
Introduction to Child Interviewing, Part 2

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This is the second special section devoted to interviewing children who may have been sexually abused. That the topic should warrant two sections perhaps speaks to its salience to the audience of *Child Maltreatment*. These articles focus on the two targets of controversy in cases in which child interviews are central to establishing the likelihood of sexual abuse: the interviewers of children and the children who are interviewed.

Articles included here represent practice, "practice wisdom," research, and opinion about issues related to child interviewing. The research comprises exploration of actual cases of investigative interviewing and analog research, both of which are useful strategies for informing professionals about the interview process.

The article by Davies and colleagues describes a pioneering program in investigative interviewing. It is typical in many ways of high-volume programs in that it relies primarily on a single interview of the child, uses a fairly structured protocol, and videotapes the interview. However, it is unique in its regular program evaluation and routine use of peer review. High-quality programs like this one exist in communities around the country. However, they rarely appear in the professional literature, in part because clinicians working in them focus on providing service, not on publishing.

In contrast are the articles by Warren and colleagues and Wood and colleagues, both of which raise concerns about the actual practices of investigative interviewers in the field. In both instances, the interviewers are public sector child protection workers. These articles represent an important next step in improving investigatory interviewing. To date, most observations of problems in child protective interviewing have been anecdotal rather than based on a systematic examination of a substantial number of cases. Both of these articles draw on analog studies and practice wisdom in their decisions about the

appropriateness and inappropriateness of certain interview practices. However, readers are reminded that neither article demonstrates that the techniques described and documented led to false allegations of sexual abuse. In fact, arguably, the questionable practices are more likely to result in false negatives than false positives.

Saywitz and colleagues have written about one of a series of studies of techniques to enhance children's recall without being suggestive. The technique, called narrative elaboration, was used in an analog context, but its potential for use in actual cases of suspected abuse is evident. These very practical cues now need to be tested in interviews of children who may have experienced trauma.

Finally, Myers discusses a troubling legal consequence of problematic interview practices: the New Jersey Appeals Court opinion that cases in which a child's disclosure of abuse is central to an accusation may be subject to taint hearings. Such hearings could be conducted to explore whether the children's accounts were tainted by the investigatory interviews. This opinion followed the appeal of the conviction of Kelly Michaels of sexual abuse of children at Wee Care day care center, a case in which child testimony was crucial and interview practices very problematic. Myers explores the advantages and disadvantages of taint hearings. He then proposes guidelines for situations in which taint hearings are to occur, drawing on legal precedent and research findings about questioning children.

As the articles in this section demonstrate, child interviewing is characterized by diversity of opinion, a modest amount of empirically established knowledge, and many unresearched aspects. The articles

reflect the state of the art and the debate related to child interviewing. They do not reflect, however, any official position of APSAC or *Child Maltreatment*. It is

hoped that these articles will further knowledge and the debate about interviewing children who may have been sexually abused.