



QUESTION FORMAT REVIEW SHEET

The goal of forensic questioning is to elicit a complete and accurate account of the child's lived experiences, while minimizing the introduction of specific information or influence from the interviewer. Research and field standards concur that information obtained through the use of recall or open-ended prompts is more likely to be accurate and to include greater detail. Practice experience and research also demonstrate that many children require more direct probes and scaffolding of their responses to be able to organize their accounts into a "story model" format and to be able to talk about embarrassing topics. The interviewer must consider both the structure (i.e. narrative prompt, 'wh' question, multiple-choice question) and the purpose of the questions (substantive intent/content) when posing questions.

This Feedback Form addresses the structure of the questions employed. Interviewers also make use of facilitative responses in conjunction with questions. The following question labels and definitions can be used to assist the interviewer or reviewer in labeling the interviewer responses when completing the Feedback Form.

Instructions

1. Tri-fold a sheet of notebook paper.
2. Label each 1/3 portion of the paper in one of 3 categories
3. Top third labeled as "open questions".
4. Middle third labeled as "wh" questions.
5. Bottom third labeled as "option-posing" questions.
6. While observing an interview (live or recorded), indicate each question in the appropriate category with an X, a check mark or a 0.
7. X indicates a question that elicited a one-word response from the child.
8. A check mark indicates a question that elicited a multiple word or narrative response from the child.
9. A 0 indicates that the child made no response or answered "I don't know."

Open Prompts

Narrative Invitation

Narrative invitations (also known as an open-ended question, open-ended prompts or free recall questions) tap recall memory and encourage the child to talk descriptively about a topic.

Narrative invitations include statements such as:

- “Start at the beginning and tell me everything”
- “Tell me more”
- “Describe how that happened”
- “Explain how that happened”
- “What happened next?”

A narrative invitation may follow a reflection of the child’s statement or a portion of the child’s statement.

“You said that mama yells when she gets mad. Tell me about that.”

Focused Narrative Request

Focused narrative requests are open-ended questions that cue the child to a specific topic (person, location, activity, object, or time frame). Focused narrative requests tap free recall memory, gathering information from the child in their own words, while providing structure to the conversation. These are excellent follow-up questions that encourage a child to talk more about a topic in their own words.

Examples are:

- “Tell me about (person/place/object/activity)”
- “Explain (person/place/object/activity)”
- “Describe (person/place/object/activity)”
- “What kind of stuff do you do for fun?” (an open-ended ‘wh’ question)

A focused narrative request may follow the reflection of a child’s words.

- “You said that the man had messy hair. Tell me about the messy hair.”
- “You said that your brother did a bad thing. Tell me about the bad thing.”

“WH” QUESTIONS

Detail/”wh” Question

Not all known and relevant information will be included in the child’s narrative descriptions. “Detail questions begin with “who,” “what,” “where,” or “how” and are useful to direct a child to think about specific elements of an event already under discussion. A child will not have encoded all descriptive information and peripheral details about even well-remembered salient events. Detail questions should always be framed in such a way as to give the child permission to say that they do not know the answer to a detail question.

Examples are:

- “Where were you in the house?”
- “Who was in the room with you?”
- “What was she yelling?”
- “What did you see?”

OPTION POSING QUESTIONS

Multiple-Choice Questions

A multiple-choice question (an option-posing question) may be useful in clarifying a detail question when the child seems confused by the intent of the question. The preferred format is to offer the child a couple of specific choices and to end with an open prompt. Follow up on the child's response with a request to "tell me about that."

As young children may not be able to make use of multiple-choice prompts, the use of this technique should be tested in earlier non-disclosure questioning and used cautiously with young or compliant children.

"Were you in the living room, or the kitchen, or somewhere else?"

"Were you standing up, or sitting down, or something else?"

Yes/No Question

Yes/No questions (also an option-posing question) serve a number of purposes in a forensic interview. Yes/no questions can be used to cue the child's memory about specific information not addressed in the child's narrative description in a manner that checks whether or not the child actually has a piece of knowledge (i.e. "Did he say anything to you?") as opposed to ("What did he say to you?") To be of benefit, these questions should be followed by an invitation to elaborate.

Interviewers should be cautious about using yes/no questions to address substantive elements of abuse (i.e. specific acts or people) though with some children they are employed as a last resort. Without additional narrative description or clarification, a singular response to a yes/no question is inconclusive.

"Did he say anything to you?"

"Do you know where your mom was when that happened?"

"Do you know how many times he came into your room?"

Leading Question

A leading question introduces information not previously provided by the child. The information may have been gained from another source in the course of the investigation (externally derived information) or may be a follow-up question to information implied, but not stated by the child. The interviewer is advised to pose the least information possible in a question and to follow the child's response to that question.

"Did you talk to your counselor about a problem yesterday?"

"Did something happen to at Kate's house?"

"Did you talk to your mom about your brother doing something?"

Leading Question

Questions that direct the child to respond in a specific way or merely ask for affirmation or denial are not recommended.

"I heard that you told your counselor that something happened to you at Kate's house?"