

Chapter 6: Child Victims and witnesses

Free Recall versus Directed questioning

- When children are asked to report all they can remember using a free narrative approach, their accuracy in reporting is comparable to that of adults. Unfortunately children tend to report very little information using free narrative.
- Direct questions that require yes or no responses or use a forced-choice format are particularly problematic for preschoolers.
- Using Recall may elicit brief responses but the responses are more likely to be accurate.
- More specifically “How did you feel?” elicited the most evaluative information compared to direct and suggestive questions.

Why are children more suggestible than adults?

- It has been argued that children respond to interviews in the manner they feel the interviewer desires, a tendency known as *Social Compliance*.
- Children may infer the desired response in keeping with the “gist” or general idea of the question.
- Currently researchers believe that an interaction of social and cognitive factors is likely responsible for children’s suggestibility and their reporting of false information.
- Researchers would recommend relying on free recall as much as possible to obtain accurate information.

Anatomically Detailed dolls

- **Anatomically detailed dolls:** A doll sometimes like a rag doll that is consistent with the male or female anatomy. Assumed to allow children to give information they would not provide orally.
- The use of Anatomically detailed dolls for diagnosing sexual abuse can be inaccurate and dangerous.

Other Techniques for interviewing Children

Criterion based content analysis: Analysis that uses criteria to distinguish truthful from false statements made by children. The criterion based analysis is part of a more comprehensive protocol called **statement validity analysis**. The underlying assumption of the CBCA is that descriptions of real events differ in quality and content from memories that are fabricated. 18 Criteria were developed to distinguish between true and fabricated events of sexual abuse. Overall the CBCA is highly subjective and does not ensure inter-rater reliability.

Statement Validity Analysis: Is a credibility assessments tool for sexual abuse allegations. The SVA consists of three parts: (1) is a structured interview with the victim, (2) a systematic analysis of the verbal content of the victims statement using the **CBCA**, (3) the application of a statement validity checklist. Some experts suggest using the entire SVA system when assessing allegations, the CBCA is considered the most important part and is often used as a stand alone protocol.

The Step-wise interview: This interview protocol consists of a series of steps designed to start the interview with the least leading and directive types of questioning, and then proceeds to more specific forms of questioning as necessary. There are 9 steps in the stepwise interview.

Goal	How
1) Rapport building	Talk to child about neutral topics, make them feel comfortable
2) Recall of two non abuse events	Have the child describe two events such as a birthday party or going to the zoo.
3) Explanation of Truth	Explain truth in general, have child agree to tell truth.
4) Introduction of Critical topics	Start with open ended questions, “Do u know why we are talking today” and proceed to relevant questions.
5) Free-narrative	Ask the child what happened by using a free narrative approach.
6) General Questions	Ask questions based on what the child said
7) Specific questions (if necessary)	Clarify inconsistencies with more specific questions.
8) Interview aids (if necessary)	Have child draw if they are not responding. Dolls may be introduced after disclosure.
9) Conclude	Thank the child for helping and explain next step.

Narrative Elaboration: An interview procedure whereby children learn to organize their story into relevant categories: participants, settings, actions, conversation/affective states, and consequences. Children interviewed with this approach reported more accurate information but not more inaccurate information for staged events compared with when just the cue cards were presented without training or the standard interview. Children trained with the narrative elaboration approach reported almost twice as much information and were more accurate than compared with control groups. Most times the use of simple pictures such as stick figures and line drawings are included.

National Institute of Child Health and Human development Interview Protocol.

The NICHD developed an interviewing procedure that relies on open ended questioning with two types of prompts available to interviewers. Interviewers can use time prompts to have the child fill in details and a time-line. Ex: Interviewer may ask "What happened next?". Interviewers can use cue question prompts where details that the child has reported are used in the question and children are asked to elaborate. For example the interviewer may ask "You said the teacher took off his belt, tell me more about that". This protocol also provides direction on how to start the interview and how to introduce topics of abuse. The NICHD protocol has been studied and received positive results. Asking multiple questions together is not recommended.

Cognitive interview

Children interviewed using the cognitive interview method reported more accurate information than children interviewed in control conditions. There are numerous interview methods and each protocol is encouraged to limit the use of direct questions and attempt to have the child provide as much information as possible by using free-recall format.

Recall Memory following Long Delay

False memory syndrome: Term used to describe clients false beliefs that they were sexually abused as children, having no memories of this abuse until they enter therapy to deal with some other psychological problem such as depression or substance abuse.

Proponents of false memory argument contend that not having any memory of abuse is different from preferring not to think about it. When there is absolutely no memory of abuse, and it is only through the use of suggestive techniques that the abuse is remembered, many argue that these memories should be interpreted cautiously.

Lindsay and read suggested five criteria to consider when determining the veracity of a recovered memory.

1. Age of complainant at the time of alleged abuse
2. Techniques used to recover memory, was the person hypnotized, were the techniques suggestive.
3. Similarity of Reports across interview sessions; Do the reports remain consistent?
4. Motivation for recall; Is the client experiencing other psychological distress?
5. Time elapsed since the alleged abuse

Historic sexual Abuse: Allegations of child abuse having occurred several years ago, often decades prior to when they are being prosecuted.

Describing the culprit

Children and youth simply may lack experience with height and weight. It is only in later adolescence that people become body conscious and more familiar with weight and height proportions.

It is important for interviewers not to introduce their own biases or inaccurate information when interviewing children. Once again the argument can be made that children should be asked to describe the culprit in terms of what he or she did and looked like using free narrative approach.

Recognition

Pozzulo and Lindsay found that children over age five produced comparable correct identifications rates to adults, provided the culprit was present in the lineup (Target present lineup). However when the culprit was not in the lineup (Target absent lineup) children as old as 14 produced greater false positives than adults.

An identification procedure for children

Elimination lineups: Lineup Procedure used for children that first asks them to pick out the person who looks most like the culprit from the photos displayed. Next children are asked whether the most similar person selected is in fact the culprit.

Risk Factors: Child Witnesses

Memory Factors

Language Factors, children cannot articulate themselves.

Authority effects, how a question is asked and the context of the situation can create different accounts.

Court room accommodations

Children can do a video statement

Judge can close court room and interview child privately

Screen can be placed in front of the testimony boxing

Consequences of sexual abuse

Short term: Low self esteem, Inappropriate sexual behaviours, PTSD, Physical problems

Long term: Depression/Anxiety, Victimization, Alcohol and drug problems.

Resilience

Resilience: Capacity for children to experience adverse events and not experience negative outcomes

What factors are related to resilience ? Child, Family, Community