, the number of responses for a data field are sometimes lower than the total cases from that site.

APPENDIX II: CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

Prepared by the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission and Harborview Center for Sexual Assault & Traumatic Stress

Section I

This **Child Interview Guide** was developed by the Criminal Justice Training Commission and the Harborview Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress. The Guide is based on the NICHD Protocol for Investigative Interviews of Alleged Sex Abuse Victims.

Use of the guide: This guide is intended to **assist** the interviewer/investigator through an investigative interview. The **Guide** provides an empirically-based method of interviewing that helps the interviewer incorporate state of the art interviewing techniques with their own style while allowing for the individual differences of each child.

The first section of the guide provides the interviewer with the central framework and principles of good interviewing. Definitions of key concepts are included.

The second section of guide provides the interviewer with examples of questions and statements that can be used for each stage of the interview.

* In this guide the term “younger children” refers to children 11 yrs and younger.

I. Introduction

- Begin with introducing yourself/neutral explanation of role.
- Provide general explanation for interview.
- Introduce anyone else in the room/anyone observing.

II. Documentation

- Tell child about the documentation method you are using.
- Explain the purpose for documenting conversation.

III. Ground Rules

Truth/Lie:

- Establish that child understands what it means to be truthful in terms the child can understand.
- Inform child to only talk about things that really happened.
- For younger children, use examples to demonstrate their understanding of truth/lie. [DO NOT ASK children to define true/lie]
- For younger children, demonstrate their understanding of consequences of telling a lie/not telling the truth.
- For all children, elicit an agreement to tell the truth or to talk only about things that really happened.

Other Ground Rules:

- Encourage child to admit any lack of knowledge, understanding, or memory.
- Give permission for child to correct you.

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- Mis-state a fact about a neutral topic and see if child will correct you. Follow up with child to explain and elicit correction.
- Explain that a repeated question doesn't mean child was wrong or wasn't believed, but that interviewer forgot or needed clarification.
- Give child permission to decline to answer uncomfortable questions "right now."

IV. Rapport Building/Developmental Assessment/Practicing Narratives

- Encourage child to give narrative accounts about neutral events.
- Child's answers should be longer than interviewer questions.
- Address neutral topics such as school, hobbies, after-school activities, and family. (Keep in mind that in some cases, a family member may be the suspected abuser. This may prevent the topic of family from being a neutral subject.)
- Address developmental concepts as needed. Concrete, simple questions for younger children. When using conceptual terms (over/under, up/down, in/out, before/after, today/yesterday/tomorrow), ensure child understands.
- Start questioning with open-ended prompts.
- Know something about child before beginning the interview to assist in asking about neutral topics.
- Request child elaborate/provide more details.
- Language, pacing, and complexity of questions should match child's pacing and speech level.

V. Training in Episodic Memory

Special Event:

- If possible, identify an event child recently experienced: first day of school; birthday party; holiday celebration; vacation or field trip; etc. Ask about that event.
- Start with open-ended invitation to get a narrative account.
- Follow with request to elaborate, using time segmentation to try to get more information. Continue questioning as indicated.

Yesterday or Today:

- Another opportunity to retrieve information from episodic memory.
- Young children may have trouble with concept of yesterday, so interviewer may use "today."
- Continue to begin with open-ended prompts, requests for elaboration, and time segmentation.

End this section with a statement reiterating the need for the child to tell only about things that really happened and to tell everything s/he remembers, because interviewer wasn't there and doesn't know what happened.

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VI. Transition to Substantive Issues

- Take time before interview to formulate specific questions based on the information previously provided. Write these questions down. Be sure questions suggest as few details as possible.
- Ask appropriate contextual questions, especially when child has not reported abuse to anyone previously.
- Begin with open-ended questions.
- Narrow focus of questions a little at a time as needed. (Funnel, or hourglass, approach), rather than jumping to the more direct questions right away.
- Ask sensory focused questions to get more details. (sights, sounds, etc.).
- If child gives information related to abuse concerns, return to open-ended follow-ups, requests to elaborate, time segmentation and sensory focus to gather detailed information.
- Motivate child by emphasizing interviewer wasn't there and doesn't know what happened.
- Be alert for any signs of reluctance and anxiety and address them.
- If child doesn't report abuse, interviewer must assess the need for continued questioning or stopping the interview. Interviewer may need to ask more direct questions if, based on the information already provided, there is a concern that the risk to the child is too high to stop the interview.
- If outside information strongly suggests or confirms abuse (e.g., photos exist, suspect has admitted, eyewitness gives credible account, etc.), focused questions are much less risky – you can ask directly about something for which you have good independent information.

VII. Investigating the Incidents

Once the child has said something related to the abuse concerns, questioning should maximize use of free recall techniques:

- Open-ended invitations
- Requests to elaborate
- Time segmentation
- Sensory focus
- Clarification and elaboration
- Focused questions relating to the specific incident mentioned by the child
- Separation of incidents, exploration of the specific incidents
- Focused questions relating to other incidents mentioned by the child:
 - If some central details of the allegations are still missing or unclear after exhausting open-ended questions, use more direct questions. Pair open 'invitations' with direct questions, whenever possible.
 - First focus child's attention on the detail mentioned, then ask the direct question.

VIII. Break (Optional)

- Take this break as needed. If interview is for a more limited safety assessment, a break may not be needed.
- Tell child why there is a break.

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- Do not turn the audio or video **recorder** off – **leave it running** during this break.
- During break time, review notes, and/or check with interview observers to see if any additional information is needed. Plan rest of interview and draft notes for focused questions.

After the Break:

- Resume questioning based on consultation during break.

IX. Eliciting Information That Has Not Been Mentioned by the Child

- Interviewer should ask these focused questions if s/he has tried other approaches and still feels that forensically important information is missing, such as information related to concerns about child's safety.
- Ask about **other potential victims and other possible offenders** as appropriate.

If Child Fails To Mention Information Previously Provided:

- Carefully assess whether or not to use more focused, or direct, questions.
- If there are previous known conversations in which child has provided information, indicate knowledge of conversation. This cues child to person s/he talked to previously, without reference to content.
- If details about prior disclosures are known and child has not told interviewer, briefly summarize concerns without specifically mentioning specific details if possible.
- If abuse-related incident was observed, let child know what was observed. Summarize in the least suggestive way.
- If child talks about having told someone else about the incident(s), ask the child to tell the interviewer about what happened, because interviewer needs to hear it from child.

X. Information about Prior Statements by Child

- This can be very important to try and assess the extent of possible contamination before you interviewed the child, and will also allow consideration of consistency of child's report.

XI. Closing

- Thank child for effort, **not** content.
- Ask child if there is anything else they want to tell right now.
- Ask child if there is anything they want interviewer to know, or they want to ask the interviewer.
- Talk to child briefly about neutral topic.

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Definitions

Narrative invitations: Broad invitations using open ended questions to encourage the child to continue talking. Designed to increase the details and accuracy of responses without the use of specific questions. Encourages the child to talk “in paragraph form” about an event or topic, without input or interruption from the interviewer.

Example: *“Tell me about...” “What happened next?”*

Open-ended prompts: Questions that allow for a broad range of responses, while minimizing leading or suggestive material that could be introduced in the interview. These questions typically include who, what, when, where, and how questions. Open-ended questions are useful throughout the interview process as a method of providing some structure to the child’s recall without being overly suggestive or leading.

Example: *“Tell me everything that happened, even the little parts you don’t think are important.”*
“Tell me about your family”

Focused questions: Questions that focus on a particular person, body part, action, or circumstance of the abuse concerns. These questions often elicit relevant information but are not leading. Focused questions also serve to trigger memory. These questions are more specific than open-ended questions and may be used to introduce a new topic.

Example: *“I heard you talked to your teacher about something that happened to you. Tell me what happened.”*
“You said you and Miguel were in the garage. Tell me what happened when you went in the garage.”

Specific (direct) closed questions: Questions that are yes/no and multiple-choice follow-up inquiries to elicit additional details from the child. These questions may be necessary after narrative and more open-ended techniques have been exhausted. These questions may be useful to cue the child’s memory but should be carefully phrased to reduce the amount of new information introduced in the question. Multiple-choice questions should include all relevant options or a catchall category (eg, “Was he in the house, in the yard, or someplace else?”) These questions often combine the identity of a person with potentially abusive action and therefore are more suggestive than focused questions.

Example: *“Was he in the house, in the yard, or someplace else?”*
“Did she touch you on any other part of your body?”

Paired questions: When compelled to use focused or direct questions, follow up with an open-ended question or a narrative invitation that allows for a narrative account by the child.

Example: *“Did he touch you with any other part of his body?” [Pause for response] “Tell me all about that time.”*

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Time segmentation: Probing for details of a particular time in an event described by the child. Or the breaking down of a reported event into smaller segments of time.

Example: *“You told me about your birthday party. Tell me what you did from when the kids first got there until you opened your presents.”*

Sensory focused questions: Questions that focus on the senses, especially sight, sound, smell, and taste

Example: *“Tell me everything you saw.” “Tell me everything you heard.”*

Substantive questions: Questions related to abuse/concerns.

Example: *“You said Tommy touched you in a way you didn’t like. Tell me about that.” “Tell me about how he touched you with his hands, from beginning to end.”*

Episodic memory: The ability to retrieve a specific event from broader context of memory.

Example: *“Tell me about the last time your babysitter touched you that way.”
“Tell me about your last birthday party.”*

CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

Section II

I. INTRODUCTION

“Hello, my name is [Name]. My job is to talk with children.”

“Detective [Name] is here today. She’ll be sitting in with us.”

“This is [Name]. He’s here to listen/help take notes.”

II. DOCUMENTATION

If audio or video-taping:

“Today is [date] and it is now [time]. I am interviewing [child’s name] at [location]”

“As you can see, there is a video-camera/tape recorder here. It will record us, so I can remember everything you tell me. Sometimes I forget things and the recorder lets me to listen to you without having to write everything down.” (Implied consent)

If taking notes, indicate:

Date: _____

Start time: _____

“I will be taking notes about what we talk about today, so that I can remember everything you tell me. Sometimes I might need your help to make sure I get everything right.”

[Note any response from the child.]

III. GROUND RULES

Truth/Lie:

For younger children (11 and under):

- “I talk with lots of children. It’s always important that they tell me the truth. So, before we begin, I want to make sure that you understand how important it is to tell the truth.”

Or

- “It’s important to talk only about things that really happened.”
- “I want to make sure you know what is true and not true/what it means to tell the truth and to tell a lie/what is real and not real.”
- “If someone said that my shoes are red, is that true or not true/would they be telling the truth or telling a lie/is that real or not real?”

[Wait for response, then say:]

- “That would not be true/would be a lie/would be real/not real, because my shoes are really [Color].”
- “And if someone said that I am sitting down now, would that be true or not true/ the truth or a lie/real/not real?”

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[Wait for response.]

- “It would be true/the truth/real, because you can see I am really sitting down.”

Demonstrate their understanding of consequences for telling a lie:

- “Is it right or wrong/good or bad to tell the truth/tell a lie?”

[Wait for response]

- “What happens when someone lies/to people who tell lies?”

[Wait for response]

- “I see that you understand what telling the truth means/what is real and not real. It is very important that you only tell me the truth today. You should only tell me about things that really happened to you.”

For children 12 and over:

- “I talk with lots of kids and it’s always important that they tell me the truth.”

For all children, elicit a promise or agreement to tell the truth/talk only about things that really happened.

Other Ground Rules:

Instruct older children (12 and over) about the rules. Elicit acknowledgment. No need to practice unless child seems confused.

- “If I ask you a question and you don’t remember, it’s okay that you don’t remember.”

[Pause]

- “If I ask a question and you don’t know the answer, just say, ‘I don’t know.’ Okay?”

For younger children (11 and under), practice:

“So, if I ask you, ‘What is my dog’s name?’ what would you say?”

[Wait for an answer.]

If the child says, “I don’t know,” say:

“Right. You don’t know, do you?”

If the child offers a guess, say:

“No, you don’t know because you don’t know me. When you don’t know the answer, don’t guess -- it’s okay to say that you don’t know.”

[Pause.]

- “If I ask you a question more than once, it doesn’t mean your first answer is wrong, maybe I forgot or got confused. If your first answer was right, just tell me again.”

[Pause for response]

- “If I make a mistake, I want you to correct me.”

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- **For younger children practice**, “So if I said that your name is [use an incorrect name], what would you say?”

[If the child does not correct you, say:]

“What would you say if I made a mistake and called you [an incorrect name]?”

[Wait for response.]

“That’s right. Now you know it’s okay to tell me if I make a mistake or say something that is not right.”

“And if I say things that are wrong, you should tell me. Okay?”

Add this ground rule, as needed, for children who you believe may be reluctant to talk: “If I ask you a question you don’t want to answer, just tell me ‘I don’t want to talk about it right now’”

IV. RAPPORT BUILDING/DEVELOPMENTAL ASSESSMENT/PRACTICING NARRATIVES

- “Now I want to get to know you better/to find out more about you.”
- “Tell me about things you like to do.”

[Wait for response.]

[If the child does not answer, gives a short answer, or gets stuck, you can ask:]

- “I really want to know you better. Tell me more about [from previous short answer]. Or, “Tell me about things you like to do with your friends.”

[Wait for response.]

- “Tell me more about [activity the child has mentioned in his/her account -- AVOID FOCUSING ON TV, VIDEOS, AND FANTASY].

[Wait for response.]

- “Now that I know about some of the things you like to do, I want to hear about your school/pre-school. Tell me all about your school/pre-school.” “Tell me some things you like/don’t like about school.”

[Wait for response]

[If the child does not answer, gives a short answer, or gets stuck, you can ask:]

- “Tell me about your favorite subject/your teacher.”

[Wait for response.]

- “Tell me about the other children in your class.”

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[Wait for response. Once topic is exhausted, move to questions about family.]

- “I would like to know about your family. Tell me about your family.”

[Wait for response.]

- “What else can you tell me about your family?”

V. TRAINING IN EPISODIC MEMORY

SPECIAL EVENT

- “A few [days/weeks] ago was [holiday/ birthday party/ the first day of school/ other event]. Tell me everything that happened then.”
- “Think again about [activity or event]. Tell me what happened from the time [event] began until it ended.”
- “And then what [happened? Tell me more]”

Use time segmentation to probe for more details:

- “Tell me everything that happened from [one portion of the event mentioned by the child to another].”

Continue **open-ended follow-ups** and **requests to elaborate:**

- “Tell me more about [activity mentioned by the child].”

Or

- “Earlier you mentioned [activity of child]. Tell me everything about that.”

Sensory focus to probe for more details:

- “Think about [previously mentioned event]. Tell me about what [sounds you heard/things you saw.]”

YESTERDAY OR TODAY

- “I really want to know about things that happened to you. Tell me everything that happened yesterday from the time you woke up until you went to bed.”

Or

- “Tell me everything that happened to you today, from the time you got up until [I came to talk to you/you came to see me.]”
- “I don’t want you to leave anything out. Tell me everything that happened from the time you woke up until [some activity or portion of the event mentioned by the child in response to the previous question].”

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VI. TRANSITION TO SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

Vague concerns/allegations:

- “Tell me about the people who live with you.”
- “Tell me some things you like/don’t like about _____.” [Wait for response] “What don’t you like about _____?”
- “What happens when you go to _____?” [Wait for response] “Tell me all about that.” OR “What are fun/not so fun things that happen at _____?”

Example: “Earlier we talked about daycare, tell me about the teachers who work there.”

“Earlier you talked about visits to your dad’s. Tell me what happens at your dad’s.”

“Who helps you get ready for bed?” “Tell me more about tuck-in time.”

If these contextual questions don’t elicit information from child regarding abuse concerns, move to focused questions.

Open-ended questions:

- “Do you know why [I came to talk to you today/you came to see me today]?”
- “Did anyone say anything to you about why I’m talking to you?”
- “As I told you, my job is to talk to kids. Tell me why [you are here/ you came here/ why you think I came to talk to you today]”
- “Tell me why you think [accompanying person] brought you here.”
- “Tell me about [context/location of alleged abuse].”

If these statements don’t elicit a response, move to focused questions.

Focused questions:

- “I understand that something may have happened to you. Tell me everything that happened from the beginning to the middle to the end.”
- “I heard that you talked to [identified person] about something that happened to you. It’s important for me to understand, tell me what happened.”
- “Tell me more about suspected [alleged offender/location/time of alleged incident]. What are some things you [like/don’t like]. Why?” “Tell me about that.”

Respond to non-verbal actions or specific concerns of the child:

- “I see you’re crying. Tell me why.”/“You’re very quiet. Tell me why.”
- “What do you think will happen if you tell? Why?”
- “What makes you think you might be in trouble?” “Tell me more about that.”

More focused transition questions:

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- “I heard you talked to [identified person] about [a problem you were having/ a picture that you drew, etc.].” [Pause] “Tell me about [problem/picture/etc].”

[If positive response ask:] “Tell me everything about that.”

[If no response ask:]

- “I heard you talked to [identified person] about [brief description of event]. Tell me what happened.”
- “Your [mom/teacher/counselor/friend] is worried that something might have happened to you. Do you know what they are worried about?”
- “I heard you were doing something at [location] – [touching other children/saying bad words, etc]. Tell me about that.”
- “Did somebody [briefly summarize allegations or suspicions without specifying names of alleged perpetrator or providing too many details].” (For example, “Did somebody do something wrong/do something you didn’t like/touch you?”)

VII. INVESTIGATING THE INCIDENTS

Questions regarding statements the child has made about the allegation should maximize the use of free recall techniques:

Open-ended invitations:

- “Tell me everything about [child’s words describing the allegation].”
- [With older children, you can simply say, “Tell me everything about that.”]
- “Tell me everything that happened, from the beginning to middle to end, even the little parts you don’t think are important.”

Requests to elaborate:

- “Then what happened?”
- “What happened next?”
- “Tell me more about [person/ object/ activity mentioned by the child].”
- “You mentioned [person/ object/ activity mentioned by the child], tell me everything about that.”

Time Segmentation:

- “Think back to that [day/ night]. Tell me everything that happened from [some previous event mentioned by child] until [alleged abusive incident described by child].”
- “Tell me everything about [one segment of the event to another segment of the event]”

Sensory focus:

- “Think about what it looked like when [event]. Tell me everything you saw.”
- “Think about what it sounded like. Tell me everything you heard.”

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Clarification and elaboration:

- “You’ve told me a lot, and that’s really helpful, but I’m a little confused. To be sure I understand, tell me again [how it started; how it ended/etc.]”
- “Let’s see if I’ve got this right. [Briefly summarize each segment of the event]. [Pause after each segment and elicit response as to accuracy of each segment].”

Focused questions relating to the specific incident mentioned by the child:

The *general format* of a focused question is:

“You said/talked about [person/object/activity]”. “[Ask for specific detail]”.

Examples:

- “You said you were at the daycare. Where exactly were you?” [Pause, wait for response] “Tell me everything about that.”
- “Earlier you said your dad touched you with his ‘thing’.” Tell me all about how he touched you with his thing.”
- “You talked about a neighbor. Do you know his/her name?” [Pause, wait for response] “Tell me about that neighbor.”
- “You said that one of your friends saw [event]. What was [his/her] name?” [Pause, wait for response] “Tell me what he was doing there.”

Separation of incidents and exploration of specific incidents:

- “Did that happen one time or more than one time?”
- **(Don’t ask** young children to tell you **how many times** something happened.)
- “Tell me about another time.”

Focused questions relating to other incidents mentioned by the child:

If more than one: “Tell me about the last time [event mentioned by child] happened.”

- “Tell me about [the first, worst, another time you remember].” (Follow-up with free recall techniques to elicit details.)
- “Tell me about the time in [a location mentioned by the child].”(Follow-up with free recall questions.)
- “You mentioned [person]. Tell me all about what happened with [person].”
- “Tell me about [previous event mentioned by child].” (Follow up with a free call questions)

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Examples:

- “You mentioned you were watching TV. What were you watching?” “Tell me everything about that.”
- “Earlier you said that your daddy ‘messed with you.’ Tell me what you mean by ‘messed with you’.”
- “Earlier you said that your uncle used Vaseline. Tell me exactly what he did.”

VIII. BREAK (OPTIONAL)

- “Now I want to make sure I understood what happened to you. I will just [think about what you told me/go over my notes/go and check with (name of observer)] to see if there’s anything else I need to ask you.”

After the Break:

- “Tell me more about [unclear information].”/“What else happened?”/ “Then what happened?”/“Tell me everything about that.”

IX. ELICITING INFORMATION THAT HAS NOT BEEN MENTIONED BY THE CHILD

- “When you told me about [specific incident] you said [person/object/activity]. Did/was [focused questions]?”
- Follow with an invitation - “Tell me [all/everything/more] about that.”

Examples:

- “You told me about the time in the basement, when [name] took off his pants. Did something happen to your clothes?” “Tell me all about that.”
- “You told me about the last time he touched you. Did he touch you on top of your clothes or underneath your clothes?” “Tell me about that.”
- “You told me about the time on the playground. Did anybody else see what happened?” “Tell me more about that.”
- “Was that before or after lunchtime?”
- “Do you know if something like that happened to other children?” “Tell me everything about that.”
- “Did someone else ever [touch you/make you touch them] like that before?” “Tell me [about that/who].”

If child fails to mention information previously provided by others:

- If you know of conversations in which information about abuse was mentioned by the child to another person indicate:

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“I heard that you talked to [person’s name] at [time/place]. Tell me what you talked about.”

- If you know specific details about abuse concerns and the child has NOT reported these details to you say:
“I heard [summarize allegation, specifically but without mentioning incriminating details if possible]. Tell me everything about that.”
- If you have solid proof/evidence of abuse (pictures/offender confession/video) say: “I know [summarize knowledge/proof]”. “Tell me in your own words about what happened.” It is okay to ask direct questions about known facts. Then ask child to tell in their own words.
- If something was observed, say:
“Has anything happened to you at [place/time]? Tell me everything about that.”
- If needed:
“I heard that someone saw [summarize what was seen in the least suggestive way possible]. Tell me everything about that.”

Carefully assess whether to use more specific questions such as:

“Did somebody [summarize activity without naming the alleged offender (unless child already named her/him) and without providing the most incriminating details]?”

“Did somebody touch you on your privates when you were at grandma’s?”

If the child talks about having told someone else about the incident(s):

- “Tell me everything you can about how [the first person, or another person, mentioned by the child] found out.”
- “Tell me everything you talked about with [person child talked to].”
- “Does anyone else know about [alleged abuse as described by the child]? Who? Tell me what [name] knows about it.”

When direct questions are necessary, pair with open-ended questions.

- “Did someone touch your chest?” “I wasn’t there, so I don’t know what happened. Tell me what happened when he [use child’s words]”. “Tell me everything that happened.”
- “What did he rub your chest with?” [Wait for response] “Tell me about that.”

X. INFORMATION ABOUT PRIOR STATEMENTS BY THE CHILD

If child hasn’t mentioned telling anyone, probe about possible immediate disclosure:

- Open-ended invitation: “Tell me what happened after [the last incident].”

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- Opened-ended follow-up/request to elaborate: “And then what happened?”
- More-focused: “Does anybody else know what happened?” “Who?”
- Another way to try: “I want understand how other people found out about [the last incident].”
- Another way to try: “Who was the first person besides you and [the alleged offender] to find out about [alleged abuse as described by the child]?”
- How did [person to whom child reported incident, who then made report which brought the allegation to your attention] find out about what happened?”

XI. CLOSING

- “You have answered lots of questions/told me lots of things today, and I want to **thank you for talking with me.**”
- “Is there anything else you feel like telling me right now/is there anything else you want me to know?”
- “Are there any questions you want to ask me about what we talked about today?”
- End on neutral note/refocus child to neutral topic – “Now you are going to go back to class.” “What are you going to do now?”
- As appropriate, briefly tell child you next steps. “Now I’m going to talk to [name].”