



ADVANCED FORENSIC INTERVIEWING TOPIC DESCRIPTIONS

Balancing Evidence-Based Practice with the Needs of the Child in a Forensic Interview

Twenty-five years of empirical research has provided evidence that supports principles of “best practice” in child forensic interviewing. These principles provide direction about interview setting, interviewer demeanor, the importance of including interview instructions and narrative practice, and the employment of a non-leading transition to the allegation topic. The greatest lesson, however, has been around the phrasing of questions throughout the interview, directing the interview to use open-ended prompts or questions that elicit narrative description from the child and to minimize the use of recognition prompts.

This training provides an overview of research based principles of best practice in Child Forensic Interviewing; as well as acknowledging challenges and the need for defensible adaptations for more reluctant or less competent children. It is an excellent initial presentation for an Advanced Forensic Interview Training because even as we deal with more thorny issues in forensic interviewing we strive to remain grounded in evidence-based practice.

Child Forensic Interviewing: Current Research, Issues, and Controversies

Research informing the practice of conducting forensic interviews of children who have potentially experienced or witnessed abuse is continually evolving. Forensic interviewers who spend much of their day conducting interviews of children are challenged to stay current with this large body of knowledge. There is an additional challenge in relaying current information to the Law Enforcement and Child Protection Investigators, prosecutors, and courtrooms.

This training reviews the recent research on child forensic interviewing and implications for our daily practice in an understandable manner. We will tie this research to practical strategies for conducting interviews as well as explaining and defending our work in court.

Training, Supervision, and Peer Review of Child Forensic Interviewers

Intensive training programs provide an excellent foundation for a professional who is new to child forensic interviewing. Such programs, usually a week in length, familiarize trainees with basic memory principles, the best questioning approaches for eliciting information, a review of children’s developmental capabilities and issues, and recommended techniques for transitioning the child to the allegation focused portion of the interview and gathering a detailed description of experiences.

However, research demonstrates and practitioners agree that training alone is not adequate for developing the sophisticated skill set necessary for eliciting the best quality and quantity of information from a child. Supervision by an experienced and skilled child forensic interviewer or an opportunity to participate in an effectively run peer review group increases the likelihood that the interviewer will put their newly acquired skills into practice.

This training focuses on preparing experienced Forensic Interviewers to provide effective feedback and support to less experienced interviewers.

Facilitated Forensic Interview Peer Review

Research demonstrates and practitioners agree that forensic interviewers “continue to maintain or improve their skills only when they regularly review their own and other’s interviews closely, discussing their strategies, successes, and mistakes with other interviewers” (Lamb, 2009).

This formalized peer review process will provide participants the opportunity to observe recorded forensic interviews of children and engage in critique and discussion of interviewer techniques, as well as examine current research and literature related to the field of forensic interviewing.

This training can be offered as a free-standing one to two day training or included with other more didactic pieces to enrich the training experience.

Beyond One Interview: Deciding When and How to Conduct a Second Interview

The “one-interview” standard in the investigation of child maltreatment is a core value of the CAC/MDT approach and has much merit. Yet we know that many children experience more than one interview in the process of an investigation, often resulting in challenges to the child’s statements or investigative practices in court. Additionally, there is increasing recognition of cases and situations where a single interview does not adequately meet the child’s needs for time and safety nor address all concerns in a complicated case.

Recent research provides support for the use of a multiple-session interview approach for particularly reluctant or traumatized children or children who present communication challenges. This research also begins to tease out the impact of multiple sessions and the influence of other elements of interviewing practice (questioning techniques, repetition of questions, leading and suggestive techniques.) Recommendations for doing “defensible” work using a multi-session approach will be presented along with supporting research.

This training can also include an overview of the NCAC Extended Forensic Interview approach if requested.

Interviewing Children about Repeated Abuse

Many children experience multiple abusive events and on multiple occasions. When abuse is long-standing, children typically develop and report “script” or “gist” memories, which actually are a compilation of multiple events. Forensic interviewers are often struggle when attempting challenged to assist children in recalling particular episodes that are helpful for investigative purposes and for making legal decisions. This can be a daunting task for the children who have experienced the most abuse or those who are young or have cognitive challenges.

This training will review the research on the formation of episodic and script memories for repeated events. Alternative interview approaches will be discussed, as well as, a review of common interview practice in this area. The training will provide practical suggestions, as well as cautions.

It's About Time: Children's Memory and Abilities

Practice and research suggests that eliciting information from a child victim or witness concerning time is especially difficult. Investigators and prosecutors often want to determine the dates when incidents occurred, the number of times events were repeated, or the sequence of differing events. Forensic interviews are often derailed as interviewers attempt to balance the needs of multidisciplinary team members with the temporal abilities of a child.

This training will present findings from the research, as well as address the implications for children and others involved in an investigation, forensic interview, or prosecution. Practical recommendations and interview strategies for gathering temporal information will be discussed.

Developmentally Sensitive Forensic Interviewing

The purpose of a forensic interview is to elicit as much reliable information as possible from a child to help determine if abuse happened. Interviewers attempt to collect information in a neutral and objective way. Trauma to the child should be minimized, while considering all reasonable explanations for the allegations. All forensic interviewing protocols agree that taking the age and development of the child into consideration during a forensic interview is essential. Lamb et al. (in press) states that "Age is the most important determinant of children's memory capacity." A child's age and developmental abilities influence their perception of an experience and the amount of information which can be stored in long term memory.

Not all forensic interviewers have a strong background in child development; which may make it difficult for them to adjust questioning strategies and interviewer approaches to the cognitive/linguistic/cultural needs of an individual child. This training provides an overview of strengths and challenges across the developmental spectrum and ties them to the basic principles of "best-practice" forensic interviewing.

Interviewing Preschoolers

Forensic interviewers find it difficult to interview preschoolers using standard protocols and recommendations for questioning. Preschool children notoriously have unique and limited language, a poor sense of time, a brief attention span, and pronounced lack of self-control or behavioral inhibition. And yet a young child does have memories of recent events, a growing ability to use language, and may be less reserved about "telling."

Knowledge of early child development shares equal importance with knowledge of the principles of good forensic interviewing practice. This presentation will review important developmental strengths and weaknesses; as well as focus on adaptations to the typical interview structure that may make the time spent with the preschooler more productive.

Strategies for Forensic Interviews with Adolescents

Conducting forensic interviews with adolescents presents opportunities and challenges not found with younger children. Adolescents are neither children nor adults but often times a confusing combination of both. Advances in brain research provide insight into how brain development and hormones impact adolescent behavior, emotions and decision-making. Combining basic principles of adolescent brain development with practical experience yields unique strategies and techniques for conducting forensic interviews with adolescents. This session will provide a practical framework for meeting the needs of adolescents while addressing the unique challenges faced by forensic interviewers as they work to gather information during an investigation.

Interviewing Children Who Witness Homicide and Other Forms of Violence

Persons charged with the critical task of communicating effectively with children who have witnessed homicide or other violent crimes can be hindered by the degree of trauma experienced by the child, the child's age and development, as well as a lack of knowledge on how to conduct interviews in a forensically sound manner. This presentation will provide participants with an understanding of how grief and trauma impacts children, assist in identifying challenges investigators, interviewers, and prosecutors face when attempting to gather information pertinent to the investigation or prosecution, and explore methods to successfully gather information from traumatized children.

Polyvictimization and the Need for Comprehensive Interviews

Children and adolescents who present for forensic interviews are frequently victims of multiple forms of abuse and/or have witnessed violent crime. Agencies which investigate and prosecute child abuse often arbitrarily compartmentalize cases based on the type of abuse stated in the initial report. Professional bias due to compartmentalization can result in a skewed forensic interview which may negatively affect the child, the investigation, and case outcome. This workshop will discuss how professionals, using a collaborative approach, can identify poly-victims, as well as examine methods of conducting comprehensive forensic interviews with children and adolescents who have experienced multiple type and incidences of maltreatment.

Questioning of Children in Judicial Proceedings

Research demonstrates that many legal professionals ask developmentally unsuitable questions to children and adolescents testifying in family, juvenile, or criminal courts. Professionals questioning child witnesses often make the critical error of assuming children use, process, and understand language in the same manner as adults. Complex, confusing, or developmentally inappropriate questions limit children's ability to provide the court with accurate information. This presentation will assist participants in understanding how to use age-appropriate language to maximize the amount of information gained regarding past events.

Effective Interviewing and Communication Skills with Children with Disabilities

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), ADHD, Cerebral Palsy, and intellectual disabilities are among the most frequently occurring developmental disabilities affecting children. Persons with developmental disabilities are disproportionately at increased risk for many forms of victimization. Consequently, the capacity to conduct informative and legally sound forensic interviews with these vulnerable groups of children is critical. Each of these developmental disabilities has a unique constellation of cognitive, social/emotional, and behavioral presentations which can create significant challenges for the forensic interview process. This presentation will provide an overview of the distinguishing features of specific disabilities and outline practical, legally defensible methods for adapting forensic interview protocols, while still adhering to “best practice” recommendations.

Interviewing Children Who Have Not Made a Prior Disclosure

The majority of the evidence-based forensic interview protocols used in the United States are designed for children who have made a prior disclosure of maltreatment. However, many interviewers are asked to interview children who may be “at risk” for sexual or physical abuse, or who may have witnessed a violent crime. These children may be siblings of alleged victim, children who engage in sexualized behavior with other children, children who are named as potential victims by other disclosing children, children who have had contact with a known sex offender, or children whose electronic images have been recovered during the course of a criminal investigation, etc. Transitioning from the pre-substantive or rapport-building phase of the interview to the area of concern has to be carefully and well-thought-out with special emphasis placed on pre-interview planning. This session will focus on latency-aged children and adolescents and present strategies for questioning children who have not disclosed prior to a forensic interview.

Interviewing the Reluctant Child

Varying degrees of reluctance is a common observance during forensic interviews. Children who are extremely reluctant to provide information are particularly worrisome as their minimal responses may tie the hands of child protection and law enforcement. Additionally, research had demonstrated that forensic interviewers often respond to a child’s reticence by decreasing levels of social support as well as reverting to more closed, option-posing, and leading questions. This presentation will identify factors which can help to predict the appearance of reluctance during the forensic interview. This session will also identify and discuss specific elements of social support and present strategies for questioning reluctant children.