

**The National Institute of Child  
Health and Human Development  
(NICHD) Protocol:**

**Interview Guide**

# **The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Protocol: Interview Guide**

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This work was conducted as part of my, Ellie Ball's, summer internship at Royal Holloway University London, whilst studying at University of Sussex.

Ellie Ball, Joseph Ball and David La Rooy, 9th August 2017.

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## I. Introduction

1. **“Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a police officer. [Introduce anyone else in the room; ideally, nobody else will be present.] Today is \_\_\_\_\_ and it is now \_\_\_\_\_ o’clock. I am interviewing \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_.”**

**“As you can see, we have a video-camera and microphones here. They will record our conversation so I can remember everything you tell me. Sometimes I forget things and the recorder allows me to listen to you without having to write everything down.”**

**“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 me the truth about things that have happened to them. So, before we begin, I want to make sure that you understand how important it is to tell the truth.”**

**[For younger children, explain: “What is true and what is not true”].**

**“If I say that my shoes are red (or green) is that true or not true?”**

[Wait for an answer, then say:]

**2. “That would not be true, because my shoes are really [black/blue/etc.]. And if I say that I am sitting down now, would that be true or not true [right or not right]?”**

[Wait for an answer.]

**3. “It would be [true/right], because you can see I am really sitting down.”**

**“I see that you understand what telling the truth means. It is very important that you only tell me the truth today. You should only tell me about things that really happened to you.”**

[Pause.]

**4. “If I ask a question that you don’t understand, just say, ‘I don’t understand.’ Okay?”**

[Pause]

**“If I don’t understand what you say, I’ll ask you to explain.”**

[Pause.]

**5. “ If I ask a question, and you don’t know the answer, just tell me, ‘I don’t know.’”**

**“So, if I ask you, ‘What is my dog’s name?’ [Or “my son’s name”] what would you say?”**

[Wait for an answer.]

[If the child says, “I don’t know,” say:]

**6. “Right. You don’t know, do you?”**

[If the child offers a GUESS, say:]

**“No, you don’t know because you don’t know me. When you don’t know the answer, don’t guess -- say that you don’t know.”**

[Pause.]

**7. “And if I say things that are wrong, you should tell me. Okay?”**

[Wait for an answer.]

**8. “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 denies and does not correct you, say:]

**“What would you say if I made a mistake and called you a 2-year-old girl [when interviewing a 5-year-old boy, etc.]?”**

[Wait for an answer.]

**9. “That’s right. Now you know you should tell me if I make a mistake or say something that is not right.”**

[Pause.]

**10. “So if I said you were standing up, what would you say?”**

[Wait for an answer.]

**“OK”**

## **II. Rapport Building**

**“Now I want to get to know you better.”**

**1. “Tell me about things you like to do.”**

[Wait for child to respond.]

[If the child gives a fairly detailed response, skip to question 3 below.]

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

**2. “I really want to know you better. I need you to tell me about the things you like to do.”**

[Wait for an answer.]

**3. “Tell me more about [activity the child has mentioned in his/her account. AVOID FOCUSING ON TV, VIDEOS, AND FANTASY].”**

[Wait for an answer.]



### III. Training in Episodic Memory

#### Special Event

[NOTE: THIS SECTION CHANGES DEPENDING ON THE INCIDENT.]

[BEFORE THE INTERVIEW, IDENTIFY A RECENT EVENT THE CHILD EXPERIENCED -- FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL, BIRTHDAY PARTY, HOLIDAY CELEBRATION, ETC. -- THEN ASK THESE QUESTIONS ABOUT THAT EVENT. 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 OR EVENT, ASK ABOUT A DIFFERENT EVENT]

**“I want to know more about you and the things you do.”**

**1. “A few [days/weeks] ago was [holiday/ birthday party/ the first day of school/ other event]. Tell me everything that happened on [your birthday, Easter, etc].”**

[Wait for an answer.]

**1a. “Think hard about [activity or event] and tell me what happened on that day from the time you got up that morning until [some portion of the event mentioned by the child in response to the previous question].”**

[Wait for an answer.]

[Note: Use this question as often as needed throughout this section.]

**1b. “And then what happened?”**

[Wait for an answer.]

[Note: Use this question as often as needed throughout this section.]

**1c. “Tell me everything that happened after [some portion of the event mentioned by the child] until you went to bed that night.”**

[Wait for an answer.]

[Note: Use this question as often as needed throughout this section.]

**1d. “Tell me more about [activity mentioned by the child].”**

[Wait for an answer.]

[Note: Use this question as often as needed throughout this section.]

**1e. “Earlier you mentioned [activity mentioned by the child]. Tell me everything about that.”**

[Wait for an answer.]

[Note: Use this question as often as needed throughout this section.]

[If the child gives a poor description of the event, continue with [questions 2-2e.](#)]

[Note: If the child gives a detailed description of the event, say:

**“It is very important that you tell me everything you remember about things that have happened to you. You can tell me both good things and bad things.”**

## Yesterday

**2. “I really want to know about things that happen to you. Tell me everything that happened yesterday, from the time you woke up until you went to bed.”**

[Wait for an answer.]

**2a. “I don’t want you to leave anything out. Tell me everything that happened from the time you woke up until [some activity or portion of the event mentioned by the child in response to the previous question].”**

[Wait for an answer.]

**2b. “Then what happened?”**

[Wait for an answer.]

[Note: Use this question as often as needed throughout this section.]

**2c. “Tell me everything that happened after [some activity or portion of the event mentioned by the child] until you went to bed.”**

[Wait for an answer.]

**2d. “Tell me more about [activity mentioned by the child].”**

[Wait for an answer. Note: Use this question as often as needed throughout this section.]

**2e. “Earlier you mentioned [activity mentioned by the child]. Tell me everything about that.”**

[Wait for an answer.]

[Note: Use this question as often as needed throughout this section.]

## **Today**

IF THE CHILD DOES NOT PROVIDE AN ADEQUATELY DETAILED NARRATIVE ABOUT YESTERDAY, REPEAT [QUESTIONS 2 TO 2E](#) ABOUT TODAY, USING “THE TIME YOU CAME HERE” AS THE CLOSING EVENT.

**“It is very important that you tell me everything about things that have really happened to you.”**

## The Substantive Part of the Interview

### IV. Transition to Substantive Issues

**“Now that I know you a little better, I want to talk about why [you are here] today.”**

[If the child starts to answer, wait.]

[If the child gives a summary of the allegation (Example: ‘David touched my wee-pee’, or ‘Daddy hit me’), go to [question 10](#)]

[If the child gives a detailed description, go to [question 10a](#)]

[If the child doesn’t make an allegation, continue with question 1.]

**1. “I understand that something may have happened to you. Tell me everything that happened from the beginning to the end.”**

[Wait for an answer.]

[If the child makes an allegation, go to [question 10](#).]

[If the child gives a detailed description go to [question 10a](#).]

[If the child does not make an allegation, continue with [question 2](#).]

**2. “As I told you, my job is to talk to kids about things that might have happened to them. It is very important that you tell me why [you are here/ you came here/ I am here]. Tell me why you think [your mum, your dad, your grandmother] brought you here today [or ‘why you think I came to talk to you today’].”**

[Wait for an answer.]

[If the child makes an allegation, go to [question 10](#).]

[If the child gives a detailed description, go to [question 10a](#).]

[If the child does not make an allegation and you don't know that there was previous contact with the authorities, go to [question 4 or 5](#).]

[If the child does not make an allegation and you know that there was previous contact with the authorities, go to [question 3](#).]

**3. “I’ve heard that you talked to [a doctor/ a teacher/ a social worker/ any other professional] at [time/location]. Tell me what you talked about.”**

[Wait for an answer.]

[If the child makes an allegation, go to [question 10.](#)]

[If the child gives a detailed description, go to [question 10a.](#)]

[If the child does not make an allegation and there are no visible marks, proceed to [question 5.](#)]



[When marks are visible, the investigator has been shown pictures of or told of marks, or the interview takes place in the hospital or right after the medical examination say:]

**4. “I see [I heard] that you have [marks/ injuries/ bruises] on your \_\_\_\_\_. Tell me everything about that.”**

[Wait for an answer.]

[If the child makes an allegation, go to [question 10.](#)]

[If the child gives a detailed description, go to [question 10a.](#)]

[If the child does not make an allegation, proceed with question 5.]

**5. “Has anybody been bothering you?”**

[Wait for an answer.]

[If the child confirms or makes an allegation, go to [question 10.](#)]

[If the child gives a detailed description, go to [question 10a.](#)]

[If the child does not confirm, and does not make an allegation, proceed with [question 6.](#)]

**6. “Has anything happened to you at [location/time of alleged incident]?”**

[Note: Don't mention the name of the suspect or any details of the allegation.]

[Wait for an answer.]

[If the child gives a detailed description, go to [question 10a.](#)]

[If the child confirms or makes an allegation, go to [question 10.](#)]

[If the child does not confirm or does not make an allegation, continue with question 7.]

**7. “Did someone do something to you that you don't think was right.”**

[Wait for an answer.]

[If the child confirms, or makes an allegation, go to [question 10.](#)]

[If the child gives a detailed description, go to [question 10a.](#)]

[If the child does not confirm or does not make an allegation, proceed to [question 8.](#)]

**PAUSE. ARE YOU READY TO GO ON? WOULD IT BE BETTER TO TAKE A BREAK BEFORE GOING FURTHER?**

IN CASE YOU DECIDE TO GO AHEAD, YOU SHOULD HAVE FORMULATED SPECIFIC VERSIONS OF QUESTIONS 8 AND 9, USING THE FACTS AVAILABLE TO YOU, BEFORE THE INTERVIEW. BE SURE THAT THEY SUGGEST AS FEW DETAILS AS POSSIBLE TO THE CHILD. IF YOU HAVEN'T FORMULATED THESE QUESTIONS, TAKE A BREAK NOW TO FORMULATE THEM CAREFULLY BEFORE YOU PROCEED.

**8. “Did somebody** [briefly summarize allegations or suspicions without specifying names of alleged perpetrator or providing too many details].” (For example, “Did somebody hit you?” or “Did somebody touch your wee-pee [private parts of your body]?”)

[Wait for an answer.]

[If the child confirms or makes an allegation, go to [question 10.](#)]

[If the child gives a detailed description, go to [question 10a.](#)]

[If the child does not confirm or does not make an allegation, proceed to [question 9.](#)]

**9. “Your teacher [the doctor/psychologist/neighbour] told me /showed me [ “that you touched other children’s wee-pee”/ “a picture that you drew”], and I want to find out if something may have happened to you. Did anybody [briefly summarize allegations or suspicions without specifying the name of the alleged perpetrator or providing too many details].” [For example: “Did somebody in your family hit you?” or “Did somebody touch your wee-pee or other private parts of your body?”)]**

[Wait for an answer]

[ If the child confirms or makes an allegation, go to [question 10.](#)]

[If the child gives a detailed description, go to [question 10a.](#)]

[If the child does not confirm or does not make an allegation, go to [section XI.](#)]

## V. Investigating the Incidents

### Open Ended Questions

**10.** [If the child is under the age of 6, REPEAT THE ALLEGATION IN THE CHILD'S OWN WORDS without providing details or names that the child hasn't mentioned.]

[then say:]

**“Tell me everything about that.”**

[Wait for an answer.]

[If the child is over the age of 6 simply say:]

**“Tell me everything about that.”**

[Wait for an answer.]

**10a. “Then what happened?” or “Tell me more about that.”**

[Wait for an answer.]

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

[NOTE: IF THE CHILD’S DESCRIPTION IS GENERIC, GO TO [QUESTION 12 \(SEPARATION OF INCIDENTS\)](#). IF THE CHILD DESCRIBES A SPECIFIC INCIDENT, CONTINUE WITH QUESTION 10b]

**10b. “Think back to that [day/night] and tell me everything that happened from [some preceding event mentioned by the child] until [alleged abusive incident as described by the child].”**

[Wait for an answer.]

[Note: Use this question as often as needed to ensure that all parts of the incident are elaborated.]

**10c. “Tell me more about [person/ object/ activity mentioned by the child].”**

[Wait for an answer.]

[Note: Use this question as often as needed throughout this section.]

**10d. “You mentioned [person/ object/ activity mentioned by the child], tell me everything about that.”**

[Wait for an answer.]

[Note: Use this question as often as needed throughout this section.]

[If you are confused about certain details (for example, about the sequence of events), it may help to say:]

**“You’ve told me a lot, and that’s really helpful, but I’m a little confused. To be sure I understand, please start at the beginning and tell me [how it all started/ exactly what happened/ how it all ended/ etc].”**

**Focused questions relating to information mentioned by the child.**

[If some central details of the allegation are still missing or unclear after exhausting the open-ended questions, use direct questions. It is important to pair open ‘invitations’ with direct questions whenever appropriate.]

[Note: First focus the child’s attention on the detail mentioned, and then ask the direct question.]



## **Following is the General Format of Direct Questions:**

**11. “You mentioned [person/ object/ activity],  
[Completion of the direct question.]**

### **Examples**

**1. “You mentioned you were at the shops. Where exactly were you?” [Pause for a response] “Tell me about that shop.”**

**2. “Earlier you mentioned that your mother ‘hit you with this long thing’. Tell me about that thing.”**

**3. “You mentioned a neighbour. Do you know his/her name?” [Pause for a response] Tell me about that neighbour.” [Do not ask for a description.]**

**4. “You said that one of your classmates saw that. What was his/her name?” [Pause for a response] “Tell me what he was doing there.”**

## Separation of Incidents

**12. “Did that happen one time or more than one time?”**

[If the incident happened one time, go to the [Break](#)].

[If the incident happened more than one time, continue to [question 13](#). REMEMBER TO EXPLORE INDIVIDUAL REPORTED INCIDENTS IN DETAIL AS SHOWN HERE]

# Exploring Specific Incidents When There Were Several

## Open -Ended Questioning

**13. “Tell me everything about the last time [the first time/the time in [some location]/the time [some specified activity/another time you remember well] something happened.”**

[Wait for an answer.]

**13a. “And then what happened?” Or “Tell me more about that.”**

[Wait for an answer.]

[Note: Use this question as often as needed throughout this section.]

**13b. “Think back to that [day/night] and tell me everything that happened, from [preceding events mentioned by the child] **until** [alleged abusive incident as described by the child].”**

[Wait for an answer.]

[Note: Use variants of this question as often as needed until all parts of the incident are elaborated.]

**13c. “Tell me more about [person/ object/ activity mentioned by the child].”**

[Wait for an answer.]

[Note: Use this question as often as needed throughout this section.]

**13d. “You mentioned [person/object/activity mentioned by the child]. Tell me everything about that.”**

[Wait for an answer.]

[Note: Use this question as often as needed throughout this section.]

**Focused questions relating to information mentioned by the child.**

[If some central details of the allegation are still missing or unclear after exhausting the open-ended questions, use direct questions. It is important to pair open ‘invitations’ with direct questions, whenever appropriate.]

[Note: First focus the child’s attention on the detail mentioned, and then ask the direct question.]

**Following is the general format of direct questions:**

**14. “You mentioned [person/object/activity],  
[How/when/where/who/which/what] [Completion of  
the direct question.]”**

### **Examples**

**1. “You mentioned you were watching TV. Where  
exactly were you?”**

[Wait for a response]

**“Tell me everything about that.”**

**2. “Earlier you mentioned that your father ‘whacked  
you’. Tell me exactly  
what he did.”**

**3. “You mentioned a friend was there. What is her/his  
name?”**

[Wait for a response]

**“Tell me what s/he was doing.”**

**4. “Earlier you said that your uncle ‘fingered you’  
[‘French kissed’/ ‘had sex with you’/ etc]. Tell me exactly  
what he did.”**

**REPEAT THE ENTIRE SECTION FOR AS MANY OF THE INCIDENTS MENTIONED BY THE CHILD AS YOU WANT DESCRIBED. UNLESS THE CHILD HAS SPECIFIED ONLY TWO INCIDENTS, ASK ABOUT “THE LAST,” THEN “THE FIRST,” THEN “ANOTHER TIME YOU REMEMBER WELL.”**

## VI. Break

[Tell the child:]

**“Now I want to make sure I understood everything and see if there’s anything else I need to ask. I will just [think about what you told me/go over my notes/go and check with?]”**

[During the break time, review the information you received, fill out the Forensic Checklist, see if there is any missing information, and plan the rest of the interview. **BE SURE TO FORMULATE FOCUSED QUESTIONS IN WRITING.**]

### After the Break

[To elicit additional important information that has not been mentioned by the child, ask additional [direct](#) and [open-ended](#) questions, as described above. Go back to open-ended questions (“Tell me more about that”) after asking each direct question. After finishing these questions, proceed to section VII.]

## **VII. 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 still feel that some forensically important information is missing. It is very important to pair open invitations (“Tell me all about that”) whenever possible.]

[Note: In case of multiple incidents, you should direct the child to the relevant incidents in the child’s own words, asking focused questions only after giving the child an opportunity to elaborate on central details.]

[BEFORE YOU MOVE TO THE NEXT INCIDENT, MAKE SURE YOU HAVE OBTAINED ALL THE MISSING DETAILS ABOUT EACH SPECIFIC INCIDENT.]



**The general format of questions focused on information that has NOT been mentioned by the child**

**“When you told me about [specific incident identified by time or location] you mentioned [person/object/activity]. Did/was [focused questions]?”**

[Wait for an answer.]

[Whenever appropriate, follow with an invitation; say:]

**“Tell me all about that.”**

## **Examples**

**1. “When you told me about the time in the basement, you mentioned that he took off his trousers. Did something happen to your clothes?”**

[Wait for an answer.]

[After the child responds, say:]

**“Tell me all about that.”**

[Wait for an answer.]

**2. “When you told me about the last time, you mentioned that he touched you. Did he touch you over your clothes?”**

[Wait for an answer.]

[After the child responds, say:]

**“Tell me all about that.”**

[Wait for an answer.]

**3. “Did he touch you under your clothes?”**

.

[Wait for an answer.]

[After the child responds, say:]

**“Tell me all about that.”**

**4. “You told me about something that happened on the playground. Did somebody see what happened?”**

[Wait for an answer.]

[When appropriate, say:]

**“Tell me all about that.”**

**5. “Do you know whether something like that happened to other children?”**

[Wait for an answer.]

[When appropriate, say:]

**“Tell me all about that.”**

**6. “You told me about something that happened in the barn. Do you know when that happened?”**

## **VIII. If Child Fails To Mention Information You Expected.**

Use only the prompts that are relevant.

If you know of conversations in which the information was mentioned say:

1. **“I heard that you talked to [                      ] at [time/ place]. Tell me what you talked about.”**

[If child doesn't provide more information, ask [question 2](#);

If child does give some more information, say:]

**“Tell me everything about that.”**

[Follow up with other open-ended prompts, such as **“Tell me about that.”** If necessary.]

If you know details about prior disclosures and the information has not been disclosed to you, say:

2. **“I heard [s/he told me] you said [summarize allegation, specifically but without mentioning incriminating details if possible]. Tell me everything about that.”**

[Follow up with other open-ended prompts, such as **“Tell me about that.”** If necessary.]

3. If something was observed, say:

- a. **“I heard that someone saw [ \_\_\_\_\_ ].  
Tell me everything about that.”**

[Follow up with other open-ended prompts, such as **“Tell me about that.”** If necessary.]

If child denies, continue to 3b.

- b. **“Has anything happened to you at [place/time]? Tell me everything about that.”**

[Follow up with other open-ended prompts, such as **“Tell me about that.”** If necessary.]

If child has/had injuries or marks say:

4. **“I see [I heard] that you have [marks/bruises] on your [                      ].  
Tell me everything about that.”**

[Follow up with other open-ended prompts, such as **“Tell me about that.”** If necessary.]

5. **“Did somebody [summarize without naming the perpetrator (unless child already named her/him) or providing most incriminating details]?”**

If child denies, go to next section.

If child acknowledges something say:

**“Tell me everything about that.”**

[Follow up with other open-ended prompts, such as **“Tell me about that”** if necessary.]

## **IX. Information about the Disclosure**

**“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 child has mentioned telling someone about the incident(s), go to [question 6](#). If child hasn’t mentioned telling anyone, probe about possible immediate disclosure by saying:]

**1. “Tell me what happened after [the last incident].”**

[Wait for an answer.]

**2. “And then what happened”?**

[Note: Use this question as often as needed throughout this section.]

[If the child mentions a disclosure, go to [question 6](#). If not, ask the following questions.]

### 3. **“Does anybody else know what happened?”**

[Wait for an answer. If the child identifies someone, go to [Question 6.](#)]

[If the child confirms but doesn't mention the name, ask:]

**“Who?”**

[Wait for an answer. If the child identifies someone, go to [Question 6.](#)]

### 4. **“Now I want to understand how other people found out about [the last incident].”**

[Wait for an answer. If the child identifies someone, go to [Question 6.](#)]

[If there is missing information, ask the following questions.]

### 5. **“Who was the first person besides you and [the perpetrator] to find out about [alleged abuse as described by the child]?”**

[Wait for an answer.]



**6. “Tell me everything you can about how [”the first person mentioned by the child”] found out.”**

[Wait for an answer.]

[Then say:]

**“Tell me more about that.”**

[Wait for an answer.]

[If the child describes a conversation, say:]

**“Tell me everything you talked about.”**

[Wait for an answer.]

**7. “Does anyone else know about [alleged abuse as described by the child]?”**

[Wait for an answer.]

[Then say:]

**“Tell me more about that.”**

[If the child described a conversation, say:]

**“Tell me everything you talked about.”**

[Wait for an answer.]

[if the child does not mention that he/she told somebody ask:]

**REPEAT ENTIRE SECTION AS NECESSARY FOR EACH OF THE INCIDENTS DESCRIBED BY THE CHILD.**

## **X. Closing**

[Say:]

**“You have told me lots of things today, and I want to thank you for helping me.”**

**1. “Is there anything else you think I should know?”**

[Wait for an answer.]

**2. “Is there anything you want to tell me?”**

[Wait for an answer.]

**3. “Are there any questions you want to ask me?”**

[Wait for an answer.]

**4. “If you want to talk to me again, you can call me at this phone number.”** [Hand the child a card with your name and phone number.]

## **XI. Neutral Topic**

**“What are you going to do today after you leave here?”**

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

**“It’s [specify time] and this interview is now complete.”**