

CONDUCTING AN EFFECTIVE NARRATIVE PRACTICE

Purpose

Research consistently demonstrates that when a child is given the opportunity to practice recalling and describing episodic details of a recent, personally meaningful, and neutral or positive event unrelated to the abuse allegation, he/she provides a greater number of forensically relevant details compared to a time period which may contain mostly routine elements. The narrative practice phase of the forensic interview allows the child to practice responding to open-ended questions, using episodic language, and demonstrating an understanding of the type of communication expected in the substantive phase.

Benefits for the Child

Conducting an effective narrative practice aids a child in remembering and reporting information, plus increases a child's willingness to share his/her experiences by:

- Learning the types of questions, the interviewer will ask
- Learning how to provide sufficient narrative detail in response to open-ended questions
- Practicing retrieving information about specific events from memory



Benefits for the Interviewer

- Allows time to adjust prompts/questions to child's style of interaction and comfort level
- Helps determine if child has problems focusing or if the narrative response is disorganized and nonsequential.
 - May need to break the event sequencing down to what occurred first, then what happened?



Narrative Practice Techniques

Duration

- Can range from as little as 2 minutes to more than 10 minutes
- Consider whether child is ready to transition
- If child displays reluctance, spend more time on safe topics to allow continuation of rapport development



Type of Event to Discuss

- Select a specific topic, drawing from an activity mentioned by the child during early engagement. For example, if the child mentioned playing travel basketball, ask him/her to "think about one time you traveled and tell me everything that happened, from beginning to end."

- Asking the child “Tell me about remembering this one trip” will assist in determining if the child can differentiate one trip from other trips (episodic memory versus script memory)
- Alternately, you may ask, “think about a time you did something fun or interesting and tell me everything that happened from beginning to end.”
- Information concerning a recent, personally meaningful event elicited from caretakers before the interview can assist with determining a possible topic for narrative practice
- If the other two options do not work, ask the child to think about a recent time period and recall “everything that happened, starting from the beginning to the end.”
 - Preschoolers can be asked “Tell me what you did this morning from the time you got up until you came here.”
- Use caution if asking about a holiday, birthday, celebration, etc. unless the child (or caretaker) has indicated this is a positive or neutral topic
- Avoid asking about fiction (plots of books, movies, or videogames) asking about semantic information (what is known, rather than remembered, such as the name of a child’s school, what kinds of pets the child has, etc.); or asking for script information (what usually happens)

Question Types

- Effective narrative practice begins with a narrative invitation. For example, “You said you play travel basketball. Think about one time you and your team traveled out of town and tell me everything that happened from beginning to end.”
- Breadth prompts are used to elicit more broadly about what occurred during the event or to help a child organize his/her narrative (i.e. “What else happened?” or “Then what happened?”)
- Depth prompts are used to elicit more detail about part of an event already mentioned by the child (i.e. “Tell me more about the part where [...]”)
- After exhausting a child’s narrative regarding a specific event, use cued-recall (detail wh-) questions to elicit specific details not given, such as who, where, when, how, or specific what questions (i.e. “Who is Matt?”; “Where/when did he fall down?” or “What color was the car?”)
- To better understand the totality of a child’s experience, ask sensorial questions or questions regarding the child’s thoughts or emotions

It may be helpful to inform the child of future narrative invitation requests. For example, explaining to the child, “that’s how we talk in here, there might be some other times I’ll ask you to tell me everything that happened from beginning to end.”

References

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