



Forensic interviewing is a means of gathering information from a victim or witness for use in a legal setting, such as a court hearing. It is a key component of many child protective services investigations. The purpose of these interviews is to gather factual information in a legally defensible and developmentally appropriate manner about whether a child (or other person) has been abused (Newlin et al., 2015). Forensic interviews are conducted by trained professionals, including child welfare caseworkers, law enforcement, and specialized forensic interviewers at children's advocacy centers (CACs). These interviewers are frequently part of a multidisciplinary team investigating the case. This factsheet provides child welfare professionals with a brief overview of forensic interviewing so they can better understand how such interviews affect their practice with children and families.






Use of Anatomical Dolls and Diagrams

The use of anatomical dolls and diagrams to help children describe or demonstrate their experiences is still up for debate in the field of forensic interviewing (Lyon, 2012). Open-ended questions and probes encourage free recall by the child (i.e., the child is not externally prompted to recall a particular memory) and are most accurate, but in children free recall is often limited (Faller, 2007). Anatomical dolls and drawings rely on recognition memory (i.e., the child chooses a response from a series of alternatives), which may be less accurate but more detailed. The cue of the anatomical doll or diagram could trigger the child's recognition of other body-related experiences. Proponents of anatomical dolls and diagrams rely on analogue research that indicates they can help a child disclose actual experiences with a very small increase in false positives. Opponents emphasize that free recall memory is more accurate and are concerned interviewers may use dolls or diagrams in leading or suggestive ways. Further, there is a modest body of research that indicates that children age 3 and younger cannot make the representational shift to understand that the doll is being used to represent themselves or the alleged offender (Faller, 2015). In addition, forensic interviewing models differ about if and when to introduce dolls or diagrams in the interview. For example, some models introduce dolls or diagrams in the rapport-building part of the interview to clarify a child's terminology for body parts. Other models advise only using them after the child has disclosed abuse (McCoy & Keen, 2014). Finally, some models caution about their use altogether. The use of anatomical dolls and diagrams will vary based on the model used by the interviewer and local practice. When given flexibility about the use of dolls and diagrams, interviewers should review the relevant research and determine if their use is appropriate given the context of each case.

For additional information, refer to <http://www.gundersenhealth.org/app/files/public/3580/NCPTC-Anatomical-Dolls-and-Diagrams-position-paper.pdf> by the Gundersen National Child Protection Training Center and the ChildFirst/Finding Words Forensic Interview Training Programs (<http://www.gundersenhealth.org/app/files/public/3580/NCPTC-Anatomical-Dolls-and-Diagrams-position-paper.pdf>) and <http://www.chicagocac.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/NCAC-Position-paper-use-of-human-figure-drawings.pdf> by the National CAC (<http://www.chicagocac.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/NCAC-Position-paper-use-of-human-figure-drawings.pdf>).





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