



# INTERVIEWERS' STRATEGIES: FORMULATING QUESTIONS

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## FOR SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW WITH A YOUNG CHILD....

- Fundamental knowledge of child's development
- Use developmentally appropriate language
- Keep questions simple. Don't ask more than one question at a time
- Be sure the child understands the question being asked
- Calm and supportive presentation
- Objective stance
- Length – should not exceed child's attention span

# QUESTIONING STRATEGIES

- To elicit a complete & accurate account of events while minimizing the introduction of specific information from the interviewer
- Use of recall or open-ended prompts
  - More likely to obtain accurate, detailed information (research & field experience)

# QUESTIONING STRATEGIES

- Structure
  - Conversational
  - Clear direction with support
  - Opportunity to practice conversational skill



# QUESTIONING STRATEGIES

Narrative ability of a child influenced by

- Age, developmental level
- Temperament
- Family style
- Level of trauma & neglect
- Health problems

# INTERVIEW STAGES & STRUCTURE / COMPONENTS

1. Introduction
2. Ground Rules/Instructions/“Orienting” Child to Interview Expectations

*“If you know the answer to my question, tell me the answer. Don’t guess.”*

*“If I make a mistake, tell me. Correct me.”*

*“If you don’t understand me, tell me.”*

*“Now, do you promise that you will tell me the truth?”*

# INTERVIEW STAGES & STRUCTURE / COMPONENTS

## 3. Narrative Event Practice/Episodic Memory Training/“Practice Interview”

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

## 4. Transition/Introducing the Topic of Concern

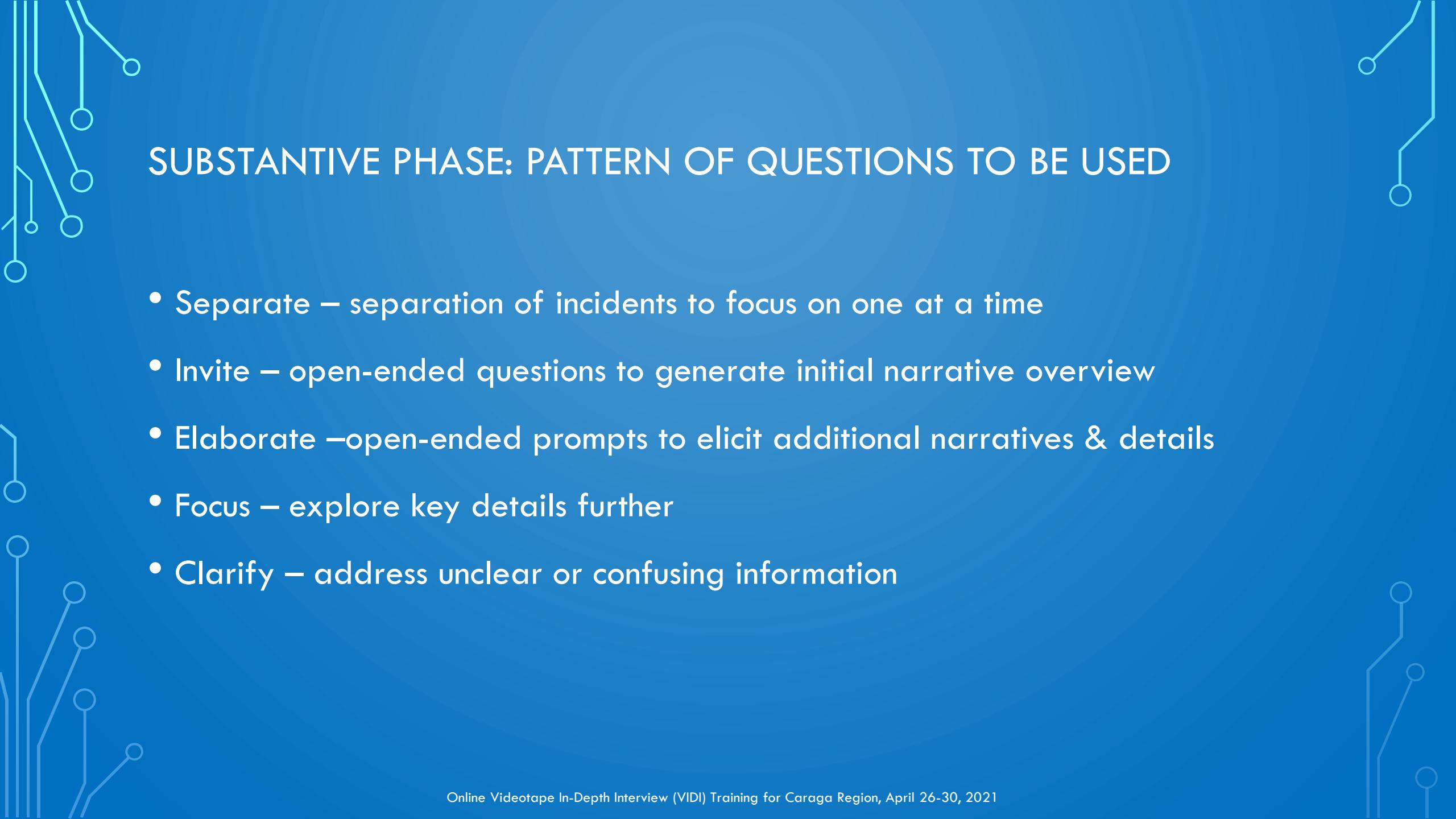
*“Tell me why you are here today.”*

THE CHILD ACKNOWLEDGES THAT SOMETHING HAPPENED.

# INTERVIEW STAGES & STRUCTURE / COMPONENTS

## 5. Substantive Questions/“Allegation Phase”/“Abuse Scenario”

- Purpose: To elicit details, elaborate and clarify about the child abuse experience
- Start with & maximize open-ended questions/invitations while minimize closed-ended questions



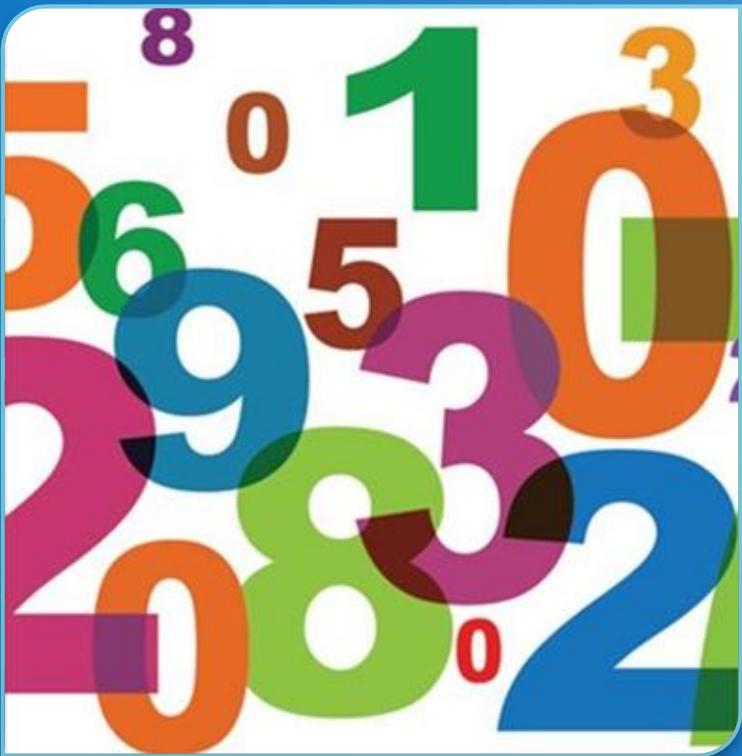
## SUBSTANTIVE PHASE: PATTERN OF QUESTIONS TO BE USED

- Separate – separation of incidents to focus on one at a time
- Invite – open-ended questions to generate initial narrative overview
- Elaborate –open-ended prompts to elicit additional narratives & details
- Focus – explore key details further
- Clarify – address unclear or confusing information

# SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS: SEPARATE

- Child indicates something happened: “I was [child’s word for the incident].”  
*“Tell me what happened.”* (if child has not provided the information)
- If the child did not mention the name of the abuser: ASK who
  - Use name of the abuser frequently when the child is asked to elaborate later
- If the child did not spontaneously give the number of times  
*“Did that happen one time or more than one time?” / “How many times? One time or more than one time.”*
- If child discloses only one incident
  - Exhaust child’s memory of the incident (Separate-Invite-Elaborate-Focus-Clarify)

# SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS: SEPARATE



- If child discloses more than one time: separate the events
  - “Tell me everything about the last time it happened.”*  
→ Invite-Elaborate-Focus-Clarify
  - “Now, tell me everything that happened the first time.”*  
→ Invite-Elaborate-Focus-Clarify
  - “Tell me about the time you remember most.”*  
→ Invite-Elaborate-Focus-Clarify
  - “Tell me about another you remember.”*  
→ Invite-Elaborate-Focus-Clarify

# SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS: INVITE

## NARRATIVE INVITATIONS (RECALL MEMORY)

- Open-ended requests to talk or continue talking (“Tell me about that”)
- May elicit detailed, accurate & idiosyncratic information
- Designed to encourage the child to talk at some length about a topic with a minimum number of questions, topic changes or other input from the interviewer

# SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS: INVITE

- Use facilitators: “Okay”, “Uh-huh”, “I see”, “Unya”, “Unsa pa”, “Ah, diay.”
- Do not interrupt a narrative
- Simply repeat what child has just said without a question mark at the end (or it becomes a “yes/no” question)
- Think about and use what the child has just said
  - Do not think about your next question until the child has finished talking
- Clarify later: note down words, names or other things you want to follow up on

# SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS: INVITE



*“Tell me everything that happened.”*

*“Tell me what happened from the beginning to the end.”*

*“Tell me all about [repeat child’s words].”*

*“Tell me everything, even the little parts you don’t think are important.”*

# SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS: INVITE

AVOID

*“Did .....?”*

*“Was .....?”*

*“Can you / will you tell me .....?”*

*“When .....?” – an abstract concept*

*“How many times?” – not a fair question for most anyone*

} yes/no questions

# SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS: ELABORATE

## CUED NARRATIVE REQUESTS

- Direct the child to provide more detail about an identified period of time already mentioned by the child
- Follow the child's answers with open-ended requests
- Keep it linear or sequential (try not to jump around in time)

# SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS: ELABORATE

- Action-oriented cues

*“Tell me more.”, “Tell me more about [what child just said].”*

*“Then what happened?” and “What happened next?”*

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

*“You said [repeat child’s words about an action], tell me all about that.”*

*“What did he do with his hands?”*

*“Tell me everything that happened with his/your clothes.”*

*“Tell me what happened after he pulled you into his room.”*

*“Unsay nahitabo pag-abot ninyo sa kalibunan?”*

# SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS: ELABORATE

- Time segmentation invitations – to generate additional details about a specific period or small segment of time within the event already described by the child

*“Tell me everything that happened from [child’s words] until [child’s words].”*

- Time framing – to determine context

*“What happened right before?”*

*“What happened right after?”*

*“Then what happened next?”*

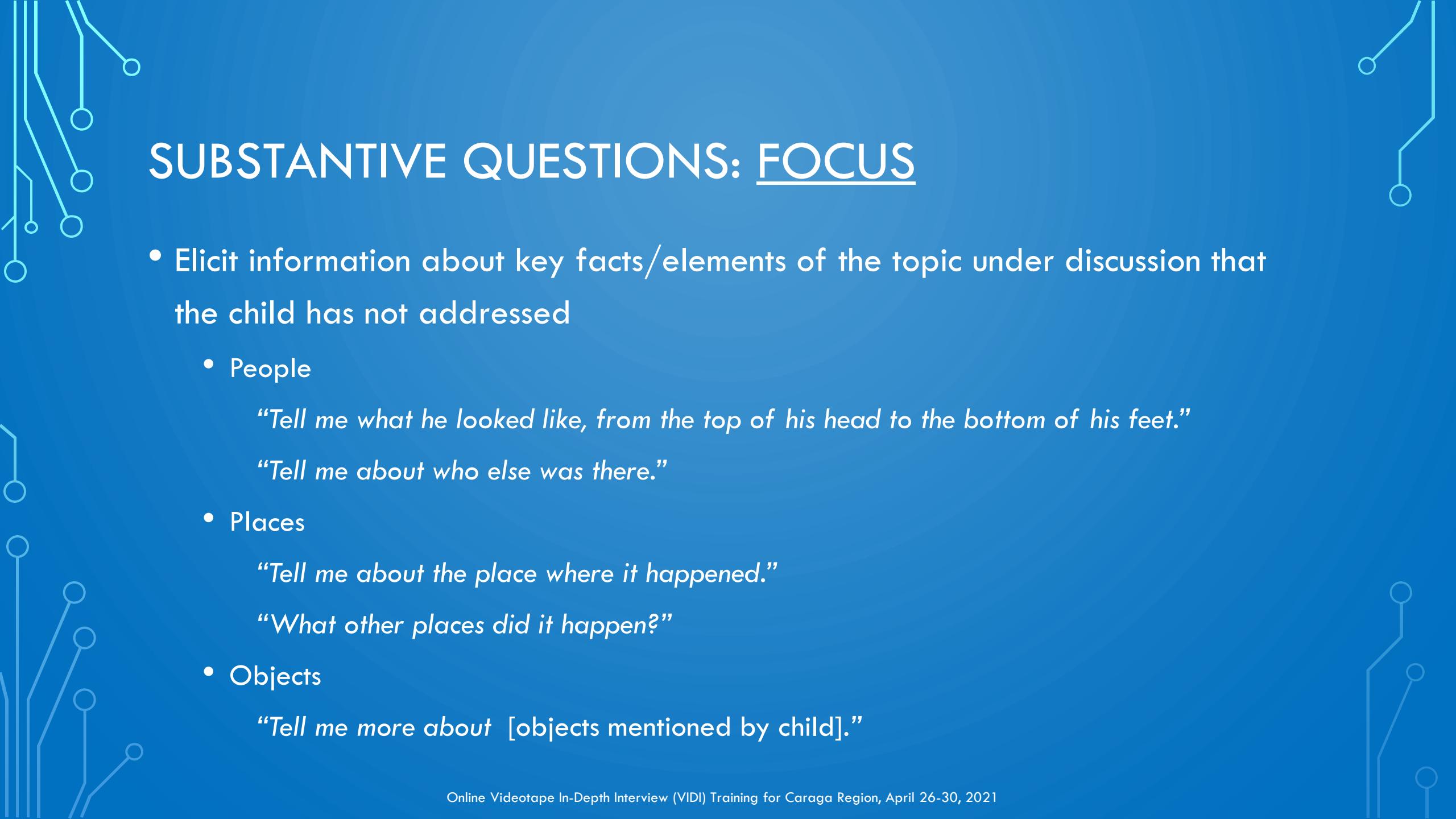
*“What happened next?”*

# SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS: FOCUS

## FOCUSED NARRATIVE INVITATIONS

- Open-ended questions → cue the child to talk about a specific element contained in a previous statement or one that the interviewer wishes to explore





# SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS: FOCUS

- Elicit information about key facts/elements of the topic under discussion that the child has not addressed
  - People

*“Tell me what he looked like, from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet.”*

*“Tell me about who else was there.”*

- Places

*“Tell me about the place where it happened.”*

*“What other places did it happen?”*

- Objects

*“Tell me more about [objects mentioned by child].”*

## SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS: FOCUS

- Used to explore topics of interest or concern in the child's life when child is unable to or unwilling to identify the purpose of the interview

*“Tell me what your mom told you why you need a check-up today.”*

- Allows the interviewer to continue the conversation without immediately proceeding to more direct questioning techniques

# SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS: FOCUS

- Elicit information about key facts: Sensory and “feeling” information

*“Tell me what you felt when he [action mentioned by the child].”*

*“How did you feel after [he touched you]? ”*

*“How did you feel about everything that has happened? ”*

*“What were you thinking when he/she [action mentioned by the child] you? ”*



# SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS: FOCUS

- Elicit information about key facts: Erection

*“Tell me everything you saw / what it looked like.”*

*“What happened right before [child’s words]? ”*

*“What happened right after [child’s words]”*

*“What was different about his [child’s words] when he was done? ”*

*“How did you know it was over? ”*

## SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS: FOCUS

- Elicit information about key facts: Penetration

(Use of “in/inside” and “out/outside” is not recommended)

*“Exactly where did [name] touch you with [his finger/thing]? ”*

*“How did it feel when he touched you in your [child’s word]? ”*

*“What were you/[name] wearing at that time? ”*

*“What happened to your/his [clothes]? ”*

*“Did he touch you on top of your [clothes] or under your [clothes]? ”*



## SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS: FOCUS

- Elicit information about key facts: Ejaculation

*“How did it feel [child’s words]?”*

*“Tell me everything you saw?”*

*“Tell me everything you felt?”*

*“How did it taste like?”*

# SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS: FOCUS

- Asking about others who know or were told:

“Who else knows?”

“Who was the first person you told about what happened?”

“Who was the first person who found out what happened ?”

“How did [name] find out?”

“What did [name] say/do when you told him/her?”

“What made you decide to tell now?” / “What made you not tell right away?”

“Did [suspect] want other people to find out?” → “How do you know?”

## SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS: FOCUS

- Additional focused questions to generate information about facts not mentioned by child include:
  - Location
  - Presence of other children or other possible victims
  - Implements used and other possible physical evidence, (e.g., pictures, videos)
  - How the child was groomed
  - Other persons who sexually abused the child

# SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS: FOCUS

- Central details of the allegation still missing or unclear after exhausting open-ended questions → direct questions used carefully paired with open-ended follow-up invitations

## DETAIL QUESTIONS

- Purpose: to request specific information about the details of a situation already under discussion

# SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS: FOCUS

## DETAIL QUESTIONS

- Used when children do not reveal all stored information when asked open-ended questions about an event under discussion
  - Lack of understanding of the task
  - Embarrassment
  - Fear
  - Minimization of the event

# SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS: FOCUS

## DETAIL QUESTIONS – “Wh” QUESTIONS

- Basically ask for the “who”, “what”, ‘where’, & “how” information about the named event, if the child knows
- Information may or may not have been encoded or remembered
  - “I don’t know.”
  - “I don’t remember.”



# SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS: FOCUS

## DETAIL QUESTIONS – “Wh” QUESTIONS

- Can pre-suppose information → suggestive  
*“Who hurt you?”* (child has not said anything about this)
- May either be open-ended or closed-ended question  
*“What happened?”* – open-ended  
*“What was the color of his shirt?”* – closed-ended
- Often invite 1- to 2-word answers; discourage narratives
- Follow the answers to the “wh” question with a narrative invitation for more information

# SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS: FOCUS

## DETAIL QUESTIONS – “Wh” QUESTIONS

- Ask the “wh” question that will encourage the child to give more than 1- or 2-word answers

“Tell me all about what happened.... “

“Tell me all about who.... “

“Tell me all about the place where it happened.”

Tell me all about how you know.... / how you figured that out.”

# SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS: FOCUS

## DETAIL QUESTIONS – “Wh” QUESTIONS

CONCRETE	ABSTRACT
What	When (e.g., “When did it happen?”)
Where	Why (e.g., “Why do you think he said that?”)
Who	How (e.g., “How did he get in your room?”)

- Avoid use of abstract “wh” questions
- Use concrete ‘wh’ questions to determine abstract information
  - WHEN: “Where was your mother that morning you said [name of offender] entered your house?”
  - HOW: “What did [name of perpetrator] do to you to let you inside his room?”

# SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS: FOCUS

## MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS

- Option-posing questions: ask child to choose from a list; characterized by “or”
- Used after other questioning alternatives have been unsuccessful
  - Helps a child understand the intent of a previous question
- Follow with an invitation to further elaborate

# SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS: FOCUS

## MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS

- How to construct
  - 3 choices + someone else or somewhere else or something else  
*"Where were you in the room? Were you by the window, by the bed, by the door or somewhere else?"*
  - Followed by: "*What were you doing by the window when [name of perpetrator] came into your room?*"

# SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS: FOCUS

## YES/NO QUESTIONS

- Option-posing questions characterized by
  - Child nods, shakes head, or responds with a single word
  - Often starts with: “*Did ...?*” or “*Was ...?*”
  - Unintentional yes/no questions
    - “*Do you remember ...?*” or “*Do you know ...?*”
    - “*Can you tell me ...?*” or “*Will you tell me ...?*”
  - Paraphrasing the child’s words with a question mark at the end: “*You said he hurt you?*”
  - Following up a denial with “*Are you sure?*”

# SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS: FOCUS

## YES/NO QUESTIONS

- To gather specific information (if available) from the child about a topic already under discussion
- To cue the child's memory about specific information that has not been discussed
  - "Did he say anything to you?"*
  - "Did he give you anything?"*
- To check if the child actually has a certain piece of knowledge
  - "Did he tell you to do anything to him?"*
  - "Do you know his name?"*
- Questions should be followed by an invitation to elaborate
  - "You said he hurt you. In what way did he hurt you?"*



## MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS YES/NO QUESTIONS

SHOULD NOT be used to elicit the main details of the abuse

# CLOSED-ENDED QUESTIONS: PROBLEMS WITH THEM

- Yes/no questions
- Multiple/force choice questions
- Questions that can be answered with a single word using the “wh” questions (closed “wh” questions)
- State what the interviewer thinks vs what the child knows
- Rely on the interviewer’s words (difficult, ambiguous)
- More suggestive & more prone to response biases vs open-ended questions
- Single word answers from children, no elaboration using own words & own memories

# CLOSED-ENDED QUESTIONS: PROBLEMS WITH THEM

- Remedy: always use PAIRING
- Give an open-ended question after a closed-ended question or a short answer to a direct or focused question to gather more information

*“Tell me more about that.”*

*“Tell me everything / all about that.”*

*“What do you mean when you say ...?”*

*“How do you know?”*

*“How did you figure that out?”*



## SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS: CLARIFY

- Purpose
    - To make sure that you clearly understand what child means
    - To address unclear or confusing information
  - Attempt to have the child expand on the information already provided
  - Take a break to find out what additional clarifying questions need to be asked
    - Consult the observers, if any
- 

# SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS: CLARIFY

- Direct, focused or closed questions + open-ended follow up questions

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

*“Let’s see if I’ve got this right [briefly summarize each segment of the event].”*

- Pause after each segment and elicit response as to accuracy.



# SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS: CLARIFY

- Other examples

*“What do you mean when you say [child’s term]?”*

*“How do you know [name of person mentioned by child]?”*

*“You said that it hurt in your privates when [name of perpetrator] touched you there. What did he do to your privates that made you hurt?”*

*“I am confused ...” OR “I want to make sure I understand – tell me again about [child’s words].”*

*“Tell me more about [child’s words] so I can understand.”*

# LEADING AND SUGGESTIVE QUESTIONS

- Questions that direct the child to respond in a specific way or merely ask for affirmation or denial of an event or act when the child has not yet disclosed any such information
- NOT recommended
  - Provide little information from the child
  - Child may perceive that the interviewer prefers certain answers

# AVOID!

- Leading questions

*“Was it [name of perpetrator] who hurt you?”*

- Suggestive questions

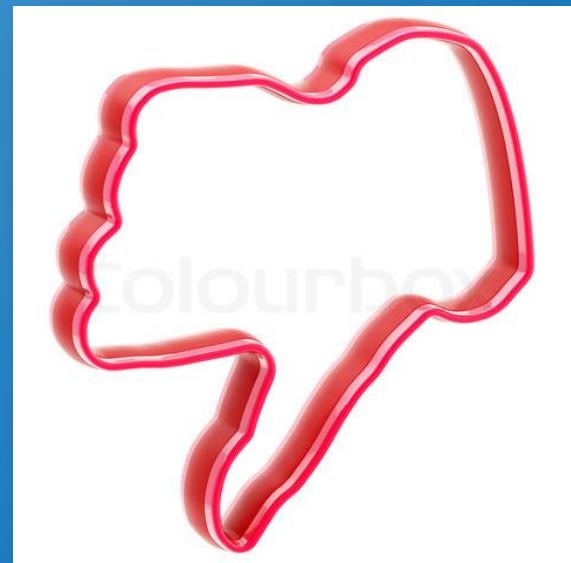
*“Did somebody hurt you?”* (when the child has not said anything about getting hurt)

- Tag questions

*“Your grandfather touched your privates, right?”*

- Coercive questions

*“If I don’t know what happened to you, whatever happened to you might happen to your younger sister.”*



# USE OF MEDIA AND INTERVIEW AIDS

- Paper, markers, simple puzzles, play-doh (access to a limited number of items)
- May relax young children & extend their attention span
- Means of communication about details of the event with less concern about leading or interviewer direction
- Adolescents: paper & pencil or drawing materials may decrease reticence to communicate & provide alternative means of communication



## DRAWINGS

- Free drawing of any topic selected by the child or child may be invited to draw self or family members
  - Develop rapport, help child relax
  - Can assess the child's developmental skills, how child engages in a conversation

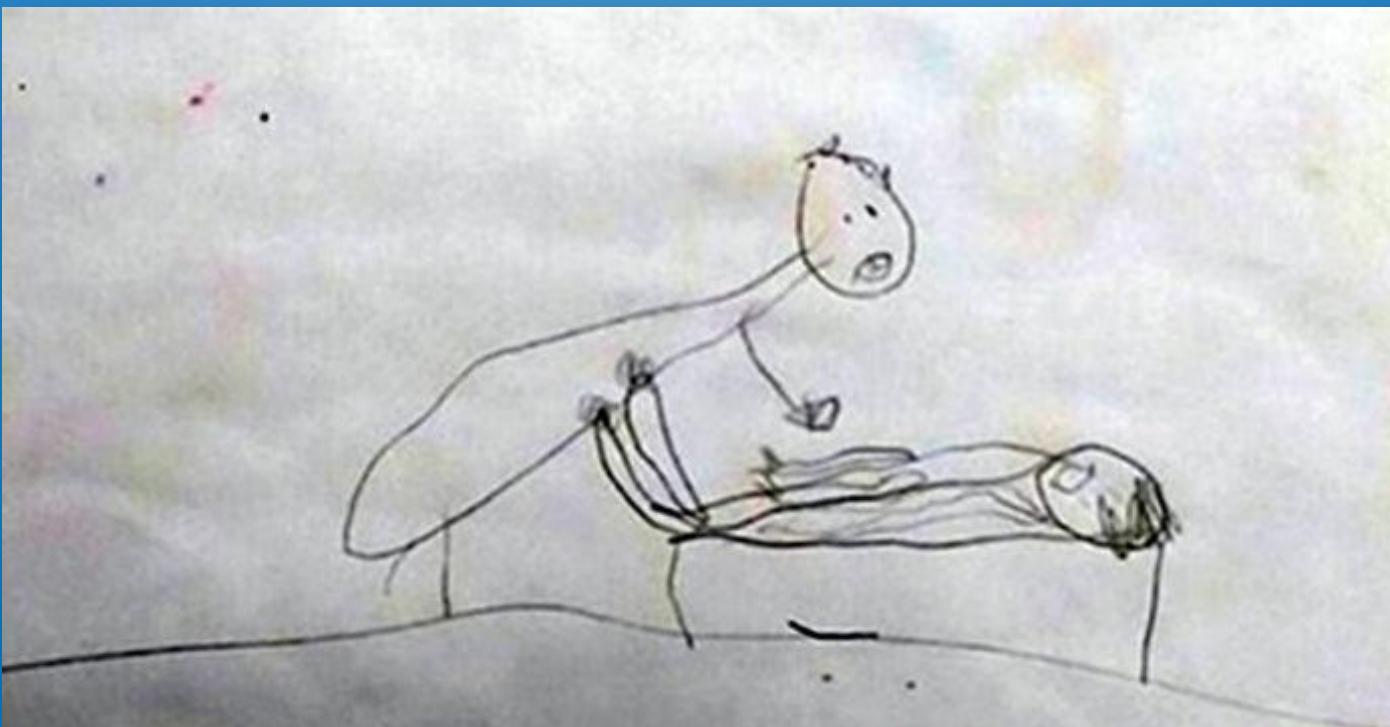
# DRAWINGS

- Facilitates communication with a child who has difficulty or is embarrassed to explain details of abuse
  - Talk freely when focus on verbal communication is decreased
  - Drawing is used as a means of distancing from painful information



# DRAWINGS

MEANS OF COMMUNICATION not as a medium for interpretation



# DRAWINGS

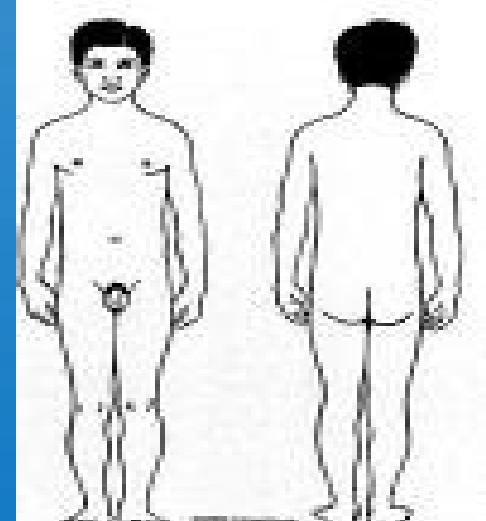
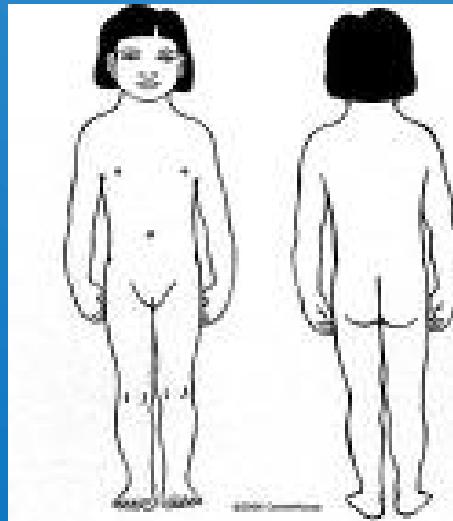
- Embarrassed or frightened older child /adolescents
  - Written replies or narrative descriptions may be used to facilitate verbal communication
  - Drawing a map of the location, a timeline, or other visual demonstration may bolster their oral communication
- Graphic representations do not replace verbal description
  - Label with child's verbal descriptions if to be used as part of the disclosure portion

# ANATOMICAL AND BODY DRAWINGS

- Simple outline drawings with minimal “anatomical” details
- Developmental assessment
  - Identify body parts, names, functions
  - Determine child’s ability to distinguish between genders

# ANATOMICAL AND BODY DRAWINGS

- Facilitate or clarify the child's disclosure
  - Communicate body touch information or clarify specific body parts using the drawings
  - Followed by a request for narrative description or additional questions



# VIDEO- AND AUDIO-TAPED INTERVIEW



- No rehearsals.
- No “take two”.
- Only one take, one chance.
- Cannot delete, cannot splice.
- Recorded.
- Evidence for prosecution or defense.



## **MESSAGE:**

A SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW IS BECAUSE YOU USED THE RIGHT STRATEGIES AND ASKED THE RIGHT QUESTIONS WHILE KEEPING IN MIND THE FACTORS THAT IMPACT CHILDREN'S INTERVIEWS. IT HAS NOTHING TO DO ABOUT THE CHILD BEING A GOOD COMMUNICATOR.

# MY REFERENCES

- APSAC Child Forensic Interview Clinic 2013 Handbook
- National Children's Advocacy Center Forensic Interview Structure.  
[http://cjc.umc.edu/documents/training/NCAC\\_forensic\\_interview\\_model.pdf](http://cjc.umc.edu/documents/training/NCAC_forensic_interview_model.pdf)
- Images are from Google Images



ALL FOR THE BEST  
INTEREST OF THE CHILD