

REVISED INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEW: VERSION 2021

A. INTRODUCTION

My name is [name]. Today's date is [date], and it is now [time]. I'm interviewing [child's name] at [location].

Verify that the recorder is on.

Hello, [child's name], I am glad to meet you today. How are you?

My name is _____ and my job is to talk to children about things that have happened to them. As you can see, we have a video-camera here. It will record us talking so I can remember everything you tell me.

In the introduction, gestures of goodwill are appropriate:

Are you comfortable?

Can I do anything to make you more comfortable?

B. RAPPORT BUILDING AND NARRATIVE TRAINING

B.1 Now, [child's name], I want to get to know you better. Tell me about the things you like to do.

Wait for child to respond.

If the child responds, express appreciation and reinforcement:

Thank you for sharing that with me, it helps me get to know you.

I'm glad I am starting to get to know more about you.

Then skip to B.3, if you think the child should go directly into narrative training from here.

If the child does not answer, gives a short answer, or gets stuck, you can say:

I know this is the first time we have met and I really want to know about you.

I am glad I can talk to you today [child's name].

Skip to B.2, if you think more rapport building is necessary

If the child displays nonverbal cues of avoidance or resistance [e.g., gaze aversion] address it right away:

[Child's name], let me see your eyes.

[Child's name], go ahead and sit closer to me.

[Child's name], I can see you're [crying, quiet], tell me what is happening so I can help.

[Child's name], thanks for letting me listen to you today. Please tell me about what you're going through.

B.2 I really want to know you better [child's name]. I would like you to tell me about things you like to do at school, during recess, after school.

Wait for an answer.

If the child continues showing avoidance or resistance:

Invite him/her to talk about a neutral topic chosen before the interview began [e.g., child's caregiver may have been asked to report about activities the child enjoys]:

I heard you like [activity, hobby]. Tell me about [activity, hobby].

Ask about distinctive items [e.g., of clothing]:

I can see you are wearing [a unique item, e.g., soccer team T-shirt]. Tell me about [that item].

Offer the child the opportunity to draw:¹

[Child's name], would you like to draw a picture or something [you like to do, something fun that happened]? Here are some crayons and paper for you.

B.3 Now [child's name], tell me more about [activity the child already mentioned].

Avoid TV shows, videos or fantasy.

Wait for an answer.

B.4 [Child's name] tell me about something fun that has happened to you [at school, at kindergarten].

B.5 Tell me about [something the child mentioned]. *Use various invitations to ask about different topics; one of those invitations should focus on internal contents: thoughts, feelings, sensations or emotions.*

B.6 You told me about something [happy, pleasant, fun] that has happened to you. Now, tell me about something unpleasant that has happened to you [at school, kindergarten].

Important: Do not mention the location in which the alleged abuse may have taken place.

B.7 Tell me about [something the child mentioned]. *Ask various invitation to elicit richer information about a variety of topics; one invitation should focus on internal contents: thoughts, feelings, sensations or emotions.*

If the child reveals distressing information, please explore that briefly while making supportive statements. You want to check whether the child has previously reported it. You told me about [the distressing incident]. Have you told an adult about that?

If the child says no, say: Would you like me to help you tell someone?

B.8 [Child's name], you told me about [pleasant event already described] and [unpleasant event already described] and you shared your [emotions, thoughts] with me [if s/he did]. Thanks for letting me know. It's important that you know you can talk to me about anything, both good things and bad things.

C. EXPLAINING AND PRACTICING GROUND RULES

Adapt the questions according to the child's developmental level.

C.1 [Child's name], I'm interested in you and I'll be asking you all kinds of questions today. If I ask a question that you don't understand, just say [interviewer's name] I don't understand." Okay, [child's name]?

Pause

¹ Note that this activity is designed to promote the child's comfort, not to learn about the abuse. Do not attempt to interpret what the child draws or ask the child to draw anything related to the suspicions that led to the interview (see Appendix 1).

C.2 If I ask a question, and you don't know the answer, just tell me, "I don't know." So, [child's name], if I ask you [e.g., what did I have for breakfast today], what would you say?

Wait for an answer

If the child says 'I don't know,' say: Right, you don't know, [child's name], do you?

If the child offers a guess, say:

No, [child's name], you don't know me and [e.g., you weren't with me when I had my breakfast this morning], so you don't know. When you don't know the answer, please don't guess, just say that you don't know.

Pause

But if you do know or do remember, it is very important that you tell me, okay, [child's name]?

C.3 And if I say things that are wrong, you should tell me. Okay, [child's name]?

Wait for an answer

So if I said that you are a 2-year-old girl [when interviewing a 5-year-old boy, etc.], what would you say?

If the child only denies and does not correct you, say: You're right, [child's name]. You're not a 2-year-old girl. What would be right?

Wait for an answer

Reinforce the child if s/he gives the right answer: You are right, [child's name], you are not a 2-year-old girl. Now you know you should tell me if I make a mistake or say something that is not right.

Pause

Correct a wrong answer: No, [child's name], you are not [wrong age], you are [real age].

So if I say you were standing up, what would you say?

Wait for an answer

Okay.

[Child's name], now you understand that if I say something incorrect, you need to correct me and tell me what is right.

C.4 Part of my job is to talk to [children, teenagers] about things that have happened to them. I meet with lots of [children, teenagers] so that they can tell the truth about things that have happened to them. [child's name], it is very important that you tell me the truth today about things that have happened to you. Do you promise to tell me the truth, [child's name]?

D. FURTHER RAPPORT BUILDING AND EPISODIC MEMORY TRAINING

Prior to the interview, please identify a recent, short, positive, and meaningful event in which the child actively participated. If possible, choose an event that took place at about the same time as the alleged or suspected abuse. If the alleged abuse took place during a specific day, event, or type of event, ask about a different event or type of event.

I'm glad to meet with you today, [child's name], and I would like to get to know you even better.

D.1 Main invitation

A few [days, weeks] ago was [a holiday, birthday party, other event]. Tell me everything that happened [during the event], from beginning to end, as best you can.

In case an event wasn't identified previously, ask: Did you do something special recently, like did you get to go somewhere or go to a birthday party?

If the child doesn't identify a suitable event, say: So, I want you to tell me everything that happened [today/ yesterday], from the time you woke up.

D.2 Follow-up invitations:

Please repeat the first action that started the event. Then ask:

And then what happened [child's name]?

Use this question as often as needed throughout this section until you have been given a full account of the event.

Thank you [child's name], you have told me many things [if s/he did]. I want to ask you some more questions about what just you told me.

D.3 Time segmenting invitations

Try to use three time segmenting invitations, although you may adjust the quantity and type of invitations to the child's capabilities and reactions.

[Child's name], I would like you to tell me everything about [the event]. Please tell me everything that happened from the moment [an activity the child mentioned] to the moment [a subsequent mentioned activity].

If the child has difficulty understanding delineated segments, say:

Please tell me everything that happened from the moment [an activity the child mentioned] began.

Thank you [child's name] for telling me that. What you say is very clear and that helps me understand what you mean.

D.4 Cued invitations

Try to use three cued invitations, but you may adjust the number depending on the child's capabilities and reactions. Please focus on thoughts and feelings as well.

Cued invitations can be used in one of two formats:

Tell me more about [an activity, object, thought, feeling].

Earlier you spoke of [an activity, object, thought, feeling]. Tell me all about that.

D.5 [Child's name], thank you for telling me about [title of the event]. When we talk today, it is very important that you tell me everything about things that have happened to you.

D.6 [Child's name], how are you feeling so far in our conversation?

If during the pre-substantive phase, the child is not cooperative and remains reluctant, consider ending the interview now. Skip to section G in order to end the interview, and schedule an additional interview for continued rapport building.

E. SUBSTANTIVE PHASE

E.1 Transition to Substantive Issues

Important: If the child expresses explicit verbal resistance without denying the abuse at any point, skip to section E.1.a, "support for managing overt refusals", and deal with the resistance without using additional transitional prompts.

Now that we know each other a little better, I want to talk about why [you are, I am] here today.

At any stage, if the child makes an allegation, skip to section E.2.

If the child reports an irrelevant event, say: I hear what you are saying to me, [child's name]. If you want, we can talk about that later. Right now though, I want to know about something else that may have happened to you.

1. I understand that something may have happened to you. Tell me everything about that from the beginning to the end.
2. As I told you, my job is to talk to children about things that might have happened to them. It is very important that you tell me why you think [your mum, dad, grandmother] [brought you here today, I came to talk to you today].
3. *If the child doesn't make an allegation and looks avoidant or resistant, you may address him/her with general supportive statements which do not refer specifically to him/her, and do not mention abuse:*

- a. [Child's name], my job is to listen to children about things that have happened to them.
- b. [Child's name], I really want to know when something happens to children. That's what I am here for.
- c. [Child's name], here kids can talk about good things and bad things that have happened to them.

4. I've heard that you talked to [a doctor, teacher, social worker, other professional] at [time, location]. Please tell me what you talked about.
5. I [saw, heard] that you have/had [documented injuries, bruises] on your [body part]. Tell me everything about [those, that].
6. [Child's name], has anything happened to you at [location, time of alleged incident]?

If the child doesn't make an allegation and looks avoidant or resistant, you may use some of the supportive statements above [a-c] or one of the following statements, which refer specifically to the child, but still do not mention abuse.

- d. You told me a lot of things about yourself. I feel I know you better and you can tell me more [about things, about both good things and about bad things] that have happened to you.
- e. You have told me a lot of things about yourself, thank you for letting me know. When you talk to me today, please go on and tell me about other things that have happened to you.
- f. [Child's name], if there is anything you want to tell me [I want to know/listen, it's important for me to know/ listen].

If there is no allegation or a denial: Evaluate and plan your next steps

You may use the child's verbal and nonverbal indications of reluctance to evaluate the situation and decide whether or not to proceed. Consider ending the interview [skip to E.1.b] and planning an additional interview [Appendix 2] if you believe that the child is resisting or avoiding cooperation and that an additional session of rapport building might be beneficial.

Proceed through the transitional prompts gradually when you suspect that:

- Abuse may not have occurred. [Because it may be important to understand why suspicions arose.]
- The child doesn't recognize the aim of the interview.
- The child is resisting your efforts or avoiding cooperation but there is serious concern about his/her welfare or the investigation so delay might leave the child unsafe.

7. [Child's name], has anybody been bothering you?
8. [Child's name], did someone do something to you that you don't think was right?
9. [Child's name], did someone [briefly summarize the allegations or suspicions without specifying the name of the alleged perpetrator or providing too many details]?

If the child doesn't make an allegation but looks avoidant or resistant and there is independent evidence arousing suspicion, you may use the above supportive statements [a-f] or one of the following:

- g. [Child's name], [I am, people] are worried about you and I want to know if something may have happened to you.
- h. [Child's name], if something has happened to you and you want it to stop, you can tell me about it.
- i.1 [Child's name], if it is hard for you to tell, what makes it so hard?
- i-2 [Child's name], is there anything you are concerned about?
- i-3 [Child's name], what would happen if you told me?
- i-4 [Child's name], has someone told you not to tell?
- j. Sometimes children think that if something happened to them, it's their fault, but children are not responsible if things happen to them.
- k. It's your choice if you want to tell me and it is my job to let you choose.

10. [Child's name], I understand [you, someone] [reported, saw] [briefly summarize allegations or suspicions without specifying the name of the alleged perpetrator or providing too much detail]. I want to find out if something may have happened to you.

E.1.a. Supportive statements to help manage overt refusals.

If the child has explicitly expressed difficulty or reluctance to disclose but hasn't denied the abuse, you may use the supportive statements above [a-k] and the following statements dealing with overt refusals to engage:

- l. [Child's name], I understand you are [difficulties the child mentioned, e.g. embarrassed]. Let's start talking and I'll try to help you with it.
- m. Many children are [difficulties the child mentioned] and I try to help them.
- n. I understand that you are [difficulties the child mentioned], tell me more about that.
- o. *If the child expressed a lack of confidence:* I'm sure you can talk to me about it well.
- p. *If the child said s/he was worried about something specific and the reassurance you can give is true:* Don't worry, I will [not tell the other children/make sure you are not late for the bus].
- q. It's your choice whether or not to tell me and I will accept what you decide.

E.1.b. Ending the interview without an allegation

If at any point while exploring whether abuse might have occurred you believe that the child is resistant or uncooperative and that rapport building will benefit from an additional meeting, end the interview and plan an additional one. Skip to section G if you want to end the interview.

E.2 Exploring the Incidents

Throughout the entire substantive part it is important to preserve and enhance the rapport established with the child, continue providing supportive statements, and address expressed inhibitions, distress, and conflicts.

E.2a Free Recall Invitations

11.a. Invitation for a first narrative about the incidents

If the child mentions a specific incident:

[Child's name], you told me that [briefly summarize the allegation the child has made]. Tell me everything from the beginning to the end, as best you can.

If the child mentions a number of incidents:

[Child's name], you told me that [briefly summarize the allegation the child has made]. Tell me everything about [the last/first time/at a place/a time/specific incident] from beginning to end.

If the child gives a generic description and you cannot determine the number of incidents:

[Child's name], you told me that [briefly summarize the allegation the child has made]. Did that happen one time or more than one time?

Depending on the answer, please invite a first narrative [11.a].

If the description remains generic, please say:

[Child's name], you told me that [briefly summarize the generic description]. Tell me everything from beginning to end.

11.b. Follow-up invitations

Please repeat the child's description of the action/occurrence that started the event. Then ask:

And then what happened?

Use this question as often as needed until you have a complete description of the alleged incident.

11.c. Time segmenting invitations

You have told me many things and helped me understand what happened. Now, [child's name], I want to ask you more questions about [incident title].

[Child's name], think back to that time [day, night] and please tell me everything that happened from the moment [an activity the child mentioned] to the moment [a subsequent activity the child mentioned].

11.d Cued invitations

Cued invitations can have two formats:

- Tell me more about [activity, object, feeling, thought].
- [Child's name], you mentioned [activity, object, feeling, thought]. Tell me more about that.

Use this question as often as needed throughout this section.

Important! Free-recall invitations should be exhausted before proceeding to directive questions.

E.2.b Directive questions

If some central details of the allegation are still missing or unclear after the exhaustive use of open-ended questions, use directive questions.

12. [Child's name], you said that/ mentioned [activity, object, feeling, thought]. [How, when, where, who, what, which, how many, what did you mean]?

It is important to pair open-ended invitations with directive questions whenever possible:

Tell me more about that.

E.2.c Exploring multiple incidents

If in reply to question 1- 10 the child mentions a single incident:

13.[Child's name], what you just told me, did that happen one time or more than one time?

If the child has said that such incidents happened more than one time, go back to question 11 and explore additional incidents. It is often best to explore the last, first, or best remembered incident.

E.2.d Break

[Child's name], now I want to make sure I have understood everything you said and see if there's anything else I need to ask. I will take a couple of minutes to think about what you told me/go over my notes.

During the break time, review the information you have received, see if there is any missing information, and plan the rest of the interview. Be sure to formulate option-posing questions in writing and consider replacing them with open-ended or directive prompts.

E.2.e Option-Posing Questions – Eliciting Information that has not been mentioned by the child.

You should ask these focused questions only if you have already tried other approaches and you realize that some forensically important information is still missing. It is very important to pair option- posing questions with open invitations ["Tell me all about that"] whenever possible.

In case of multiple incidents, you should direct the child to the relevant incidents in his own words.

14. [Child's name], when you told me about [specific incident embedded in time and place], you mentioned [activity, object, feeling, thought]. [Did, have, has, is, are] a detail for child to confirm or deny]?

Example: Sarah, when you told me about being in the kitchen with Lewis, were other people there with you?

Whenever appropriate, follow with an invitation:

Tell me everything about that [activity, object, feeling, thought].

Before you move to the next incident, make sure you have obtained all the missing details about each specific incident.

F. DISCLOSURE INFORMATION

You've told me why you came to talk to me today. You've given me [lots of] information and that really helps me to understand what happened.

If the child mentioned telling someone about the incident[s], you may say:

Now I want to understand how other people found out about [last incident].

*If the child has not mention telling anyone, probe about a possible disclosure by saying:
Does anybody else know what happened?*

Then explore the disclosure process, addressing the disclosure time, circumstances, recipients, potential discussions of the event, and reactions to disclosure by both the child and recipients. Use open-ended questions whenever possible.

G. ENDING THE INTERVIEW

[Child's name], what are you going to do after we finish talking?

Talk to the child for a couple of minutes about a neutral topic.

Appendix 1: Rapport Building Drawing Supplement

If the child does not respond, and looks distant, frightened, or disengaged during the rapport building phase, you can use the following invitation:

[Child's name], would you like to draw something you like to do?

[Child's name], would you like to draw something fun that happened to you?

Offer the child blank paper and drawing tools and allow him/her to draw for several minutes. Sit next to the child, smile, and encourage him/her to talk while drawing.

Do not interpret the drawing. Ignore what the child has drawn and refer only to verbal information that the child mentions during or after drawing using open invitations.

If the child does not speak during or after drawing, use an open invitation:

Please tell me about the drawing you have made.

Once the child has finished drawing, offer praise:

Very nice, [child's name]. Thank you for drawing that.

Appendix 2: When you Need an Additional Interview

An additional interview may be performed if the investigator believes that better rapport could be built in another meeting, allowing better insight into whether or not abuse has occurred (the transitional phase). 2-3 interviews may sometimes be necessary.

General guidelines for additional interviews:

- 1. Collect personal information about the child from an external source in advance to help inform your rapport-building efforts (e.g., interests, positive events the child experienced, other relevant information).*
- 2. Before the later interview, review the information obtained in the previous interview to refresh your memory about your conversation with the child.*
- 3. Depending on the child and the circumstances, the ground rules can be mentioned briefly at the beginning, instead of being practiced in full.*
- 4. During the rapport-building phase, probe about friends, interests, significant events, or topics discussed in the previous meeting(s).*
- 5. At any stage, if the child makes an allegation or mentions substantive information, proceed to the substantive part of the interview.*
- 6. Generally, an additional interview should follow the Protocol's structure, adjusted as needed to refer to the former interview in order to build on any rapport established earlier. For example:*
 - As you may remember [my name is...]
 - Today again [I have a video camera with me]
 - Last time we met you told me that [e.g., you like playing soccer]
- 7. Progression and decision making about the interview flow and about the transitional phase*