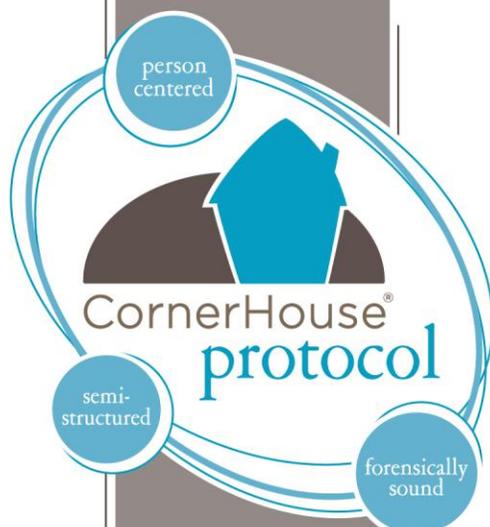


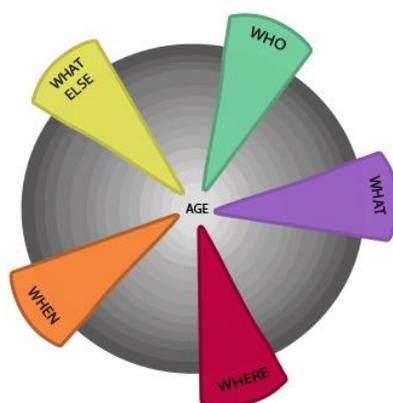
Reflections on Emerging Issues



Developmental Expectations

One of the three Guiding Principles of The CornerHouse Forensic Interview Protocol™ is that it is Person Centered. This has long been reflected by the semi-structured interview process utilized and trained by CornerHouse for more than 20 years. Utilizing a semi-structured approach allows for a developmentally based protocol, with adjustment and modification based upon the individual child's developmental presentation and needs; this is consistent with best practice recommendations in the field of forensic interviewing (APSAC, 2012). Along with having a basic overall understanding of child development, interviewers and other professionals should have developmentally appropriate expectations about the information a child may be able to provide within a forensic interview. This is true with regards to the structure and degree of complexity of information sharing, as well as to the content of the information.

Previous CornerHouse conceptualizations of this were referred to as Guidelines for Age-Appropriate Questions (Anderson et al., 2010), which consisted of a grid that is likely familiar to many previously trained in the CornerHouse Forensic Interview Protocol™. This grid was a guideline used to indicate the developmental age at which a child may reach the ability to share particular information. Such Guidelines were based upon both child development research (*see, for example*, Fivush, 1993; Garbarino, Stott, & Faculty of The Erickson Institute, 1992; Hewitt, 1999) and clinical practice in the field. While the information in the Guidelines remains valid, it does have limitations with regards to representing a full picture of how and when children may share information. For example, in the Age-Appropriate Guidelines, it is indicated that beginning at age 7, children may be able to provide information regarding “when.” While it is true that younger children do not have cognitive abilities and understanding of temporal concepts to identify time, per se, this does not mean that they are completely unable to share any information that could be used in identifying when an event occurred; for example, a 5-year-old child may be able to say that an event occurred “when we were playing hide-and-seek” or “when Jenny was babysitting.” Similarly, although a 10-year-old child may have the cognitive abilities to understand time-related concepts, this does not mean that such a child is going to be able to identify the specific point in time that a particular event occurred if the “when” was not encoded as part of the child's memory of the event (Friedman & Lyon, 2005; Wandrey, Lyon, Quas, & Freidman, 2012). For such reasons, CornerHouse has reconceptualized the concept of a developmentally appropriate approach into what is now referred to as “Developmental Expectations.”



The graphic representation of the Developmental Expectations features a circle of gradient rings. The youngest children interviewed should be viewed as the center, with the ever-widening concentric circles representing the increasing age of children. These circles represent expansion: as the age of a child increases, they have increased communication and cognitive abilities and increasing exposure and experiences, resulting in more information being taken in and processed, along with expanding ability to share information. The wedges represent the content areas in which children may report information: Who, What, Where, When, and What Else. The wedges begin narrow in the center and widen, representing that as the age of the child increases, the information shared increases in both amount and complexity.

CornerHouse's Developmental Expectations considers elements beyond information's being shared from the different content areas. For each individual child interviewed, it is important to consider that within these content areas, less or more information may be shared by different developmental groups, and information may be dissimilar dependent upon where a particular child's development falls; so, for example, not only can 9-year-old children typically provide more information in general than can 5-year-olds, but the information provided is also likely to be different.

Similarly, there is also variation in the information that may be provided directly by the individual compared to information that may need to be explained or supplemented by other individuals. For example, a younger child may refer to "Uncle Fred," but have no ability to share further information regarding this person, as could be developmentally expected. Following the interview, it may be necessary for the multidisciplinary team to utilize another person, such as the child's caregiver, to provide further identifying information. A somewhat older child may be able to explain that Uncle Fred is not a relative, but is their father's friend. An even older child or adolescent may be able to provide additional information, such as that Uncle Fred's last name is Jones and that he is the child's father's former roommate who comes over to watch baseball.

It is imperative to recognize that the responsibility for clear communication rests fully on the interviewer (Graffam Walker, A., Kenniston, J., 2013). Having appropriate developmental expectations is critical to successful forensic interviews for a variety of reasons. It is important for the interviewer during the interview, as this directly impacts the interviewer's conducting of the interview through what approaches are used to elicit information and how these are employed; this includes the use of invitations offered to the child to encourage narrative responses and other various types of inquiry and information-gathering strategies. Having appropriate developmental expectations can assist with maximizing the child's abilities without pushing past and remaining beyond these abilities. Beyond conducting the interview itself, having realistic developmental expectations assists professionals with recognizing that the information shared by a child is consistent with what can and should be expected for a child's age and unique developmental capacities. Particularly with younger children, their sharing of information, which is often more simple and limited, may erroneously be seen as a failure in some way, rather than being viewed as fully appropriate within the context of a particular child's age. Without an appropriate and realistic understanding of developmental expectations, professionals will find it difficult to successfully conduct and assess forensic interviews.

In the ongoing evolution of The CornerHouse Forensic Interview Protocol™, continued attention is paid to finding ways to maintain the Guiding Principles of Person Centered, Forensically Sound, and Semi-Structured and to continue to develop training and engage in practice that will best meet the needs of those we serve through giving them a voice; Development Expectations represent a framework through which we can hear those voices in a manner that recognizes and responds to the individual's abilities.

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