

Child Forensic Interview Training

A Bibliography



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Scope

This bibliography provides citations and abstracts to publications on numerous topics related to issues in child forensic interview training. International publications are included.

Organization

Publications are listed in date-descending order. Links to full-text are provided when available.

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Child Forensic Interview Training

A Bibliography

Haginoya, S., Ibe, T., Yamamoto, S., Yoshimoto, N., Mizushi, H., & Santtila, P. (2023). [AI avatar tells you what happened: The first test of using AI-operated children in simulated interviews to train investigative interviewers](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1133621). *Frontiers in Psychology, 14*, 579. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1133621>

Previous research has shown that simulated child sexual abuse interview training using avatars paired with feedback and modeling improves interview quality. However, in order to make this approach scalable, the classification of interviewer questions needs to be automated. We tested an automated question classification system for simulated investigative interviews with children while also providing interventions (feedback and modeling) aimed at improving interview quality. Participants and Setting: Forty-two professionals were randomly assigned to the no intervention, feedback, or modeling group. The participants conducted two simulated child sexual abuse interviews online while receiving no intervention, feedback or modeling after the first interview. Feedback consisted of the outcome of the alleged case and comments on the quality of the questions asked by the interviewer. Modeling consisted of learning points and videos illustrating good and bad questioning methods. The total percentage of agreement in question coding between human operators and the automated classification was 72% for the main categories (recommended vs. not recommended) and 52% when the eleven subcategories were considered. The intervention groups improved from first to second interview while this was not the case in the no intervention group (intervention x time: $p = .007$, $\eta^2 = .28$). Automated question classification worked well for classifying the interviewers' questions allowing interventions to improve the quality of the interviews.

Yan, Z., Brubacher, S., Boud, D., & Powell, M. (2023). The influence of self-assessment practices on online training for investigative interviewing skills. *Studies in Educational Evaluation, 76*. DOI:10.1016/j.stueduc.2023.101236

This paper investigates how 192 trainees' self-assessment practices and personal attributes related to their success in an online interview training program. Performance was measured pre- and post-training by evaluating the use of open-ended questions and positive interviewing behaviors.

Personal data and a pre-training survey on self-assessment practices (i.e., SEFI, seeking external feedback through inquiry; SEFM, seeking external feedback through monitoring; SIF, seeking internal feedback; and SR, self-reflection) were also collected. Trainees with higher levels of SEFI had larger learning gains from the training, whereas trainees with higher levels of SEFM or SIF had smaller learning gains. Trainees with lower interviewing skills before the training, and those from policing backgrounds, demonstrated larger learning gains. Younger trainees evidenced a larger increase in the use of open-ended questions, while older trainees showed greater changes in prevalence of positive interviewing behaviors. The implications of the findings for the development of training programs are discussed.

Brubacher, S. P., Shulman, E. P., Bearman, M. J., & Powell, M. B. (2022). Teaching child investigative interviewing skills: Long-term retention requires cumulative training. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 28(1), 123-136. DOI:10.1037/law0000332

Successful interview training includes components beyond content learning (e.g., coding question types, practicing skills in simulated interviews), but the advantages conferred by adding components are unclear. The present research evaluated best practice questioning and behavior following the addition of a series of training components delivered in a logical order. In Study 1, randomly assigned treatment (n = 34) and control (n = 41) participants received an intensive 1-day content lecture. Next, the treatment condition completed workbook exercises (self-paced) followed by small-group practical sessions over 6 weeks. Both conditions were assessed prior to and immediately following the lecture, after the coding exercises, after the small-group sessions, and 9 months posttraining. Improved skill was observed in all participants after the lecture. The treatment condition continued to progress with cumulative training, whereas the control condition leveled off or decreased in skill with time. There was no deterioration for the treatment condition 9 months posttraining. Study 2 replicated the treatment condition from Study 1 except that all training was delivered online (with face-to-face components via videochat) and learners (n = 12) differed from Study 1 participants in their profession, country of employment, and recruitment. Study 2 results indicated that the training program could be delivered completely online with the same positive outcomes as when the program included in-person components. Overall, results indicated increased learning with the addition of components and showed that, when initial

learning is intensive, skill is maintained. (PsycInfo Database Record © 2022 APA, all rights reserved)

Danby, M. C., Sharman, S. J., & Guadagno, B. (2022). [Testing an evaluation tool to facilitate police officers' peer review of child interviews](#). *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 37(3), 711-725. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11896-022-09516-8>

Providing child forensic interviewers with ongoing opportunities for feedback is critical to maintaining their interviewing skills. Given practical difficulties with engaging experts to provide this feedback (such as costs and workloads), the current paper explores whether a structured evaluation tool can assist police interviewers to accurately peer review interviews. A structured checklist of best practice skills was created, and participants in two studies used it to evaluate mock transcripts of child interviews that ranged in quality. Transcripts were manipulated to present the opening, transitional, and substantive interview phases as a strong, poor, or mixed performance of best practice skills. In Study 1, 57 police participants from one jurisdiction evaluated the opening and substantive phases of the transcript less accurately when the transcript contained a mixed performance of best practice and the transitional phase less accurately when it contained poor performance. In Study 2, a similar pattern of results was replicated with a sample of 37 police interviewers from a separate jurisdiction with shorter interview training. Results suggest that structured tools are helpful to inform peer review of child interviews, but tools that are too rigid might not be helpful when nuanced improvements are required.

Hassan, S. Z., Salehi, P., Røed, R. K., Halvorsen, P., Baugerud, G. A., Johnson, M. S., ... & Sabet, S. S. (2022, June). Towards an AI-driven talking avatar in virtual reality for investigative interviews of children. In Proceedings of the 2nd Workshop on Games Systems (pp. 9-15).

Artificial intelligence (AI) and gaming systems have advanced to the stage where the current models and technologies can be used to address real-world problems. The development of such systems comes with different challenges, e.g., most of them related to system performance, complexity and user testing. Using a virtual reality (VR) environment, we have designed and developed a game-like system aiming to mimic an abused child that can help to assist police and child protection service (CPS) personnel in interview training of maltreated children. Current research in this area points to the poor quality of conducted interviews, and emphasises the need

for better training methods. Information obtained in these interviews is the core piece of evidence in the prosecution process. We utilised advanced dialogue models, talking visual avatars, and VR to build a virtual child avatar that can interact with users. We discuss our proposed architecture and the performance of the developed child avatar prototype, and we present the results from the user study conducted with CPS personnel. The user study investigates the users' perceived quality of experience (QoE) and their learning effects. Our study confirms that such a gaming system can increase the knowledge and skills of the users. We also benchmark and discuss the system performance aspects of the child avatar. Our results show that the proposed prototype works well in practice and is well received by the interview experts.

Hyman Gregory, A., Wolfs, A., & Schreiber Compo, N. (2022). Witness/victim interviewing: A survey of real-world investigators' training and practices. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 1-25. DOI:10.1080/1068316X.2022.2043312

The U.S. National Institute of Justice's Eyewitness Evidence: A Guide for Law Enforcement makes recommendations regarding best practice witness interviewing techniques. However, relatively little is known about police training in collecting and documenting evidence from witness interviews. One hundred seventy-seven police officers from three U.S. states (CT, FL, and MA) were surveyed about witness interview training and practices, perceptions of question type, and recording/documentation of interviews. Results indicate awareness of the importance of asking open-ended questions, but training is lacking, particularly regarding question types. Many officers reported using techniques consistent with the Cognitive Interview such as rapport-building, avoiding leading questions, and taking additional steps to assist recall. Seventy-four percent reported recording interviews via notes or electronic recording devices, while 16% indicated only doing so for certain cases/situations. Fourteen percent also acknowledged not documenting their questions in notes or reports, focusing solely on witness responses. In terms of post-interview documentation, 78% acknowledged writing reports using information elicited during witness interviews. In terms of testimony, 82% reported frequently testifying about witness interview content at criminal trials. Findings suggest that although U.S. police interviewers have implemented some best practice techniques, there are still some considerable training needs as evidenced by self-reported practices.

Ismail, N., & Adams, A. (2022). Enablers and barriers of integrating game-based learning in professional development programmes: Case study of child witness interview simulation in the police sector. In *Handbook of Research on Cross-Disciplinary Uses of Gamification in Organizations* (pp. 507-532). IGI Global.

This study investigates the enablers and barriers of embedding technology for continuing professional development (CPD) of staff in the police sector. The research team developed an online game called “Child Witness Interview Simulation” (CWIS) to complement existing interview training for police officers and help them gain competency in interviewing children. Within the game design, development, and commercializing phases, the research team came across key themes that define the opportunities and challenges of implementing GBL through a police-based learning approach to CPD. The study identified that the successful implantation of Technology-Enhanced learning (TEL) in CPD falls into two broad categories: organizational, which considers learning outcomes, and individual, which considers learning aims and competency. Therefore, for successful implementation of TEL in CPD, ongoing supportive organizational culture that encourages employees and managers to be committed and motivated to implement TEL in CPD is necessary.

Pompedda, F., Zhang, Y., Haginoya, S., & Santtila, P. (2022). [A mega-analysis of the effects of feedback on the quality of simulated child sexual abuse interviews with avatars](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11896-022-09509-7). *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 37(3), 485-498. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11896-022-09509-7>

The present study aimed to test the effectiveness of giving feedback on simulated avatar interview training (Avatar Training) across different experiments and participant groups and to explore the effect of professional training and parenting experience by conducting a mega-analysis of previous studies. A total of 2,208 interviews containing 39,950 recommended and 36,622 non-recommended questions from 394 participants including European and Japanese students, psychologists, and police officers from nine studies were included in the mega-analysis. Experimental conditions were dummy-coded, and all dependent variables were coded in the same way as in the previously published studies. Professional experience and parenting experience were coded as dichotomous variables and used in moderation analyses. Linear mixed effects analyses demonstrated robust effects of feedback on increasing recommended questions and decreasing non-recommended questions, improving quality of details elicited from the avatar, and reaching a

correct conclusion regarding the suspected abuse. Round-wise comparisons in the interviews involving feedback showed a continued increase of recommended questions and a continued decrease of non-recommended questions. Those with (vs. without) professional and parenting experience improved faster in the feedback group. These findings provide strong support for the efficacy of Avatar Training.

Powell, M. B., Brubacher, S. P., & Baugerud, G. A. (2022). An overview of mock interviews as a training tool for interviewers of children. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 129, 105685.
DOI:10.1016/j.chiabu.2022.105685

Mock (simulated) interviews can be used as a safe context for trainee interviewers to learn and practice questioning skills. When mock interviews are designed to reflect the body of scientific evidence on how questioning skills are best learned, research has demonstrated that interviewers acquire relevant and enduring skills. Despite the importance of this exercise in learning interview skill and its prevalence as a learning tool in other fields such as medicine and allied health, there has been relatively little discussion about mock interviews from an educational perspective in investigative interview training. This paper addresses that gap by providing the first comprehensive overview of the way mock interviews have been used in training interviewers of children. We describe the research that supports their utility, and the various ways they can be implemented in training: providing insight to learners; allowing opportunities for practice, feedback, and discussion; and as a standardized way to assess skill change over time. The paper also includes an overview of the cutting-edge use of avatars in mock interviews to enhance efficiency, provide unique learning experiences, and ultimately reduce training costs. We explain why avatars may be particularly useful in basic training, freeing up human trainers to facilitate mock interviews around advanced topics and discussion.

Salehi, P., Hassan, S. Z., Lammerse, M., Sabet, S. S., Riiser, I., Røed, R. K., ... & Riegler, M. A. (2022). [Synthesizing a talking child avatar to train interviewers working with maltreated children](https://doi.org/10.3390/bdcc6020062). *Big Data and Cognitive Computing*, 6(2), 62.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/bdcc6020062>

When responding to allegations of child sexual, physical, and psychological abuse, Child Protection Service (CPS) workers and police personnel need to elicit detailed and accurate accounts of the abuse to assist in decision-making and prosecution. Current research emphasizes

the importance of the interviewer's ability to follow empirically based guidelines. In doing so, it is essential to implement economical and scientific training courses for interviewers. Due to recent advances in artificial intelligence, we propose to generate a realistic and interactive child avatar, aiming to mimic a child. Our ongoing research involves the integration and interaction of different components with each other, including how to handle the language, auditory, emotional, and visual components of the avatar. This paper presents three subjective studies that investigate and compare various state-of-the-art methods for implementing multiple aspects of the child avatar. The first user study evaluates the whole system and shows that the system is well received by the expert and highlights the importance of its realism. The second user study investigates the emotional component and how it can be integrated with video and audio, and the third user study investigates realism in the auditory and visual components of the avatar created by different methods. The insights and feedback from these studies have contributed to the refined and improved architecture of the child avatar system which we present here.

Segal, A., Pompedda, F., Haginoya, S., Kaniušonytė, G., & Santtila, P. (2022). Avatars with child sexual abuse (vs. no abuse) scenarios elicit different emotional reactions. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 1-21. DOI:10.1080/1068316X.2022.2082422

Simulated avatar interview training has been proven to be effective in improving child sexual abuse interview quality. However, the topic of perceived realism of the avatars and whether they cause emotional reactions has not been previously investigated. Such reactions could affect both learning from the interview simulations as well as how actual interviews are conducted. We wanted to understand whether participants perceive allegedly sexually abused child avatars as realistic and how they emotionally respond to avatars revealing they were actually abused vs. not-abused. Psychology students and recent graduates (N = 30, Mage = 27.9 years) watched eight avatars (four boys, four girls, four with a CSA and four with a no-CSA scenario) providing a series of details about what had happened. Before and after observing each avatar, the participants' emotional reactions and perceived realness of the avatars were measured. Also, during each observation, the participant's facial expressions were recorded. The participants self-reported more negative (anger, sadness, disgust) and more positive (relief) emotions to confirmed CSA and disconfirmed CSA scenarios, respectively, while results for facially expressed emotions were less clear. Higher

general emotionality related to CSA and higher perceived realness of the avatars made the differences generally stronger.

Akca, D., Larivière, C. D., & Eastwood, J. (2021). [Assessing the efficacy of investigative interviewing training courses: A systematic review](#). *International Journal of Police Science & Management*, 23(1), 73-84. DOI:10.1177/14613557211008470

Substantial resources have been dedicated to designing and implementing training courses that focus on enhancing the interviewing skills of police officers. Laboratory research studies and real-world assessments of the effectiveness of interview training courses, however, have found notably mixed results. In this article, empirical studies (N = 30) that have assessed the effectiveness of police interview and interrogation training courses were systematically reviewed. We found a wide variation in terms of the type, length, and content of the training courses, the performance criteria used to assess the training effectiveness, and the impact of the training courses on interviewing performance. Overall, the studies found that basic interviewing skills can be developed to a certain level through even short evidence-based training courses. More cognitively demanding skills, such as question selection and meaningful rapport-building, showed less of an improvement post training. The courses that included multiple training sessions showed the most consistent impact on interviewing behavior. This review also indicated a need for more systematic research on training effectiveness with more uniform and longer-term measures of effectiveness. Our findings should help guide future research on this specific topic and inform the training strategies of law enforcement and other investigatory organizations.

Cyr, M., Dion, J., Gendron, A., Powell, M., & Brubacher, S. (2021). [A test of three refresher modalities on child forensic interviewer po-training performance](#). *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 27(2), 221-230. <https://doi.org/10.1037/law0000300>

This study aims to advance the field of child forensic interviewing by assessing the impact of different refresher training modalities on police officers' abilities to adhere to the steps of an interview protocol and on the types of questions used. Previously trained police officers (N = 46) were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions: (1) supervision with an expert, (2) peer group supervision, and (3) computer-assisted exercises on children's investigative interview techniques. Comparison of interviews conducted before (n = 136) and after (n = 124) the refresher modalities revealed an improvement in performance across time for almost all steps

of the protocol. There were more effects associated with time than with modality of refresher training with regard to question types used during episodic memory training and the substantive phase of the interview. Although there were some differences between the three conditions, no method emerged as clearly superior. Results suggest that all modalities could be useful in refreshing adherence to the steps of an interview protocol and use of best practice questioning approaches. The discussion highlights that the time devoted to the three modalities was likely not enough and that further studies are needed to determine the most optimal delivery of refresher training. (PsycInfo Database Record © 2021 APA, all rights reserved)

Haginoya, S., Yamamoto, S., & Santtila, P. (2021). The combination of feedback and modeling in online simulation training of child sexual abuse interviews improves interview quality in clinical psychologists. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 115*.
DOI:10.1016/j.chiabu.2021.105013

Previous research has shown the effectiveness of simulation training using avatars paired with feedback in improving child sexual abuse interview quality. However, it has room for improvement. The present study aimed to determine if the combination of two interventions, feedback and modeling, would further improve interview quality compared to either intervention alone. Thirty-two clinical psychologists were randomly assigned to a feedback, modeling, or the combination of feedback and modeling group. The participants conducted five simulated child sexual abuse interviews online while receiving the intervention(s) corresponding to their allocated group. Feedback was provided after each interview and consisted of the outcome of the alleged cases and comments on the quality of the questions asked in the interviews. Modeling was provided after the 1st interview and consisted of learning points and videos illustrating good and bad questioning methods. The proportion of recommended questions improved over the five interviews when considering all groups combined. The combined intervention (vs. feedback alone) showed a higher proportion of recommended questions from the 2nd interview onward while the difference between the combined intervention and modeling alone and the difference between the modeling alone and feedback alone were mostly not significant. The number of correct details were affected in the same way. No significant differences in the number of incorrect details were found. The results show that the combination of feedback and modeling achieves improvement greater than that of feedback alone.

Hershkowitz, I., Lamb, M. E., Blasbalg, U., & Karni-Visel, Y. (2021). [The dynamics of two-session interviews with suspected victims of abuse who are reluctant to make allegations.](#) *Development and Psychopathology*, 33, 739-747.
<https://doi:10.1017/S0954579420001820>

Supportive forensic interviews conducted in accordance with the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Revised Protocol (RP) help many alleged victims describe abusive experiences. When children remain reluctant to make allegations, the RP guides interviewers to (a) focus on rapport building and nonsuggestive support in a first interview, and (b) plan a second interview to allow continued rapport building before exploring for possible abuse. We explored the dynamics of such two-session RP interviews. Of 204 children who remained reluctant in an initial interview, we focused on 104 who made allegations when re-interviewed a few days later. A structural equation model revealed that interviewer support during the first session predicted children's cooperation during the rapport-building phase of the second session, which, in turn, predicted more spontaneous allegations, which were associated with the interviewers' enhanced use of open-ended questions. Together, these factors mediated the effects of support on children's free recall of forensically important information. This highlighted the importance of emphasizing rapport with reluctant children, confirming that some children may need more time to build rapport even with supportive interviewers.

Lawrie, M., Brubacher, S. P., Earhart, B., Powell, M. B., Steele, L. C., & Boud, D. (2021). Testing the effectiveness of a blended vulnerable witness training for forensic interviewers. *Journal of Family Trauma, Child Custody & Child Development*, 18(3), 279-297.
DOI:10.1080/26904586.2021.1894303

The current study tested the effectiveness of a compact (18 hour) and blended (involving online and face-to-face components) training course, adapted from a previously evaluated course found to be successful in fostering long-term change in interviewing skill. The compact course was developed by trimming the previous course to only include learning activities that empirically demonstrated improvement of interviewing skills. There were 41 US forensic interviewers, with prior training experience, who took part in the research. Their interviewing habits were assessed using standardized mock interviews immediately prior to, and at the conclusion of training. A subset were assessed 9-24 months later. Results demonstrated that, despite reductions in length and content, training was effective in the short term and the subset maintained trained behaviors

up to 24 months after completion. Results suggest that adjustments to training can be effective if the training remains founded on principles of human learning.

Lawrie, M., Brubacher, S. P., Powell, M. B., & Boud, D. (2020). Forensic interviewers' perceptions of the utility of mock interviews with trained actors as a training tool for child interviewing. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 106*.
DOI:10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104553

The use of mock interviews (also known as role play), particularly using trained actors as interviewees, has demonstrated positive effects on communication training but little is known about how learners engage with these practice activities. The current study was conducted to determine what perceptions forensic interviewers hold about mock interviews as a learning exercise for developing skills for child interviewing, and whether there are negative perceptions that could potentially have an impact on the helpfulness of the exercise. Participants: Written reflections were obtained from 35 US forensic interviewing professionals who were enrolled in an online child interviewer training program. Common themes were extracted from the reflections to establish forensic interviewers' perceptions of aspects of the mock interview. Extraction of themes assisted in the determination of whether perceptions impacted the manner and degree to which interviewers engaged in the mock interview process. Results suggest that regardless of potential anxiety, learners experience multiple benefits from the mock interview. Findings from the present study suggest most trainees perceive mock interviews favourably, and they are useful in child interview training programs.

Pompedda, F., Palu, A., Kask, K., Schiff, K., Soveri, A., Antfolk, J., & Santtila, P. (2020). Transfer of simulated interview training effects into interviews with children exposed to a mock event. *Nordic Psychology, 73*(1), 43-67.
DOI:10.1080/19012276.2020.1788417

Research on students suggests that repeated feedback in simulated investigative interviews with avatars (computerized children) improves the quality of the interviews conducted in this simulated environment. It remains unclear whether also professional groups (psychologists) benefit from the training and if the effects obtained in the simulated interviews transfer into interviews with real children who have witnessed a mock event. We trained 40 psychologists (Study I) and 69 psychology students (Study II). In both studies, half of the participants received no feedback

(control group) while the other half received feedback (experimental group) on their performance during repeated interviews with avatars. Each participant then interviewed two 4-6-year-old children who had each witnessed a different mock event without any feedback being provided. In both studies, interview quality improved in the feedback (vs. control) group during the training session with avatars. The analyses of transfer effects showed that, compared to controls, interview quality was better in the experimental group. More recommended questions were used in both studies, and more correct details were elicited from the children in Study I, during the interviews each participant conducted with two children (N = 76 in Study I; N = 116 in Study II) one week after the training. Although the two studies did not show statistically significant training effects for all investigated variables, we conclude that interview quality can be improved using avatar training and that there is transfer into actual interviews with children at least in the use of recommended questions.

Blasbalg, U., Hershkowitz, I., Lamb, M. E., Karni-Visel, Y., & Ahern, E. C. (2019). Is interviewer support associated with the reduced reluctance and enhanced informativeness of alleged child abuse victims?. *Law and Human Behavior, 43*(2), 156-165.
DOI:10.1037/lhb0000303

Child maltreatment victims are often reluctant to report abuse when formally interviewed. Evidence-based guidelines like the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Standard Investigative Interview Protocol do not adequately address such reluctance because they are focused on cognitive rather than socioemotional strategies. The present study was designed to determine whether the Revised National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Protocol, which emphasizes supportive interviewing more than the standard protocol does, might predict increases in the overall informativeness and reductions in the reluctance of alleged victims. A total of 254 interviews, 166 using the revised protocol and 88 using the standard protocol, were conducted with 4.06- to 13.98-year-old children (M = 9.20, SD = 2.49) who disclosed multiple incidents of physical abuse by their parents and were thus expected to be more reluctant than victims of extrafamilial abuse. We coded indices of interviewer support and question types, children's reluctance, and informativeness in each utterance during the substantive phases of the interviews. The Revised Protocol was associated with better interviewer support and questioning as well as reduced reluctance and increased informativeness on the part of the children. These

findings document the value of training interviewers to attend to the socioemotional needs of suspected abuse victims during investigative interviews. (PsycInfo Database Record © 2020 APA, all rights reserved)

Farrugia, L., Oxburgh, G., & Gabbert, F. (2019). [Effective evaluation of forensic interviews: The Forensic Interview Trace \(FIT\)©](#). *Investigative Interviewing: Research and Practice*, 10(1), 20-31.

Forensic interviewing forms an integral part of a police/law enforcement officer's main duties and responsibilities. However, not every interviewer possesses suitable interview skills to be able to complete this effectively and despite the introduction of the PEACE model of interviewing, with the last 'E' focusing specifically on 'Evaluation', this stage of the interview model rarely gets the attention it deserves. This is concerning given the need for forensic interviews to be ethical, productive and admissible. The Forensic Interview Trace (FIT)© is a recently developed tool designed to record all aspects of a forensic interview including questioning, interviewee responses and interview/interviewee characteristics. The development of this tool is considered within the context of a forensic interview and in comparison to similar empirical testing and validation, it is anticipated that the FIT© will assist with the effective evaluations of forensic interviews in order to ensure compliance with relevant guidance and legislation, as well as ensuring that effective interview skills pertain to best practice.

Brubacher, S. P., Roberts, K., Cooper, B., Price, H., Barry, L., & Vanderloon, M. (2018). [A nationwide survey of child interviewing practices in Canada](#). *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 60(1), 34-68. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cjccj.2017-0008>

The goal of the present study was to create professional awareness about the degree of consensus and consistency in the interview techniques that ultimately influence child victims' experiences and progression through the legal system in Canada. We surveyed 200 professionals who interview children in Canada about the guidelines and techniques they use, their perceptions of their training and interviewing arrangements, and the needs and challenges they face in daily practice. Results revealed a wide variety of practices in use across the country, and differences in length of training and who provided it. Police and child protection workers tended to differ on their satisfaction with

interviewing arrangements. Commonalities were observed across organizations and locales in that most interviewers could readily identify challenges in talking to vulnerable witnesses and desires for additional training (e.g., greater topic breadth and regular follow-ups). Responses revealed awareness of contemporary research, as well as pockets of more traditional thinking, about child witness capabilities and interviewing techniques. Although variety in interviewing guidelines and training providers is not necessarily problematic, the development of a single nationwide policy on the core components of vulnerable witness interviewing, to which training programs must adhere, could have particular value.

Pompedda, F. (2018). [Training in investigative interviews of children: Serious gaming paired with feedback improves interview quality.](#) Göteborg University.

Interview quality (i.e., adherence to best practice) in alleged child sexual abuse (CSA) cases remains low. Training programs have been developed in order to tackle this problem. However, these programs are usually not successful in creating stable effects over time, or when positive results have been achieved, programs are often logistically complicated and expensive in addition to requiring a lot of time from those participating. The general aim of the present thesis was to create and test an interview simulation tool (EIT®). This tool was used to train interviewers to use more recommended questions through multiple practice occasions in combination with the administration of detailed, immediate and continuous feedback, but without excessive time and cost burden. We thus applied a serious gaming approach in which trainee-interviewed computer-generated avatars equipped with response algorithms and predefined memories to explore the feasibility of this approach to train interviewers in alleged CSA cases. In all the studies presented in the present thesis, we operationalized interview quality as recommended and not recommended questions asked, relevant, neutral and wrong details elicited from the avatars or children and correct conclusions reached concerning what had happened to the avatars or children. In Study I, we showed how interviews with avatars combined with feedback improved the quality of simulated investigative interviews in a group of students compared to a group of students that conducted the interviews without feedback. We also showed that knowledge regarding evidence-based principles relating to CSA investigations did not influence the quality of interviews. Here, we used a combination of outcome (i.e. information regarding the conclusion of the story) and process (i.e. information regarding the question types used) feedback simultaneously. In Study II,

we separated between the two types of feedback and showed that the combination of feedback enhanced training effects to a higher degree compared to the process and outcome feedback provided alone. For example, a combination of feedback elicited medium/strong effects ($d_{ppc2} = 0.76$) in improving the percentage of recommended questions in only four interviews. In Study III, we used a new set of algorithms to relate interviewer questions to avatar responses. In the previous studies, the algorithms were mechanical (i.e., after a certain number of recommended questions an operator provided a detail). Starting from Study III, we used probabilistic algorithms that related interviewer questions to avatar responses probabilistically (in both cases the probabilities themselves were derived from research on child memory and suggestibility). In Study III, we also tested if a simple reflection task enhances training effects. The reflection task did not enhance training effects compared to the group that received a combination of the two previously used feedback types. This study replicated previous results regarding the effect of avatar interviews combined with feedback on interview quality. For example, 90% of participants in the two groups that received feedback improved their use of 10 recommended questions, and 38% reached a reliable change in their use of recommended questions in only two hours. In Study IV, we showed that the improvements in interview quality achieved in student samples in Studies I-III were also achieved in a group of psychologists. The second and most important result of Study IV was that the improvements achieved during the training also transferred into interviews with actual children who had witnessed a mock event. During these interviews, that occurred one week after the training, the feedback group asked 40% of recommended questions compared to the control group who reached 26%. The results of training were analyzed using a mega-analytic approach in the present thesis combining the results of the individual studies. The results showed how simulated interviews with avatars and the provision of a combination of outcome and process feedback improved in a robust manner the quality of simulated investigative interviews compared to a control group. Overall, the results provide support for the use of a serious gaming approach to training interviewers. Previous research clearly shows how important it is to interview the child in the most neutral way possible when there is suspicion of abuse. Because of this, providing interviewers with a new, interactive and efficient tool together with providing police departments or training institutions with a realistically applicable, time-and-cost efficient training protocol can change the way we plan and organize training in this context.

Hershkowitz, I., Ahern, E. C., Lamb, M. E., Blasbalg, U., Karni-Visel, Y., & Breitman, M. (2017). Changes in interviewers' use of supportive techniques during the Revised Protocol training. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 31*(3), 340-350. DOI: 10.1002/acp.3333

Although many children are reluctant to disclose abuse due to embarrassment, fear, and the anticipation of negative consequences, researchers have only recently begun to examine whether forensic interviewers can be trained to manage children's reluctance. In this study, the supportiveness of 53 experienced interviewers was assessed in their interviews with 321 3- to 14-year-old alleged victims, each conducted during the course of training to use the Revised Protocol (RP). The use of support increased, especially between levels evident at baseline and in the last two interviews assessed. Over time, instances of inadequate support and insensitivity to children's reluctance became less common. Younger children received proportionally more support, including inadequate support, than older children. The RP training did not affect the extensive use of free recall-based questions. Findings highlight the benefits of continued supervision and training. Copyright © 2017 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Hsu, C. W., & Teoh, Y. S. (2017). Investigating event memory in children with autism spectrum disorder: Effects of a computer-mediated interview. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 47*(2), 359-372. DOI:10.1007/s10803-016-2959-2

The present study aimed to examine the effects of a novel avatar interviewing aid during memory interviews with children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Thirty children were recruited for our study (Age: $M = 7.60$, $SD = 0.68$), half with ASD (13 boys; 2 girls) and the other half being neurotypical (13 boys; 2 girls). Children participated in a target event and were subsequently interviewed a week later by either an avatar interviewer or a human. The participants were also asked six misleading questions aimed to examine their suggestibility. Bayesian analysis showed some increase in memory performance for both groups of children interviewed by the avatar interviewer, and this effect exacerbated for children with ASD. These results showed encouraging implications for future applications.

Krause, N., Pompedda, F., Antfolk, J., Zappalá, A., & Santtila, P. (2017). [The effects of feedback and reflection on the questioning style of untrained interviewers in simulated child sexual abuse interviews](#). *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 31*(2), 187-198. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/acp.3316>

Due to a lack of eyewitnesses and corroborating evidence, investigative interviews with alleged victims are of central importance in child sexual abuse (CSA) investigation. In almost 70% of cases, the child's statement is the only evidence to rely on in court (Elliott & Briere, 1994; Herman, 2009). As international research has shown, interview quality remains quite poor worldwide (Cederborg, Orbach, Sternberg, & Lamb, 2000; Korkman, Santtila, Westeråker & Sandnabba, 2008b; Sternberg, Lamb, Davies, & Westcott, 2001). For example, a Joint Inspectorate report in England and Wales (Criminal Justice Joint Inspection, 2014) described a 'widespread tendency to also pose specific closed questions throughout the interview, which tended to elicit shorter and less detailed responses' (p. 22) and 'the use of leading questions was common where a more open style of questioning would have been appropriate' (p. 23), showing the continued need for training. Training programs, even if some promising results have been reported (Benson & Powell, 2015; Cederborg, Alm, Lima da Silva Nises, & Lamb, 2013; Yi, Jo, & Lamb, 2015), have generally failed in creating and maintaining improvements in the quality of these interviews. For example, a Norwegian follow up (Johnson et al., 2015) showed no improvement in interview quality over a time span of 22 years, in spite of considerable investment in training. The most promising research has shown that, together with a structured protocol, feedback on questions used must be provided in an immediate, continuous and detailed way (Lamb, Sternberg, Orbach, Esplin and Mitchell, 2002a; Smith, 2008). This is a problem for a number of reasons: CSA interviewers rarely get feedback on their use of question types outside of scientific studies. Organizing this type of training can result in high costs and logistical problems. Also, in most real CSA cases, it cannot be reliably known whether a child's statement, or parts of it, are actually true (Vrij, 2005), resulting in a lack of feedback on the conclusions drawn by the interviewers.

Lafontaine, J., & Cyr, M. (2017). The relation between interviewers' personal characteristics and investigative interview performance in a child sexual abuse context. *Police practice and research, 18*(2), 106-118. DOI:10.1080/15614263.2016.1242423

Despite important progress in knowledge about interview 'best practice' with child victims, few studies had yet evaluated the impact of interviewers' personal characteristics on adherence to these

‘best practice’. This study was designed to determine whether interviewers’ personal characteristics are associated with adherence to a structured interview protocol (National Institute of Child and Human Development), the use of open-ended questions and the amount of details provided in children’s responses during investigative interviews with alleged victims of child sexual abuse. 114 interviews were scored from 13 police investigators after they followed a one-week training program. Results showed that experience, emotional intelligence, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Neuroticism were related with adherence to the protocol and ratio of open-ended questions. Cognitive abilities were related to the amount of details obtained from the child. Generalized estimating equations were used to compare relative contribution of each variable. These findings raise questions about how investigative interviewers are selected and trained.

Pompedda, F., Antfolk, J., Zappalà, A., & Santtila, P. (2017). [A combination of outcome and process feedback enhances performance in simulations of child sexual abuse interviews using avatars](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01474). *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8, 1474.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01474>

Simulated interviews in alleged child sexual abuse (CSA) cases with computer-generated avatars paired with feedback improve interview quality. In the current study, we aimed to understand better the effect of different types of feedback in this context. Feedback was divided into feedback regarding conclusions about what happened to the avatar (outcome feedback) and feedback regarding the appropriateness of question-types used by the interviewer (process feedback). Forty-eight participants each interviewed four different avatars. Participants were divided into four groups (no feedback, outcome feedback, process feedback, and a combination of both feedback types). Compared to the control group, interview quality was generally improved in all the feedback groups on all outcome variables included. Combined feedback produced the strongest effect on increasing recommended questions and correct conclusions. For relevant and neutral details elicited by the interviewers, no statistically significant differences were found between feedback types. For wrong details, the combination of feedback produced the strongest effect, but this did not differ from the other two feedback groups. Nevertheless, process feedback produced a better result compared to outcome feedback. The present study replicated previous findings regarding the effect of feedback in improving interview quality, and provided new knowledge on feedback characteristics that maximize training effects. A combination of process and outcome

feedback showed the strongest effect in enhancing training in simulated CSA interviews. Further research is, however, needed.

Rivard, J. R., & Schreiber Compo, N. (2017). [Self-reported current practices in child forensic interviewing: Training, tools, and pre-interview preparation](https://doi.org/10.1002/bsl.2290). *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 35(3), 253-268. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bsl.2290>

In child sexual abuse investigations, forensic interviewers within the Child Advocacy Center (CAC) model serve as neutral fact-finders for a team of professionals tasked with investigating and intervening in cases of alleged child sexual abuse. Although empirical evidence has led to the development of best-practice techniques and protocols, there is currently no universally adopted protocol in the field. The present research gathered detailed information from a national sample of real-world child forensic interviewers about their training and current practices, with a specific focus on assessing the information interviewers typically review prior to conducting child forensic interviews. Most notably, the survey revealed a lack of uniformity in interviewing protocols adopted and pre-interview preparation practices. Although rare, some interviewers reported using an allegation-blind interviewing approach, highlighting the need for future research on this and other under-studied techniques. Copyright © 2017 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Wolfman, M., Brown, D., & Jose, P. (2017). Examining forensic interviewers' perceptions of practice-focused supervision. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 50(4), 566-581. DOI:10.1177/000486581665558

Regular supervision influences interviewing quality with child witnesses. It is unclear, however, whether interviewers recognize the importance of supervision, and how often they access it. The present study surveyed 39 New Zealand Specialist Child Witness Interviewers (otherwise known as forensic interviewers), and examined: (a) their access to, and, perceptions of supervision, and (b) factors that may influence their access to, and, perceptions of supervision. We identified 26 interviewers who received some form of practice-focused supervision. Within this group, there was considerable variability in terms of how often they accessed supervision, and, their ratings of how satisfied they were with their access to, and the content of, supervision. Furthermore, some of those who did participate in supervision felt they did not actually receive specific input about their interviewing. Thus, an important area for investment in promoting good interviewing practice is developing effective approaches to facilitate interviewers engaging in regular practice-focused

supervision, perhaps, at least in part, by addressing some of systemic barriers identified (e.g. limited financial support, time constraints, lack of experienced supervisors, lack of understanding/support from managerial staff and geographical isolation).

Duron, J. F., & Cheung, M. (2016). Impact of repeated questioning on interviewers: Learning from a forensic interview training project. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 25(4), 347-362. DOI:10.1080/10538712.2016.1161687

Forensic interviewers have a difficult job with high risk for career burnout and secondary trauma. Few studies have addressed how new forensic interviewers or trainees experience repeated questioning and multiple interviews. This study simulated the process of training new forensic interviewers through the creation of two interview videos in which social work graduate students participated as actors portraying the roles of interviewer and child. These films served as instructional aids preparing graduate social work students for professional child welfare roles while promoting research-based approaches to interviewing children about sexual abuse allegations. Qualitative data from two cohorts of student actors were collected to analyze interviewers' perspectives on repeated questioning and interviews in child sexual abuse cases. Two themes were extracted from the subjects' experiences: "It is emotionally taxing" and "Navigating the interviewer role is unexpectedly complex." Exposure to repeated questions and multiple interviews affected the performance and confidence of the interviewers.

Lamb, M. E. (2016). Difficulties translating research on forensic interview practices to practitioners: Finding water, leading horses, but can we get them to drink?. *American Psychologist*, 71(8), 710-718. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000039>

Over the last three decades, researchers have elucidated the cognitive and motivational conditions that affect the capacity and willingness of young alleged victims to describe their experiences to forensic interviewers. Applied researchers have also studied the contents and features of training programs designed to help interviewers take advantage of the research on developmentally appropriate interviewing. The latter studies have highlighted a knowledge transfer problem—scientists understand best-practice techniques well, many interviewers believe that they both understand and employ those practices, but widespread training has had a limited impact on the actual quality of interviews conducted in the field. There is now clear evidence that improvements

in interviewing practice occur reliably only when training courses involve multiple modules, distributed over time, with repeated opportunities for interviewers to consolidate learning and to obtain feedback on the quality of the interviews they do conduct. Barriers to the implementation of such training are discussed.

Benson, M. S., & Powell, M. B. (2015). Evaluation of a comprehensive interactive training system for investigative interviewers of children. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 21(3), 309-322. DOI:10.1037/law0000052

This article reports on the evaluation of an interactive interviewer training system with a large, heterogeneous sample of investigative interviewers of children. The system, delivered predominantly through computer-assisted learning activities, focused on how to elicit important evidential details from child witnesses in a narrative format. Two studies are reported, each adopting a pre-versus posttraining design. Study 1 examined the effect of the training on trainees' (N = 92) performance, using mock interviews where an actor played the role of the child in a highly controlled manner. Study 2 examined the effect of the training on field interviews (N = 156) conducted prior to and after the training. Five measures were analyzed: (a) proportion of interviewer question types, (b) proportion of desirable interviewer behaviors, (c) adherence to the interview protocol, (d) interview length, and (e) the quality of evidential information sought. Overall, the findings provide clear support for the utility of the training system. Irrespective of the type of interview or measure, adherence to best-practice interviewing increased from pre- to posttraining, with some evidence supporting sustained performance 12 months after there had been no intervening training or supervision. The implication is that there is now an evidence-based alternative to the traditional classroom-based training system for investigative interviewers. Suggestions for future research are also discussed. (PsycINFO Database Record © 2016 APA, all rights reserved)

Brubacher, S. P., Powell, M., Skouteris, H., & Guadagno, B. (2015). The effects of e-simulation interview training on teachers' use of open-ended questions. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 43, 95-103. DOI:10.1016/j.chiabu.2015.02.004

Teachers in many parts of the world are mandated reporters of child abuse and maltreatment but very little is known concerning how they question children in suspicious circumstances. Teachers (n = 36), who had previously participated in a mock interview scenario designed to characterize

their baseline use of various question-types when attempting to elicit sensitive information from children, were given online training in choosing effective questions. They engaged in simulated interviews with a virtual avatar several times in one week and then participated in a mock interview scenario. The amount and proportion of open-ended questions they used increased dramatically after training. The overall number of questions, and amount and proportions of specific and leading questions decreased. In particular, large decreases were observed in more risky yes-no and other forced-choice questions. Given that most teachers may feel the need to ask a child about an ambiguous situation at some point during their careers it is worthwhile to incorporate practice asking effective questions into their training, and the present research suggests that an e-learning format is effective. Additionally, effective questions encourage the development of narrative competence, and we discuss how teachers might include open-ended questions during regular classroom learning.

Johnson, M., Magnussen, S., Thoresen, C., Lønnum, K., Burrell, L. V., & Melinder, A. (2015). Best practice recommendations still fail to result in action: A national 10-year follow-up study of investigative interviews in CSA cases. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 29*(5), 661-668. DOI:10.1002/acp.3147

The present study examined a national sample of Norwegian investigative interviews in alleged child sexual abuse cases (N = 224) across a 10-year period (2002–2012), in order to decide whether practice had improved over the decade in terms of the types of questions asked. The results indicate that the frequency of open-ended, directive, option-posing, and suggestive questions asked was unchanged during the 10-year period, but that the frequency of repeated questions had increased significantly. When analyzed together with the results from a previous study of interview practice covering the period of 1990–2002, long-term trends were found to be similarly stable, with no change in the frequency of open-ended and suggestive questions asked over a 22-year perspective. However, a decreasing frequency of option-posing questions observed accompanied by an increasing frequency of directive questions may be considered a positive trend. Copyright © 2015 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Köpsén, S., & Nyström, S. (2015). The practice of supervision for professional learning: the example of future forensic specialists. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 37(1), 30-46. DOI:10.1080/0158037X.2014.967343

Supervision intended to support learning is of great interest in professional knowledge development. No single definition governs the implementation and enactment of supervision because of different conditions, intentions, and pedagogical approaches. Uncertainty exists at a time when knowledge and methods are undergoing constant development. This situation affects professions with high demands on precision and safety, and thus supervision and learning. The aim of this article is to explore the practice of supervision for learning professional knowledge of forensic specialists. The context is the Swedish National Laboratory of Forensic Science internal training program, which focuses on learning in daily work when the forensic trainee is assigned a supervisor. Ethnographic studies of supervisors and trainees in different forensic specialties were conducted. Practice theory is used to understand how supervision is planned and implemented to support professional development. Findings show that supervision by seasoned professional forensic specialists is significant for trainee learning. However, supervision is arranged, and performed differently, indicating various conditions for learning. Furthermore, the material setups of the professional practice prefigure the practice of supervision. Supervision is an area of expertise that needs to be cultivated and learned to maintain highly specialized professional knowledge in current time of change and uncertainty.

La Rooy, D., Brubacher, S. P., Aromäki-Stratos, A., Cyr, M., Hershkowitz, I., Korkman, J., ... & Stewart, H. (2015). [The NICHD protocol: A review of an internationally-used evidence-based tool for training child forensic interviewers](https://doi.org/10.1108/JCRPP-01-2015-0001). *Journal of Criminological Research, Policy and Practice*, 1(2), 76-89. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCRPP-01-2015-0001>

This article reviews an evidence-based tool for training child forensic interviewers called the NICHD Protocol, and the relevant research on: children's memory development; communication; suggestibility; the importance of open-prompts, and challenges associated with interview training. We include international contributions from experienced trainers, practitioners, and scientists, who are already using the Protocol or whose national or regional procedures have been directly influenced by the NICHD Protocol research (Canada, Finland, Israel, Japan, Korea, Norway, Portugal, Scotland, and United States). Throughout the review, these experts comment on: how and when the Protocol was adopted in their country; who uses it; challenges to implementation

and translation; training procedures; and other pertinent aspects. We aim to further promote good interviewing practice by sharing the experiences of these experts. The NICHD Protocol can be easily incorporated into existing training programs worldwide and is available for free. It was originally developed in English and Hebrew and is available in several other languages at nichdprotocol.com.

Pompedda, F., Zappalà, A., & Santtila, P. (2015). Simulations of child sexual abuse interviews using avatars paired with feedback improves interview quality. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 21(1), 28-52. DOI:10.1080/1068316X.2014.915323

We tested whether simulated child sexual abuse (CSA) interviews with computer-generated child avatars could improve interview quality. Feedback was provided not only on question types, as in previous research, but also on whether the conclusions drawn by the interviewers were correct. Twenty-one psychology students (average age $M = 24.5$) interviewed four different avatars which had a simulated story of either abuse or non-abuse. The participants were randomly divided into two groups: one received feedback on question types and conclusions after each simulated interview and the other one did not receive any feedback. Avatars revealed pre-defined ‘memories’ as a function of algorithms formulated based on previous empirical research on children’s suggestibility. The feedback group used more open-ended and fewer closed questions. They also made more correct conclusions and found more correct details in the last two interviews compared to the no-feedback group. Feedback on both the question types and conclusions in simulated CSA interviews with avatars can improve the quality of investigative interviews in only one hour. The implications for training practice were discussed.

Powell, M. B., & Barnett, M. (2015). Elements underpinning successful implementation of a national best-practice child investigative interviewing framework. *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, 22(3), 368-377. DOI:10.1080/13218719.2014.951112

The complexity and effort required to achieve the widespread implementation of best-practice child interview guidelines justifies the establishment of structures to enhance cross-jurisdictional sharing of expertise, resources and training delivery support. Australia has made great strides toward such a system via work currently being undertaken by police jurisdictions to facilitate greater consistency in education and training for practitioners in the area of investigative interviewing, strengthening collaboration between police and tertiary education institutions, and

growing commitment to evidence-based policy and practice among police executives. To maximise progress, however, organisations need to consider the development of a coordinated continual quality improvement approach. This will be impeded by three structural elements: access to field interviews for practitioner feedback and organisational evaluation, interviewer tenure and case tracking. This article discusses each element, their roles within a national best-practice interview framework, and attempts by some jurisdictions to address them. It also provides recommendations to guide further reform.

Stolzenberg, S. N., & Lyon, T. D. (2015). [Repeated self-and peer-review leads to continuous improvement in child interviewing performance](https://doi.org/10.1080/1936928X.2015.1068721). *Journal of Forensic Social Work*, 5(1-3), 20-28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1936928X.2015.1068721>

The present study examined whether a training model that focuses on consistent exposure to protocol procedure, self-evaluation, and intensive peer-review sessions could improve interviewers' ability to adhere to best practices. Law students (N = 19) interviewed 5- to 10-year-old children on a weekly basis as part of a semester-long forensic child interviewing class. They transcribed their interviews, and participated in one-hour self and peer-reviews. The proportion of each question type was calculated (option-posing, Wh-, and open-invitations) within each interview for each interviewer. Across ten weeks of interviews, interviewers consistently improved their performance, decreasing the proportion of option-posing questions by 31% and increasing the proportion of open-invitations by 47%. All interviewers improved. The present study suggests that with consistent self-evaluation and peer-review, forensic interviewers can incrementally improve their performance.

Yii, S. L. B., Powell, M. B., & Guadagno, B. (2014). The association between investigative interviewers' knowledge of question type and adherence to best-practice interviewing. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 19(2), 270-281. DOI:10.1111/lcrp.12000

It is well established that not all investigative interviewers adhere to 'best-practice' interview guidelines (i.e., the use of open-ended questions) when interviewing child witnesses about abuse. However, little research has examined the sub skills associated with open question usage. In this article, we examined the association between investigative interviewers' ability to identify various types of questions and adherence to open-ended questions in a standardized mock interview. Study 1, incorporating 27 trainee police interviewers, revealed positive associations between open-ended

question usage and two tasks; a recognition task where trainees used a structured protocol to guide their response and a recall task where they generated examples of open-ended questions from memory. In Study 2, incorporating a more heterogeneous sample of 40 professionals and a different training format and range of tests, positive relationships between interviewers' identification of questions and adherence to best-practice interviewing was consistently revealed. A measure of interviewer knowledge about what constitutes best-practice investigative (as opposed to knowledge of question types) showed no association with interviewer performance. The implications of these findings for interviewer training programs are discussed.

Cederborg, A. C., Alm, C., Lima da Silva Nises, D., & Lamb, M. E. (2013). Investigative interviewing of alleged child abuse victims: An evaluation of a new training programme for investigative interviewers. *Police Practice and Research, 14*(3), 242-254. DOI:10.1080/15614263.2012.712292

This evaluation focused on the developing interviewing skills of 104 active crime investigators in Sweden who participated in six different half-year courses between 2007 and 2010. The courses emphasised a combined model of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Protocol and the PEACE model of investigative interviewing. The teaching was interdisciplinary. The evaluation involved interviews of 208 children, most of whom were suspected victims of physical abuse. The investigators used two-thirds fewer option-posing questions and three times as many invitations after training as they did before training. These data show that the training was very effective in shaping the interviewers' behaviour into better compliance with internationally recognised guidelines.

Hughes-Scholes, C. H., & Powell, M. B. (2013). Techniques used by investigative interviewers to elicit disclosures of abuse from child witnesses: A critique. *Police Practice and Research, 14*(1), 45-52. DOI:10.1080/15614263.2012.680716

Eliciting disclosures of abuse from children is a challenging skill that requires considerable practice, feedback, training and instruction. While there is an abundance of literature outlining what constitutes best practice interviewing of children, there has been little discussion, in particular, of investigative interviewers' limitations when applying best practice interview guidelines to elicit disclosures of abusive acts. This paper assists police by identifying common problems of child investigative interviewers when eliciting disclosures (N= 131) and provides

alternate questioning strategies. The results support the need for further training to be developed to ensure better adherence to best practice guidelines in relation to all aspects of eliciting a disclosure from children.

Powell, M. B., Benson, M. S., Sharman, S. J., Guadagno, B., & Steinberg, R. (2013). [Errors in the identification of question types in investigative interviews of children](https://doi.org/10.1350/ijps.2013.15.2.308). *International Journal of Police Science & Management*, 15(2), 144-156. <https://doi.org/10.1350/ijps.2013.15.2.308>

This study examined the incidence and nature of the errors made by trainee coders during their coding of question types in interviews in which children disclosed abuse. Three groups of trainees (online, postgraduate and police) studied the coding manual before practising their question coding. After this practice, participants were given two-page field transcripts to code in which children disclosed abuse. Their coding was assessed for accuracy; any errors were analysed thematically. The overall error rate was low, and police participants made the fewest errors. Analysis of the errors revealed four common misunderstandings: (1) the use of a 'wh' question always denotes a specific cued-recall question; (2) 'Tell me' always constitutes an open-ended question; (3) open-ended questions cannot include specific detail; and (4) specific questions cannot elicit elaborate responses. An analysis of coding accuracy in the one group who were able to practise question coding over time revealed that practice was essential for trainees to maintain their accuracy. Those who did not practise decreased in coding accuracy. This research shows that trainees need more than a coding manual; they must demonstrate their understanding of question codes through practice training tasks. Misunderstandings about questions need to be elicited and corrected so that accurate codes are used in future tasks.

Cyr, M., Dion, J., McDuff, P., & Trotier-Sylvain, K. (2012). Transfer of skills in the context of non-suggestive investigative interviews: Impact of structured interview protocol and feedback. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 26(4), 516-524. DOI:10.1002/acp.2822

Two groups of police investigators were trained in the use of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) interview protocol. After the training, one group (n = 8) received written feedback on each interview they conducted, whereas the other group (n = 11) did not. The objective of the study was, first, to evaluate the effect of NICHD protocol implementation on the types of questions and details provided by children and, second, to evaluate the impact of

post-training feedback. Interviewees were alleged sexual abuse victims between the ages of 3 and 14 years. Application of the NICHD protocol allowed interviewers to use more open-ended questions and to obtain more details. The results show that providing feedback significantly increased the quality of the interviews. It is recommended that the NICHD protocol be used to interview child victims and witnesses and that feedback sessions be held with interviewers. Copyright © 2012 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Price, H. L., & Roberts, K. P. (2011). The effects of an intensive training and feedback program on police and social workers' investigative interviews of children. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science/Revue canadienne des sciences du comportement*, 43(3), 235-244. DOI:10.1037/a0022541

In the present study, we assessed the effectiveness of an extensive training and feedback program with investigative interviewers of child victims of alleged abuse and neglect in a large Canadian city. Twelve investigative interviewers participated in a joint training initiative that lasted eight months and involved classroom components and extensive weekly verbal and written feedback. Interviewers were significantly more likely to use open-ended prompts and elicited more information from children with open-ended prompts following training. These differences were especially prominent following a subsequent 'refresher' training session. No negative effects of training were observed. Clear evidence was found of the benefits of an intensive training and feedback program across a wide variety of investigative interviews with children. Although previous research has found benefits of training with interviewers of child sexual assault victims, the current study extends these findings to a wide range of allegations and maltreatment contexts.

Powell, M. B., Hughes-Scholes, C. H., Cavezza, C., & Stoové, M. A. (2010). Examination of the stability and consistency of investigative interviewer performance across similar mock interview contexts. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 15(2), 243-260. DOI:10.1348/135532509X472077

Three studies examined the degree to which investigative interviewers' adherence to best-practice guidelines is consistent across similar mock interviews. In each study, two interviews were administered within a period of several hours. Further, group and individual stability of interviewer performance was analysed, and performance was measured by calculating the proportion of open-ended and leading questions as well as the presence of predetermined problem behaviours. The

studies varied depending on the type of interview paradigm employed. Interviewer performance in Study 1 was measured in a group context where participants rotated between the role of interviewer, child respondent, and observer. In Study 2, an adult played the role of a child recalling abuse but this occurred in isolation (participants did not observe others or play the child). Study 3 was similar to Study 2 except that in each interview an unfamiliar child aged 5–7 years recalled an innocuous event. Interviewer performance was relatively stable across tasks, although the strength of the relationship between measures varied across analyses. Improvement in open-ended question usage occurred in Study 1 but not Studies 2 and 3. Irrespective of the assessment context, the dichotomous rating scale yielded greater consistency than when questions were tallied. Further, group stability overestimated individual stability. The practical implications of these findings for trainers and researchers are discussed.

Cederborg, A. C., & Lamb, M. E. (2008). The need for systematic and intensive training of forensic interviewers. In T. I. Richardson & M. V. Williams (Eds.), *Child abuse and violence* (pp. 1-17). New York, NY: Nova Science Publishers.

Powell, M. B. (2008). [Designing effective training programs for investigative interviewers of children](https://doi.org/10.1080/10345329.2008.12035804). *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*, 20(2), 189-208.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10345329.2008.12035804>

‘Best-practice’ guidelines for conducting investigative interviews with children are well established in the literature, yet few investigative interviewers actually adhere to such guidelines in the field. One of the problems is that little discussion has focused on how such guidelines are learned and sustained by professionals. To address this concern, the current article reviews the key elements of interview training programs that are known to promote competent interviewing. These elements include: (i) the establishment of key principles or beliefs that underpin effective interviewing, (ii) the adoption of an interview framework that maximises narrative detail, (iii) clear instruction in relation to the application of the interview framework, (iv) effective ongoing practice, (v) expert feedback and (vi) regular evaluation of interviewer performance. A description and justification of each element is provided, followed by broad recommendations regarding how these elements can be implemented by police and human service organisations in a cost-effective manner.

Powell, M. B., Fisher, R. P., & Hughes-Scholes, C. H. (2008). The effect of intra-versus post-interview feedback during simulated practice interviews about child abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 32(2), 213-227. DOI:10.1016/j.chiabu.2007.08.002

This study compared the effectiveness of two types of instructor feedback (relative to no feedback) on investigative interviewers' ability to adhere to open-ended questions in simulated practice interviews about child abuse. In one condition, feedback was provided at the end of each practice interview. In the other, the instructor stopped the interviewer at various stages during the practice interviews to provide feedback. The relative effect of these conditions was examined by measuring interviewers' performance in a standardized mock interview paradigm immediately prior to, immediately after, and 12 weeks after the practice and feedback sessions. Prior to and 12 weeks after the practice sessions were administered, there was no significant difference in participants' adherence to open-ended questions irrespective of the nature of the feedback, or whether feedback was received. At the immediate post-practice assessment interval, however, the participants who received feedback during the practice interviews performed better (M proportion of open-ended questions = .85, SD = .13) than the other participants (post-interview feedback M = .67, SD = .18, $p < .001$; no feedback M = .56, SD = .16, $p < .001$). This heightened use of open-ended questions was associated with a greater tendency among the interviewees to provide abuse-related details in response to open-ended questions (M = .91, SD = .11) compared to the other participants (post-interview feedback M = .77, SD = .15, $p < .05$; no feedback M = .69, SD = .16, $p = .001$). Different types of feedback can be differentially effective in training child abuse investigators to adhere to open-ended questions. The benefits of any training program, however, are likely to be short-lived without ongoing practice. A single study compared the relative effectiveness of two types of instructor feedback (relative to no feedback) on investigative interviewers' ability to adhere to open-ended questions in simulated practice interviews about child abuse. This research is relevant to trainers of investigative interviewers because there is currently large variability in the type of feedback employed in training programs. This study is one of the first to empirically demonstrate that different types of feedback may be differentially effective in improving the performance of investigative interviewers.

Powell, M. B., & Wright, R. (2008). Investigative interviewers' perceptions of the value of different training tasks on their adherence to open-ended questions with children. *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, 15(2), 272-283. DOI:10.1080/13218710802014493

Prior research has highlighted the considerable difficulties investigative interviewers have in adhering to open-ended questions in child abuse interviews. Although improvements in interviewing can be achieved by providing training that incorporates multiple practice opportunities and feedback, currently little is known about the way in which these elements are best administered. The current study extends debate and research on this issue by examining the perceptions of 15 trainee interviewers (police as well as social workers) regarding the relative value of various practical training exercises experienced in a recent training program. The findings indicated that although practice in interviewing was deemed essential, not all tasks were perceived to be equally beneficial. The two most favoured exercises were (a) simulated interviews involving trained actors playing the role of the child, and (b) self-evaluation of a transcribed interview using an objective coding protocol. A summary of the participants' perceptions is provided along with a discussion of the implications for trainers and researchers.

Westcott, H. L., & Kynan, S. (2006). Interviewer practice in investigative interviews for suspected child sexual abuse. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 12(4), 367-382. DOI:10.1080/10683160500036962

The aim of the research was to analyse interviewer practice in investigative interviews, concentrating on features other than the type of questions asked. Transcripts of 70 videotaped Memorandum interviews from England and Wales were coded using a specifically developed scheme. Children were aged from under 7 to 12 years. Aspects of interviewer practice that were recorded included implementation of the different phases of the interview, interviewer distortions, and other problematic interviewer behaviours, e.g. excessive familiarity, inappropriate disbelief, etc. A number of problems were noted in the transcripts. Rapport, closure and free narrative phases varied in the degree to which they were present, and in their quality even when included. Discussions of truth and lies in the rapport phase were at a basic level that did not include intention to deceive. Over half the sample included interviewer distortions, and other instances of problematic behaviours were also noted. The results of the study support and extend earlier research, and suggest a number of areas requiring attention. The importance of interviewer training

is highlighted, and further discussion is required as to why such training does not appear to be implemented in practice.

Lamb, M. E., Sternberg, K. J., Orbach, Y., Hershkowitz, I., Horowitz, D., & Esplin, P. W. (2002). The effects of intensive training and ongoing supervision on the quality of investigative interviews with alleged sex abuse victims. *Applied Developmental Science*, 6(3), 114-125. DOI:10.1207/S1532480XADS0603_2

Four distinct strategies were employed to train 21 experienced forensic interviewers to interview alleged sex abuse victims ($M = 9.20$ years of age) in accordance with professionally recommended practices. The structure and informativeness of the 96 interviews they conducted following training were compared with the structure and informativeness of 96 matched interviews conducted by the same interviewers in the 6 months prior to the training. Didactic workshops and instruction in the utilization of highly structured presubstantive interview procedures had little effect on the number of open-ended prompts used to elicit information or on the amount of substantive information elicited in this way. By contrast, intensive training in the use of a highly structured interview protocol, followed by continuing supervision in the form of monthly day-long seminars, supplemented in some cases by detailed individual feedback on recent interviews, yielded dramatic improvements on these measures of interview quality.

Lamb, M. E., Sternberg, K. J., Orbach, Y., Esplin, P. W., & Mitchell, S. (2002). Is ongoing feedback necessary to maintain the quality of investigative interviews with allegedly abused children?. *Applied Developmental Science*, 6(1), 35-41. DOI:10.1207/S1532480XADS0601_04

Thirty-seven 4- to 12-year-old alleged victims of sexual abuse were interviewed using the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development investigative interview guide by 8 experienced forensic investigators who received regular supervision, including timely feedback on their ongoing interviews. These interviews were matched and compared with 37 interviews conducted by the same investigators immediately following termination of the supervision and feedback phase. After the supervision ended, interviewers used fewer open-ended prompts and thus elicited less information from recall, instead relying more heavily on option-posing and suggestive prompts, which are less likely to elicit accurate information. These results suggest that ongoing supervision and feedback may be necessary to maintain desirable interview practices.

Powell, M. B. (2002). Specialist training in investigative and evidential interviewing: Is it having any effect on the behaviour of professionals in the field?. *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, 9(1), 44-55. DOI:10.1375/pplt.2002.9.1.44

While numerous concerns have been voiced over the past decade regarding the inappropriate question styles of investigative and evidential interviewers, there has been relatively little research, discussion, and critique in relation to the content, structure, and efficacy of existing interviewer training courses. This article provides a brief up-to-date summary of the essential elements of an investigative or evidential interview, followed by a review of research relating to the effectiveness of training programs for forensic interviewers and the factors that are needed to promote the use of appropriate questioning techniques. Finally, this article offers recommendations for future research and for the revision of existing training programs in forensic interviewing.

Aldridge, J., & Cameron, S. (1999). Interviewing child witnesses: Questioning techniques. *Applied Developmental Science*, 3(2), 136-147. DOI:10.1207/s1532480xads0302_7

The last decade has seen major developments in the legal arena concerning the evidential interviewing of children. Research evidence clarifying the ability of children to provide valid and reliable information has been incorporated into the development of evidential interviewing techniques. This in turn has focused attention on the importance of training. Despite the increase in training, research with both child and adult interviewers has shown that inappropriate questioning strategies and poorly structured interviews still typify a significant number of investigations. This study evaluated the effect of a 1-week intensive training course on police and social worker forensic interviewing with children and investigated the actual types of questions employed by interviewers. Analysis of videoed interviews was used to compare trained and untrained interviewers on a series of rating scales designed to assess interviewer performance. The number of requests for free reports and the number of open, specific, leading, and nonleading questions used were obtained. The study found no differences in performance between trained and untrained interviewers on any rated behaviors with both trained and untrained interviewers rating poorly. Specific and leading questions were found to occupy over half the total number of questions used by both sets of interviewers, and few free report requests were used. That is, interviewers mostly asked the types of questions least likely to obtain valid and reliable information from children, with no evident variation from this pattern within the trained group.

These findings echo the results of other studies in suggesting that interviewers use inappropriate questioning strategies to obtain information even after training and rely heavily on specific rather than open questioning. The results of this study suggest that the frequently adopted model of the short, intensive training course may not be the most effective way of training investigators to interview children, and more research is needed to establish the best way forward.

Warren, A. R., Woodall, C. E., Thomas, M., Nunno, M., Keeney, J. M., Larson, S. M., & Stadfeld, J. A. (1999). Assessing the effectiveness of a training program for interviewing child witnesses. *Applied Developmental Science, 3*(2), 128-135.
DOI:10.1207/s1532480xads0302_6

Twenty-seven experienced interviewers attended a 10-day training institute designed to provide knowledge and skills for improving investigative interviews with young children. Participants completed pre- and posttraining surveys assessing their knowledge of the scientific evidence regarding memory, suggestibility, and other aspects of children's ability to provide accurate accounts of events during interviews. They also conducted pre- and posttraining interviews with preschool children about 2 previously experienced events. Participants' knowledge about children's abilities and the scientific basis of various interviewing protocols increased significantly after the training. However, training did not have a significant impact on interviewers' questioning styles or the amount of accurate information elicited from the children. Results indicate that successfully translating knowledge into practice requires multiple opportunities for skill practice and feedback.