



## **National Children's Advocacy Center's Extended Forensic Interview Protocol**

In child abuse investigations the single interview model is the approach currently recommended by Multidisciplinary Teams (MDTs), Child Advocacy Centers (CACs), and “best practice” resources throughout the U.S. This model assumes a child is willing and able to discuss the allegation topic and can provide sufficient detail to inform the investigation and to support case decisions. While the single interview approach is sufficient for many children and cases, a subset of children are challenged to participate in such a focused conversation with a stranger and may benefit from more time and an expanded conversation over multiple sessions. As the forensic interviewer and the child will speak on more than one occasion, it is important to insure the forensic integrity of these conversations. The National Children's Advocacy Center (NCAC) offers a model for conducting a multi-session interview of a child, based on current research about the best ways to elicit information from a child. Originally developed in 1997 under the name “Forensic Evaluation” the extended interview protocol has evolved over the years to incorporate new literature and research and was officially renamed the “NCAC Extended Forensic Interview” in 2011. The NCAC offers a three-day training program which prepares professionals to implement the model in their CAC or through their MDT. Since 1999, NCAC has provided extended interview training to over 1,300 professionals nationally and internationally.

### **Overview of the NCAC Extended Forensic Interview Protocol**

NCAC's Extended Forensic Interview (EFI) protocol provides for a flexible number of interview sessions and should be adjusted to the needs of the child; usually varying between two and five sessions. The goal of the EFI is to complete the process with the minimum number of sessions needed to acquire the child's information. Current literature recommends that the time lapse between sessions should be short; so the entire process can be completed within a week or two. EFI sessions should be recorded in the same manner as a single session forensic interview.

#### ***Pre-Interview Preparation***

Prior to the first meeting with the child the Interviewer should review relevant information, which may include police reports, any report to Child Protective Services, notes or digital recording of any prior forensic interview of the child. Additionally, the Interviewer might familiarize themselves with any available information about the child developmental status and functioning which may impact the child's participation in the interview.

This preparation might include a brief meeting with a primary caregiver to obtain a brief developmental history, family make-up, and particular issues or concerns with cognitive or communicative abilities or limitations. This caregiver meeting is not intended to address issues of the investigation as that is the purview of Law Enforcement and Child Protective Services.

### ***Foundational Session(s) with the Child***

The purpose of the one or two foundational sessions is to establish rapport, learn about the child's day-to-day life, get a sense of the child's linguistic style and abilities, and familiarize the child with the unique conversational patterns of a forensic conversation (where the child is the holder of the information about their experiences and the adult is asking questions to elicit the child's information and attempt to understand their experience.)

#### ***Session 1***

The goal of the first foundational session is to build rapport and encourage narrative description/explanation from the child. Guidelines are introduced and practiced. There is an attempt to focus on safe topics and topics that are enjoyable for the child to discuss.

- Explain process.
- Introduce guidelines.
- Employ narrative practice.

#### ***Session 2***

Guidelines are reviewed and the interviewer continues to build rapport with the child and encourage narrative elaboration about topics under discussion. Focused topics are introduced and explored (Lyon). The Interviewer should follow up on any concerns, hesitations, or questions that emerge from the child. If the child transitions to topics connected to the allegations, the Interviewer should follow the child's lead; but the discussion of allegation focused topics is not the goal of this session.

- Review guidelines.
- Continue Narrative practice.
- Engage in discussion of family.
- Identify feelings, with examples provided by the child.

### ***Allegation Focused Session(s) with the Child***

A report to a Law Enforcement agency and/or Child Protective Services is the starting point for an investigation of child abuse or some other form(s) of victimization. The initial report may be quite detailed or sparse and unclear; but typically contains a specific allegation(s). Part of that investigation includes having a trained professional question the child about people, activities, or locations mentioned in the initial report. The interviewer should not provide answers to the questions or lead the child to make particular statements or draw conclusions. If the child has not spontaneously made reference to the allegation topic, the Interviewer should initiate the

discussion in the least leading manner possible. Additional prompts may be necessary if the child remains reluctant. Possible transitions can be planned in advance of this session; but the Interviewer must remain open to following the child's lead and exploring all concerning topics that emerge. The Interviewer should implement good forensic questioning practices in exploring any topics of concern.

### Session 3

In this session the EF Interviewer will engage the child in more focused conversation about topics alleged in the initial report. As with any high quality forensic interview, the EF Interviewer should be as non-leading as possible and should always be responsive to any and all concerns raised by the child.

- Review guidelines.
- Transition to allegation topics implementing plan and attending and adjusting to child's responses.
- Follow standard forensic interview procedures, using questions that are as open as possible.

### Session 4

If additional time is needed for exploration of allegation topics, a second Allegation-focused session can be conducted. This is most likely needed when the child has a complex history and perhaps many things to talk about or a child who is fearful and needs additional time to talk about difficult topics and memories. Again, good forensic practice in use of questions and any strategies (use of free drawing, anatomical drawings, written responses) should be implemented.

### ***Closure Session***

The primary goal of this session is to allow the child to have a sense of closure with the EFI process and to have their questions or concerns addressed. This session may not be necessary with many children, particularly if the previous session allowed for the tasks/goals of this session to be accomplished.

- Review guidelines.
- Acknowledge previous discussions without a need to review them.
- Ask if there is additional information that should be added or clarified.
- Ask if child has feelings, thoughts, concerns, or questions?
- Transition to therapy or follow-up, if appropriate.

## References

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