

ASKING ABOUT “MANIPULATION” TACTICS DURING THE FORENSIC INTERVIEW

Let's Call It What It Is – “Manipulation” Rather Than “Grooming”

A key variable in the manipulation process is the cultivation, creation, and subsequent abuse of trust of a child, his/her family, an organization, or even a community. “Grooming” has a positive social connotation and does not adequately convey how an offender systematically develops a relationship with a child's family, the child, and others beyond the family unit and then deliberately violates that trust when a child is sexually abused.



Benefits of Targeting the Nuances of Manipulation During Forensic Interviews

- Helps children provide more complete account of their experiences
- Provides investigators with a broader understanding of alleged offense(s)
- May reduce bias by illuminating offender's psychological manipulation



Victim Selection and Gaining Access

Asking questions regarding victim selection or access assists the interviewer, multidisciplinary team members, and others better understand what a child experiences during the initial phases of the manipulation process.

- “Tell me about meeting [...].”
- “What did you think about [...], the first time you met him/her?”
- “How did you feel about [...] the first time you met him/her?”
- “What did your family or friends say about [...] when you first met him/her?”
- “Did your feelings ever change about [...]?”



Asking about Differential Treatment, Enticements, or Financial Incentives

Rapport and developing trust with children is a key aspect of the manipulation process. Asking questions regarding differential treatment, material enticements, financial incentives, or special privileges provided to children should be topics covered in the interview.



- “What type of things did [...] first do with you?”
- “Did [...] give you or your friends something?” (If yes, then utilize the pairing principle “Tell me about [...].”
- “Tell me about any rules [...] had.” “What would happen if you or someone else broke the rules?”
- “What did [...] say about your parents/caretakers/others?” (people significant to child)

Keeping the Secret

“Why don’t children tell?” is a common question from people. To better understand the challenges individual children face when thinking about reporting maltreatment, the interviewer can ask questions regarding the disclosure process.



- “Did you ever think about telling?” If yes, “Tell me about...”
- “What kinds of things made you think about telling?”
- “Tell me if something was ever said about telling.”
- “What kept you from telling someone?”
- “What’s happened that you could now talk about [...]”

It’s not enough that interviewers ask about “what happened”. We need to also explore what happened from the beginning of an offender’s interactions with a child and the child’s caretakers and, once abuse began, what kept the child silent. Asking the child some of the above listed questions will aid you in better understanding a child’s abusive experience.

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