



# VICTIM SERVICES DIVISION

*STRENGTH, RENEWAL, AND HOPE FOR EVERY VICTIM*

## **Child/Adolescent Forensic Interview Interpreter Training**

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# Disclaimer

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Please be advised that this training will include some **explicit content** involving physical, emotional, and sexual abuse of children.

# Forensic Interview

The goal of a forensic interview is to obtain a statement from a child/adolescent, in a developmentally sensitive, unbiased and legally defensible manner, that will support accurate and fair decision making in the criminal justice and child welfare systems.

Information obtained from an investigative interview might be useful for making treatment decisions, the interview is not part of the treatment process.

# Interview Considerations

These are fundamentally different interviews because of social, emotional, cognitive, sexual and language development.

Policy & protocol guidelines are established for the FBI on interviewing children and adolescents.

How a child/adolescent victim is interviewed can determine the threshold of evidence and statements admitted into court. If done incorrectly, the interview could become the focus of the court case.

# Translating vs. Interpreting

Common errors when discussing and planning for an interview in another language

Translating= written content

Interpreting= verbal content

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**Say What I Say,  
Say What They Say  
EXACTLY how it is said.**

# Wording is Important

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“ *When interpreting during a forensic interview, the manner in which the questions are asked may seem awkward or unnecessary when interpreting them back to the child. Keep in mind, however, that the wording is important. Forensic questions are designed to increase the accuracy of the child’s statement and the validity of the interview.* ”

# Interpreters in Forensic Interviews



Neutrality



Indirect Interpretation/Translation



Understanding of Best Practice



Preparedness to Deal With  
Traumatic Detail




# Neutrality

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The interpreter is not an advocate for the child or family



The interpreter should not try to explain or help witnesses/observers by expanding or rephrasing questions and answers



Use of verbal and non-verbal cues

# Indirect Interpretation

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## **Inaccurate interpretation may result in:**

- Contamination of the witnesses' account
- Potential inadmissibility of evidence
- Diminished credibility of the witness in court

## **Questions or concepts that cannot be interpreted verbatim:**

- Alert the interviewer
- Allow the interviewer to rephrase the question

**Example:** "how come"

# Indirect Interpretation

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- Interpret everything—even if seemingly unrelated.
- Convey content/spirit of what was said; provide a cultural framework if appropriate.
- Questions/concepts with multiple options for translation - GO SIMPLE
- How a question is asked is just as important as the response:
  - Question structure (i.e., multiple choice, open ended, yes/no) should not be changed.
  - It is not the role of the interpreter to offer suggestions or attempt to clarify questions.

*“With children, even if the structure of the question is changed ever so slightly, it can have big ramifications...the smallest things can make all the difference.”*

# Best Practice in Forensic Interviews

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## **FATIGUE**

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- To the child, the interviewer, the interpreter
- Use of interpreter for the first time may be unfamiliar and stressful for children
- Interpretation increases the cognitive load on child

## **INTERRUPTION OF FREE NARRATIVE**

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- Interrupts flow and breaks child's concentration
- May lead to loss of concentration

## **DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

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# Interpreter Preparedness

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## Challenges in the utilization of interpreters

*“Interpreters frequent lack of preparedness to deal with traumatic and sensitive nature of children’s abuse histories, and insufficient understanding of ‘best-practice’ child investigative interview process.”*

# Interpreter Preparedness



Level of Comfort with Child Abuse Topic



Understanding Victim Dynamics



Details necessary for investigative interviews

# Interpreter Preparedness

Negative reactions to disclosure directly impacts the child's emotional state and their willingness to disclose further information

Children can be highly sensitive to signs of distress in others, even when the signs are ambiguous or subtle



# Interpreter Preparedness

*“It is very important to let the [interpreter] know that not everyone is capable of doing this type of interview, and that is okay. It does not speak to the [interpreter’s] capability, it is just not for everyone.”*

*“It is important that they know beforehand what to expect—the type of trauma they will hear about, and how you expect them to react or not react. Sometimes we are not aware of our body language or reactions, which would not have an impact in other settings, but can negatively affect a forensic interview.”*

# Reality

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Children are “*subjected to 4 to 11 interviews...and in most cases they have experienced numerous other bouts of questioning from family members, therapists, social workers, and other interested parties.*”

# Interpreter Guidelines

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- Convey and maintain a relaxed, friendly atmosphere—match the interviewer
  - Do not express surprise, disgust, disbelief, or other emotional reactions to descriptions of abuse
  - Respect the child's personal space
  - Avoid touching the child
  - Do not stare or sit uncomfortably close
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# Interpreter Guidelines

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- ▶▶ Do not suggest feelings or responses to the child (e.g., do not say “*I know how hard this must be for you.*”)
  - ▶▶ Do not make promises.
  - ▶▶ Do not make comments such as “*Good girl*” or “*We’re buddies, aren’t we?*” This may be interpreted as reinforcing the child for talking about abuse issues.
  - ▶▶ Be tolerant of pauses in conversation.
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# Interpreter Guidelines

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- » Ask for clarification of ambiguous questions
  - » Notify the interviewer when a word or concept is difficult to translate or there is no appropriate translation
  - » Notify the interviewer when the child is using a slang word...don't assume you know the slang
  - » Avoid giving gifts to the child.
  - » Do not address child's questions directly- always defer to the interviewer
  - » Be sure to match the child's register
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# Interpreter Preparedness



Who gets an interview?



The effects of trauma on the child during the interview



Pre-Interview preparation

# Interview Considerations

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*“Recounting traumatic and sensitive accounts places considerable cognitive and emotional strain on interviewees.” (Powell, et al., 2016)*

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## Who gets an interview?

*\*IT IS NOT JUST FOR CHILDREN*

- Recipients of an interview is not age-dependent
- Trauma history or developmental issues may be a consideration

## Effects of Trauma- Identifying trauma indicators in the interview:

- Language may revert back to chronological age of traumatic event both in speech and body language

# Interview Considerations

*“Often times the child shows little or no emotion about an event that others may be horrified to hear. If this lack of affect or contradictory affect causes an interpreter to question the validity of the disclosure the tone of the interview may be tainted.” (CATT, 2004)*

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## **Effects of Trauma - Identifying trauma indicators in the interview:**

- Understanding dissociative behaviors and “matter-of-fact” tones when interviewee is describing trauma.
- Inappropriate/Bizarre affect



# Pre-Interview Preparations



Meeting with the MDT/Case Preparations



Introducing interpreter to the child



Evidence



Room setup and recording

# Meeting with the Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT)

*“The meeting before the actual interview is super important. It is super useful to discuss expectations, use of vocabulary, interruptions, see the evidence and anything else that will help the [interpreter] understand her/his role. It is important to discuss beforehand the translation of questions. Sometimes things don’t translate well, or they don’t have the same effect in another language.”*

# Pre-Interview Preparations

**Multidisciplinary Team Members:** CAFI, Linguist, Victim Specialists (VS), Law Enforcement, etc...

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**Meeting with the MDT and case consultation with the MDT:**

The goals of the interview

Topics that need to be covered

**Understanding the goals of the interview and topics to be covered: safety and/or criminal cases adhering to best practice.**

*“...those (*interpreters*) unaccustomed to working with child complaints were reported as *underestimating the high level of skill involved in translating questions* in a developmentally appropriate and non-leading way.”*

# Pre-Interview Preparations

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## Concerns of Interpreter

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- Cultural considerations, language nuances, etc.
  - Helps interviewer establish rapport, clearly communicate with child, formulate questions, and develop and test alternative hypotheses
  - Helps investigative team understand child's presentation during the interview and avoid misinterpreting appropriateness of narrative style or non-verbal presentation

# Pre-Interview Preparations

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## Concerns of Interpreter

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- Interpretation Style
  - Simultaneous v. Consecutive (MDT interpreter v. child Interpreter)
  - Research regarding best style for forensic interviews
- What if a word or expression can't be translated verbatim?
- Breaks?

# Simultaneous vs. Consecutive Interpretation

## Simultaneous



## Consecutive

Victim's primary language is **Not** English

The CAFI is fluent in the victim's primary language

Utilize the FBI Linguist to interpret for the agents/MDT.  
-FBI Linguist will sit in the observation room with the team  
-Currently have one Spanish Speaking CAFI that requests simultaneous

Victim's primary language is **Not** English

The CAFI's primary language is English

Utilize FBI Linguist to facilitate communication between the CAFI and the victim  
-FBI Linguist will sit in the interview room  
-Interprets CAFI's question to the victim  
-Interprets victim's answer

# Pre-Interview Preparations

## Room Set-up

- Recording equipment
- Seating arrangements
- In-person vs. tele-forensic interview

**Reviewing evidence (e.g., graphic, unredacted images of child abuse)**

## Introduction to the Child

- The interviewer will make the introductions:

“This is (*Interpreter’s name*) and she is here to help us talk. She speaks (*child’s language*) and I don’t know how to speak (*child’s language*).”

# Pre-Interview Preparations

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## Meeting with Parent/Primary Caretaker

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**Pre-interview parent meeting covers the following:**

- Explanation of the interview process
- Developmental information
- Mental health concerns
- History of abuse/neglect
- Outcry/disclosure information
- What the child/adolescent “knows” about being here today



# The Phased Interview

*A phased interview structure minimizes suggestive influences and empowers children to be informative. These goals are accomplished by three major guidelines:*

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Children/adolescents receive clear information about the interviewer's job and the ground rules for the interview.

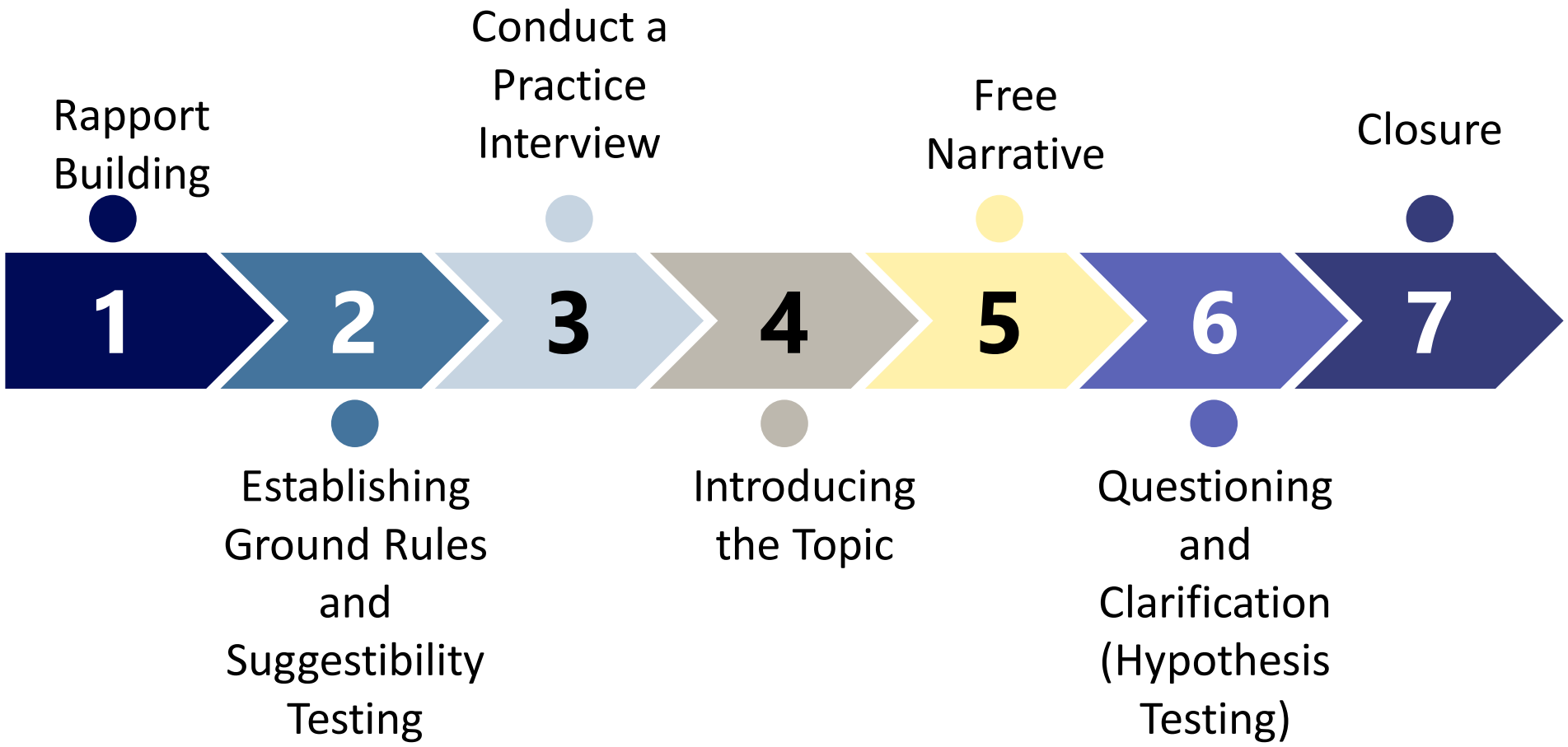


The interviewer builds rapport in a way that encourages children to talk.



The interviewer elicits information using the least directive question formats.

# Phases of the Interview



# Phase 1 – Rapport Building

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*Rapport building begins with the initial introduction and continues throughout the interview.*

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## Building rapport helps to:



Make the victim comfortable with the interview setting



Get preliminary information about victim's verbal skills and cognitive maturity



Convey the goal of the interview is for the victim to talk: Conveyed through verbal and non-verbal communication

# Phase 1 – Rapport Building

## WITH INTERPRETER

- Process may take longer due to potential language complications (CATTA, 2004).
- Verbatim interpretation and clarification is very important throughout the interview, but the rapport stage sets the tone and flow for the rest of the interview.

*“Observing the negative reaction of their disclosure on others directly impacts their own emotional state and their willingness to disclose further information, thus contributing to case attrition.”*

(Powell et al., 2016)

# Phase 2: Establishing Ground Rules

**1** “Tell the truth” Instruction

**2** “I Don’t Know” Instruction

**3** “I Don’t Want to Answer” Instruction

**4** “I Don’t Understand” Instruction

**5** “Correct Me” Instruction

# Phase 3: Practice Interview

Helps child understand interview process

Focuses on a neutral event

**Helps the interviewer assess for:**

- Language skills
- Sequencing capabilities
- Developmental issues
- Cultural communication barriers

# Phase 3: Practice Interview

Elicit information with open ended prompts

**Invite the child to provide information:**  
*“Tell me everything that happened from beginning to end.”*

**Encourage child to continue talking:**

- Nodding head
- “Then what”
- “Tell me more”

Reinforce the ground rules

# Good Touch/Bad Touch

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Not recommended to be used in the forensic interview. The idea of good touch/bad touch can be confusing to kids, especially when it feels good.

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# Transitioning to Topic

The substantive portion of the interview begins when the interviewer prompts a **transition to the target topic**.



Interviewers should start with the least suggestive prompt that might raise the topic, avoiding mention of particular individuals or events.

“Tell me how come you came here today.”

“Tell me the reason you are here today.”

“It’s my understanding that you were in a hotel room when the police showed up. Tell me about that.”

# Transitioning to Topic

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## ➤➤ Direct Questions: Tell me about...

- Cultural considerations

## ➤➤ Open-ended questions: And then what happened?

## ➤➤ “Why Questions” What are your thoughts?

*“Wording is important. Forensic questions are designed to increase the accuracy of the child’s statement and the validity of the interview.”*

(CATT, 2004)

# Free Narrative

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**Following the disclosure of abuse, the interviewer offers an open invitation for the child to narrate:**

*“Sarah, start at the beginning and go to the end, and tell me everything you can about the nasty things Kenny does.”*

# Free Narrative



**Encourage free narrative with open ended prompts:**

- “Then what?”
- “Tell me more”
- “Tell me the very next thing that happened”

**Open ended prompts are the preferred structure for questioning during this phase**

**Patience is key during this phase and interruption of the child should be avoided**

# Free Narrative

This is perhaps the most difficult and taxing task on the interpreter and the interviewer

We need to allow the child to speak until they are ready to stop, we provide minimal encouragers

\*During this phase, it may be necessary to take some notes.

# Question & Clarification

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The questioning and clarification phase begins *after* it is clear that the victim has finished providing a free narrative.



This phase is a time to ask follow-up questions, seek legally-relevant information, and to clarify statements.

# Question & Clarification

*After the narrative phase, it is time to focus on the legally relevant information:*

Establishing jurisdiction

Timeline-separating out each event

Establish sequence of events during the abuse

Establish number of times the abuse occurred. If it was long-term abuse, ask the victim to describe first time, last time and the time they remember the most

Identifying other crimes and/or victims (Production of CSAM, sexual contact between victim and subject, etc.)

Eliciting sensory details and corroborating evidence

# Question & Clarification

- Importance of verbatim interpretation and clarification when needed
- The interpreter should not try to explain, or help witnesses by expanding or rephrasing questions
- Insertion of prior knowledge
  - Interpreters for family should be different from interpreters for the forensic interview
- Changing of pronouns
  - Example: 'I said' to 'He said' can lead to misinterpretation



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# Hierarchy of Interview Questions

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Free narrative and other open-ended questions

Specific or focused but nonleading questions

Closed questions

Explicitly leading questions

# Child's Language

## Script Memory

- What usually happens
- Description of an event typically given in general times; often seen in children who have repeated experiences of abuse

*“Well, Dad comes in at night, he gets in my bed, and then he does it, and then he leaves.”*



## Episodic Memory

- Specific details about a specific event
- May be a follow up to child's free narrative that assists in acquiring more detail

*“You told me Dad comes in at night and gets in your bed. Tell me everything about the very first time Dad came in at night and got in your bed.”*

# Child's Language

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- **As important as the Interviewer's questions are, the child's responses are just as imperative**
  - When child is recalling script memory, language such as: *usually, sometimes, always, often, normally* may be used
  - The language used is important to prompt the interviewer to request more episodic detail
  - If these language nuances are lost in interpretation, the interpreter should communicate this to the interviewer.

# Child's Language

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## SLANG

Should be discussed prior to the interview as part of cultural competence

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When the child uses slang:

- Interviewer *needs* to know that slang is being used
- *Interviewer* decides the appropriate way to proceed
- By notifying the interviewer, this prompts the interviewer to ensure the child understands and can convey the true meaning of the term

***Slang should not be translated into the vernacular***

# Child's Language - Slang

*“[Interpreters] should be comfortable with slang and possibly curse words. It is not the same translating this type of vocabulary than having to say them [out loud in front of a child]. Some people are not that comfortable with the latter and may not even be aware of it.”*

# Child's Language

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## GESTURES

- 1 Some children will avoid explicitly naming body parts by gesturing instead
  - 2 Do not interpret the gesture, notify the interviewer that a gesture was made
- \* By notifying the interviewer, this prompts the interviewer to clarify the gesture and ensures the child conveys the true meaning of the gestures

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# Child's Language

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## Abstract vs. Concrete Language

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**Phrases or words may need more exploring or explanation:**

- Bother, touch, bad, scared, love, etc...
- “You are not in trouble.”

# ASL and the Forensic Interview

**ASL is more explicit than English which may impact interview when interviewer asks something intentionally vague (e.g., asking about types of sex)**

- Oral sex is very explicit - includes physical motion of performing the act

**For some victims, 3 interpreters are used**

- Deaf interpreter
- Hearing interpreter
- 3<sup>rd</sup> interpreter for validity of what is being communicated as well as backup for hearing interpreter

**Like most languages, ASL has a “Register,” includes several words for one English word; they choose which word they believe is best:**

- Example: When beginning a meeting: “Good morning”, “Hello”, “Hey” or “Hi”. Register can change depending on formality and context.
  - Make sure interpreter understands intention of question

# ASL and the Forensic Interview

## Words we use are forensically sound

- Listen for words that indicate script and/or episodic memory
- No “tags” used: such as “right?” “correct?”

## When choosing a word from register:

- Use word most similar to victim’s developmental abilities
- Understand intention of interviewers' question as some words are considered leading

## Explicit/Implicit language

- Begin with least explicit language i.e. oral sex: “Did something happen with your mouth”, vs. blow job and physical motion
- When giving examples, add “or something else” at the end to remain forensically sound
- If relevant, interpret facial expressions: Linguistic or emotional response?
- Facial expressions in ASL are communicating the differences between a statement or a question.
  - Example: While describing a line as being long with their hands, the tongue is also moving in a particular way. Sometimes a nose may crinkle for expression or word and the mouth may make a move that does not match the word being said.

# Presentation of Evidence

Evidence can be critical in helping victim to disclose

Showing images to victim in a neutral and non-judgmental manner may help victim feel less shame and embarrassment

Researchers believe that the use of technology, specifically, photographing/video-recording doubles the likelihood of victims not disclosing

Reluctant children may need more cues to help with disclosure

The sensitive introduction of evidence may actually help children who are reluctant to disclose

Disclosure is an important part of putting the child in contact with supportive services that can assist in their protection from further maltreatment and initiate the healing process

# Types of Evidence

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**Chat Logs/  
texts**

**Journals/  
diaries**

**Photos**

**Medical  
evidence**

**Witness  
statements**

**Subject  
confession**

**Victim  
disclosure**

**CSAM**

**Ads**


**Missing  
child  
posters**

What enables victims to disclose abusive images is the professional letting them know that they know about the images as well as a trusting relationship and patience.

# Presenting Evidence

The interviewer will be up front in beginning of the interview that they have evidence with them.

We give the child a heads up because we do not want to conduct the interview and have child deny and then pull-out evidence.



S: So, remember I told you I had some photos I wanted to show you?  
L: Yeah, yeah



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**Before closing: Do we have a clear picture of what happened?**

# 7. Closure



Keep the interview process open by allowing the victim to contact the MDT post interview if there is additional investigative information



Allow victim to ask questions and express worries/concerns



De-escalate/Focus on neutral topics



Don't make any promises



Suicide Risk Assessment, if appropriate (post-interview and off-camera if possible)

# Post-Interview

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## WHAT TO EXPECT

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### Potential Suicide Screening

- At discretion of CAFI
- Off-camera

### Meeting with Parent/Primary Caretaker

- Any information requiring a response from parent to care for or protect child

### Additional Interviews

- Per child's request
- Per investigative need
- Utilizing the same interpreter

**Follow up with the Victim Specialist**

# Secondary/Vicarious Trauma

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**Defined by Figley (1995) as:**

“The natural behaviors and emotions that arise from knowing about a traumatizing event experienced by a significant other.”

# Secondary/Vicarious Trauma

“The use of first-person voice in conveying such emotionally laden content potentially increases the interpreter's risk of experiencing vicarious trauma.”

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## Risk factors:

- Commonalities between interpreter and interviewee (e.g., same country of origin)
- Over-identifying with people they are interpreting for
- Unresolved personal trauma history
- Training - *“High levels of negative affectivity reported lower levels of competence as an interpreter.”*

# Secondary/Vicarious Trauma

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## Protective factors:

- ❖ Compassion Satisfaction
  - ❖ Positive thinking/optimism
  - ❖ Cognitive restructuring/reframing
  - ❖ Balanced workload
  - ❖ Mentor/support network
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# Timing Concerns

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Benefits of interviewing the victim immediately, if possible:

- ❖ Preservation of evidence
  - ❖ Increased likelihood of locating suspect
  - ❖ Proper and timely identification of victim and/or guardian
  - ❖ Prevents influence from other incarcerated victims
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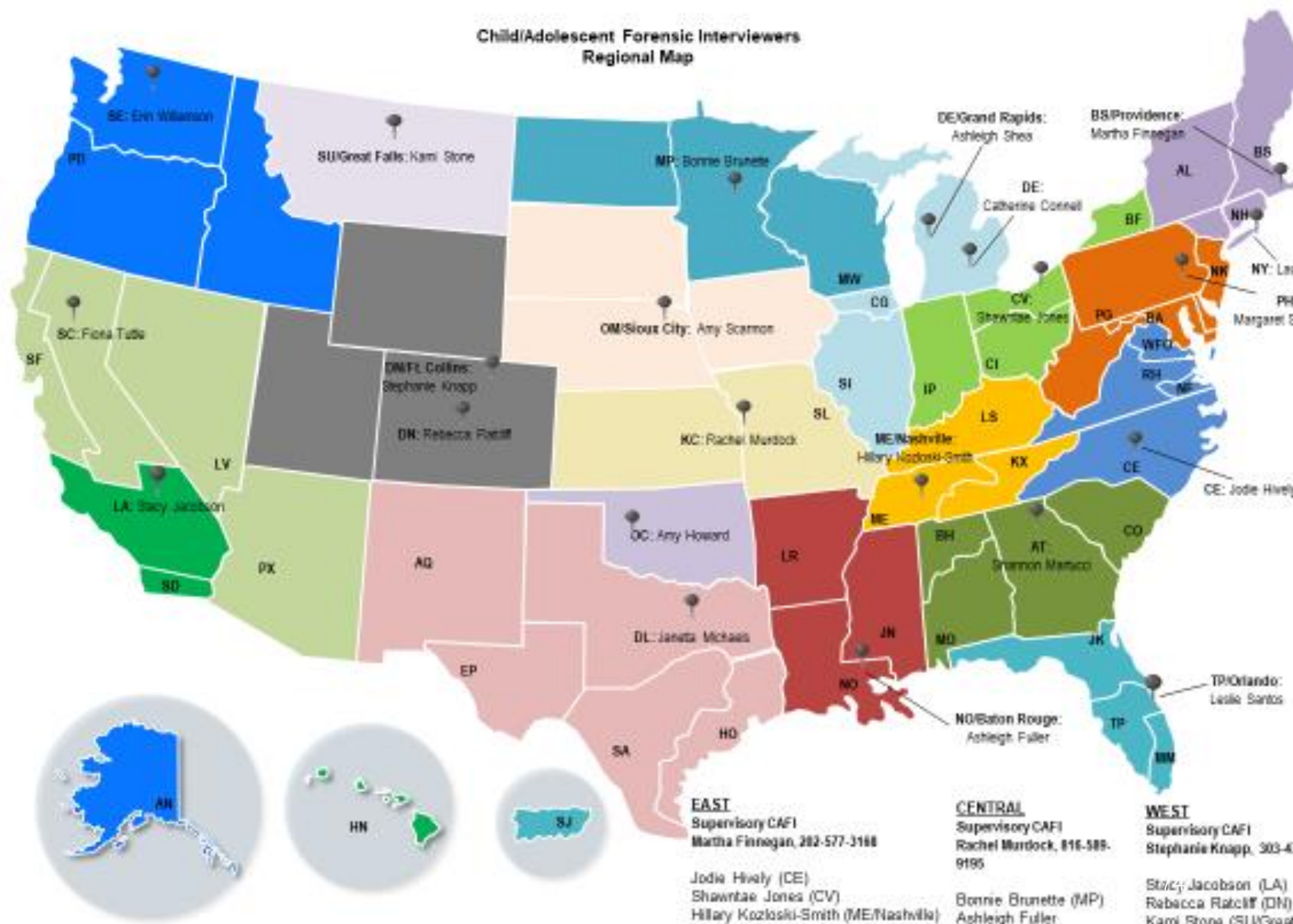
# CAFI Contact Information

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- Your name – email -----@fbi.gov



## Child/Adolescent Forensic Interviewers Regional Map



**EAST**  
Supervisory CAFI  
Martha Finnegan, 282-577-3168

**CENTRAL**  
Supervisory CAFI  
Rachel Murdock, 816-588-9195

**WEST**  
Supervisory CAFI  
Stephanie Knapp, 303-491-9195

Jodie Hively (CE)  
Shawntae Jones (CV)  
Hillary Kozloski-Smith (ME/Nashville)  
Ashleigh Fuller (NO/Baton Rouge)

Stacy Jacobson (LA)  
Rebecca Ratcliff (DN)  
Kami Stone (SU/Great Falls)

**Questions/Comments?**

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D1 - Interpreters in FI

Jodie Hively

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