

**Interviewing Children:
A Training Video for Child Welfare
Social Workers and Forensic
Interviewers**

**A guide to accompany
the training video**

**PRODUCED BY PACCA
(PROVINCIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHILD ABUSE)
MANITOBA, CANADA, 2009**

Interviewing Children

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Child abuse is a serious community problem. The maltreatment of children, whether physical abuse or sexual abuse, can affect children's physical health and safety, as well as their emotional health and well-being. Simply stated, abuse is detrimental to children. For some children, the negative effects of abuse are life-long, affecting their self-esteem, their sense of competence, their relationships with family members and peers, and their ability to form healthy families as adults.

Child abuse is a problem in countries around the world, including Canada. It affects all communities, all cultures, all socio-economic groups. We all must work together to address, and prevent, child abuse.

This training video is one of our efforts to respond to the problem of child abuse. Produced by the Manitoba Provincial Advisory Committee on Child Abuse, known as PACCA, this training video will help child and family services social workers develop the necessary interview skills to conduct child abuse investigations.

Conducting skillful interviews in child abuse investigations is critical. Often, we must rely on the disclosures made by children to understand what has happened to them in order to protect them from further harm and provide them with the necessary supports to help them recover, physically and emotionally, from child abuse. Sometimes there are no physical signs that maltreatment has occurred. Sometimes children are afraid of the consequences of telling. Sometimes children have trouble putting into words the things that have happened to them, things that they may not fully understand to be abuse. Sometimes children want to protect their families from the consequences of disclosing abuse, even though they desperately want the abuse to stop. Helping children tell their stories, so that we can help them be safe and help families to keep children safe, is the goal of child abuse investigations.

In this training video, you will learn how to conduct a child abuse investigation interview. The stages of an interview, and the skills involved at different stages, will be discussed and demonstrated in video segments of social workers interviewing children and adolescents who are disclosing physical or sexual abuse. Additionally, questions to assess the developmental level of preschoolers as part of a child abuse investigation interview will also be presented. Our goal is to develop your knowledge of child abuse

interviewing, strengthen your interviewing skills, and build your confidence in this challenging but important aspect of child and family services work.

The social workers that you will see in this video are experienced and trained in child abuse investigations. The children and youth that you will meet are not victims of abuse, but actors who are playing the part of an abused child. The dialogue in the interviews is not scripted, in an effort to demonstrate good interviewing skills in as natural a manner as possible. As a result, you will notice that workers utilize good interviewing skills in a variety of ways, often in response to the needs of the child at that moment in time, creating a more realistic portrayal of investigative interviews.

This training video focuses on the basic skills of child abuse interviewing. Specialized skills may be required when interviewing children who have special needs, such as disabilities, speech and language difficulties, developmental delay, or significant emotional trauma. It is also important to be familiar with and sensitive to the culture and customs of the children in our communities, especially when interviewing children whose culture is different from your own. Advanced training and ongoing professional development in these areas is recommended.

Keeping children safe from abuse is the responsibility of all community members. Child and family services workers have an important job, and a legislated mandate, to investigate allegations of child abuse as part of their role in the community. This video is a valuable resource that will help you to meet this responsibility.

*PACCA
Provincial Advisory Committee on Child Abuse
Manitoba, Canada*

Interviewing Children

How to Use This Training Video

Interviewing Children is a training video for child welfare social workers, forensic interviewers, and other mandated investigators who are responsible for the investigation of allegations of child abuse. The training video presents improvisations of investigative interviews, conducted by trained Canadian social workers who are interviewing children playing the part of a child who has been abused. The intent of this training video is to demonstrate the basic skills of investigative interviewing in a structured, skillful way, while also illustrating how interviews need to be flexible and adaptive to the needs of the child.

The training video is best utilized in a group presentation format, overseen by a specialist with expertise in child abuse investigations, such as an abuse coordinator, a supervisor, a training coordinator, or an external consultant. Group presentations allow for discussion, raising questions, examination of case examples, and rehearsal of skills in roleplays with colleagues. Alternately, supervisors or senior workers may choose to view this training video with new staff, to provide an opportunity for discussion and ensure comprehension of information and acquisition of skills. This training guide is provided as an additional resource to support trainees in gaining knowledge and skills, to facilitate note-taking and serve as a personal recording of one's learning that can be reviewed and referenced as needed.

The emphasis of this training video is on the basic stages and skills of investigative interviewing. However, investigative interviewing is only one component of the range of services children who have been maltreated may require. Children who have been abused may require protective intervention, such as placement in agency care, examination by a physician for assessment and treatment of injury, and assessment for trauma or other emotional consequences of maltreatment. Parents, both non-offending parents and caregivers who are alleged perpetrators of abuse, will need to be interviewed. Child welfare case planning to address the causes and contributing factors to child maltreatment must occur. Decisions about criminal charges and treatment of alleged offenders must be made. These critical aspects of good child protection work are best addressed through one's academic preparation for working in the field of child welfare, through training specific to the issues of child abuse, through supervision and professional consultation, and through multi-disciplinary case planning and coordination.

While this training video is representative of the knowledge and skills considered to be "best practice" at the time of development, viewers are reminded that advances in interviewing techniques may occur over time and should appropriately inform practice. Further, this training video does not substitute for the importance and value of case consultation with one's supervisor, agency director, or other experts in child abuse investigation.

Interviewing Children

What is child abuse?

This training video focuses on interviewing children who may have experienced physical or sexual abuse.

Physical abuse is characterized by physical harm or injury as a result of the action, or lack of action, of a child's caregiver. Although the caregiver may not have intended to harm the child, the injury is not accidental and therefore is considered to be physical abuse. Physical abuse may be a single episode or involve repeated incidents, and can range in severity, from a minor bruise to serious injuries that are life-threatening.

In Canada, physical abuse also is considered to have occurred if a child is injured when a caregiver uses physical punishment that involves:

- the use of objects to punish children,
- slaps or blows to the head,
- physical punishment of children under the age of three and of teenagers
- physical punishment carried out in anger or frustration, and
- conduct that is degrading, inhuman, or harmful.

Sexual abuse includes a wide range of behaviors, such as fondling, penetration, oral sex, exhibitionism, and sexual exploitation. It can involve varying degrees of violence and emotional trauma.

Under the *Criminal Code of Canada*, children under the age of 16 cannot consent to sexual activity. However, even if a youth consents to or participates willingly in sexual contact, the activity may constitute sexual abuse, especially if the involved individual is in a position of trust or power in relation to the youth, such as a parent, relative, teacher, coach, or employer.

The Context of Child Abuse Investigations

Responding to reports of child abuse is a responsibility shared by many professionals in each community. Child and family services agencies are mandated by legislation to investigate allegations of physical and sexual abuse of children and take action to ensure that children are safe and protected. But child welfare social workers are only one part of the community response to child abuse.

Physical abuse and sexual abuse of children is against the law. Individuals who abuse children may face criminal charges and other legal consequences imposed by the justice system. The police have a responsibility to investigate allegations of criminal activity and work with lawyers and judges to ensure that individuals who have broken the

law are appropriately prosecuted. Child welfare workers and police officers must work together to ensure that children are protected from individuals who have harmed them.

Child abuse may result in injury. Medical practitioners specially trained in the identification of child abuse must be consulted to assess the child's injury, provide medical treatment, and assist police and child welfare workers to determine how the child's injury occurred. It is important for these three systems to work together to ensure the safety of children.

In some jurisdictions, child advocacy centres provide a coordinated response to the investigation of child abuse. These multi-disciplinary centres ensure that child welfare, law enforcement, medical services and prosecution work in a collaborative, child-friendly environment to promote a child-centred approach to investigation and to strengthen prosecutions of alleged offenders. It is also an opportunity to better plan for children's treatment needs to aid in their recovery from child abuse.

The Child Abuse Interview

The purpose of an investigative interview is to obtain information from the child, in his or her own words, about what has happened. Investigative interviews of children should be developmentally appropriate, sensitive to the child's culture and gender, unbiased, and respectful. Information learned from the child, as well as from others who can add to a complete understanding of the facts, assists child protection workers to make sound decisions regarding children's safety needs, and aids the justice system in determining if a child has been abused.

Often, child and family services workers are the first to respond to an allegation that a child has been abused. Before conducting an interview of a child who may have been abused, it is important to check agency records, as well as records of other child welfare agencies in the jurisdiction, to determine if the child or the family has had previous child welfare involvement. Such information can be critical in putting the current allegation in a more comprehensive context and facilitate better decision making to ensure the child's safety. Additionally, it is important to follow your agency's child abuse investigation protocols, which may include consultation with police services, joint interviews with police officers, or involvement of a child advocacy centre or other specialized abuse investigation service.

Investigative interviewers should have knowledge of child development, the dynamics of child abuse, the effects of abuse on children, cultural diversity, children's disabilities, legal issues regarding child abuse investigations, and of course, child interviewing techniques.

Knowing how to conduct investigative interviews to determine if the child is in need of protection is an important skill. A complete child abuse investigative interview generally includes the following stages:

1. Introduction
2. Building Rapport
3. Explaining the Rules
4. Telling the Truth
5. Topic of Concern
6. The Disclosure
7. Clarification
8. Conclusion

Each stage utilizes specific skills and techniques to accomplish particular goals. However, the investigative interviewer needs to be flexible. Although the stages of an investigative interview presented here provide a useful framework, children's needs may require some adaptation to the sequencing of stages. In this training video, you will see some variations, as social workers respond to the needs of the child at that moment.

Additional interview stages may also be required, such as an assessment of the child's functioning when interviewing a preschooler or a child with developmental delay. Later in this training video, we'll look at some ways to assess the developmental functioning of a preschool child.

Let's begin now with the stages and skills of the basic child abuse investigative interview.

Introduction

Interviews with children who may have been abused may happen in a variety of settings. Often, the environment is one that is familiar to the child, such as the child's school or home, but interviews may also happen in settings such as a child and family services office, a hospital, a police station, or a child advocacy centre. Interviews should be conducted in a private setting where the child can be comfortable and not distracted.

In beginning the interview with the child, introduce yourself by name and describe your role and where you work. It is also important to explain the purpose of the interview, which may vary from situation to situation. It can be helpful for children to understand that you will be asking them a lot of questions. Reassure the child that you have spoken with lots of other kids before, and that you are interested in talking with the child.

Steven, a teenager, has come to the local child and family services agency to speak to a social worker about some concerns. The social worker, Lindsay, demonstrates a range of skills in introducing herself to Steven, explaining her role, and helping him to feel comfortable.

When interviewing a younger child, the social worker's language must be age- and stage-appropriate. Use common, every day words that are familiar to the child. Use

shorter sentences, no more than 2 – 3 words longer than the child’s sentence length. Break long questions into shorter ones, asking only one question at a time. In this example, Shawenne, the social worker, meets Angeline for the first time at her school.

Explaining the Rules

Children and youth are acutely aware of the power differences between themselves and adults, especially adults in a position of authority such as teachers, social workers, or police officers. It is important that children and adolescents who are being interviewed about being abused know that they have some power during the interview process. The following rules can be explained to help kids understand their role in the interview process and give them some degree of control. These guidelines also help kids to talk about what has happened to them as accurately as possible:

- If you don’t understand something I ask you, please tell me and I will ask the question in a different way.
- If I make a mistake about something and don’t understand something you’ve told me, please tell me. I want to be sure that I understand what you’re trying to say.
- If I ask you something that makes you feel uncomfortable about answering, please tell me. You can say “I don’t want to answer” or “Stop” or “Pass” to let me know you are uncomfortable.
- If you aren’t sure about an answer, don’t try to guess. Just tell me that you don’t know.

Liisa, the social worker, is meeting with Alexis, an adolescent who has disclosed sexual abuse to her school guidance counsellor. Before discussing the sexual abuse, Liisa ensures that Alexis is familiar with her rights and the interview guidelines that will help to ensure an accurate understanding of her experience.

It can be helpful to provide children with an example of how the interview rules work. In this example, Shawenne empowers Angeline to accurately answer a question to which she does not know the answer.

However, due to their utter dependence on adults and their stage of child development, young children find it more difficult to correct or disagree with an adult, even when they have been given permission to do so. For many young children, and for youth with developmental disabilities, wanting to please adults and demonstrating compliance with adult expectations is not unusual. Consequently, it is important for investigators to follow sound interviewing techniques to minimize the possibility of inaccurate or misunderstood information from children during their disclosures. The following excerpt illustrates a young child’s response to the social worker’s discussion of the rules of the interview.

In a demonstration of combining skills through the first two stages of the interview process, Jennifer, the social worker, introduces herself to 11-year-old Paige and sets the stage for the interview to begin.

Building Rapport

Children and youth often feel nervous talking with social workers, partly because they are strangers but also because they are disclosing information about what has happened to them, information that may have them feeling anxious, upset, or afraid. It is important for social workers to build rapport with children and youth when they first meet them, by developing some trust and demonstrating care and concern for the child. Questions about the child's life, such as experiences at school, relationships with friends, interests and hobbies, and family demographics are often useful ways to help children feel comfortable sharing information about themselves in an interview.

In general, open-ended questions are the most effective way to encourage children to share information about themselves. Open-ended questions allow children to provide their own responses, without the potential influence or bias of the interviewer. Research has found that children who are asked open-ended questions tend to feel more at ease and share more information than children who are asked closed-ended ones.

Examples of open-ended questions are:

- What are the things you like best about school?
- What are some things that you don't like about school?
- Who's in your family?
- What kinds of things do you like to do with your friends?

Closed-ended questions tend to result in more narrow, less detailed responses. They can be helpful, following open-ended questions, to clarify information, but may lead to the child feeling defensive if used frequently. Examples of closed-ended questions are:

- What grade are you in?
- Do you like sports?
- Do you like math?
- Does your family live in a house?

In the next video excerpt, Lindsay, the social worker, continues her first interview with Steven. She spends time developing trust and rapport with Steven, using numerous open-ended questions to get to know him and help him become ready to talk about the more difficult or emotional issues that are on his mind.

Telling the Truth

After rapport with the child has been established and the guidelines of the interview have been reviewed, it is important to emphasize the need to speak the truth during the interview. Research has indicated that as early as the age of 4, children can understand what it means to lie. However, language and cognitive skills during early childhood make it difficult for children to define these terms in their own words. Children can give a more clear indication of their understanding of telling the truth and telling lies when provided with concrete examples of facts or non-facts. Adolescents, however, are often able to demonstrate more advanced understanding of the complexities of truth, lies, and exaggerations.

To illustrate these developmental differences, let's look at two different examples of discussing truth and lies in the investigative interview. In this first segment, Lindsay asks Steven, an adolescent, to distinguish between these terms.

Young children do not have the same developmental capacity to explain their understanding of the truth. This does not mean that children do not have some knowledge of this concept, but they will need age-appropriate assistance to demonstrate their understanding of truth-telling. In this excerpt, six-year-old Breanne cannot independently define the terms "truth" or "lie" but under guided questioning, she is able to show her capacity to distinguish between truth and lies.

Especially with children under the age of 7 or children with developmental delay, offer examples of telling the truth and telling a lie, rather than asking children to explain the concepts. Examples to illustrate truth and lies to children must be specific, consistent with the child's language capacity, and unambiguous. It is most helpful to use examples that are observable in the interview setting, such as:

- Can you tell me what colour my shirt is? [assuming the shirt is red]
If I said that my shirt is blue, would I be telling the truth or telling a lie?

Or

- [while holding up a book] If someone were to tell you that this is a pencil, is that a truth or a lie?

Or

- If someone said that it was raining inside this room, would that be true or not true?

In general, it is good practice to reinforce with children the importance of telling the truth during the interview. However, jurisdictions vary on how much emphasis should be placed on demonstrating children's understanding of truth and lies in the

interview. Some interview guidelines do not include a stage focusing on truth and lies at all. It is best practice to consult with your agency and your Crown prosecutor about expected interview protocol on this topic.

Topic of Concern

Even after some rapport has been established, some children need time before they are ready to disclose their experience of maltreatment. Open-ended, general inquiry questions do not assume that abuse may have occurred. Instead, they are questions intended to help children talk about their lives, their families, and their overall well-being. Questions that focus on day-to-day routines, familial contexts, and specific details about the child's general life experiences help social workers to assess family dynamics, the child's level of functioning, and identify any issues that may require further investigation. Additionally, it may help children feel more comfortable about voluntarily disclosing incidents of abuse to the social worker.

In this example, Shawenne, the social worker, gently guides Angeline in a discussion about a typical day in the family home. Angeline shares with Shawenne information that suggests that her mother has a problem with alcohol, a problem which sometimes leads to emotional abuse of Angeline.

The social worker is empathic and caring towards Angeline as she begins to talk about some of her worries about her family, such as her mom's alcohol use and the hurtful name-calling. This approach helps Angeline to feel more comfortable about sharing even more difficult issues, such as incidents of abuse.

Some children and adolescents may be more difficult to engage or may be very reluctant to disclose that abuse has been happening to them. They may be ashamed of the abuse and blame themselves or minimize the abuse, they may want to protect their families, or they may feel discouraged and hopeless about things in their family ever changing. It is important that workers take their time in the interview and do not rush children to make a disclosure. Diana, the social worker in this next example, interviews Jack, a teenager who has threatened to run away from home because of physical altercations with his mom rather than seek help for the family. Diana takes her time in getting to know Jack and understanding what life is like for him in his family before she explores with him any incidents of abuse.

In addition to the abuse that Jack is beginning to disclose, it is clear that there are many things going on in Jack's family that are of concern to child welfare. While investigating allegations of abuse and intervening to keep children physically safe is important, child welfare workers also need to consider children's emotional well-being and whether their emotional needs are being met in the family. Once safety concerns are addressed, family dynamics often need to change in order to ensure that children's best interests are adequately met within their families.

The Disclosure

The Disclosure is a critical stage in the investigative interview. During this stage, the child tells the social worker about what has happened that may constitute abuse. Many children disclose only after the social worker has spent time getting to know them and explained the purpose and process of the investigative interview, as we have seen earlier in this training video. However, some children will be ready to disclose what has happened to them early on in the interview. In either case, it is important that the social worker gather as much information as possible, in the child's own words, while following accepted interview questioning protocol.

These investigative protocol include the following:

1. Encourage the child to talk about what has happened to them in a free narrative.

Tell me everything you can remember.

2. Use open questions. Open questions are very broad and guide the child to share more information about what has happened to them.

What else do you remember?

What happened next?

Where did this happen?

Could you tell me more about that?

When did that happen?

Tell me about a time that was different.

It is important to use simply constructed questions that are clearly worded and appropriate to the child's language and developmental understanding.

3. Ask focused questions. After the child has responded as much as they can to your invitation to talk about their experiences and to your open questions, it may be helpful to ask focused questions to clarify the information.

Focused questions are specific, but not leading, and do not introduce information that you may have from other sources but did not obtain from the child. Focused questions can be useful in clarifying information or inconsistencies and in gathering more details. Focused questions are usually specific to the actual disclosure that the child is making:

Where was your mom when this happened?

What did your mom say when she saw the mark on your face?

What were you wearing at the time?

What time of day did this happen?

Who else saw the fight between you and your dad?

4. Closed questions. If additional information is still required from the child after encouraging a free narrative and using open and focused questions to assist the child, a limited number of closed questions may be posed. Closed questions often result in single word responses, such as:

Was your mom at home when your dad hit you?

Were you wearing pyjamas when this happened?

Did your brother see your mom fighting with you?

Closed questions suggest to the child that only a 'yes' or 'no' or otherwise simple response is required. Further, closed questions do not encourage elaboration. Younger children especially may want to please adults and may give an affirmative answer to a closed question, even if incorrect.

Multiple choice questions can also be considered closed questions and should be rarely used. If necessary to pose a multiple choice question, build it on information already provided by the child in order to clarify details. Be sure to allow the child to choose an open option other than the ones presented in the multiple choice question. For example,

You told me that this happened at home. Did this happen in the kitchen or in the living room or maybe it happened in a different room?

You said you can't remember how many times you got hit. Did you get hit one time, or maybe it was more than one time

5. Leading Questions. Leading questions should be used with the greatest of care and only as a last resort. On occasion, it may be necessary to ask a leading question, especially if a child has already disclosed to another individual but has not disclosed during the investigative interview. For example:

I want to talk to you about the reason I am here today. I understand that you told your teacher about something that happened to you. Can you tell me what you told your teacher?

I notice that you have a bruise on your arm. Can you tell me how that happened?

I imagine that you might be worried about speaking with me today. I want to reassure you that my job is to make sure that you are safe. Your teacher told me that you were upset this morning because your mom hit you. What happened?

Leading questions may be viewed as encouraging a child to make a disclosure that is inaccurate or untruthful and may not be legally defensible. However, if all other interviewing strategies to assist the child to disclose have been unsuccessful, it may be necessary as a last resort to use leading questions to better assess the child's safety and need for protective intervention, even if the opportunity to pursue criminal charges, if warranted, becomes compromised.

The most problematic leading questions are those that make a statement, adding a short question that asks the child to affirm the statement as truth. For example,

Your daddy touched your peepee, didn't he?

Did your mom abuse you?

These questions are inappropriate and should never be used, even with children who are reluctant to disclose. They provide no opportunity to really clarify what has happened to the child, may create guilt or shame for the child, and are not defensible questions in court proceedings.

In a continuation of the interview of Paige, the social worker, Jennifer, begins by asking open-ended and focused questions to better understand the family context and dynamics. Eventually, Paige discloses an incident of conflict with her mother that resulted in her mother physically assaulting her by punching her in the arm. After Paige has told what happened, Jennifer ensures that she has a full and accurate understanding of Paige's disclosure by summarizing what she has heard and confirming the details with Paige.

Clarification

As we discussed, during the Disclosure Phase, focused questions may be used to clarify information that the child has shared in order to clear up any inconsistencies and to gather more detailed information to better understand what has happened to the child. It is also an opportunity to determine if there is any corroborating evidence to support the child's disclosure. Corroborating information may include witnesses to the abuse,

physical evidence such as injuries or damaged property, photographs, video or audio recordings of the incident, other victims of abuse, or other individuals to whom the child may have disclosed.

- witnesses to the abuse
- physical evidence
- photographs
- video or audio recordings
- other victims of abuse
- other individuals to whom the child may have disclosed

In this interview, Mark, the social worker, is meeting with Zak, who has a noticeable injury on his face. After Mark has spent a few moments explaining his role to Zak and establishing some rapport, he moves more quickly into inviting Zak to talk about what has happened to cause the injury. Focused questions are utilized to better understand the incident of abuse that has occurred and to assess for any corroboration.

Conclusion

It is important to end the interview by advising the child what will happen next and how the child's safety will be ensured. Often, the social worker will not be able to provide a final plan to the child, as this will be determined by the outcome of the following processes:

- involvement of a child advocacy centre
- A medical examination of the child who has or may have an injury
- A consultation with the police and decisions around police interviews of the child and/or the alleged offender
- Interviews of the child's parents (non-offending parent, and the alleged offender, if one of the child's parents)
- Safety assessment and safety planning

For some children, immediate safety plans must be made by the social worker until these consultations and interviews have been concluded. Placement with extended family or formal agency placement may be required to guarantee the child's safety while these additional steps are conducted. In some cases, the alleged offender may agree to leave the child's home environment to allow the child to remain at home with safe, non-offending caregivers until the conclusion of the investigation.

Continuing the interview between Mark and Zak, we will see how Mark explores Zak's thoughts about safety and describes his responsibilities in ensuring Zak's safety. Older youth may be engaged in their safety planning, while younger children must rely on adults to ensure that their safety needs are addressed. However, regardless of the age of the child or adolescent, the agency must take responsibility for ensuring that they are no longer at risk of harm.

Sexual Abuse

The interview process that we have outlined in this training video applies to investigating situations of physical or sexual abuse of children. However, the videotaped interview examples that we have viewed so far involve children who were disclosing physical abuse.

Sexual abuse allegations are sometimes more uncomfortable for children and youth to talk about, and are sometimes more uncomfortable for social workers to talk about as well.

It is especially important when children are disclosing sexual abuse that the social worker is open, supportive, and reassuring. The worker must be comfortable with the terminology of sexual behavior, including children's language for private body parts and their description of sexual activity that may have occurred. Social workers must be able to manage their own emotional reactions and not show shock or disapproval of the child, due to the high degree of shame that usually accompanies sexual abuse. The responsibility of adults to refrain from sexual behavior with children must be emphasized.

Children and youth have often been pressured or threatened by the offender into keeping the sexual abuse secret. Sometimes, the offender has told them that they won't be believed if they tell. Frequently, there are no physical indicators that sexual abuse has occurred. Consequently, the investigation often must rely entirely on the child's disclosure.

Good interviewing practices are extremely important when sexual abuse is being disclosed. In this next video example, Diana meets with Scott, an adolescent who is upset about the sexual behavior of someone outside of his family, his hockey coach. He is not sure how to interpret this behavior, but he has been feeling very uncomfortable, to the point where he no longer wants to go to hockey practice.

Sexual abuse can often produce confusing and conflicting emotions for children. Kids may not recognize that they are being sexually exploited or abused by adults, due to their lack of knowledge and experience with sexual behavior, and due to the grooming processes that many offenders utilize to gain children's trust. In the interview you've just seen, Scott was visibly uncomfortable with what had happened to him and struggled to tell the social worker about his experience. Diana validated Scott's feelings of discomfort, was sensitive to Scott's difficulty in interpreting his coach's behavior as abusive, and was clear that adults need to take responsibility for their behavior. In addition to the coach needing to be responsible for his actions, Diana was clear that other adults, such as herself, the police, and Scott's parents had responsibilities in ensuring Scott's safety together.

Review

In this training video, we have examined each stage of the investigative interview process separately, through discussing the purpose, features, and skills associated with each stage and by watching videotaped demonstrations of social workers interviewing children and youth. Some interview segments have focused on a specific stage, while others have demonstrated several stages in sequence, to demonstrate the overall interview process.

To help review what you have learned in this training program, we will now watch two complete investigative interviews. In the first video, the social worker arrives at the local high school to interview Cynthia about physical abuse that has been happening. Watch for each stage of the investigative interview as the interview progresses and take note of the skills and characteristics of each stage.

In the second example, the social worker, Liisa, interviews Alexis, a 17-year-old who has already disclosed to her school guidance counsellor that she is being sexually abused by her stepfather. The fact that Alexis is an older adolescent and has already made a disclosure allows Liisa to initiate the disclosure stage a little earlier in the interview process.

The disclosure of sexual abuse that Alexis makes in this interview is detailed and descriptive. Social workers need to be prepared for the strong emotions that they might experience when children or youth disclose sexual abuse. It is important to manage our reactions so that we do not make the child feel guilty, ashamed or embarrassed about what has happened to them. It is important for children to be able to tell all that has happened to them, in spite of our feelings of anger, sadness, or fear.

The following video may create strong emotions for you. It is an important opportunity for you to assess how you might feel when a child is disclosing sexual abuse to you and to develop, in consultation with your supervisor, strategies to cope with your feelings.

Each of these videos demonstrates variations in stages of the interview process, based on the degree of disclosure that has already occurred and the child's comfort level in disclosing. In the first example, Cynthia has not previously disclosed details about how she received her injuries. Consequently, many more questions are required to ascertain how the injuries occurred and the frequency and history of physical abuse in the family. In the second example, Alexis has already made a detailed disclosure to her guidance counsellor and provides the social worker with sufficient information to confirm that she is a youth in need of protection. It is not necessary to ask her to provide more details than are necessary to assess her safety and need for protection. Additional details for the purpose of a criminal investigation will be determined by the police during a subsequent interview.

Additionally, some children may find making a disclosure of physical or sexual abuse to be emotionally upsetting. It is good interview practice to give the child time to explain what has happened to them without pressing them when they become emotional. Interviewers can move to a less threatening topic, or go back and review information that has already been disclosed, to give the young person time to regain his or her composure and readiness to continue the disclosure.

Conclusion

This training video has introduced you to the essential skills of conducting a child-focused investigative interview. The stages of the investigative interview were discussed and demonstrated in excerpts from videotaped interviews with children and adolescents. To recap, the stages of an investigative interview are:

1. Introduction
2. Building Rapport
3. Explaining the Rules
4. Telling the Truth
5. Topic of Concern
6. The Disclosure
7. Clarification
8. Conclusion

Conducting your investigative interviews in this planned way will help the child to feel more at ease and reduce the likelihood of additional trauma during the investigative process. It is an approach to investigative interviewing that facilitates the gathering of information in an accurate, child-sensitive way. As well as assisting children to talk about what has happened to them, this approach supports better decision making by child welfare workers and by police, strengthening our capacity to keep children safe from maltreatment.

These stages of an investigative interview are also applicable when one is interviewing a preschooler child or a child with developmental delay. It is important to conduct a brief assessment of the preschool child's functioning, in terms of their language comprehension, conceptual knowledge, and general functioning before beginning the investigative interview. A brief assessment will help the investigating worker to better understand the child's skills in communication and assist the worker to adapt his or her own language to the developmental understanding of the child.

In this final component of the training video, we will discuss components of a conducting a brief developmental assessment of preschoolers as part of the investigative interview.

The Preschooler Interview

When interviewing young children, a brief assessment provides the investigating worker with important insight into the child's level of development, comprehension, and functioning. This assessment is important in helping workers to determine how to adapt their own communication to ensure a more complete understanding of the child's experience. Asking questions in language that is developmentally appropriate for a particular child will result in more complete and clear information from the child.

The video examples that you will see in this section involve social workers meeting with preschool children. The children are not playing the role of a child who has been abused, so there are no disclosures depicted here. Instead, the excerpts demonstrate important components of a developmental assessment with a preschooler. As with all children, a range of skills and levels of comprehension will be evident, illustrating how there can be variations of normative development within age ranges.

In general, communication with young children should involve short sentences, and words that are common and familiar to the child. Open-ended questions are preferable, rather than closed questions that result in short, yes or no responses. When asked closed questions, children may feel obligated to agree with adults or provide what they perceive to be the right answers, which may not be an accurate reflection of what has happened to them. As with all interviews of children, leading questions should be avoided. The goal is to facilitate communication for the preschooler so that you can best understand what has happened to the child.

Investigating workers should introduce themselves to preschoolers using language that will aid children's understanding of the role of the social worker and the basic expectations of the investigative interview. In this example, Jennifer, the social worker, meets with Jacob to explain her role and what will happen in the interview.

Compared to older children who are more experienced in expressive language, younger children may have more difficulty responding in detail to the open-ended question to talk about what has happened to them. Further, young children may be shy around adults who are new to them, inhibiting their comfort in expressing themselves completely. In this example, Lynda asks Carter to tell her about something that had happened to him that day, prior to the interview. Like many other preschoolers, Carter is able to provide a complete description of his experience with free-recall prompts, a series of open-ended questions, and some focused questions to clarify details.

Asking young children to talk about something that has happened to them recently, before talking about situations involving alleged abuse, allows children to become familiar with the expectations of the interview: that they will speak in full about things that have happened to them and that the interviewing worker will ask questions to better understand their experience. It also allows the worker to assess the child's ability to recall events in their lives, to understand their language skills, and to determine how to best assist the child to share their experiences.

The Rapport Building stage of the investigative interview is an appropriate time to conduct a brief assessment of the child's developmental functioning. Questions pertaining to children's knowledge of themselves, such as their age and birthdate, as well as basic concepts around the alphabet, counting, colours, and seasons can be helpful to engage children in responding to questions as well as provide the worker with a basic sense of the child's functioning. Sometimes, children may be a little shy around strangers, so it is important to create a relaxed, comfortable environment for the child. In this example, the social worker Ursula meets with four-year-old Zachary and helps him to feel at ease. She offers some guidance where appropriate, always allowing Zachary to determine how much he wants to participate.

By six years of age, children can demonstrate a more complex understanding of dates and the sequencing of dates, often in reference to seasons or major holidays or events. Additionally, they can grasp concepts such as over, under, on, and other themes that may be important in accurately interpreting a child's experience when conducting a child abuse investigation, as illustrated in these next two video examples.

Often, physical or practical examples help children to demonstrate their knowledge, as illustrated by Lynda in the following interview with Carter. Notice how questions can be asked in a variety of ways to allow children to show their understanding and consistency in their responses.

As children reach primary school age, many have developed the fine motor skills required to write some letters and their name. In this excerpt of an interview of Breanne, Liisa, the social worker, briefly gauges Breanne's basic printing skills.

In abuse investigations, it is important to understand children's exact meaning. Their meaning can be determined by confirming children's awareness of body parts and their ability to describe daily routines and relate specific events that have happened in their lives. In this interview, Lynda speaks with Carter about these themes, summarizing what she has understood from Carter to confirm accuracy and asking questions to clarify additional details.

Preschool children often have trouble putting into words their understanding of more abstract concepts, such as safety. However, they are often able to provide examples of safety rules that they are familiar with and they can identify who they would turn to if they felt unsafe or afraid. In this first example, six-year-old Breanne has a number of safety examples. In the second video excerpt, four-year-old Zachary has been frightened by monsters in a television program. Although he has a harder time articulating his fears, he is very clear about who he can go to for safety and support.

When conducting an investigative interview with a preschool child, the same best practices are followed as when interviewing an older child. However, as we have seen, interviewing preschoolers may take more time to establish rapport and to help children feel comfortable with the interview process. Additionally, it provides an important opportunity to assess the child's language and cognitive skills, to facilitate a more

accurate understanding of the child's meaning. Using practical examples so that children can demonstrate their meaning, rather than explain in words, can be helpful. Utilizing the skills we have seen in this training video with preschool children can result in better quality interviews and a more emotionally supportive experience for the child.

Conclusion

Interviewing children about allegations of abuse is challenging work. Having knowledge of best interviewing practices and an understanding of child development are critical foundational skills in conducting child abuse investigations. It is also important to practice our interviewing skills and receive feedback from supervisors and experienced colleagues so that we can provide children with the best possible interview experience. As you know, children are often the only witnesses to the incidents of abuse that have happened to them, and there may be no physical evidence to tell their story for them. It is our responsibility to help children as best we can to describe what has happened to them, so that we can ensure their safety and well-being in their families and in our communities.