



Family &  
Community Services  
Community Services

# Module 11

## NSW Investigative Interview Framework

**Essential Readings**



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The contents of these readings are summaries of resources and literature. All references are located at the end of each article.

# THE NSW INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEW FRAMEWORK

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When a report is received from the Helpline that a child or young person is suspected of being at risk of significant harm or has been significantly harmed, a decision must be made about the best way to obtain information in order to assess the child's safety and risk. The details contained within some reports means that they may be immediately referred to JIRT. Information about which reports meet the [JIRT criteria can be found on the intranet](#). Other reports may be allocated to a CSC for a field response by child protection caseworkers to gather further information to assess safety and risk. Some of these reports may require an investigative interview approach to gather this information.

The NSW Investigative Interview Framework allows caseworkers to obtain valuable information for secondary assessment (SARA or SROH) and gather evidence in a way that maximises the potential for children to give accurate detail in a manner that is accepted by the courts. In order to gather evidence, caseworkers need to have a good understanding of children's developmental capacities and apply this knowledge in an interview to allow children to be credible witnesses.

'A child' in the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 is defined as 'a person who is under the age of 16 years'. Although the Investigative Interview Framework is predominantly used with children, it may also be used with young people, most especially if they have identified vulnerabilities such as cognitive disability or learning delay. This is because in such circumstances the framework may be the most effective way to gather detail. In this module, the term 'child' is used to reflect that most of the time caseworkers will be utilizing the framework with children under 16 years of age.

The role of the caseworker is to assist the child to recall details of an event(s) to the best of their ability. As interviewers, caseworkers should minimise the opportunity for introducing information into the interview based on their own assumptions and biases by creating most opportunities for free narrative disclosure. Caseworkers employ the Investigative Interview framework when interviewing children and young people about a specific event, such as an allegation of physical or sexual abuse which has occurred to the child or that they have witnessed. These interviews may potentially result in criminal action. The interview framework is used when a caseworker needs to know the details of an abuse event the child has experienced or witnessed.

## A Framework for Interviewing Children

The preferred model for interviewing children is to adopt an open and collaborative approach. The interviewer must show respect, concern and empathy for the child. In turn the interviewee will show respect by sharing their concerns and providing the requested information (Sattler 1998: pp21-22). The principles of this approach to interviewing children are consistent with the principles of a solution focused approach.

The NSW Investigative Interview framework is based on the large body of scientific literature pertaining to interviewing as well as international guidelines set out by key working parties (see Powell & Wilson 2001). The guidelines are consistent with key frameworks and models currently adopted both nationally and internationally.

Whatever the framework or protocol that is adopted, they all have similar stages or phases of an interview.

1. Introduction and Rapport Building
2. Raising the Allegation and Particularising the Event
3. Event Line – Breadth
4. Gathering Detail – Depth
5. Closure

The quotes from the children below were said to the caseworker at the completion of the interview. It is not uncommon for children to say something similar to the below quotes. These quotes speak to the child's experience of an interview when it is conducted in a manner which supports the child to be able to tell us what happened in detail.

**References**

CDC Interviewing Children & Gathering Evidence Manual, version 3 revision 2 April 2008.

Sattler, J. (1998) Clinical and Forensic Interviewing of Children and Families. Guidelines for Mental Health, Education, Paediatric and Child Maltreatment Fields. Jerome M Sattler.

Wilson, C. & Powell, M. (2001) 'Understanding a Child's Mind' and 'Essential Elements of the Interview' in *A Guide to Interviewing Children*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

# THE NSW INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEW FRAMEWORK IN CONTEXT

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It is important for caseworkers to identify when to utilise The NSW Investigative Interview Framework rather than conduct a general conversational style interview with a child. The Framework highlights the importance of planning the focus of our intervention. Caseworkers need to be clear about the purpose of the intervention.

When working with a family, caseworkers always need to be thinking about the following:

- The principle of safety, welfare and wellbeing of the child/young person underpins all of the work caseworkers do.
- An investigative interview gathers detail from the child to inform decision about immediate safety and ongoing risk. Caseworkers will also gather information from a variety of sources, often including parents/carers, school, health providers and police.
- Safety and Risk assessments are an ongoing process. A caseworker should always be considering and reconsidering their assessment, with each new piece of information that they receive.

There are three main instances when an investigative interview may be warranted;

1. It may be necessary to take an investigatory approach when **reports are classified as a less than 24 hours or less than 72 hours response but do not meet the criteria for JIRT**. There may have been an incident where a child was hit by a parent or injured intervening in domestic violence. This would be an opportunity for caseworkers to use the Framework to find out as much as they can about the child's experience of violence at home. The information caseworkers obtain will help inform the safety and risk assessments.
2. In other instances a child may disclose a serious abuse event **during ongoing casework for Child Protection or Out of Home Care** that may warrant a referral to JIRT. In these situations caseworkers need to have the skills to introduce the Interview Framework in a way that is sensitive to the child's needs, provides the opportunity for the child to tell their story and reduce the necessity for a child to be reinterviewed (if possible) where further court action may be required
3. When there has been a serious incident of abuse, that if substantiated would constitute a criminal offence, the report would **be referred to JIRT** for joint response by Family and Community Services, NSW Police Force and NSW Health. The referral would be made from the Helpline directly to the JIRT Referral Unit (JRU).

As a general rule, investigative interviews should be conducted where there has been an identified event or incident where a child has experienced abuse or been harmed as the result of violence. If there has been more than one event then the interview will focus on one event at a time.

It is important for caseworkers to plan and prepare for an interview with a child in order to support disclosure and to give children the best opportunity to tell their story. The better caseworkers plan, the better they will support disclosure, and the more informed decisions about safety will be. When planning caseworkers should consider:

- the information that has prompted this interview
- is this a child who knows why they are being interviewed/ a child who doesn't know/ a child who knows but doesn't want to talk about it
- the child's history and experiences
- the child's community, safe people and attachments
- the child's social and cognitive development

- possible issues that may arise
- questions to cover and how best to raise the allegation with this particular child.

Disclosure is a process, not an event and each child is different and has individual needs when it comes to what they need to support them to make a disclosure. Telling a stranger about abuse or violence in the home can be very frightening for a child especially if their first experience of disclosure had a negative outcome (they may not have been believed or nothing was done about it). Planning will help you to meet the needs of this individual child, but most importantly showing respect and empathy is paramount.

Interviewing children can be challenging and planning is important, but caseworkers are unable to predict everything that may be said or happen in an interview, so it is also important to be flexible and to be able to change plans when circumstances change.

Caseworkers need to plan the focus of assessment during the Pre-Assessment Consultation and check their Interview Planning Sheet with their manager casework prior to conducting an investigative interview with a child. The interview planning sheet should cover non leading questions to ask a child when raising the allegation graduating to partial leading and then leading if necessary to establish the child's safety. Strategies for dealing with the child's fears and concerns about disclosing in an interview should also be covered. E.g. If a child says I'm scared, the caseworker needs to have some plans for appropriate responses to support the child in their disclosure.

Child's concern: 'I'm scared'

Possible responses:

- What are you scared about?
- What makes you think that might happen? (Whilst these are questions in response to a question, they may help support the child to continue with the disclosure)
- What can I do to help you not be as scared as you are right now?

It is important to reassure the child if their fears are unfounded. Whilst a caseworker shouldn't make assurances they can't keep, if the child's fear is they will go to jail, this can very easily be alleviate by reassuring them that won't happen. Alternatively, if the child's fear is that someone else will go to jail, whilst caseworkers can't promise this won't happen, they can tell the child:

'My job isn't to send anyone to jail. My job is to find out what happened so that I can work with you and your family and help you so that it doesn't happen again.'

Child's concern: 'I don't want mum/dad to get in trouble'

Possible responses:

- 'What would dad get in trouble for? (As above, this may help support the child to continue with the disclosure)
- 'My job is to find out what happened and to help you, your mum and dad find a way so that it doesn't happen again.'

Child's concern: 'It's a secret'

Possible responses:

- 'Who told you that it is a secret?'
- 'Who knows about the secret?'
- 'Who is the secret about?'
- 'What will happen if you tell me the secret? Who told you that' (you can then use what the child tells you to reassure them without making promises you can't keep)

## Supporting a Distressed Child

### At start of Interview:

It may not be helpful in situation where a child is distressed or refusing to go with the interviewer, to use persuasion. Attempts to convince the child that there is nothing to worry about may increase the child's anxiety by focusing attention on their fears. If the interviewer is anxious about whether the child will go with them, the child may sense this and perceive it as confirmation that there is something to fear. An alternative approach might be to immediately divert the child's attention away from the interview environment. This can be done by showing the child interesting toys, objects or equipment, or by engaging the child in an interesting age-appropriate task or conversation. A confident, calm and friendly approach that assumes cooperation is likely to be most beneficial.

### Example:

Interviewer: Hello James, I'm Cathy. I'm going to be talking with you today. [Immediately directs child's attention to stuffed toy] Who's this you have with you?

Child: [crying] My bear.

Interviewer: Your bear, and he's a very cute bear. What's his name?

Child: Boo [still crying]

Interviewer: What a great name. Where did you get him?

Child: I don't know.... Mum got him for me.

Interviewer: Well, would mum, Boo and you like to come and sit down.... Perhaps you can tell me what you and Boo like to do together.

In this scenario the interviewer did not attempt to lead the child away from his mother. The child was already distressed, and this would have likely made it worse. To help a child feel safe and to reinforce appropriate behaviour, it is important to provide clear expectations. The best way to help a young child take part in an interview is to encourage appropriate behaviours, such as sitting still and listening to questions. Praise is useful as long as it is based on the child's behaviour and not the content of the child's answers. Also, praise should be used early in the interview. It may be gently phased out as the child becomes more comfortable.

### During Interview:

A child can become visibly distressed or agitated during an interview for many reasons. Perhaps the child feels emotional pain associated with remembering the trauma or they are anxious about being in the strange interview environment. Perhaps the child is fearful of the consequences of disclosure, is tired of answering questions or is hungry. There are numerous ways a child experiences stress in the interview situation, and attempts to minimise this should be based on professional judgement about the needs of each child, taking into consideration the child's non-verbal behaviours and development. It may be useful to ask the child if there is anything you can do to help. Every child is different.

Sometimes children who have experienced severe trauma may dissociate. In such cases, the child needs therapeutic intervention and the interview should be discontinued.

If the child breaks down and cries, it is important that the interviewer remain calm show that they are listening and accepting of the child's feelings. Further, the interviewer needs to show that they have the patience and respect to allow the child to express their experiences in their own time. If necessary the interviewer could shift the questioning to a less threatening topic for a while, or have a short break. It is important to acknowledge the difficulty the child has in talking e.g. 'It's ok to cry' or 'it's hard to talk about these things'. However, empathy should not be confused with sympathy or overt demonstrations of concern. Empathy is letting the child know that you accept their

feelings. Sympathy (and concern) in contrast is telling the child how you feel about what has happened to them.

**References:**

CDC Interviewing Children & Gathering Evidence Manual, version 3, revision 2 April 2008.

Wilson, C. & Powell, M. (2001) 'Understanding a Child's Mind' and 'Essential Elements of the Interview' in *A Guide to Interviewing Children*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

# DEVELOPMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR INTERVIEWING CHILDREN

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## Language

One of the key cognitive and language requirements for interviews with children is that questions are simple, concrete and easily understood. Caseworkers should ask simple questions that have one idea at a time. If two questions are asked at once it will be difficult to know which question the child is answering. Limit the question length (i.e. the amount of words used) to ask something.

Things to keep in mind:

- Always use the child's words, especially for body parts e.g. – 'private part', 'vag' (Once the body part has been clarified, return to using the child's words).
- Children may sound the same as adults, but that does not mean they have the same understandings.
- Young children have a literal interpretation of meaning, they may deny going to a house, but they did go to a unit.
- The ability to group like objects and events together is not well developed until around the age of 5 years e.g. – knickers and clothing, child may not distinguish between touch and kiss.
- Children respond in concrete terms, e.g. – 'What does this picture say?' 'Nothing – pictures don't talk'.

Avoid:

- Jargon e.g. – Using 'DoCS' or 'FaCS' without explaining that it stands for Family and Community Services and what our role is.
- Ambiguous language e.g. – 'Where did she hit you?' – may be interpreted as 'where' on your body or 'where' were you when you were hit. Be specific.
- Double barreled questions e.g. – 'What could you see and hear?'
- Double negatives e.g. – 'It's not without it's good points'.
- Questions that begin with or ask a child WHY something has happened. If necessary you could ask, *How come?* Never ask the child why they think they were physically or sexually abused. This may make the child feel ashamed and blamed for the abuse. Children can often answer a WHY question if it is about the present e.g. Why are you crying? They find it hard to answer a WHY question about something that happened in the past.

Children may be easily influenced by adults. Caseworkers need to be mindful that they do not bias them toward a particular response. Avoid language that may influence the answer given as this may lead the child e.g.: 'What else did he do with his hand?' suggests that there was something else the child has not told us. Leading questions suggest the answer or lead toward it. Wherever possible, it is preferable that a child gives a free narrative account of the abuse incident so this information can best be used in making decisions about their safety'

## Other Language Considerations:

Aboriginal children or children from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background may not understand our questions as English may not be their primary language. Non-verbal expressions and kinship terms can have a different meaning to children from diverse family structures. Caseworkers should consider using interpreters, if warranted in interviews to provide a child the best possible opportunity to provide their story of the event of abuse.

Caseworkers should consult with an Aboriginal or multicultural caseworker before and after the interview to assist with preparation and planning for the interview. Cultural consults can help

caseworkers understand family structure, culture and norms, as well as clarify terminology or concepts that may not be understood from the child's disclosure.

### **Interviewing young children and children with a disability.**

There are many different types of disabilities that a child could have, which may impact on their sensory processing, functioning, social skills or physical ability. These in turn could impact on the child's ability to tell their story. Caseworkers need to be well prepared to interview young children and children with a disability. They can start this preparation by contacting a professional in the child's life, or if appropriate, the child's carer to find out how the child needs can best be supported in the interview. Ask about how the child presents in interactions, how the child communicates, and ask for any tips to keep the child engaged.

A caseworker needs to be flexible and adapt their communication style to ensure the child understands the question and the caseworker understands their response. Caseworkers should keep their sentences short and simple, so as not to confuse the child.

Caseworkers should give the child enough time to think about, and answer the question being asked. Just as with young children, caseworkers need to be mindful that they are not asking too many questions too quickly. This may confuse the child, and it may become difficult to know which question the child is answering'

Whether they have a disability or not, children under stress may function at a lower level making it hard for them to remember accurately and think clearly. Some children may need to feel settled and familiar with the interview environment while others may be fidgety, unable to sit still or need to move around the room. A child's concentration span may be limited and they may need regular breaks or have something suitable they can play with that may be soothing for them.

### **Social Development**

How children develop socially may impact on the way they communicate, including the language they use, the conversation rules they follow, and our understanding of what they tell us. Some key points to consider:

- Impact of the child's conversational environment in the home will impact their command of language and the extent of their vocabulary. E.g. are they spoken 'with' or spoken 'at'.
- Gender differences in the way adults socialise boys and girls. This is demonstrated in the manner in which adults engage in dialogue with boys and girls – generally our tone changes and the words we choose to use.
- Adults speak; children listen or adults ask questions, knowing the answer (and at times providing the answer in the questions) e.g.: How was your day, good?
- Children need to be given permission to enquire, as well as correct us - adults are authority figures.
- There is a difference between and within cultures in norms around communication and expression of meaning or emotion. This includes eye contact and body language. There are also different cultural norms around communicating between men and women e.g. women's and men's business in Aboriginal communities.

### **Memory**

Memory is complex and is affected by many factors operating at the time of the event, for example, the time of day, level of stress experienced by the child, where the child's attention was focused, or the time delay between an incident and the time of the interview. In some circumstances, memory can be highly detailed, accurate and persistent. In other circumstances, memories can be rapidly forgotten or distorted. A child as young as three can provide detailed and accurate information, although his/her ability to remember and express information will increase with age (Wilson and Powell, 2001).

Personally significant and familiar information is remembered better than other types of information. People, including children, remember an event by reconstructing the memory of it. You think about an event and imagine yourself there, e.g. – going to work each day. If it's an event that is familiar, you use knowledge about what you normally do in that event to remember. If you try to remember your normal routine you may not remember all the details; e.g. when you leave home in the morning to go to work you may not remember collecting your phone and wallet, as

these details will be similar every time. You may remember a significant event though, as there may have been something specific or different that occurred that assists you to remember. In the example of going to work, you may remember a particular event because you might have picked up a colleague to give them a lift or passed an accident that delayed your journey. An event is not a moving picture stored in our mind, rather we piece it together.

### Key points regarding memory:

- Neither adults nor children notice all features of an event
- Memory fades over time
- Central information (main detail) is likely to be accurate
- Children may identify information that is personally significant better than other information

### Link to practice:

- On going suggestive questioning during memory recall may lead to inaccuracies
- When children say little in answers, interviewers can become suggestive

Memory, regardless of age is not entirely accurate. We tend to think of children's memory as inferior, but that assumption is not correct. While children are able to fabricate peripheral information, there is no evidence that indicates that children can be led to fabricate an entire event, especially central information. It is important to gather details of most recent events from children as memory fades over time. When looking at multiple events, children will identify those incidents where there were significant differences. Children may also have a stronger memory of the first time.

### Concepts

Not all children develop at the same rate and their development in terms of grasping and being able to understand abstract concepts will also vary. Caseworkers need to be mindful about the individual abilities of the child being interviewed.

Children's development can be affected by a number of factors including genetics, gender, disability, culture and religion, or family crises. For example a 16 year old with an intellectual disability may be functioning at the age of a 5 year old. Children may also have other physical issues that may impact on their ability to articulate 'concepts such as time, age, measurement etc.

### Points to Consider:

- Age:** Children under 8 may guess age according to height. Someone taller or bigger can be seen as older by a child. Children generally know their own age, regardless of the concept of age.
- Height / Weight:** May be difficult for children to answer Can provide descriptive information and older children (over 10yrs) can use comparative descriptions accurately.
- Time:** Children link time to activities in their routine – breakfast time, bed time. Children usually understand clock time by 8 or 9 years once taught at school.
- Days of the Week / Months:** Time and date is very limited before the age of 8-10 years. If a child does provide a date then ask them 'How do you know it was Tuesday?' 'Because that's the day Grandma comes over'. When asking a child when something happened try to link the When with the child's routine or a concrete event.
- Numbers:** Even though children can count it does not mean that they can answer 'How many times did that happen?'
- Truth & Lies:** Children as young as 2 are able to lie, and by age 4 years are able to detect and convincingly tell lies. The older the child, the more complex and convincing their lies.

- **Measurements** Children do not master these until early adolescence (e.g. volume, height, length) –compare these to something they have experience of, e.g. – a school ruler.
- **Prepositions:** Children begin to learn how to use words like ‘on’, ‘under’, ‘before’, ‘after’, ‘inside’, ‘outside’ from ages 2-4 through to 5-6 years old. During the learning period children can use ‘in’ to mean ‘between’, and ‘on’ for ‘above’. Four year olds can mix up ‘above’, ‘below’, ‘at the bottom of’ and ‘in front of’.

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## SEXUAL UNDERSTANDING & INTERVIEWING

Sexual abuse can not be substantiated because a child presents with age inappropriate sexual behaviour or knowledge, but it needs to be taken into account when completing risk assessments.

### Learning about Sexuality

Children need help to understand what they see and hear around them. They take in information about observing adults. They also pick up ideas about sexuality from their friends and school, from advertising, TV, movies and the internet, from other families and their community. There will be mixed messages about sexuality and it can be confusing for children.

Sexuality starts developing from birth. It's normal for children to explore their bodies and get a sense of being a boy or a girl. The sexual behaviours of children relate to their stage of development. They learn through play, observations and relationships and they express sexual behaviours in a variety of ways. Children learn as their bodies, brains and relationships grow and change. To understand children's sexual behaviours, adults sometimes need to take off their 'adult glasses'. Adult sexuality is different to children's.

SEXUALITY HIGHWAY	AGE
It's a boy! It's a girl!	0
Show me yours and I'll show you mine	4
Boys' germs, girls' germs	9
Everything's changing	10
Friendships, fun, fights and sleepovers	12
Do you think I'm cute?	14
Who am I?	17

Key factors to consider when understanding sexual behaviour:

- Sexual exploration, both visually & through touch of another's body is normal. Children will act out gender roles & behaviours. However, children involved in healthy exploration are of similar age, size, generally mixed gender, friends rather than siblings and participate voluntarily. This play is light-hearted & spontaneous.
- Children as young as 2-3 years will identify gender based on genital differences; however they have little or no knowledge of adult sexual behaviour.
- Children (prior to the age of 14) usually have limited knowledge of sexual behaviour; they start to show some understanding of procreation, but not specifically in relation to sexual acts.
- Knowledge of adult sexual activity rapidly increases as children approach puberty. 50% of children aged 10-12 years are aware of sexual touching, masturbation, & intercourse.
- Children's conceptual development will depend on experiences. Their understanding of sex is not exclusively related to age, but rather to their experiences. (Wilson and Powell 2001: 8)

There are other factors that may impact on what a child will or will not talk about in relation to sexual abuse. Sometimes children may be embarrassed & omit information. Other children may use language because they have been exposed to it, but may not necessarily have experienced or understand its meaning.

In order to be responsive to children, and be able to hear their story, caseworkers need to be mindful of their own reactions to language which may be confronting when children talk about incidents of sexual abuse. Caseworkers should reflect on their own triggers and how their stress responses impact upon the level of detail they are willing to explore with the child. It is important to be mindful of biased verbal and non verbal messages conveyed to a child in an interview and remain objective in order to gather sufficient information to make decisions around safety.

**References:**

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## TYPES OF QUESTIONS

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There are different types of questions used throughout an investigative interview, some are used more often than others, while some are used in specific contexts. Open ended questions are preferable because they allow children to give a free narrative account, and to do most of the talking with as little prompting as possible.

Open ended questions can be challenging for caseworkers because normal patterns of communication with children do not encourage children to inform adults. Research shows that despite training in open style questioning, interviewers automatically revert to closed or specific questions when under pressure.

### Open Ended Questions

Open ended questions are always non-leading, they obtain greater details and give the child every opportunity to provide all the information they have in their own words. They don't assume a particular answer.

e.g. 'What happened next?'

e.g. 'Tell me everything you can remember about the part where...'

e.g. 'Tell me more about the time you were in the park'

e.g. 'Tell me more about your school uniform'

### Specific Non-Leading Questions

Assist in obtaining clarification, or further specific details. Specific questions ask for precise information and usually require only a few words in response.

e.g. 'What hand was she using?' (When child already mentioned a hand was used)

e.g. 'Where does Dad keep the belt?' (When child already mentioned 'belt').

e.g. 'What colour was his shirt?' (When child already mentioned he was wearing a shirt)

e.g. 'How do you know it was Uncle Fred?'

### Multiple Choice Questions

Multiple choice questions should be avoided where possible as they can become suggestive or leading. If used however, multiple choice questions should provide more than two alternatives. By adding the phrase 'OR SOMETHING ELSE' which provides another option that allows the child to answer something entirely different to what you have suggested.

e.g. 'Was it before lunch or after lunch, or another time?'

e.g. 'Was it day time, night time or something else?'

e.g. 'Was he wearing trousers, shorts or something else?'

e.g. 'Was it on top of your clothes, under your clothes or somewhere else?'

### Closed Questions (Yes/No)

Closed questions limit the child's opportunity to provide free narrative and detail. They communicate to the child that the interviewer only wants them to give short answers. Limiting the child to short answers increases the likelihood that the child will not provide a full and detailed account of the abuse incident. Also, the more closed questions asked by the interviewer, the greater the likelihood that the interviewer will introduce information not volunteered by the child. Closed questions can however be appropriately used when the child does not respond to open ended questions and a specific answer is needed.

e.g. 'Was anything said?'

e.g. 'Was anyone else there?'

e.g. 'Did anything else happen?'

e.g. 'Have you shown anyone the marks?'

### Leading Questions

Leading questions are those questions that suggest a certain answer or assume the existence of facts that have not yet been mentioned by the child. Leading questions can impact upon the information the child gives us, because they may not want to contradict or correct us.

e.g. 'Did someone hurt you?'

e.g. 'Tell me where Uncle Ben touched you?' (when child has not said that Uncle Ben touched them)

e.g. 'When dad hit you, was it sore?' (when the child has not volunteered information about pain)

e.g. 'She hit you with her hand didn't she?' (when child has not said that she used her hand)

Leading questions should be avoided wherever possible. There may be times however, where caseworkers will need to ask leading questions because of genuine concerns for the immediate safety of the child. For example, if the child has not made a disclosure through the use of non leading questioning techniques, and they are likely to be at risk of significant harm because they will be going home or having contact with the person who is alleged to have caused them harm, then the caseworker may need to put the allegation to the child. This should be done gradually starting with partial leading to leading where necessary.

**Case example:** Reported information states that the child was injured last night intervening when his father was assaulting his mother.

**Partial leading:** *'I heard something happened last night, can you tell me about that?'* (Introduces the 'when')

**Partial leading:** *'I heard you got hurt last night...'* (Introduces the 'what' and 'when')

**Leading:** *'I heard you got hurt last night when your dad was hitting your mum...'* (Introduces the 'what', 'when' and 'who')

### Questions about Feelings

Questions about feelings are appropriate however be clear whether you are seeking an answer about emotions (scared), or a description (the buckle end of a belt), or a sensation (it stung/hurt). Descriptive and tactile 'feelings' generally provide useful information in investigative interviews, e.g. What could you feel on your body? If the child does provide a response which tells the interviewer how they were feeling emotionally (worried; sad; scared) the interviewer should acknowledge these feelings, let the child know that that what they disclosed about feelings is important, and thank the child for sharing.

### Types of Questions that are NOT used in Investigative Interviews

**Please Note:** These questions are appropriate for use in other circumstances when engaging children and families however are not used in investigative interviews.

### Future focused questions

The aim of an investigative interview is to focus the child and gather details on one critical abuse event that has already occurred in order to assess risk and safety. Future focused questions do not support assessment of immediate safety and risk.

### Miracle Questions

Miracle questions may introduce fantasy or pretend play to investigative interviews such as 'Magic Wands' and 'Fairy Dust'. Caseworkers should not introduce these concepts in investigative interviews as such techniques do not support the assessment of immediate safety and risk.

**Reference:**

Battin D.B., Ceci S. J., Lust B. C. (2012) Do children really mean what they say? The forensic implications of preschoolers' linguistic referencing, *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 33, pp 167-174.

Lexicon Limited (2013) <http://www.lexiconlimited.co.uk> Additional Factors Concerning Children Under 7 (Or Functioning at A Very Young Age) (2013) Advocate's Gateway Toolkit 6 & 7

Powell, M. B. (2008) Designing Effective Training Programs for Investigative Interviewers of Children, *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*, 20, 2.

Wilson, C. & Powell, M. (2001) 'Understanding a Child's Mind' and 'Essential Elements of the Interview' in *A Guide to Interviewing Children*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

# INTRODUCTION & RAPPORT BUILDING

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## Phase 1

### Settle the Child

Greet the child by their name. Ask where they would like to sit in the room.

### Introduce Yourself and Co-Worker

Involve your co-worker (secondary) in the process from the beginning by allowing them to introduce themselves.

**'Hi ...(child's name). My name is.....and this is.....who works with me. We work for Family and Community Services, which used to be called DoCS. Have you heard of Family and Community Services?'**

Respond to the child's answer. You want to know what the child thinks of Family and Community Services, particularly if they or their family has had past involvement with Family and Community Services.

If a child says that they know someone Family and Community Services took away from their family we could reply by saying:

**'Yes, sometimes we do have to find somewhere else for kids to stay when they can't stay at home, but our job is also to talk with children and we would like to talk with you today. Is it ok to talk with you today?'**

Occasionally the child/young person may develop greater rapport with the secondary worker. Caseworkers need to be prepared for this and accommodate the child/ young person's needs.

### Briefly Explain your Role

If the child says they've never heard of Family and Community Services we could say:

**'Our job is to talk with children and we would like to talk with you today. Is it ok to talk with you today?'**

When explaining the purpose of your talk with them we need to ensure that we are not leading. We do not say that our job is to 'help protect or keep kids safe' as this is suggesting that the reason we are there is because they may not be. We do not talk about 'safety' as this implies assumptions about the child not being 'safe'. It may be suggestible and may start the child wondering why they are unsafe.

We also do not tell children that they are not in trouble, as we cannot guarantee that. If a child should ask, the most we can say is that the child is not in any trouble with us, for speaking to us today.

### Explain Recording Procedure to the Child

Explain that you and the secondary worker will be taking notes/writing things down. Avoid words such as 'records' and 'files' as this is impersonal and adult language. Keep the explanation simple:

**'When we talk with children we like to write down the things that we say, because what we talk about is really important. Is it ok if we write down the things that we talk about?'**

### Consent – to talk and record

Generally, consent of parents should be sought before interviewing a child. However, in cases of serious abuse where there is a concern for the safety of the child or the possibility that one or both of the parents is the alleged offender and could potentially interfere with the safety or risk assessment, then an interview of a child can proceed without parental consent. This is reflected in

Section 30 of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 which states that the Secretary is to make investigations and assessments as is deemed necessary to determine whether the child or young person is at risk of significant harm. When interviewing children 10 years and over, their consent should be obtained.

The NSW Interagency Guidelines, 11/2006, Chapter 3, Page 9 states

Sometimes interviews of children and young people need to be conducted by a caseworker in a neutral environment. The Department of Education and Training has procedures in place for interviewing students in schools. The following basic principles apply:

- Principals will permit an interview at school only when they have been assured by Family and Community Services or police officer that there is no suitable alternative and the person has agreed to be interviewed
- No person should be interviewed against their wishes (it is the principal's responsibility to inform the child or young person of this)
- The child or young person is given the opportunity to have a support person of their choice with them

### **Offer another adult to sit in with the child (Support person)**

Ask the child if they would like another adult to sit in with them while we talk today. Try to avoid using the word 'support person' as most children will not know what this is.

**'Would you like another adult to be here when we talk today, or are you okay to talk with us on your own?'**

The 'other adult' should not be the first person the child made their disclosure to (the first complainant). Police may want to interview this person separately and therefore they should not be present during the child's interview. A support person can only be an adult. It is not appropriate for the support person to be another child, as they can become exposed to the recounting of an abuse event. If a support person is to be present, brief them on their role and the investigative interview process. You may need to ask a support person to leave the room if they become a distraction. You need to inform them prior to the interview that a support person can be required to provide evidence in court. It is also important to explain the role of the support person to the child or young person in age appropriate language at the beginning of the interview i.e. that the support person will not answer or ask any questions.

The Department of Education has their own Policy about asking a child if they want support person. If the Principal wants to ask the child if they want a support person; ask them to do that together with you as the caseworker. Inform them that although they have this policy, we need to determine whether support people are the most appropriate for each child.

### **Obtain the child's full name & age/D.O.B.**

Ask the child to tell you their full name. It is also important to obtain their date of birth. This can be done simply, by asking them when their birthday is or how old they are.

**'What's your full name? What do you like to be called? When is your birthday? (Date of Birth for older children)'**

### **Details of Family members**

It is helpful to find out about the child or young person's family and who resides with them. Again keep this simple:

**'I don't know much about you. Who is in your family?' 'Who do you live with?'**

### **Breaks**

Let the child know they can take a break. You may explain to the child that you too may need a break.

**'During our talk today, you may need to take a break – to get a drink or go to the toilet. How will you let me know you need to take a break? (await response) I might also need to take a break, and I will let you know.'**

## Truth & Lies

Caseworkers are required to cover truth and lies in the introduction phase of the interview. This must be done before moving on to gathering any detail about the alleged abuse. Establishing a child's ability to tell between the truth and lies is known in court as a 'competency test'. However, it may also provide important information about a child's level of cognitive ability in distinguishing between what is real and what is fantasy. It therefore helps caseworkers to assess vulnerability, safety and risk.

There are three elements to cover when covering truth and lies, they are:

1. The definitions (What is a lie? What is a truth? You may need to use an example to clarify if the definitions the child provides are not clear)
3. Consequence (of lying)
4. Agreement (to tell the truth)

To introduce the child or young person to this section you could say;

**'When we talk with children, we talk about truth and lies'**

Always begin the questions by obtaining the definition of a lie first, as children can conceptualise this better:

**'Tell me what a lie is?'**

**'Tell me what the truth is?'**

If the child defines it in a manner that is clear then there is no need to seek clarification. If a child is not able to clearly articulate then you may need to use the following 'transport' example:

**CW: 'How did you get here today?'**

**Child: 'I caught the bus'**

**CW: 'If someone said you walked here today, would that be the truth or a lie?'**

**Child: 'That would be a lie'**

**CW: 'So what would the truth be?'**

**Child: 'That I caught the bus'**

The last two elements of Truth and Lies cover a child's understanding that telling a lie has a consequence, and ensuring that a child agrees to tell the truth during the interview.

**'What usually happens when someone tells a lie?'**

**'While we are talking today it is important that we only talk about the truth. Can we agree to only talk about the truth, which are things that really happened?'**

## Things to avoid:

- Avoid personalising any examples, use 'someone' instead of 'I' or 'you'. By saying 'If I said ...' would imply that you have introduced a lie.
- Don't use colours as an example to clarify Truth & Lies as some children may be colour-blind, or not know their colours yet.
- Do not use examples that are too unbelievable or introduce fantasy concepts. For example with the transport method below do not ask, *If someone said you caught an aeroplane here today.....?*

## Rules of Conversation

There may be questions that children find difficult to answer. This may occur for any number of reasons. In setting up an interview, it is important that children know how to communicate when

they don't understand or don't know the answer and that the interviewer and the child have an agreed response to this. To help children understand what you mean, this conversation must be age appropriate.

There are four points to cover when discussing the rules of conversation:

1. **'If I ask you a question that you don't know the answer to, how will you let me know that you don't know the answer?'**
2. **'If I ask you a question that you don't understand or you don't know the words that I use how will you let me know?'**
3. **'If I ask you a question that you know the answer to, but you don't want to tell me, how will you let me know?'**

**When the child provides an answer to the final question, the caseworker should respond:**

4. **'That's okay, but we might need to come back to that to help me understand why you don't want to tell.'**

The aim of these questions is to ensure the child or young person feels empowered during the interview. You will need to gain a separate answer to each question, i.e. – if the child responds 'I don't know' for each question, you will not know which s/he is referring to.

### Rapport Building

Rapport Building should be considered in the context of relationship based practice which is one of the Care and Protection Practice Standards and a core element of the way we work with families. The quality of the relationship we developed with a family, including children can have a far reaching impact on the safety of children. As such, rapport building is not a thing we do at the beginning of the interview and then stop doing. It forms the basis of the relationship between the interviewer and the child.

Rapport building with a child or young person begins in the introduction phase and is demonstrated by:

- Listening to the child
- Talking about neutral topics
- Engaging in a way that has the child speaking, not just us talking to them
- Eye contact and other engaging body language
- Speaking slowly and clearly
- Using a warm and expressive (neutral) tone
- Using the child's name

Creating an environment where the child or young person feels safe to tell their story requires caseworkers to listen more than they talk and be genuine, empathic and respectful.

### The Rapport Question in the introduction phase has three main goals;

- To build rapport.** This can be done by asking the child to talk about their favourite activity
- To obtain a sense of language development, narrative style, speed of speech and to assess memory recall.** By asking the child to recount a story, the child is required to access memory.
- To prepare the child for the interview format and type of questioning.** By promoting a communication style that encourages free narrative responses.

- Particularise the fun event by covering **What** the child enjoyed then ask **When** they did this and **Where**. Then **frame** the particulars for more detail. This concept will be covered in the next section in more detail in Raising the Allegation.

Example:

**CW:** 'Tell me something you like to do' or 'Tell me something fun you like to do?'

**Child:** 'I like to ride my bike'

**CW:** 'When did you last ride your bike?'

**Child:** 'Yesterday after school'

**CW:** 'Where were you when you were riding your bike?'

**Child:** 'Up and down my street'

**CW:** 'I wasn't there yesterday after school when you rode your bike up and down your street; tell me everything that happened from the start until the end.'

**References:**

CDC Interviewing Children & Gathering Evidence Manual, version 3, revision 2 April 2008.

Ministry of Justice, 2011, Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings, Guidance on interviewing victims and witnesses, and guidance on using special measures.

FACS Care and Protection Practice Standards, Office of the Senior Practitioner, 2014

# RAISING THE ALLEGATION

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## Phase 2

This is the phase of the interview when a caseworker attempts to support a disclosure from the child. This must be done in a non-leading way. Caseworkers need to be careful not to assume that any harm or abuse has occurred to a child. Such an assumption can influence a child's responses, and may be interpreted as leading. The incident reported to Family and Community Services may not have occurred at all.

Caseworkers must plan strategies that will help a child to tell them what has happened without stating the information they have received, because it is important that we give the child the best opportunity to tell us in their own words what happened. By relying on the information in the report to raise the allegation caseworkers may also inadvertently identify the reporter, which is a breach of the legislation.

**Always introduce the allegation to the child by saying either:**

**'Tell me what you have to come to talk to me about today'**

- This type of question obligates the child to respond, it is a polite way of asking and it's non leading.

**or**

**'Tell me what I've come to talk to you about today?'** (E.g. If you went to the school.)

- Avoid 'do you' or 'can you' questions as it is much easier to simply say 'no'.

Some children may know why someone is there to interview them, others may not and some may know but not want to tell. Offender tactics play a large role in why children may not want or be able to tell. Consider what you learned in module 5 about the dynamics of child sexual abuse and how a child is discredited by the offender and conditioned to keep the abuse secret.

## A Child Who Knows and is Able to Tell You

If a child knows why they are being interviewed, the interviewer can ask them *'What do you think I am here to talk with you about?'* Children may have a history of Family and Community Services intervention or they may have been told that Family and Community Services will be coming to talk with them. They may have an obvious mark on their face or body - in this case an interviewer is able to say, *'I can see you have a mark on your face, tell me about that'*.

(Caseworkers should be careful not to refer to the mark as a 'bruise' unless the child already has. Caseworkers are not considered 'medical experts' and therefore cannot qualify this statement)

## A Child Who Does Not Know

It is important that we do not assume the information we have is correct or known to the child. There may be a number of reasons that a child does not know why Family and Community Services have come to talk with them.

- The abuse may have occurred some time ago
- The abuse may be 'normal' for a child:
  - Consider Finkelhor's 4 factor model from module 5 and how an offender may have redefining the sexual abuse for the child as a relationship or imposed other distorted interpretations on the child
- The reporter may have been a third party witness, or there may have been no abuse.

## A Child Who Knows but Does Not Want to Tell You

We know that offenders engage in threats, exploiting vulnerable children who have no-one to believe them or children who have already been abused. They bribe or force children into sexual abuse and foster relationships with the children they intend to abuse, often targeting children that they believe won't tell anyone. Children, who know why a caseworker is there to talk to them but don't want to tell, usually don't due to fear, threats and concern about the outcome of making a disclosure.

The dynamics of child abuse inform us that offenders may groom, coerce or threaten a child, stating that no one would believe them if they told. A child may be scared to talk about the abuse or may be concerned about the impact of disclosing on their siblings or family.

Alternatively, the child may not be ready to disclose to you or your co-worker, they may be embarrassed or believe they will get into trouble from the offender. Children may refer to the abuse as 'a secret'. Children may be worrying about what will happen to their family.

As the safety concerns for a child increase, Caseworkers may need to move along a continuum from non-leading strategies to partial leading onto leading questioning, in order to assess a child's safety, welfare and wellbeing, and complete a holistic Secondary Assessment. The decision to become leading in an interview, especially when raising the allegation, should be discussed with your manager casework in your Pre-Assessment Consultation and noted in your Interview Planning Sheet.

## Strategies to Support a Disclosure When a Child Does Not Know

Interviewers need to have planned appropriate strategies for raising the allegation in a non-leading way by referring to the **contextual information** they have in a report, e.g. – a child disclosed to their teacher after a 'protective behaviours' class. You may use this fact to raise the allegation, rather than the actual disclosed information.

Some strategies that can be used (dependent on the contextual information in a report) are:

- Likes / Dislikes about family members
  - **E.g. - 'Earlier you said you live with Mum, Dad and your two brothers...'**
  - **'Tell me something you like about Mum? Anything else...? Anything else...?'**
  - **'Tell me something you don't like about Mum? Anything else...? Anything else...?'**
- Continue this pattern for each family member until the likes and dislikes have been exhausted.
- Who cares for you / who looks after you?**
- Who visits your house / whose house do you visit?**
- What do you do when you are not at school; Do you like school?**
- Have you had any classes that are different at school lately? Tell me about your 'protective behaviours' class.**
- Discussing family, routines, significant events, relationships.
- Feeling Faces: Happy/Sad, Angry/Scared – What makes you feel...? Or Who makes you feel ...?
- As a last non-leading strategy you could use the Body Chart. This needs to be done systematically and needs to be covered in a specific way. It needs to be from top to toe on the front AND back covering the main body areas.

The exact same questions need to be asked for each body part. The questions are as follows, in this order;

**‘What is this?’ (Pointing to the body part, starting with the child’s hair)**

**‘What does it do?’**

**‘Who touches you there?’**

**‘Anyone else?’ ‘Anyone else? (Continue exhausting this question until the child says ‘no’)** The reason for exhausting this is that often the child doesn’t disclose in the first instance.

Should the child nominate the offender as someone who touches them in a particular place (e.g. genitalia), acknowledge what they have told you, tell them you may need to ask more questions and will come back to this, before moving on to rest of the body chart. This is called ‘parking’.

Example:

**‘What you have told me is really important and I will come back to that and talk with you more about it, but for now I want to ask you some more questions.’**

You can then go back and ask more open ended questions to expand their disclosure. The reason for doing this is to remain unbiased and not prejudicial and there may be other body parts involved.

**Please Note:** The list is not exhaustive for non-leading raising strategies. You must plan your strategies as part of your PAC with your manager casework, co-worker and/or casework specialist.

**References:**

Finkelhor, D. (1984) *Child Sexual Abuse: New Theory and Research*, New York: Free Press.

Wilson, C. & Powell, M. (2001) ‘Understanding a Child’s Mind’ and ‘Essential Elements of the Interview’ *in A Guide to Interviewing Children*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

## PARTICULARISING THE EVENT

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### Phase 2 continued

After raising the allegation in a non-leading way that has elicited a disclosure from a child, firstly, the interviewer needs to clarify that **what** has occurred is an incident of abuse.

It is important to ensure that the event meets the threshold for a child protection response, prior to moving onto the next stage of the interview. If the information the child has given is not clear further questions need to be asked to clarify the incident and whether it is ROSH.

Example:

1.      **Child:**        **'He played with my wee and I got angry'**  
           **CW:**            **'What do you mean by wee?'**  
           **Child:**        **'My vagina'**
  
2.      **Child:**        **'He played with my Wii and I got angry'**  
           **CW:**            **'What do you mean by Wii?'**  
           **Child:**        **'My Nintendo Wii. It's a computer game, a bit like an X-Box'**

As in this last example, if the interviewer is satisfied the child has not been abused and it does not meet the child protection threshold, they may move straight to the closure phase.

When clarifying **what happened**, an interviewer must be sure to cover all names for body parts and must confirm what a child means by terms that are unclear or easily misinterpreted,

- Child:**        **'Mum flogged the life out of me'**  
**CW:**            **'What do you mean by flogged?'**  
**Child:**        **'Mum punched me over and over in the face and body'**

This clarification has identified that the child has been physically assaulted. Then the interviewer needs to find out other specific details about the incident – such as the **Who**, **When** and **Where**. This process is called **particularising the event**.

Once it has been clarified **what happened**, the interviewer needs to know **when** it happened. The interview is about one particular event only. If the child implies that the abuse has occurred more than once, it is important the interviewer ascertain **when was the last time** the event occurred. The interviewer will then ask the child to recall and talk about this most recent event.

Interviewers also need to establish **where** the abuse event occurred.

Once these particulars have been obtained, the interviewer will be ready to move to the free narrative phase of the interview. This is a demonstration of what we call **Particularising the Event**.

1.      **Child:**        **'Mum flogged the life out of me'**  
           **CW:**            **'What do you mean by flogged?'**  
           **Child:**        **'Mum punched me over and over in the face and body'**  
           **CW:**            **'When did Mum punch you in the face and body?'**  
           **Child:**        **'This morning'**  
           **CW:**            **'Where were you when Mum flogged the life out of you?'**  
           **Child:**        **'In the garage at my house'**

- CW:** 'I wasn't there this morning when Mum flogged the life out of you in the garage at your house. Tell me everything that happened from the beginning until the end.'
2. **Child:** 'Winston puts his willy in my mouth'
- CW:** 'What do you mean by willy?'
- Child:** 'His doodle'
- CW:** 'Do you have another name for 'doodle'?'
- Child:** 'No'
- CW:** 'What does a willy do?'
- Child:** 'You wee out of it'
- CW:** (Interviewer should ask the child to show on a Body Chart where the 'willy' is because the child is unable to provide the anatomical name: penis)
- CW:** 'When was the last time Winston put his willy in your mouth?'
- Child:** 'On the weekend'
- CW:** 'Where were you when Winston put his willy in your mouth?'
- Child:** 'At Winston's house'
- CW:** 'I wasn't there on the weekend when Winston put his willy in your mouth at his house tell me everything that happened from the start until the end.'

By repeating the Who, What, When and Where in this '**framing**' question the interviewer is giving the child the parameters of the event that we wish them to recall. When the particulars are framed back to the child in this statement, it is important that the child's own words are used, even if the interviewer had to clarify words used by the child. It is important that the interviewer DOES NOT ask any further specific questions outside of the **Who, What, When** and **Where** of the disclosure at this stage; such as 'what time was it?', as these details will be gathered in a later phase of the interview.

**References:**

Wilson, C. & Powell, M. (2001) 'Understanding a Child's Mind' and 'Essential Elements of the Interview' in *A Guide to Interviewing Children*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

# THE EVENT LINE

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## Phase 3

### The Event Line

Once we have particularised the event and asked the child the framing question:

**'I wasn't there on (when) when (who) did (what) to you (where) tell me everything that happened from the beginning until the end'**

We have reached the point in the interview when the child is now able to provide a free narrative account of the abuse event. Interviewers use the Event Line tool to record the child's free narrative.

### What is a free narrative?

A free narrative is obtained when a child is encouraged to provide an account of the event or situation in their own words, at their own pace and without interruption.

According to Powell (2001) the benefits of eliciting a free narrative are fourfold:

- Responses to open-ended questions are usually more accurate than to specific questions.
- Open ended prompts encourage respondents to provide as much relevant information as they remember whereas more focused questions put pressure on the child to respond.
- Swift questioning does not allow the child and interviewer the time to collect their thoughts.
- When the interviewer imposes their language on the event, there is greater potential for confusion.

### How does the Event Line record the free narrative?

An Event Line is a tool used by the **primary interviewer** that is useful in structuring the free narrative the child provides regarding an abuse event. It is considered to be a conversation management tool, which means it assists the interviewer to manage the conversation and maintain the sequence of the child's narrative.

It is important that we do not ask specific questions during the child's free narrative as this will interrupt the memory recall and the child may have to repeat their narrative. This may cause problems if there is a slight difference in both accounts.

### Plotting Anchor Points on an Event Line

An Event Line used in an interview will consist of as many Anchor Points as required by the child's narrative.

As the primary interviewer listens to the child's free narrative they record one or two lines, of the child's narrative as an anchor point (parts of the child's story) on the top of the event line. That is, as the interviewer hears the story, they write in the top square of the event line a 'chunk' of information in the exact words that the child uses. This is done so you can go back to each anchor point and gather further details in the next phase. The anchor points will continue until a child completes their free narrative and the child and offender separate or the child has clearly explained the end of the abuse, e.g. – then I went to sleep.

The secondary interviewer continues to record contemporaneous notes throughout all phases of the interview.

While recording each anchor point, the interviewer asks no further details of the child, but simply prompts the child if the child goes quiet by asking ‘**What happened next?**’ or ‘**Then what happened?**’ or ‘**What happened after that?**’.

Once the child completes their narrative, the interviewer concludes the Event Line by asking:

‘**Did anything else happen after that?**’ This is to confirm that the abuse event has concluded and that no further abuse occurred at this time.

**CW:** ‘I wasn’t there this morning when Mum punched you over and over in the face and body in the garage at your house, tell me everything that happened from the start until the end.’

**Child:** Mum sent me to get dad’s guitar from the garage

**CW:** What happened next?

**Child:** I broke a string and was trying to fix it when mum came in.

**CW:** Then what happened?

**Child:** Then she cracked it at me and punched me over and over in the face and body.

**CW:** What happened after that?

**Child:** I fell to the ground and she left and went back to the house.

**CW:** Did anything else happen after that?

**Child:** No.

Anchor Point 1	Anchor Point 2	Anchor Point 3	Anchor Point 4	Anchor Point 5
Mum sent me to get dad’s guitar from the garage	I broke a string and was trying to fix it when mum came in.	Then she cracked it at me and punched me over and over in the face and body.	I fell to the ground	She left and went back to the house.

### References

Powell, M. B. & Snow, P. C (2007) Guide to questioning children during the free-narrative phase of an investigative interview, *Australian Psychologist*, 42, 1, pp. 57-65.

Wilson, C. & Powell, M. (2001) ‘Understanding a Child’s Mind’ and ‘Essential Elements of the Interview’ in *A Guide to Interviewing Children*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

# Event Line Guide

**Particularise the event**

**Who:** **Where:**  
**What:** **When:**

‘I wasn’t there on (when) when (who) did (what) to you (where). Tell me everything that happened from beginning to end’

Anchor Point 1 <i>Child and POI Come Together</i>	Anchor Point 2	Anchor Point 3	Anchor Point 4	Anchor Point 5 etc <i>Child and POI Part</i>
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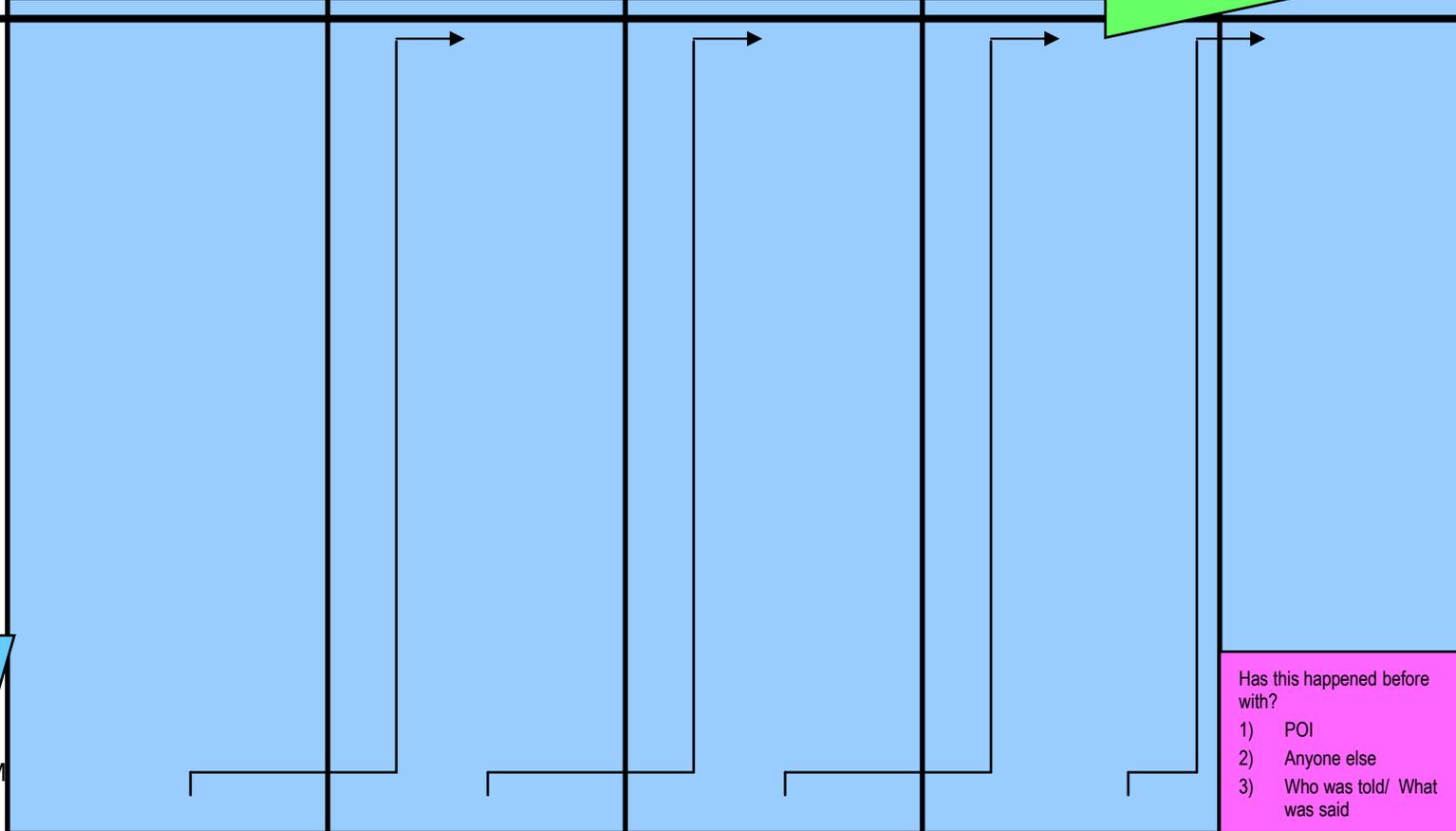
**WHAT HAPPENED NEXT...WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THAT...THEN WHAT HAPPENED...DID ANYTHING HAPPEN AFTER THAT?**

‘You’ve given me a lot of information. I want to go back and ask you some more questions.  
**Tell me more about the part where (Anchor Point)**  
 (Detail given by child)  
**‘Tell me more about (detail)’**  
 Tell me more, tell me more, tell me more...etc  
 Then move onto specific questions

**Who?**  
**What?**  
**Where?**  
**When?**  
**How?**

You *may* then want to ask ‘**Is there anything more you want to tell me about (Anchor Point 1)**’  
 You should check with your co-worker whether they have any questions they want to ask about (Anchor Point 1)  
 Then move onto the **next anchor point**, following this same guide.

**TELL ME MORE...TELL ME MORE**



Has this happened before with?

- 1) POI
- 2) Anyone else
- 3) Who was told/ What was said

### Event Line Template

**Who:**  
**What:**

**Where:**  
**When:**

'I wasn't' there on (when) when (who) did (what) to you (where). Tell me everything that happened from beginning to end'

What happened next...What happened then...What happened after that...Did anything else happen?

The diagram features a large horizontal arrow pointing to the right, with the text 'What happened next...What happened then...What happened after that...Did anything else happen?' inside it. Below this arrow is a large grid with two rows and five columns. To the left of the grid is a large downward-pointing arrow containing the text 'Tell Me More... Me More...'. Below the grid, the following questions are listed: 'Who?', 'What?', 'Where?', 'When?', and 'How?'.

## GATHERING DETAIL

### Phase 4

In the gathering detail phase of the interview, the purpose is for the interviewer to support the child to tell their story in as much detail as possible in order to inform decisions around safety and risk assessment. This phase of the interview starts from when a child has finished providing their free narrative which the interviewer has plotted in anchor points. The interviewer then says:

**‘You have given me a lot of information. I want to go back and ask you some more questions about what you have just told me’ OR**

**‘You have given me a lot of information, I want to go back to the beginning and ask you some more questions’.**

To commence the gathering detail phase of the interview, the interviewer must restate each anchor point by asking:

**‘Tell me more about the part where...’ and repeat the exact words in each anchor point, one at a time.**

**Or ‘Tell me more about when you said, Mum sent me to get .....’**

The interviewer only moves onto the next anchor point when they have gathered sufficient detail from each anchor point. E.g.

Anchor Point 1	Anchor Point 2	Anchor Point 3	Anchor Point 4	Anchor Point 5
Mum sent me to get dad’s guitar from the garage	I broke a string and was trying to fix it when mum came in.	Then she cracked it at me and punched me over and over in the face and body.	I fell to the ground	She left and went back to the house.
Tell me more...	Tell me more...	Tell me more...	Tell me more...	Tell me more...

**‘Tell me more about the part where Mum sent you to get dad’s guitar from the garage?’**

Wherever possible the interviewer should then use open-ended questions to collect the necessary details about each anchor point.

‘Tell me more...’ questions will assist to elicit further free narrative from the child in each anchor point. ‘Tell me more...’ questions should be exhausted before moving to specific, non-leading questions.

Specific questions should be asked if they serve a purpose: E.g.

**‘What was on television?’** can help establish the time.

**‘Who else was in the room?’** can establish any witnesses.

**‘What were you wearing?’** can corroborate the child’s narrative, with physical evidence such as blood, semen or other bodily fluids.

Once an anchor point on the event line has been exhausted, an interviewer can decide to move on to the next anchor point, by first asking the co-worker if they have any questions. The interviewer moves to the next anchor point by re-stating what the child has said:

**‘Tell me more about the part where... (Next anchor point)’.**

Asking questions in this way allows the child to recall the event in a logical, sequential order. The child is always thinking forward and the interview is based on the exact words the child has used in their narrative.

Sometimes children will begin to tell us detail about a part of the event that is further down the Event Line, before we are ready. This can be managed by stating:

**'We're going to get to the part about .....soon; however I want to ask you some more questions about.... (Current anchor point)'**

Children who have been repeatedly abused may move to generalisations. For example, they might say 'what usually happens...' It is important for the interviewer to guide the questioning back to what happened, staying focussed on the particular abuse event in this Event Line. E.g.

**'We're going to talk about the other times later. But right now we're only talking about this morning when you were in the garage and mum punched you over and over on the face and body'**

### Asking Specific Questions

To gather sufficient detail, it is usually necessary to ask specific questions after 'tell me more...' questions have been exhausted and the child has provided as much information as their memory allows or they think to disclose. If the information required has still not been provided by the child, the interviewer may move to a multiple choice question. For example the interviewer might want to know where exactly the offender's hand was on the child, once the child has provided information that his hand was used:

**Child: His hand was down my pants.**

**CW: Tell me more about his hand being down your pants?**

**Child: It was just down my pants, touching.**

**CW: What was his hand touching?**

**Child: Me, down my pants and knickers.**

**CW: Was his hand on top of your knickers, under your knickers or somewhere else?**

**Child: His hand was in between my pants and my knickers.**

**CW: Tell me more about his hand in between your pants and knickers?**

The option of 'something else' always needs to be offered to allow for error in understanding, and to demonstrate unbiased information. This example demonstrates how open ended, specific and multiple choice questions can be used subsequently of each other.

### Types of Detail to be Gathered

Interviewers should aim to gather sufficient information to:

- Assess current safety and future risk of the child or young person.
- Exclude alternative hypotheses. For example, to gather sufficient information to exclude the possibility the alleged offender was only washing the child when they touched their genital area.
- Validate the child's statement and demonstrate they are a credible witness.
- Assist the non-offending parent to develop a position of belief.
- Make appropriate referrals e.g. JIRT, Health or other services.
- Refer any criminal issues to Police Local Area Commands (LAC's).

Depending on the type of abuse, the following lists can assist interviewers to gather detail about pertinent information:

Sexual	Physical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Clothing (child and offender)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> On top of or underneath clothing</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What was said</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What was seen, heard, smelt, tasted or felt (physically).</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How the abuse ended (injury/ejaculation/blood etc).</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Implement/s used (condoms/ lubricant etc).</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The extent of abuse (exposure/fondling/penetration)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Any witnesses.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> If pornography was involved/ where is it now, (DVDs/ magazines/video/ camera/computer etc).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Clothing (child and offender)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What was said</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What was seen, heard, smelt, tasted or felt (physically).</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How the abuse ended (injury/blood).</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Implement/s or weapon/s used</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> (open hand/closed hand/belt etc)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> If an implement was used (a description, where it came from, where its kept, where is it now)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Any witnesses</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Any injury/injuries (a description/ colour/size/location on body)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Any first aid or medical care administered or required?</li> </ul>

In considering what sorts of details to gather information on, an interviewer also needs to think about how to frame questions in non-leading ways. For example, an interviewer should not ask a child whether the perpetrator wore a condom. Instead it would be more open to ask the child 'how did it stop/end?' or 'tell me more about how it ended?' or 'what could you see?' If the information is not nominated then you need to no longer pursue this line of questioning.

#### References:

Powell, M. B. & Snow, P. C (2007) Guide to questioning children during the free-narrative phase of an investigative interview, *Australian Psychologist*, 42, 1, pp. 57-65.

Wilson, C. & Powell, M. (2001) 'Understanding a Child's Mind' and 'Essential Elements of the Interview' in *A Guide to Interviewing Children*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

## INTERVIEW TOOLS – BODY CHARTS, LOCATION DIAGRAMS AND OTHER TOOLS

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Interview tools are designed to support disclosure by providing the child with additional tools to aid in the verbal information they disclose in an interview.

### Body Charts

There are **three** ways of using a Body Chart –

- a) When raising the allegation in a non leading way (See earlier Reading ‘Raising the Allegation’)
- b) When clarifying the child’s language of body parts in a child’s disclosure (See earlier reading ‘Particularising the Event’)
  - You can show the child the body chart and ask them to mark or circle the body part they are referring to e.g. genitalia
- c) When gathering detail in a child’s disclosure of the location on the body chart where a child was touched/harmed
  - Locating what parts of the body were harmed in a sexual abuse disclosure on the chart
  - Locating what parts of the body were harmed in a physical abuse disclosure on the chart

A body chart in no way replaces a medical record of injuries, but is a way of recording and discussing information regarding injuries which cannot be sighted by the interviewer.

**Please Note:** Caseworkers are NOT to request children to remove any piece of clothing to show us an injury. They are to record this information on a Body Chart.

The approved body chart is referred to on the following page. This is the only body chart endorsed for use in NSW Investigative Interviews.

Body charts must be labelled, signed and dated by the child being interviewed, if they are able to, as well as by the interviewer.

The interviewer introduces the Body Chart by saying:

**‘What is this a picture of?’ (Showing the child both sides of the Body Chart)**

The child usually responds by saying ‘it’s a picture of a girl/boy’.

The interviewer then restates the child’s words about an injury or part of their body and asks: E.g.

**CW: ‘You said the belt hit you on your back and that’s where it hurts. Show me on this picture where on your back you were hit?’**

**Child: ‘Just here’ (points to lower back on the Body Chart)**

**CW: ‘Put a mark or circle there. What do you call that body part?’**

**Child: ‘The bottom of my back’ The CW can label the body part if the child is unable to or needs help.**

**‘Write your name on the drawing and I’ll sign and date it too.’**

See the example on the following page of a Body Chart:

**NB: Body Chart should be used as a full size A4 picture, with the front on one side and the back on the other side.**

**FRONT**



**BACK**



**Signed by child (or write their name if they can't write)  
Signed and dated by the interviewer**

## Location Diagrams

Location diagrams assist with contextualising the environment the incident occurred in, eliciting and clarifying detail about the incident, and corroborating information. They are also useful to identify the location of possible physical evidence, such as body fluids on clothing or bed sheets. The drawing should relate to the specific location where the abuse event took place. Location drawings can be used to understand movement during an abuse event.

To use a location diagram during the Gathering Detail phase of the interview, the interviewer introduces a blank A4 piece of paper and commences by saying:

**'I haven't been to your house. What shape is your room?'**

The interviewer then draws the outline of the room, filling up the whole A4 page. To help orientate the child, interviewers then explain:

**'If we were looking into your room from above, where is the door? Where are the windows?'**

The interviewer marks on the outline where the door and window/s are and labels them.

The interviewer then gives the pen/pencil over to the child and asks:

**'What else is in the room? Can you draw that and label it... Anything else? ... Anything else?'**

The interviewer continues to prompt the child until sufficient detail is in the drawing for the interviewers to have a sense of what is in the room, where it is, the positioning of people in the room and a record of any movement. You can assist the child to label items if they are unable to on their own. Any movement made by the offender can be recorded with a dashed line and labelled. Any responses or movements by the child should also be recorded. You can use different colours for recording the movement of more than one person.

**'Where were you? Where was (the offender)? Can you mark that and write 'me' there? Etc.'**

Ensure the location drawing is signed and dated by the interviewer and the child has written their name on it.

**'Can you write your name on the drawing and I'll sign it too?'** See an example of a location drawing by an 8 year old.

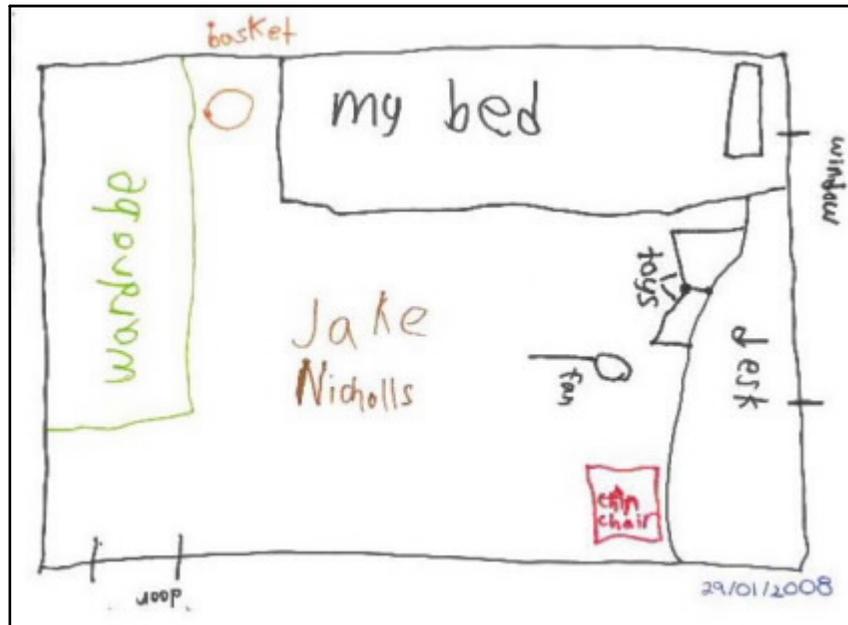
## Other Tools

Other information gathering tools that could be used:

- Family drawings could be used to identify who's in the child's family or who lives with the child. It is often used with the likes/dislikes questioning strategy when raising the allegation. Drawings are also useful to help settle young children. It is good to keep in mind though that this could take a long time to complete and its usefulness needs to be weighed against the negative effect of tiring the child through a lengthy interview process.
- Drawings of implements used in an abuse event that a child talks about, such as a belt can assist an interviewer in gathering detail about an implement or weapon.

## Please Note:

It is not appropriate to ask a child who has been sexually abused to demonstrate on their own body how they were touched, nor a child who has been physically abused to demonstrate on their own body how they were hit etc. Both of these techniques can be seen as asking the child to relive the abuse situation and take on the perpetrating role.



**Note:** Remember to use all of the entire A4 piece of paper for the location diagram.

### References

Wilson, C. & Powell, M. (2001) 'Understanding a Child's Mind' and 'Essential Elements of the Interview' in *A Guide to Interviewing Children*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

# CLOSING THE INTERVIEW

## Phase 5

### Finalising your Event Line

Once the interviewer is satisfied that they have obtained all the details about the abuse incident, they should ascertain if this type of incident has happened before.

- Asking **'has this ever happened before with ... (POI)?'** determines whether the alleged offender has offended against the child on any other prior occasions.

Should the child respond 'yes', then a Time Line needs to be completed – see below.

- The next question that needs to be asked is **'Have you told anyone about this? Who have you told?'** This question not only assists us in assessing safety and risk (i.e. has the child told a parent, or significant other who has dismissed the information) but also to identify who the first complainant is.
- 'What did you tell them?'** Direct quotes should be obtained, including **what** was said, **when** it was said and **where** this conversation took place.
- The final question that needs to be asked is **'has this ever happened before with anyone else?'** This can be interpreted in two different ways. Firstly, whether any other person has abused the child, and secondly, whether the child is aware of this happening to any other person.

### Time Lines

In the event that a child discloses multiple incidents of abuse it is important to ask the child 'Tell me about the first time that it happened?' We need to particularise this event by gathering information about:

- WHAT HAPPENED**
- WHEN IT HAPPENED**
- WHERE IT HAPPENED**

The next question that needs to be asked is **'Tell me about any other time that you can remember'**. This event will also need to be particularised, gathering the WHAT, WHEN & WHERE.

Caseworkers can then use a 'Time Line' to map the different events of abuse that have occurred.

E.g.: TIME LINE

The first time	Other times the child remembers	The last time (usually the interview just completed)
What:	What:	What:
When:	When:	When:
Where:	Where:	Where:

The interviewer/ caseworker will generally not have to undertake another event line at this stage, as they should have enough information to establish whether the child is safe. In an instance where the child has disclosed sexual abuse or serious physical abuse, this information would be referred onto JIRT for further investigation and assessment. However, the caseworker should always consult their manager casework, to determine that this is the most appropriate course of action. Particularising the other event(s) is **very important** and will assist JIRT staff should they need to undertake further interviews with the child.

## Closure

This is the final stage of the interview and is just as important as any other phase. It has a significant impact on how the child has perceived the contact with the caseworkers and sets the foundations for future contact.

- Explain what will happen next
- Review the child's expectations of the interview outcome

**'What's going to happen now is that we are going to talk with some more people that we work with about what you have just told us. And we will have to talk with your Mum/ Dad/ Carer' (depending on child's disclosure and who the offender is)**  
**'How do you feel about that?'**

**'We've asked you a lot of questions today. Do you have any questions for us?'**

**'If anything like this were to ever happen again, who could you tell?'**(Ensure supports are functioning adults who can either keep the child safe and/or report to Family and Community Services)

- If necessary or appropriate, arrange the next contact with the child and give them your name and telephone number.

**'You can also tell me. I'd like to give you my card with my name and phone number on it. I'm not always at my desk, but you can leave a message and I'll get back to you as soon as I can.'** (if this is appropriate for the child's age and development)

- Thank the child. and help them re-enter the day to day world

**'Thank you again for talking to us. Before you said you like riding your bike...when will be the next time you ride your bike?'**

### What should caseworkers do after an interview?

- Contact your manager casework and proceed with their directions or those from your PAC.
- Cover any contingencies that may have arisen from the child's disclosure, e.g. – medical examination required or emergency foster care placement
- Visit and advise parents of the report and interview. Parents must be informed of the report and contact with child. It is the responsibility of Family and Community Services to inform parents that an interview has been conducted before a child is collected from a school or service.
- Safety plan with child (if appropriate for age and development and the child has the capacity to engage in safety interventions)
- Safety plan with parents
- Ensure your own well being by employing self care strategies and debriefing following any interview (Disclosure/ non disclosure).
- Discussion with manager casework and Assessment Consultation completed.

### References

Wilson, C. & Powell, M. (2001) 'Understanding a Child's Mind' and 'Essential Elements of the Interview' *in A Guide to Interviewing Children*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.