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The Step-Wise Guidelines for Child Interviews: The New Generation

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Introduction

Interviewing potential crime witnesses provides information vital to hypotheses testing and decision making by many players in the criminal justice system. This is especially the case with respect to the investigative interviewing of children with allegations of sexual crimes. In the vast majority of cases of alleged child sexual abuse, there is no evidence that a crime has been committed save for the account of the child in question. Thus, the investigative child interview, the resultant recollection obtained within, and its assessment of credibility impart profound importance to the case at hand. Although the importance of investigative interviewing for children has been recognized for many years (e.g., Yuille, 1988), only a handful of evidence-based techniques have been developed and critically examined through research and clinical-forensic practice. *The Step-Wise Interview* (Yuille, 1990) is an example of a technique that has been developed specifically for the investigative interviewing of children. It has been empirically examined and its use is widespread by law enforcement and child protection agencies in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and other countries. Since its inception, however, a number of theoretical, empirical, and practical developments have occurred which has necessitated modifications. This chapter provides an overview of these changes and, in doing so, provides an introduction to the recently developed *Step-Wise Interview Guidelines for Child Interviews: The New Generation*.

First, the importance of investigative interviewing for children is discussed. Following is a review of a few commonly used investigative interviewing techniques. Third, a discussion of the overall goals of investigative interviewing, irrespective of the

specific technique, is provided. A review of the minimal requirements for effective investigative interviewing is then reviewed followed by an overview of other training and related issues. Fifth, the original *Step-Wise Interview* (Yuille, 1990) is briefly outlined as is its revised version and the reasons for the revision.

Importance Of Investigative Interviewing For Children

The importance of proper investigative interviewing for children is exemplified by the high number of child witnesses testifying in court in the last decade and a half. For example, it has been estimated that, in the United States alone, approximately one hundred thousand children provide eyewitness evidence every year (Bruck, Ceci, & Hembrooke, 1998). This represents a major change in the traditional receptivity of courts. Historically, justice systems based upon British Common Law traditions held the view that children could not distinguish fact from fantasy. Thus, in many criminal justice contexts (e.g., the Child and Young Person' Act in England and Wales), the eyewitness account of a child was generally inadmissible or required independent corroboration before being presented to the Court (for a review, see Bull, 1998). This situation has dramatically changed and children as young as three years old have been permitted to testify, irrespective of independent evidence (e.g., Bala, Lee, Lindsay, & Talwar, 2000). This change in the assessment of the witness abilities of children has a solid empirical foundation. It has been demonstrated that young child have a conceptual understanding of truth telling versus lying (e.g., Talwar, Lee, Bala, & Lindsay, 2002) and can distinguish reality from fantasy (e.g., Golomb & Galasso, 1995). For example, research has shown that six year olds are able to differentiate memory for their own actions from

their own thoughts (e.g., Johnson & Foley, 1984). Although children are more suggestible and typically provide less information than adults (e.g., Baker-Ward, Gordon, Ornstein, Larus, & Clubb, 1993; Flin, Boon, Knox, & Bull, 1992; 1993), if interviewed without the use of suggestive and leading questions, they can produce accounts of events that are as accurate as the accounts of adults (Ceci & Bruck, 1993).

Issues of suggestibility illustrate the importance of a properly conducted investigative interview of a child witness, an area that has been recognized for many years. That is, it is clear that witnesses in general and child witnesses in particular can be led to produce false information if interviewed with the use of leading / suggestive questions (e.g., Erdmann, Volbert, & Bohm, 2004; Melnyk & Bruck, 2004). Due to this reality all modern evidence-based approaches to investigative interviewing formally preclude the use of such strategies.

Multiple Approaches To Investigative Interviewing

In addition to *The Step-Wise Interview* (Yuille, 1990), a number of approaches to investigative interviewing have been developed (e.g., *The Structured Interview*; see Larsson, Granhag, & Spjut, 2003; Memon, 1998). *The Cognitive Interview* (Fisher & Geiselman, 1992) is a technique often used by law enforcement in an attempt to improve the quality and quantity of information obtained by witnesses. Indeed, research suggests that law enforcement officers can elicit substantially more accurate information (as much as 40% more) from witnesses with the use of *The Cognitive Interview* in comparison to a traditional law enforcement interview (e.g., Fisher, Geiselman, & Amador, 1989). The

original *Cognitive Interview* included the following general steps: Context Reinstatement; Exhaust Recall; Change of Perspective; Backward Recall; and Closing The Interview. Although not developed specifically for use with child witnesses, the *Cognitive Interview* has been effectively applied to such contexts (e.g., Saywitz, Geiselman, & Bornstein, 1992). However its use with children has not been without problems (e.g., difficulty understanding techniques; Geiselman & Padilla, 1998; Memon, Cronin, Eaves, & Bull, 1996). For example, research has demonstrated that, in addition to increasing the amount of information received in comparison to traditional investigative interviewing techniques (e.g., Larsson et al., 2003), the *Cognitive Interview* can increase the quantity of errors in children's accounts (e.g., Kohnken, Milne, Bull, & Memon, 1999; Memon, Wark, Bull, & Koehnken, 1997). The revised or enhanced *Cognitive Interview* was developed to address some of the communicative shortcomings of the original version. It incorporates the following procedures (see Memon, 1998): Rapport Building; Supportive; Interview Behavior, Context Reinstatement, Focused Retrieval; Free Recall; Questions Related To Free Narrative; Active/ Probe Images; Change Perspective; Witness Compatible Questioning; and Reverse Order Recall. These improvements have made the *Cognitive Interview* more effective with children although some components (e.g., backward recall) remain problematic for younger (preschool age) children. The *Cognitive Interview* serves as an additional tool in *The Step-Wise Interview: The New Generation*.

A considerable number of protocols and guidelines specific to the task of interviewing children have appeared during the past twenty years. These have included interview techniques developed by academics (e.g., Faller, 2007; Saywitz et al, 2002), those presented by professional organizations (e.g., APSAC, 1990; National Institute of

Child Health and Human Development, see Lamb et al, 1999), and government departments or agencies (e.g., Home Office, 1992; Harborview Child Interview Guide, 2006). These alternative protocols and guidelines are more similar than different. Each advocates avoidance of leading questions, the use of a hypothesis testing approach, and a child centered form of questioning. The variations between the various approaches are only in when and how to use particular types of questions.

Overall Goals of Investigative Interviewing

Irrespective of the differences of modern evidence-based approaches to investigative interviewing, most share the following goals with the *Step-Wise Interview* and *The Step-Wise Interview Guideline for Child Interviews: The New Generation*: (1) to minimize the impact of the investigation on the child; (2) to maximize the quality and quantity of information received from the witness; and (3) to protect the integrity of the investigative process. The latter point refers to the need to obtain the relevant information to assist law enforcement in making a decision concerning criminal charges and child protection services the relevant information to determine the child's safety. Another goal of *The Step-Wise Interview* and *The Step-Wise Interview Guideline for Child Interviews: The New Generation* is to allow an evaluation of the credibility of information received (e.g., via a verbal-based approach to evaluating truthfulness such as Criterion Based Content Analysis; Steller & Koehnken, 1989). As noted earlier, almost all of the approaches to child interviews emphasize the value of video taping the interview to provide an accurate and complete account of the questions asked and the child's answers.

Minimal Requirements For Effective Investigative Interviewing

Although the content of training will vary by discipline (e.g., law enforcement, child protection, mental health professional), we suggest that the following knowledge and skill based areas be viewed as minimal requirements for effective investigative interviewing. First, interviewers need to be well versed in the empirical literature on memory and cognition and on how these factors change with age throughout childhood. . Indeed, in order to know what type of memory patterns to expect to receive in the context of an investigative interview, interviewers must understand how memory works in different contexts (e.g., positive events, traumatic events), including the biopsychosocial variables that interact to impact memory (i.e., predisposing, precipitating, and perpetuating factors; see Hervé, Cooper, & Yuille, 2007). For example, the concept of script memories is relevant as it is not uncommon for victims of repeated abuse to have a general recollection of ‘what used to happen’ as opposed to specific memories for distinct events (Cooper, 1999). This issue is discussed in more detail below.

Second, any investigative interviewer tasked with the challenge of interviewing a child witness is required to have a solid understanding of developmental psychology. Interviewers should have knowledge of how age impacts memory and the associated variables (e.g., suggestibility) that vary as a function of age. For example, generally speaking, due to increased cognitive complexity, older children can provide more detailed narratives than younger children (McCann, 1998). As well, older children are less vulnerable to the effects of suggestion in comparison to younger children (for a

review, see Ceci & Bruck, 1993). Knowledge about how age impacts the different interview steps is also imperative. For example, as discussed in more detail below, the rapport-building step in *The Step-Wise Interview Guideline for Child Interviews: The New Generation* is age dependent and will no doubt vary by attachment style (e.g. younger children may require more rapport building before they are comfortable speaking to an adult about a negative event; a securely attached child will likely require less rapport building than a child with an anxious-avoidant attachment style).

Third, investigative interviewers need to understand the complex and variable impact of abuse on children. Research and clinical forensic experience indicates that some child victims develop significant mental health problems as the result of sexual abuse (Kendall-Tackett, et al, 1993; Putnam, 2003). Also, some victims may develop sexualized behaviors (Widom & Ames, 1994). However, many victims of child sexual abuse show little or no apparent consequences of the abuse. For example, in a controversial study, Rind et al (1998) concluded that as many as a third of victims are asymptomatic when they report their abuse. The important point is that child sexual abuse has a range of impact on the victims and an investigator must be sensitive to this range and understand the factors that affect impact. It is most important that an investigator not conclude that a child is a victim because the child has behavioral problems. In contrast, it is equally important to understand that a child's disclosure of sexual abuse should not be doubted because the child is asymptomatic

Investigative interviewers should also be knowledgeable about the varied patterns of sexual offending. For example, a seductive pedophile will have quite a different modus operandi than would a situational intrafamilial child molester who would, in turn, have a

different modus operandi than a psychopathic sadistic offender who preys on children amongst other types of victims (Lanning, 1992). Knowledge about the varied patterns of sexual offenders will put the investigative interviewer in a strong position to observe the processes of such offending behavior (e.g., the grooming process of the seductive pedophile) and therefore the credibility of the allegation in question.

Clearly, investigative interviewers are required to have the ability to engage in the process of critical thinking and to test multiple hypotheses. Investigative interviewers should approach the interviewing context with an open mind, not a set agenda (Poole & Lamb, 1998). Evidence that is both consistent and inconsistent with the hypotheses in question should be considered and decisions should be made based on the balance of probabilities (Cooper et al., in press). Investigative interviewers are urged to always consider framing their questions with this in mind. Investigative interviewers should be cognizant of the larger context, recognizing that interviewing does not occur in a vacuum. It is suggested that preparing for the interview is key, both in a general manner, and specifically tailored for the witness in question. Finally, it is recommended that an evaluation of the interview occur, both in terms of the interviewee and interviewer's behavior. Post interview evaluation serves a quality control function and allows issues related to credibility to be assessed.

Other Training and Related Issues

Attaining proficiency in any professional activity requires evidence-based knowledge and skills as well as the opportunity to practice and refine such skills. Indeed, at least with respect to areas of the investigative interviewing and credibility assessment,

experience suggests that the quantity and quality of training, including practice, are the most pressing variables that impact professionals' performance abilities. In addition, to some of the domains of knowledge discussed above, investigative interviewers should be cognizant of their own limitations and biases. Irrespective of the level of education and the quantity of professional experience attained, not all individuals can be proficient in investigative interviews. There are a number of factors that preclude individuals from achieving adeptness in this area and these individuals should not feel that they have failed in some way per se if they are not effective investigative interviewers. For example, experience in training investigative interviewing techniques suggests that some individuals cannot cease from verbally and physically empathizing with the interviewee, factors that could prove problematic in the forensic context. The bottom line is that hearing about alleged childhood abuse presents unique challenges to the interviewer and not everyone is capable of meeting such challenges.

Any approach to interviewing children must be flexible. In particular, different techniques are needed to engage children of different ages. The interviewer may be on the floor with a preschooler doing some coloring to develop rapport. An elementary school child might be engaged by talking about favorite TV shows while rapport with an older child might involve discussion of favorite sports. Interviewers need both training and experience to develop the skill set to deal with the variety of children encountered in these interviews.

A clear distinction must be drawn between therapeutic and investigative interviews. An investigative interviewer is required to be objective, to maintain an independent stance with respect to the allegations under investigation. In contrast, a

therapist is concerned not with the historic reality of the allegations but with their subjective reality. The therapist may feel free to be leading and suggestive when interviewing a client, an investigator will not. The therapeutic role and the investigative role are incompatible (Greenberg & Shuman, 1997).

The Original Step-Wise Interview

The original Step-Wise Interview (Yuille, 1990) incorporated the following steps (for a review, see Yuille, Marxsen & Cooper, 1999):

1. Introduction
2. Building Rapport
3. Interview Rules (Optional)
4. Establishing The Need To Tell The Truth
5. Introducing The Topic Of Concern
6. Free Narrative
7. Open Questioning
8. Specific Questions (Optional)
9. Concluding The Interview.

The Step-Wise interview was originally called The Step-Wise Protocol. In the late 1990s this title was changed to The Step-Wise Guidelines. The change was made due to feedback from interviewers concerning legal challenges. In areas where the Step-Wise Protocol was regularly employed the defense bar became sophisticated about the protocol and began to criticize interviewers in court if they did not follow the protocol to the letter. These lawyers stressed that a protocol

required rigid adherence. The Step-Wise approach to interviewing has always incorporated flexibility as a necessary component. To emphasize this the title was changed to ‘The Step-Wise Guidelines.’

The Step-Wise Interview Guidelines: The New Generation

New Developments

Clinical-forensic experience and the advancement of theory and research on investigative interviewing, eyewitness memory, and credibility assessment led to the need to revise *The Step-Wise Interview* (Yuille, 1990). As discussed below, the modifications reflect new developments in developmental, cognitive, and forensic psychology as well as actual changes to the original steps. Similarities and differences between the two versions are highlighted below.

Age, Developmental, and Culturally Sensitivity

The Step-Wise Interview (Yuille, 1990) was developed as an investigative interviewing tool to be used with children and adolescents. *The Step-Wise Interview Guidelines for Child Interviews: The New Generation* is to be used with children and adolescents but it is more age and developmentally sensitive in comparison to its predecessor. For example, as expanded on below, different strategies are suggested when interviewing a preschool age child versus an adolescent. In addition *The Step-Wise Interview Guidelines for Child Interviews: The New Generation* is sensitive to the needs of children with mental or physical disabilities that could affect, for example, the cognitive and linguistic abilities of the child. Consequently, the investigative interviewer must recognize these factors and demonstrate informed flexibility and modify the

interview accordingly. The same is true with respect to culture. That is, the investigative interviewer must take into account the cultural background of the interviewee and, as a result, modify the interview and interpretation of the interview findings. For example, all things considered, a child who was raised within the context of traditional aboriginal spirituality will likely behave considerably different during the investigative interview than a third generation Indo-Canadian child (for example, the former child, due to cultural teachings, will likely display less eye contact). In short, the investigative interviewer who adopts *The Step-Wise Interview Guidelines for Child Interviews: The New Generation* must acquire, in advance of interviews, the requisite knowledge regarding the age, developmental, and culturally specific issues regarding the child interviewee in question.

Alterations to the “Steps”

(1) Introduction

The first step in *The Step-Wise Interview Guidelines for Child Interviews: The New Generation* has not changed since the development of *The Step-Wise Interview* (Yuille, 1990). This step exists simply to protect the integrity of the interview. In this step the interviewer makes sure that the time, date and location of the interview are recorded and that the identities and roles of all those present are noted. Training assures that this step is taken in a child friendly manner..

(2) Rapport Building

Developing rapport with the child is an important yet difficult step in the process of investigative interviewing (Bull, 1998). In the original *Step-Wise Interview* (Yuille, 1990), the goal of the rapport-building step was to assist the interviewee in becoming

relatively comfortable with the interviewer so that the interviewee would be in a position to discuss the topic of concern. An additional purpose of this step is for the interviewer to assess the cognitive and linguistic capacities of the interviewee. These objectives remain in *The Step-Wise Interview Guidelines for Child Interviews: The New Generation*.

However, this step has been expanded. For example, specific techniques are provided to assist the interviewer in evaluating the linguistic level of the child (e.g., vocabulary, sentence complexity, etc.). Similarly, techniques are provided to assess the conceptual level of the child (e.g., concepts such as over, under, inside, outside, before, after). These assessments provide a foundation for subsequent assessment of any allegations the child makes. Also, as a consequence of these improvements, the interviewer is better able to assess baseline information about the child and, thus, can detect any change from baseline, which is integral to the accurate evaluation of truthfulness (Cooper et al., in press). Also, as interviews should focus, in part, on evaluating stylistic and paralinguistic factors in the interviewee's speech (McCann, 1998), the establishment of a baseline for these factors becomes important and should be assessed at this stage. Finally, the interviewer assesses the child's memory during the Rapport Phase. This is done by having the child provide as much detail as he or she can about a positive, important event (e.g., a recent birthday, holiday, field trip, sporting event). The quality and quantity of detail in this memory serves as a foundation for the evaluation of the detail provided about the alleged abuse.

Interview Rules

In the original *Step-Wise Interview* (Yuille, 1990), a discussion of interview rules was the third step in the interview. This step is not included in the "steps" of *The Step-*

Wise Interview Guidelines for Child Interviews: The New Generation. Through clinical-forensic experience, it was discovered that some children, particularly preschool age children (e.g., less than 6 or 7 years of age), had a difficult to impossible time understanding the rules when they were discussed in a formal step. Further, research from developmental psychology suggests that, generally speaking, preschool age children do not have the requisite attention span and cognitive capacity to comprehend a set of rules that are largely applied in a somewhat abstract fashion at the early states of an interview. Rather, research and clinical forensic experience suggests that preschool age children are better suited for “in vivo learning” – that is, learning by experience (e.g., via play, imitation). In fact, it is more effective for children, particularly preschool age children, to have the interview rules reinforced throughout the interview as they arise. For example, if a child says ‘I think this is what happens next but I am not sure.’ The interviewer can then present the rule: ‘Thank you, please let me know when you are not sure of something.’ Consequently, the interview rules are now provided as an appendix to the Guidelines (see Appendix One). The interviewer learns the eight rules and anytime a child spontaneously follows a rule the interviewer reinforces it (e.g., “... that’s good Johnny ... it’s ok to say I don’t remember ... I am only interested in hearing about things that you can remember”). An added bonus of reinforcing the interview rules when the child is correctly subscribing to them is that it helps maintain rapport and the smoothness of the interview process.

In addition to potential problems with young children, providing a list of interview rules to older children /adolescents has potential drawbacks. For example, clinical-forensic experience suggests that providing a list of interview rules at the

beginning of the interview to older children / adolescents may result in feelings of being ‘talked down to’, which is at odds with developing rapport. Moreover, in practice, interview rules have sometimes been discussed as a series of leading questions, an approach that is inconsistent with *The Step-Wise* approach to interviewing.

(3) Establishing The Need To Tell the Truth (Optional)

This step was a requirement in the original *Step-Wise Interview* (Yuille, 1990) but is now optional (i.e., not required) in *The Step-Wise Interview Guidelines for Child Interviews: The New Generation*. Initially, this step was added for child interviews at the behest of prosecution lawyers so that it was clear that the child had an obligation to tell the truth (it is interesting to note that this step has never been applied to adult investigative interviews). As noted earlier, it was traditionally thought, a priori, that children could not distinguish reality from fantasy. This was based upon a cultural belief, there has been no research to show that children cannot reliably distinguish truth from make-believe. More recently research has refuted this belief (e.g., Golomb & Galasso, 1995) and it has been demonstrated that, when interviewed properly, children can produce accurate and credible accounts of their past experiences (Ceci & Bruck, 1993). It should be noted, however, that although most children know the conceptual differences between lying and truth telling and can understand the obligation to tell the truth, such does not necessarily translate into action. Indeed, it has been demonstrated that children will lie to hide their own transgressions (Talwar et al., 2002) and experience indicates that some children, for a variety of reasons (e.g., coercion and threats from the alleged perpetrator), will lie about what has or not has happened to them, irrespective of whether an obligation to tell the truth was discussed. Thus, neither the articulation of the concept

nor a promise to tell the truth is necessarily effective in assuring that the truth will be told. This is not an issue particular to children. Adults can and do lie after promising to tell the truth. Thus, the inclusion of this step has become optional. The interviewer should be guided by local practice (the advice of the prosecutor) concerning whether to include this step and where in the interview to place it.

If this step is included it should be done in a child oriented fashion. In many interviews that we have reviewed the request to tell the truth is presented as a test for the child, sometimes even involving pictures of children lying and telling the truth. This approach is not child friendly and potentially interferes with rapport building. Sometimes, interviewers have indicated to interviewees that they will not ‘... be in trouble’ if they tell the truth. Of course, there is no way to know what such a statement means to an interviewee and there is no way to predict with certainty what will or not happen to an interviewee in the future. Thus, statements of this kind should be avoided.

The new generation approach to this step involves the following: the interviewer says to the child ‘While we are talking today I am going to make sure that everything that I tell you is the truth. What does it mean when I say that?’ This wording will be varied to make it age appropriate. Thus, the topic of truth is at first related to the interviewer and not a demand of the child. After the topic has been canvassed, if the child understands the concept, the interviewer says: ‘So you do know what it means when I say I will only talk about things that are true. Will you make me that same promise?’ In this way, the issue of truth is shared rather than a demand made of the child.

(4) Introducing The Topic Of Concern

The revised guidelines include more ways of conducting this step in comparison to those outlined in the original *Step-Wise Interview* (Yuille, 1990). For example, the investigative interviewer may pose the following questions to the interviewee: "... Do you know why you are here today" or "... is there something that you want to talk to me about?" If these questions do not prove successful, it is suggested that the interviewee utilized the following: "... my job is to talk to kids about things that have happened to them. Can you tell me about something good that happened to you?" and subsequently: "... Can you tell me about something bad that has happened to you?" The aforementioned queries are *Step-Wise* in nature, that is, they proceed from the most general type of questioning to more specific queries. It is wise to model the *Step-Wise*, funnel approach (i.e., from general to specific) as much as possible during different phases of the interview (e.g., when probing for unrelated events during rapport building) as it demonstrates consistency to the child interviewee and thus provides them with some understanding of what to expect as the interview unfolds. The training includes up to a dozen different ways to introduce the topic of concern.

(5) Disclosure Phase

In the original *Step-Wise Interview* (Yuille, 1990), the disclosure phase included three separate steps: the free-narrative phase, followed by open-ended questions and, then, specific questions. In *The Step-Wise Interview Guidelines for Child Interviews: The New Generation*, these steps have been integrated into one phase with a number of parts. Consistent with the original *Step-Wise Interview*, however, there is still a funnel approach to questioning: investigative interviewers should proceed from the most general

form of questioning (i.e., elicit a free narrative) to more specific forms of questioning (e.g., open-ended questioning), as necessary.

(a) Free Narrative

In many respects, the free narrative part of the disclosure phase is arguably the most important component of any investigative interviewing technique for children in that it leads to the most unbiased information reported by child witnesses (Steward, Bussey, Goodman, & Saywitz, 1993). Research indicates, for example, that open ended and specific questions may result in less correct information and confabulations in comparison to the free narrative stage of interviewing (Dent & Stephenson, 1979; Larsson et al., 2003). Thus, it is unfortunate that some law enforcement professionals rely heavily on specific questioning rather than eliciting a free narrative (Fisher, Geiselman, & Raymond, 1987). Indeed, in some child sexual abuse investigations, it has been shown that approximately 90% of the questions asked to children were specific in nature, thus mostly requiring a yes or no response (McGough & Warren, 1994).

Clearly, evidence-based practice suggests that the disclosure phase of an investigative interview, particularly for children, should commence by eliciting an unbiased, un-interrupted free narrative (e.g., “Please tell me everything that you can remember about ... please remember that I was not there at time ...”). The objective at this stage of the interview is to elicit an episodic memory; that is, an account of a specific event. It is not uncommon, however, for victims of repeated crimes to have a script memory for their multiple victimizations. A script memory reflects the blending together of similar episodes into a script (Ceci & Bruck, 1993). Everyone has scripts. For

example, a script for grocery shopping usually encompasses formulating a list of needed items, driving to the supermarket, retrieving items from the aisles, paying the cashier, etc. More germane to the present chapter are script memories of crimes. For example, victims of repeated child sexual abuse may have a general recollection of typically or usually happened (King & Yuille, 1987). When repetitive instances of abuse occur most of the specific episodes will be forgotten. Instead the child will retain the script of the blended episodes (Yuille & Daylen, 1998). The only episodes that will be retained over multiple events will be script violations, that is, the child will remember the episodes that did not follow the script. Script memories are often distinguished from narrative memories of specific events by the linguistic form of description (e.g., generalized nature, use of conditional verbs verbs; Nelson & Gruendel, 1981). In Cooper's (1999) study, for example, a few participants had script memories for repeated child sexual abuse. Invariably, their memories for the abuse commenced with the phrase, 'he used to.'

If the investigative interviewer receives what appears to be a script memory from the child interviewee, the script should be exhausted for detail in a stepwise fashion (i.e., elicit a free narrative for the script followed by open-ended questions and then specific questions if necessary; see below). Subsequently, the interviewer should ask for script violations. Each specific episode should be exhausted in a step-wise fashion before proceeding to another episode. Individual script violations are, by definition, separate instances and, thus, the recall of such are separate episodic memories. Of course, if the interviewee does not report a script memory, the episodic memory (or memories) should be exhausted for detail in a step-wise manner. That is, at the free narrative step, the interviewer should simply allow the interviewee to recount the event un-interrupted. The

only questions asked during this part of the interview are questions like: ‘What else do you remember?’; ‘Did something else happen?’; ‘What happened next?’

(b) Open-ended Questions

After the child has finished their free narrative (i.e., after a sufficient pause and it appears clear that the child is not merely thinking harder in order to provide more information), open-ended questions are of the ‘Wh’ variety, that is, these questions are requests for more information about ‘Who’, ‘Where’, ‘When’, and ‘What’ happened. For example, an interviewer might ask: ‘Tell me who was there in the room?’ The child might say: ‘My uncle and me.’ The interviewer would then ask: ‘What did your uncle look like?’ A subsequent question would be: ‘What do you remember about what your uncle was wearing?’ Note the funnel-like nature of this series of questions: the questions begin with the broadest form and proceed to more narrow forms of questions.

(c) Specific Questions:

If it appears that the memory for a specific event has not been exhausted for detail and /or if there are aspects of the account that require clarification, it may be necessary for the interviewer to ask specific questions following the completion of open-ended questions. The form of the specific questions is of considerable importance, as it has been empirically demonstrated that the accuracy of children’s responses to specific questions is differentially impacted by divergent question structure. For example, research indicates that the use of ‘wh-’ questions are significantly more likely to produce accurate responses or ‘I don’t know’ responses in comparison to specific questions that simply require the child to respond with ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answers (Peterson, Dowden, & Tobin, 1999). These results

relate to the reality that the latter type of questions, that is, questions that have the answers embedded within, are inherently suggestive. Thus, it is not uncommon for children to provide a response to such questions, irrespective of whether the response is based on their memory. While specific questions can be asked they should never be leading or suggestive.

As an example, consider a case in which a child has disclosed genital fondling by an adult. During the disclosure phase the child also indicated that she was wearing a snow suit. The interviewer could ask the following specific question: ‘I need your help to understand what happened. You said that the man touched your pee-pee and that you had on your snow suit. Tell me how that happened.’

(6) Closure

The last step in *The Step-Wise Interview Guidelines for Child Interviews: The New Generation* has not been altered since the development of *The Step-Wise Interview* (Yuille, 1990). Regardless of the outcome of the interview the child is thanked for his or her participation. The child is asked if she or he has any questions and if so they are answered. Finally, the child is told what will happen next in the process.

Additional Techniques

Some research suggests that the use of toy props and /or anatomically detailed dolls increases the amount of information children can recall from stressful events without a concurrent increase in errors (e.g., Goodman, Quas, Batterman-Faunce, Riddlesberger, & Kuhn, 1997). However, clinical-forensic experience suggests that, when used in actual investigative interviewing contexts, anatomically detailed dolls are

inherently suggestible and may lead to the production of false information. Consequently, the use of these dolls should generally be avoided, although on rare occasions they may be used to clarify a disclosure. That is, a child with limited expressive ability who has already disclosed abuse may use the dolls to clarify the nature of the touching or the sexual act.

The training in the use of *The Step-Wise Guidelines for Child Interviews: The New Generation* also includes an examination of a variety of additional interview tools. These include The Cognitive Interview (to be used only with pre-adolescent and adolescent children), the use of drawings (e.g., drawings to which anatomical details are added; drawings of floor plans), and when to request a repetition of an allegation from a child.

Throughout the training the need for objectivity is stressed. To this end, the step-wise approach is presented as part of The Balanced Investigation. The Balanced Investigation requires that the investigator/interviewer maintain objectivity by always entertaining alternative hypotheses as the case unfolds. That is, throughout the investigative process alternative explanations are generated for the emerging fact pattern. Similarly, throughout the interview of the child the interviewer is constantly creating alternative hypotheses to explain what the child is saying and the interviewer is weighing those hypotheses. At the end of the investigation the investigator develops a narrative to explain the existing facts. Once the narrative is developed the investigator then tries to disprove the narrative. Only if the narrative stands up to this challenge are any conclusions drawn about the case.

Other Issues

Advancements in Statement Validity Analyses

The Step-Wise Interview Guidelines for Child Interviews: The New Generation is an investigative interviewing approach that serves as basis for the accurate assessment of credibility. In fact, it is not possible to effectively assess the credibility of a verbal statement without the use of a high quality interview. For this reason, techniques such as *The Step-Wise Interview* (Yuille, 1990) and *The Cognitive Interview* (Fisher & Geiselman, 1992) have often been utilized as part of a multi-component investigative technique often referred to as Statement Validity Analysis (SVA; Horowitz, 1991; Yuille, 1988). One component of SVA is Criteria Based Content Analysis (CBCA), a set of criteria that are applied to a verbal statement (Griesel & Yuille, 2005). The theoretical underpinnings of CBCA are based on the Undeutsch Hypothesis that there are quantitative and qualitative differences between the recall of events based on experience and those based on invention. Depending on the version utilized, 19 criteria (Steller, 1989, Steller & Koehnken, 1989) or 24 criteria (Cooper, Ternes, Griesel, Viljoen, & Yuille, 2005) have been utilized in research and clinical-forensic practice to assess the credibility of a statement. At the time of the creation of *The Step-Wise Interview* (Yuille, 1990) CBCA had received relatively little empirical attention. However, since this time, it has been the subject of extensive research (for review, see Griesel & Yuille, 2005). The general flavor of the results of recent CBCA research is that truthful accounts of events contain more CBCA criteria than false accounts (for review, see Vrij, 2005). These

findings have been demonstrated with both children (e.g., Lamb et al., 1997; Vrij et al., 2002) and adults (e.g., Vrij, Edward, & Bull, 2001). A truth bias has almost invariably been demonstrated, in that truthful accounts are correctly identified more so than deceptive accounts when CBCA is utilized on its own (e.g., 76% vs. 68%; for review, see Vrij, 2000). Although CBCA is a qualitative procedure, it has been criticized for lacking empirically based cut offs and a quantitative scoring system (McCann, 1998). CBCA is not a test and should be incorporated with other information before conclusions are drawn about credibility (e.g., cognitive and verbal skills, motivation, personality; Erdmann et al., 2004).

Research has demonstrated that older children's accounts of truthful events contain more criteria associated with credibility than those of younger children (e.g., Bekerian & Dennett, 1995) and that older children's (e.g., ten and eleven years old) truthful accounts contain less CBCA criteria than those of adults (Vrij, Akehurst, Soukara, & Bull, 2002). These findings illustrate the reality that younger children have relatively less developed verbal and cognitive skills than older children who, in turn, have less developed verbal and cognitive skills than adults (Erdmann et al., 2004). Indeed, research indicates that, as individuals develop, their cognitive and verbal complexity increases, allowing for richer accounts of their past experiences (McCann, 1998) and, in some cases, more accurate memories (Powell, Thomson, & Ceci, 2003). This simply reflects the basic problem in the investigation of allegations made by children: the younger the child the more difficult it will be to assess the credibility of a child's allegations.

Empirical Foundation

The Step-Wise Guidelines represent one of the few approaches to child interviewing that have been empirically tested (see Yuille, 1996). The technique was field tested in three communities in British Columbia. Frontline workers (police and child protection) received training in the step-wise approach. Some had the training at the beginning of the project, others only after a year. All participants in the project video taped their child interviews (both before and after training). The interviews were rated by 'blind' raters. However, the raters could tell, with 100% accuracy, within minutes of the start of the interview whether the interviewer had received the training. Trained interviews were more structured, flowed more effectively and were much less likely to involve leading or suggestive questions. Police and child protection workers reported much greater satisfaction with their interviews and investigations after the training. This satisfaction persisted a year after the training. The children and families involved in investigations by trained interviewers were more satisfied with the process than those involved with untrained interviewers.

Conclusions

Any investigation of a crime requires effective interviewing. This is especially the case when the witness is a child due to the greater suggestibility of children. It is also especially true when the investigation is of potential child sexual abuse as often the only evidence is the interview of the child. The knowledge base is sufficient and the practical

experience extensive enough to provide clear guidelines for effective interviewing of children. This chapter has outlined the recent revision of an empirically based approach to interviewing children. This type of approach is essential to insure that a child is given an opportunity to provide his or her own version of events; that the child's version is not contaminated by the interview; and that as much information as possible is acquired to permit an objective assessment of the credibility of the child's allegations.

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Appendix One: Interview Rules

- 1: If I misunderstand something you say please tell me. I want to know, I want to get it right.**
- 2: If you don't understand something that I say, please tell me and I will try again.**
- 3: If you feel uncomfortable at any time, please tell me or show me the stop sign.**
- 4: Even if you think I already know something, please tell me anyway.**
- 5: If you are not sure about an answer, please do not guess, tell me your not sure before you say it.**
- 6: Please remember when you are describing something to me that I was not there when it happened. The more you can tell me about what happened, the more I will understand what happened.**
- 7: Please remember that I will not get angry or upset with you**
- 8: Only talk about things that are true and really happened.**