



Advanced Forensic Interviewing Training
Customized Topic Selections 2019

Interviewing Children with Complex Communication Needs

Attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum disorder, and Intellectual disabilities are among the most frequently occurring childhood psychiatric diagnoses. Manifestations of these diagnoses can increase a child's risk for maltreatment while simultaneously challenging the interviewer's capacity to facilitate effective description of abuse experiences. This session will examine how these three diagnoses may affect a child's efforts to communicate crucial information in the context of forensic interview. Strategies for managing communication challenges, from pre-interview planning to post-interview recommendations will be discussed. An emphasis will be placed on adapting questions to address communication challenges while maintaining best practice forensic interviewing.

Effective Transitions: Beyond Tell Me More

Forensic interviewing research has consistently demonstrated that questions targeting recall memory are superior due to their capacity to cue for encoded memories and produce rich detailed narratives. "Tell me more" is perhaps the most ubiquitous recall question in forensic interviews, and while this prompt can be extremely effective in directing children to focus on maltreatment/witness experiences, overusing it can become unhelpfully rote as well as frustrating for both interviewers and children. This session will review the memory processes underlying effective recall questions. Strategies for effective question selection in the transition and substantive phases, incorporating children's specific language into recall prompts, and viable alternatives to "tell me more" will be presented.

Manipulation (Grooming) and Corroboration

"Grooming" is an important part of the offense chain and research into child sexual offending has explored offender's behaviors and perspectives. One area often lost in the child abuse investigation and forensic interview is how victims experience grooming and how this manipulation affects their willingness to disclose. To fully understand a child's experience and their apparent compliance the forensic interviewer must explore the child's perception of the offender's manipulation process. The focus of the presentation is an in-depth examination of activities sexual offenders engage in to acclimatize a child to sexually abusive behaviors and the methods offenders use to keep children from disclosing the abuse.

Specific questions which interviewers should be asking children regarding these activities will be discussed. The information gained from asking these questions will help investigators and team members have a better understanding of how a child is coerced and kept from disclosing maltreatment.

Episodic and Script Memory: Gathering the Details

Children often experience multiple abusive events. When abuse is long-standing, children typically develop and report “script” or “gist” memories, which are a compilation of multiple events. Current research supports gathering gist memory (what normally happens) before talking about specific incidences of abuse. Exploring what normally happens serves as a memory recall technique and can assist in the recall of episodic information. In addition, developing specific labels for individual occurrences of repeated abuse allegations may also improve children’s reporting. This session will demonstrate how to gather gist memory in a forensic interview, and, then utilizing information from the gist narrative, delve into gathering details related to individual occurrences of maltreatment. How to effectively label individual events will also be discussed and demonstrated.

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 impact children, assist in identifying challenges investigators, interviewers, and prosecutors face when attempting to gather information pertinent to the investigation or prosecution, as well as explore methods to successfully gather information from traumatized children regarding events witnessed.

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 cognitive control or behavioral inhibition. 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 practical adaptations to a typical interview structure that can make the time spent with a preschooler more productive.

Interviewing the Reluctant or Non-Disclosing Child

Varying degrees of reluctance displayed by children 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. Research had consistently 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 which leads to even less information reported. This presentation will assist interviewers and team members in predicting reluctance, demonstrate specific elements of social

support to utilize during the forensic interview in an effort to overcome reluctance, and offer strategies and techniques which can be utilized in questioning reluctant children.

Introduction of Evidence in the Forensic Interview

Child Advocacy Centers are increasingly tasked with investigating cases where electronic evidence of some type is discovered, typically without a previous outcry from the child or adolescent. When forensic interviewers are conducting interviews of these alleged victims or witnesses, it may be necessary to introduce information about digital media or in some cases the electronic evidence itself to overcome reluctance on the part of the witness. This process presents many new concerns such as the possibility of trauma reaction or concerns about suggestibility or influence on the witness. Pre-interview preparation and planning by the investigative team and interview strategies for addressing the challenge will be discussed.

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 regarding possible abuse, neglect, or witnessing.

Training, Supervision, and Peer Review of Child Forensic Interviewers

Intensive training programs provide a foundation for developing skills in beginning child forensic interviewers. Research demonstrates, and practitioners agree that training alone is not adequate to achieve the sophisticated skill set necessary for eliciting the best quality and quantity from young witnesses. Access to supervision by an experienced and skilled child forensic interview and/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. More experienced interviewers benefit from opportunities to acquire new knowledge and ever more nuanced interview strategies to effectively question a diverse population of children.