

## Allegation Phase and Follow-up Questions

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Child Interviewing Seminar  
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With the assistance of Brittany  
Younger

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## Overview of the Ten-step interview

- Interview instructions (Steps 1-5)
  - Teaches child how an interview is different than other child-adult interactions
- Narrative practice rapport building (Step 6)
  - Helps you and the child practice open-ended questions and narrative responses
- Allegation phase (Step 7)
  - Introduces the reason for investigation without leading the child
- Open-ended followups (Steps 8-10)
  - Avoids suggestion or shutting the child down

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## What we'll do today

- Allegation phase questions for
  - Sexual abuse
  - Physical abuse
  - Domestic violence
  - Homicide
- Follow-up questions
  - Keep asking what happened next
  - How to follow-up on touching
- Research Review
  - Eliciting the disclosure
  - Dolls and diagrams

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### The allegation phase (Step 7)

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### Allegation Questions (sexual abuse)

- Tell me why
- I heard you saw
- Someone's worried
- Bothering you
- Something wasn't right

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### Tell me why

- Now that I know you a little better,
- Tell me why you came to talk to me.
- Or
- Tell me why I came to talk to you.
- It's really important for me to know why you came to talk to me/I came to talk to you.

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### I heard you saw

- I heard you saw a teacher last week. Tell me what you talked about.
- Refer to a person to whom the child disclosed.

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### Someone's worried

- Is your teacher worried that something may have happened to you? Tell me what they are worried about.
- Refer to a person who has reported the abuse.

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### Bothered you

- I heard that someone might have bothered you. Tell me everything about that.

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### Something wasn't right

- I heard that someone may have done something to you that wasn't right. Tell me everything about that.

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### Review of Allegation Questions

- Tell me why
- I heard you saw
- Someone's worried
- Bothering you
- Something wasn't right

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### *Additional* allegation question

- Tell me about something bad that has happened to you.
- Some professionals may prefer this to "tell me why you are here"
  - Doesn't suggest that the child has been prepped
  - All children can answer (everyone has experienced something bad), so doesn't suggest abuse.

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*Additional* allegation question for  
child in foster care

- Where are you staying now? What made them move you to a new place?

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*Additional* allegation questions for  
physical abuse

- I heard you had a mark on your body. Tell me what happened.
- What happens when a grownup in your house gets mad at you?
  - Tell me about the worst thing that ever happened

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*Additional* allegation questions for  
Domestic Violence

- I heard the grown-ups in your house got in a fight. Tell me what happened.
- I heard your mom or dad got hurt. Tell me what happened.
- What happens when the grownups in your house get mad at each other?

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*Additional* allegation questions for  
homicide

- I heard something happened to [victim].  
Tell me what happened.

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Follow ups to allegation  
(Steps 8-9)

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Followups

- Step 8:
- You said that [e.g. Bill hurt your private].  
Tell me *everything* that happened.
- Step 9:
- Use Tell me more prompts.
- Use What happened next prompts.

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### What happened next?

- You said X. What happened next?
  - what happened right after that?
  - what happened just before that?
- You said X. What's the first thing that happened?

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### What Happened Next: After Abuse

(10-year-old girl, S90)

Q: Okay. Alright. And what happened right after that?

A: I went downstairs. I got the soap. I locked in and I pulled up my pants. And then I went downstairs running, but then I gave the soap to my mom.

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A: My mom said why was I taking long, but I didn't answer her, and I just went in the bathroom and started crying.

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(6-year-old boy, S66)

Q: ...on your wee-wee? And then what happened.

A: I didn't like that and I started crying.

Q: And then what happened?

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A: My Uncle David woke up and then he start and then he stop cause he didn't want to get in trouble, and he told me not to tell anybody, and I wanted to disobey him cause I don't like him,

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A: and cause he used to call me bad words, like me and my big sister and my little one and my mom, and my mom told me not to be with him anymore, and then cause I don't remember.

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(9-year-old girl, S88)

Q: And then what did you do after he left the room?

A: After he left the room?

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Q: Mmm-hmm. And what did you do?

A: I didn't want to go to sleep, cause I thought he was gonna come back.

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Examples of moving from closed-ended to open-ended questions

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### Follow-up questions about touching

- If child doesn't identify where "touched"
  - Most open-ended
    - Tell me everything he did when he touched you.
  - Specific wh- questions
    - Where on your body did he touch you?
- How did your body feel when he touched you?
- How did your [child's term for part] feel when he touched you?

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### Clarifying ambiguous touch

- You said he touched your X.
  - What is your X?
  - Do you have another word for your X?
  - Where is your X?
  - What do you do with your X?
- Where were you when..?

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### Clarifying body positioning

- Where were your hands / feet / head / back when [suspect] X'ed?
- Where were [suspect's] hands / stomach / legs when [suspect] X'ed?

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### Skin to skin?

- Not good
  - Was it over or under your clothes?
    - Forced choice
  - Did he put his finger inside you?
    - Yes/no
- Better
  - What did he do with his hands?
    - Wh-

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### What did he do with his hands?

(8-year-old girl) Only he put his hand inside me and also he put inside a little my private part.

(9-year-old girl) He usually put his hands inside his after he used to put his hands inside his clothes.

I: Where were his hands when he was doing this to you?

C: His hands were under my clothes.

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### Clothes?

- Not good
  - Were his clothes on or off?
    - Forced choice
  - Were your clothes on or off?
    - Forced choice
- Better
  - Where were his clothes?
    - Wh-
  - Where were your clothes?
    - Wh-
  - What did he do with his clothes?
    - Wh-

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### Where were his clothes?

- (S92 9-year-old girl) He took off his clothes.
- (S66 6-year-old boy) Off on the floor.
- (S99 9-year-old girl) To his knees.
- (S99 6-year-old boy) He didn't take all of it. He took his pants. Not everything. Q: Not everything. Where were his underwear? A: Down.
- (S68 11-year-old girl) He just had underwear and he was like sleeping and he woke up when she closed the door.

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### Where were his clothes?

(12-year-old girl, S84)

Q: Where were his clothes when he touched you?  
 A: On him. He was wearing them.  
 Q: He was wearing?  
 A: His clothes.

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Q: He was wearing his clothes.  
 A: He just unzipped his pants.  
 Q: What did he unzip his pants for?  
 A: He put his penis in

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### What did he do with his clothes?

(10-year-old girl, S90)

Q: Ok. And then what did he do with his clothes?

A: He like um, the zipper he pulled it down and took out his and he was like touching me with it and then he it felt like he was putting it inside of my...

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Q: Inside of what?

A: My butt.

Q: Inside of your butt? Ok. And so what did he take out and touch you with?

A: His dick.

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### Where were your clothes?

- (S88 9-year-old girl) To my feet.
- (S98 8-year-old girl) It was on he just pull it up and my shorts he pulled down and then my panties too he touched it.
- (S95 6-year-old girl) My clothes are on my they just pull my pants down like that and they keep my pants on and I be saying stop it and they won't
- (S58 10-year-old girl) They're on me but when he wanted to touch me he just put them like like all the way to here and he put his fingers on my vagina.
- (S69 11-year-old girl) He ripped it.

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### Does it work?

- Research consistently finds that *at least half* of children who disclose sexual abuse will have done so by the time one asks the “tell me why” question.

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### Sternberg et al. (2001)

Journal of Applied Psychology  
2001, Vol. 86, No. 3, 997–1008

In the public domain  
DOI: 10.1037/0021-9010.86.3.997

Use of a Structured Investigative Protocol Enhances Young Children's Responses to Free-Recall Prompts in the Course of Forensic Interviews

Kathleen J. Sternberg, Michael E. Lamb,  
and Yael Orbach  
National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

Phillip W. Esplin  
Phoenix, Arizona

Susanne Mitchell  
Salt Lake County Children's Justice Center

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### Sternberg et al. (2001)

- 100 forensic interviews: 50 NICHD protocol, 50 standard
- First interview following formal report
- Average age 8 (range 3-11 to 12-9)
  - 16 4- to 6-year-olds
- Protocol original pool of 138
  - 40 failed to follow protocol (29%)

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## Sternberg et al. (2001)

the interviewer shifted the focus to substantive issues using nonsuggestive prompts ("**Now that I know you a little better, I'd like to discuss the reason you came here today**") designed to avoid providing any input about a possible incident while allowing the child to introduce the topic.

Other nonsuggestive prompts followed if the child did not make an allegation.

If an allegation was made, the child was given an open "invitation" ("**Tell me everything that happened to you from the beginning to the end, as best you can remember**"),

which was followed by additional open-ended probes ("Tell me more about that" or "And then what happened?") and cues ("Tell me more about [something the child had mentioned]") as appropriate.

## Sternberg et al. (2001)

Table 1  
*Practices During the Presubstantive Phase of Investigative Interviews*

Recommended practice	Baseline (%)	Protocol (%)
Interviewer introduces himself or herself	58	88
Interviewer explains purpose of interview	76	90
Interviewer obtains information about child's family	90	70
Interviewer establishes rapport	52	100
Interviewer practices discussing neutral topic	2	100
Interviewer distinguishes between truth and lie	34	96
Child given permission to say "I don't know/understand"	0	58
Child given permission to correct interviewer	0	62
Substantive topic introduced in nonsuggestive manner	42	100

## Sternberg et al. (2001)

Table 3  
*Prompt Eliciting Allegation in the Protocol Condition (n = 50)*

Prompt eliciting disclosure	No. of children asked each question	No. of children disclosing in response to each question
Disclosure prior to substantive section		4
1. Tell me why you came to talk to me.	45	30
2. It's important for me to understand why you came to talk to me.	8	1
3. I heard you saw [professional]. Tell me what you talked about.	13	7
4. Tell me why you think I... brought you here today.	3	1
5. Is [ ] worried that something may have happened to you?	3	1
6. I heard someone has been bothering you.	3	0
7. I heard someone may have done something to you that wasn't right.	4	1
8. I heard something may have happened to you [location, time].	2	0
9. I heard that someone may have [allegation].	5	5

"In 89% of the protocol interviews, children made their preliminary allegations in response to open-ended prompts, compared with 36% in the standard interviews." (Sternberg et al., 2001, p. 997)

### Sternberg et al. (2001)

- 98 protocol interviews
  - 50 disclosed during allegation phase (51%)
  - Another 12 disclosed *before* rapport building (12%)
  - 36 did not disclose (37%)

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### Sternberg et al. (2001)

- [Compared to the non-protocol interviews] children in the protocol group provided nearly **two and a half times as many details** and proportionally more information in response to open-ended invitations... (p. 1000)
- There were no significant age differences in the number and proportion of details elicited in response to open-ended or suggestive prompts. (p. 1001)

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### Dolls and Diagrams

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## How to think about accuracy

- There are two measures that contribute to accuracy
  - True disclosures (e.g. they WERE touched and they say they WERE)
  - False disclosures (e.g. they were NOT touched and they say they WERE)
- The RATIO of the two tells you how much your confidence that touching occurred should increase if any child discloses touch using the technique (aka the likelihood ratio).

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## True disclosures: False disclosures

- If it is greater than 20, this is usually considered STRONG evidence.
- If it is less than 5, this is usually considered WEAK evidence (Wood, 1996)
- Technically, the Ratio tells you by how much the ODDS of touching are increased by an affirmation.
- E.g. if you think chances are 50:50 before interview (1:1 odds), and the Ratio is 3, then the chances are 3:1 odds (or 75%) after the interview.

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## Anatomically correct dolls

- Saywitz et al., 1991
- Free recall
  - True disclosure: 22%
  - False disclosure: 0%
  - Disclosure is CONCLUSIVE evidence of touching.
- Point to doll's vagina; Did dr. touch you here?
  - True disclosure: 86%
  - False disclosure: 3%
  - Disclosure is STRONG evidence of touching (Ratio > 20)
- Limitations
  - 5-7 year olds
  - Nothing between free recall and direct questions (no invitations, no wh- questions).

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### Anatomically correct dolls/Diagrams

- Steward et al., 1996
- Free recall
  - True disclosure: 18-33%
  - False disclosure: 0%
  - Disclosure is CONCLUSIVE evidence of touching.
- Point to doll's vagina; Did dr. touch you here?
  - True disclosure: 73-86%
  - False disclosure: 8-12%
  - Likelihood ratios 5 to 9
  - Disclosure is MODERATE evidence of touching
- Limitations
  - Anal touch (dolls only): Likelihood ratio only 2 (80%:36%)
  - Nothing between free recall and direct questions (no invitations, no wh- questions).

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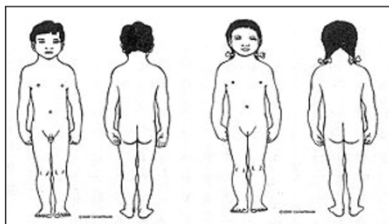
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### Body diagrams in Steward




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### Anatomically correct dolls

- Bruck, Ceci, Francouer, & Renick, 1995; Bruck, Ceci & Francouer, 2000
- Did the doctor touch you here?
  - 3-year-olds (mean 2-11)
    - True disclosure: 50%
    - False disclosure: 42%
    - Disclosure is NOT evidence of touching
  - 4-year-olds (mean 4-1)
    - True disclosure: 45%
    - False disclosure: 14%
    - Disclosure is WEAK evidence of touching

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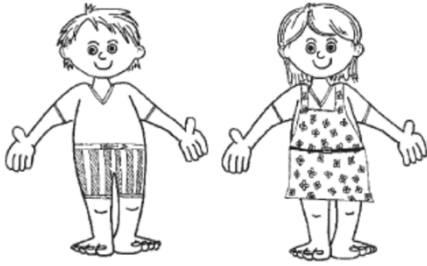
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### Willcock et al. (2006)



5-6 year olds, 11% false allegations of "genital" touch (Study 1)

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### Willcock et al. (2006)

- Problem:
  - Do children think they are reporting genital touch?
  - What percentage who WERE touched on genitalia report with drawings?
    - No children were touched on their genitalia.

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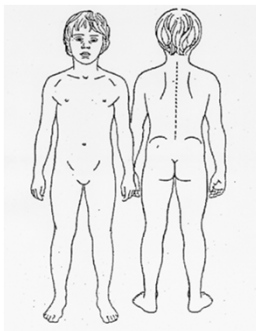
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### Brown et al. (2007)



5-7 year olds; 4% false allegations of "genital" touch

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### Brown et al. (2007)

- Problem:
  - Genitalia are still obscured.
  - What percentage of children who WERE touched on genitalia report with drawings?
    - Children were not touched on genitalia.

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### Other studies/reviews critical of human figure drawings

- Pipe & Salmon, 2009
- Bruck, 2009
- Poole, Bruck, & Pipe, 2011
- Poole & Dickinson, 2011

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### For more information

- Google “bepress lyon” for reprints of the Ten-step interview, other practitioner guides, and articles.
- Google “MRCAC Tom Lyon Spring 2013” to sign up for online viewing of lectures.
- You can reach me at [tlyon@law.usc.edu](mailto:tlyon@law.usc.edu)

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