



Reflections on Emerging Issues: Tell Me Everything

CornerHouse has always integrated research findings into our interviewing practices. In fact, the CornerHouse Forensic Interview Protocol™ is unique in that it is based on best practices derived from both rigorous research and interviewer experiences. Recent research has shown that more accurate statements come from spontaneous, free flowing narrative. Research has also shown that when people are encouraged to practice providing this narrative in the “rapport” stage, they provide more details later in the interview process.

A forensic interview is a unique interaction, unlike any other conversation between an adult and a child or other vulnerable individual. Unlike a teacher, parent or other authority figure, a forensic interviewer does not know the answers to the questions being asked. The individual is the expert in the interview room. Because an individual may arrive for a forensic interview with some anxiety, it helps to provide an opportunity to practice a forensic conversation about a non-forensic topic during the “rapport” stage of the interview. Ideally, the interviewer will ask open-ended questions about a neutral topic that the individual has mentioned, eliciting details from both script memory (things that happen all the time, such as school) and episodic memory (unique events such as yesterday’s basketball game) (Cordisco-Steele, 2010). When more direct prompts are necessary for clarification, the interviewer will return to open-ended questions as soon as possible.

Practicing this kind of conversation early in the interview helps lay the groundwork for more successful inquiry about the substantive topic of conversation. Sternberg et al. (1997) found that building rapport by using open-ended questions about both a child’s everyday life and a recent event helped interviewers to later draw out more abuse-relevant information. Interviewers are able to use the same types of questions in both the “rapport” and “abuse scenario” stages of the interview, thereby maximizing the individual’s comfort and competence.

Older children, adolescents, and some vulnerable adults are developmentally able to provide more extended narrative in response to open-ended questions. However, even very young children can provide significant details about their experiences when questioned in an open-ended and developmentally-appropriate manner (Lamb et al., 2003).

CornerHouse has integrated “narrative practice” into every interview as we build rapport, as a strategy to help clients provide the most comprehensive and spontaneous information possible. Research regarding CornerHouse’s use of narrative practice showed that children provided more detailed accounts of abuse when interviewers used open-ended questions and supportive statements through narrative practice (Anderson et al., 2014).

References

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