Forensic Interviewing Techniques for Child Victims

OAG 2014 Crime Victim Services Conference
Forensic Interviewing Techniques for Child Victims

Who am I?
Ada McCloud, Program Specialist
Children’s Advocacy Centers™ of Texas

Who is CACTX?
Statewide Membership Association for Children’s Advocacy Centers in Texas Dedicated to Providing Local Programs with:
- Funding
- Technical Assistance
- Training
- Legislative Advocacy
CAC Movement in Texas

Today, there are 68 CACs in Texas that serve 172 Texas counties where 95% of the population resides. Courtesy services are available for the unserved areas.

What is a CAC?

How does the CAC Model Work?
First things first

- Most kids grow, mature, develop along a projectable, predictable path.
  - Growth charts
  - Milestones
  - Reading Levels

First things first

- The child you are questioning may or may not fit the projectable, predictable path.

Some Facts About Preschool Children

- Children as young as 2 and 3 can recall and report past experience accurately.
- Children as young as 3 have testified competently and credibly in court.
- Even very young children can tell us what they know *if we ask them the right questions in the right way.*
Facts About Preschoolers (3-6)

- Sentence length increases at a steady pace
- Syntax doubles each month
- By age 6, child knows 8,000 - 14,000 words

More Facts About Preschoolers

- By 3, use plurals and possessive forms of nouns
- By 3, use past tense
- By 3, grammatically correct more than 90% of the time

Facts About Middle Childhood (6-12)

- Between 9 & 11, vocabulary grows by 5,000 words.
- Difficulties decoding sentences when the meaning depends on intonation.
- Better understanding of pragmatics over time.
Facts About Adolescence (12-20)

- They are not adults!
- Self-concept differentiates to encompass other’s views
- Self-esteem differentiates

More Facts About Adolescence

- They are searching for their identity.
- They are searching for autonomy.
- Egocentric and sense of invulnerability.

Understand the Art of Asking Questions

- Goal of asking questions should be to get accurate answers, but that goal is unlikely if the question is not understood.
Continuum of Question Types

- Open-Ended / Free Recall Questions
- Focused Recall
  - Cue Question
  - Time Segmentation
- Wh-Question (Who, what, where, when, how come)
  - General
  - Specific
- Recognition
  - Yes/No
  - Forced Choice
- Leading

Question Type

Pairing
- If an interviewer asks a specific wh-question, a yes/no question, or a forced-choice question, then the next question should be an open-ended question.
- This allows the interviewer to "open up" the line of questioning, elicits narrative, and protects the integrity of the interview.

Guidelines for Age-Appropriate Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>2-3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5-6</th>
<th>7-9</th>
<th>10 and Up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What is a forensic interview?

- **Forensic Interview**: A developmentally-sensitive and legally sound method of gathering factual information regarding allegations of abuse and/or exposure to violence. This interview is conducted by a competently-trained, neutral professional utilizing research and practice-informed techniques as part of a larger investigative process.

Other Types of Forensic Interviews

- **Subsequent Forensic Interview**: An interview to supplement the initial completed forensic interview (i.e. more information, recant, reaffirmation).

- **Multi-Session Forensic Interview**: One forensic interview conducted over multiple sessions for children and cases with special considerations.

Semi-Structured Narrative Process

- **P** • Preparation
- **R** • Rapport
- **T** • Truth/Lie/Oath
- **I** • Introduce Topic of Concern
- **D** • Detail Gathering
- **C** • Closure
Benefits of a Forensic Interview

- Builds stronger cases,
- facilitates prosecution,
- expeditiously exonerates accused in cases of false allegations, and
- minimizes trauma to child and family.

Questions & Final Thoughts

How to Contact Me

Ada McCloud
Program Specialist
Children’s Advocacy Centers™ of Texas
1501 W. Anderson Lane B-1
Austin, TX 78757

amcloud@cactx.org
800/255-2574 ext. 107
Fax: 512/258-9926
www.cactx.org
Children's Advocacy Centers™ of Texas, Inc.

MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

- Member Children’s Advocacy Centers
- Member Children’s Advocacy Centers serving multiple counties
- Location of main CAC
- Satellite locations of Children’s Advocacy Centers in counties contiguous to primary location
Children’s Advocacy Centers:
A Collaborative Model Designed to Improve Community and Systems Response to Child Abuse Through Investigation, Assessment, Intervention, and Prosecution
HOW DOES THE CAC MODEL WORK?

**LAW ENFORCEMENT**

- The role of local law enforcement is grounded in public safety.
- If not criminal in nature, law enforcement may not take action.

**CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES**

- The role of CPS is to ensure that a child’s home is safe.
- If the family/caretaker is not the alleged abuser, CPS may not take action.

**Immediate Response**

**Priority Assigned (24-72 hours)**

**Child is brought to Children’s Advocacy Center**

- Joint Investigation Begins
  - Forensic Interview
  - Evidence Collected
  - Photos Taken
  - Witness Interview
  - Medical Treatment and Exam

**CAC coordinates Case Review with all team members, including law enforcement, prosecution, Child Protective Services, the forensic interviewer, a mental health provider, a medical professional, and a family advocate**

**Case presented to District Attorney**

**Suspect Charged or Case Refused**

**Child & family receive mental health services—Family advocate works with family to assess critical resources and provide support as the case moves through the justice system**

**Child Removed from Home, or Case Opened for Services, or Case Closed**
Guidelines for Age-Appropriate Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>WHO</th>
<th>WHAT</th>
<th>WHERE</th>
<th>WHEN</th>
<th>HOW</th>
<th># OF TIMES</th>
<th>CHRONOLOGICAL NARRATIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 and Up</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key

- **Child *should* be able to answer these questions.**
- **Child *might* be able to answer these questions; interviewer should proceed with extreme caution.**
- **Child will not be able to answer these questions; therefore they should not be asked.**
The field of forensic interviewing is evolving to 1) ensure better access to justice for children of abuse; and 2) to enhance the investigation and prosecution of cases. Based on evidence in case law and the latest research in forensic interviewing, a group of interviewers from recognized training programs throughout the country developed a universally accepted definition of a forensic interview. The CACTX Forensic Interview Training Team has adopted this definition for use in developing training curricula and technical assistance materials for local children’s advocacy centers (CACs) and their multidisciplinary teams (MDTs). Recently, the team developed definitions for the various types of forensic interviews in order to ensure a common language for interviewers and MDTs in Texas. These definitions reflect practices that have been implemented across the state to better meet the needs of kids and cases.

### Forensic Interview

A developmentally-sensitive and legally sound method of gathering factual information regarding allegations of abuse and/or exposure to violence. This interview is conducted by a competently-trained, neutral professional utilizing research and practice-informed techniques as part of a larger investigative process.

### Subsequent Forensic Interview

An interview to supplement the initial completed forensic interview.

### Multi-Session Forensic Interview

One forensic interview completed over multiple sessions for children and cases with special considerations.

Should you have questions, please contact Children’s Advocacy Centers of Texas at 800/255-2574.