ARTICLE:

SUMMARY:
The purpose of this study was to explore the ability of young children (between ages 3-6) to respond informatively to various questions or prompts used in forensic interviews, and to explore age differences in patterns of response to various types of prompts.

Subjects/Design:
There were 299 alleged victims of child abuse between the ages of 3-6 who disclosed either sexual (n=128) or physical (n=171) abuse.
- 3-3.11 – 46
- 4-4.11 - 98
- 5-5.11 – 96
- 6-6.11 – 59
These children were from all five administrative regions of Israel and had been interviewed by a total of 61 child investigators using the NICHD protocol. 110 of the children were abused a single time, and 189 disclosed being abused multiple times. Most suspects were members of the child’s family. All interviews were audio-recorded, and these interviews were then transcribed and all interviewer prompts were classified into one of four categories of questions:
- Open-ended invitations
- Directive prompts
- Option-posing prompts
- Suggestive prompts
The raters also classified the children’s responses in regards to the number of details provided and whether responses were responsive to the interviewer prompts.

Findings:
1. Substantive Phase of the interview – interviewers made 84.59 prompts to the children
2. Directive prompts were most frequent, followed by invitations, option-posing questions, and suggestive prompts
3. 3 year olds were given fewer invitations than either 5 or 6 year olds
4. Children of all ages made some response to 92% of interviewer prompts
5. However, only about 63% of these responses were “on-track”
6. Children provided proportionally fewer “on-track” responses to invitations than to directive, option-posing, or suggestive prompts
7. 3 and 4 year olds provided significantly more “on-track” responses to directive prompts
than to invitations
8. On average, children provided 1.99 forensic details per response
9. Overall, invitations yielded the greatest number of forensic details, but this is
dramatically more likely with the older children

National Children’s Advocacy Center (2014). The development of communicative and narrative
skills among preschoolers: Lessons from forensic interviews about child abuse. Research to
Practice Summary. Huntsville, AL: Author.

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National Children’s Advocacy Center
Research to Practice Summary
The development of communicative and narrative skills among preschoolers:
Lessons from forensic interviews about child abuse