

# Washington State Child Forensic Interviewing Guidelines

## Stages of the Forensic Interview

Follow your county protocol. Do not interview a child about allegations of criminal abuse if it is not your role.

Use these guidelines in conjunction with updated best practices and with formal training:

Child Abuse Interviewing and Assessment, Washington Criminal Justice Training Commission

### 1 Introduction

Hello, my name is ~. What would you like me to call you?  
Thanks for being here today.

We are being video recorded and people I work with can see and hear us from another room.

If you need a break, or water, or have a question, please let me know.

Tell me some things about you... Tell me all about ~. Tell me more about ~.

*As developmentally appropriate:*  
My pronouns are ~. What are your pronouns?

*If child discloses early, write down their exact words to use at transition and say:*  
That is important and I want to learn more about that later. First I want to get to know you better.

### 2 Instructions

There are some things to tell you about talking with me.

If you don't know the answer to my question, don't guess, say, **I don't know.**

Let's practice. What did I eat for breakfast?

OK, because you don't know. What did you eat for breakfast?

If I make a mistake, please say, **You're wrong.**

Let's practice. You are 30 years old.

OK, because I got that wrong. How old are you?

If you don't understand, don't guess, tell me, **I don't understand.**

Let's practice. What is your ocular hue?

OK, because those are hard words that mean eye color, so now I can ask you a better question. What color are your eyes?

I don't know the answers to my questions.

I'm here to learn from you today.

It's really important that you tell me the truth.

**Do you promise you will tell me the truth?**

*Practicing examples and counterexamples is not needed for children over 9 years old.*

*If child guesses:*  
Remember it is important not to guess.  
Let's practice again, how old am I?

*If child won't correct you:*  
It helps me so much if you tell me I'm wrong.  
Let's practice again. Your name is ~.

*If child knows the answer:*  
Let's practice again, where's your patella?  
That means kneecap and now I can ask you a different question, where is your knee?

*If child will not promise:*  
It's really important that you tell the truth.  
Do you promise you will tell the truth?  
Tell me everything about not being able to tell the truth today.

### 3 Narrative Event Practice

I'd like to get to know you a little better. What do you like to do?

Tell me everything that happened the last time ~.

Then what happened? And then? What happened next?

You said ~, tell me more about that. Tell me everything about ~.

Tell me everything you saw when ~.

Tell me everything you heard when ~.

Thanks for telling me about ~.

*If child does not appear comfortable:*

- How are you feeling about talking with me?
- What worries do you have about talking today?
- Is someone worried about you talking with me?
- How can I help you feel more comfortable?

### 4 Transition

Now that I've gotten to know you a little better,

**tell me what you're here to talk about today.**

*If no informative response:*

- What do you think you're here to talk about?
- It's really important I know what happened.
- Tell me everything ~ said about coming here.
- I heard ~, tell me what happened.

### 5 Substantive

Tell me everything that happened.

Then what happened? And then? What happened next?

Tell me more about ~. Tell me everything about ~.

Help me understand...

Tell me everything you saw when ~.

Tell me everything you heard when ~.

Tell me what else happened.

Who knows this happened? Tell me everything that happened when you told ~.

*If the child disclosed early:*

I heard you say ~, tell me everything that happened.

### 6 Closure

Thank you for talking with me today.

How are you feeling now?

Do you have questions about what we talked about?

What is coming up for you that you are looking forward to?

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## Additional Helpful Prompts

Follow your county protocol. Do not interview a child about allegations of criminal abuse if it is not your role.  
This is not a checklist of questions to ask every child. Choose prompts that are appropriate to the situation and child.  
Use these guidelines in conjunction with formal child interviewing training and best practices.

### Introduction - Give a simple introduction of yourself and the room.

- My job is to ask questions and listen today.
- This is being video recorded so I can remember what we talked about.
- This is being video recorded because we talk about important things in this room.
- This recording will be kept as private as possible. Only people who have a right to see it can see it.
- There is a law in Washington that says this recording must be kept as private as possible.
- It is helpful to record our talk today. Is that OK with you? (*only needed if organization requires permission of child*)

### Support - Express non-contingent support throughout the interview. Check on the child's emotional state, especially if the child is showing signs of distress.

- Let me know if you need a break.
- Do you have any questions about today?
- Thanks for helping me understand.
- Many children tell me about things that have happened to them, and it is ok.
- Think for a little bit and tell me what you can remember.
- I am asking you these questions because I was not there, and I don't know what happened.
- Now that we've been talking a few minutes, how are you feeling?
- I hear you - this can be *[use child's feeling word]*.
- Many children tell me they feel *[child's feeling word]* at the beginning.
- It is ok to *[talk about embarrassing things / say bad words - use child's words]*.
- I see you are *[crying]*, tell me what you are feeling right now / tell me all about the thoughts you're having.
- Do you / does someone have worries about you talking with me? (*If yes: Tell me everything about that.*)

### Instructions - Set the expectations for the interview and mitigate suggestibility.

Use script in Stages of the Forensic Interview for children under 10 years old, and explain them conversationally to older children. The following can be used as reminders throughout the interview:

- It's OK if you don't remember. I only want to learn about what you know.
- I see you are shrugging. I didn't ask that clearly. I'll ask that in a different way.
- I wasn't there, and I need your help to understand what happened.
- Remember it's important not to guess.

### Narrative Event Practice - Use the pattern of questions to help the child respond with narratives to various open-ended questions.

Practice various open-ended prompts and at least one sensory question during narrative event practice.

- Tell me what you like to do. / Earlier you talked about --. Tell me everything that happened the last time you --.
- Tell me what you like to do outside. (*useful if child only lists electronic activities*) Tell me everything that happened --.
- Tell me everything that happened today, from when you woke up until you got here.
- Tell me something fun you did this week. Start at the beginning and tell me everything that happened.

### Transition - Use the most open-ended transition prompt possible to introduce the topic of concern.

Most children will respond to **Tell me what you're here to talk about.** and What do you think you're here to talk about?

- What did -- tell you were here to talk about?
- I heard something might have happened. Tell me everything that happened.
- I heard you talked to someone about something that happened. Tell me everything that happened.
- I heard you went to the hospital / the police went to your house. Tell me everything that happened.
- I see you have *[a bruise]*. Tell me everything that happened.
- Is someone worried about you? Tell me what they are worried about. Tell me everything that happened.
- I heard someone may have done something that wasn't right. Tell me everything that happened.

### Substantive - Use the pattern of questions to elicit the child's narratives on what happened.

### Break - Consider other prompts, consult with the observers, and give the child time to remember more.

- I'm going to think if I have more to ask you and you can think about what more has happened.

### Closure - Help the child find equilibrium by asking about a neutral or positive topic.

- How do feel now that we're done talking?
- How do you feel about *[leaving here / going home with your mom today]*?
- Are you ready to be done talking for today?
- What are you going to do after this?
- Do you have anything fun planned *[this week]*?
- What do you have coming up that you're looking forward to?

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## Additional Helpful Prompts for Pattern of Questions

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### Pattern of Questions for Narrative Event Practice & Substantive Stages

#### TMETH

##### Tell me everything that happened

- start at the beginning
- from beginning to end
- from when -- until --
- what happened first?

#### Breadth

Use active listening skills to help children to understand it is still their turn to talk.  
Give children time to continue their narrative with purposeful silence.

Vary breadth prompts by using the following:

- Then what happened?
- What happened next?
- And then?
- What then?
- What happened after that?

#### Depth

Circle back to details in the narrative and ask for further elaboration with open ended prompts using the child's words. Ask in the order of the narrative.

- You said --, tell me everything about that.
- You said --, tell me more about that.
- I heard you say --, tell me all about that.
- Help me understand more about --.
- Tell me everything you remember about --.

#### Sensory/Feelings/Thoughts

Link the question to a moment in time of the narrative.

- Tell me everything you saw when --.
- Tell me everything you heard when --.
- Tell me everything you felt when --.
  - You said --, tell me more about feeling --.
- How did your body feel when --?
  - You said --, tell me more about --.
- Tell me everything you were feeling when --.
  - You said --, tell me more about feeling --.
- Think about what you could see at that moment. Tell me everything you saw.
- Tell me all your thoughts when --?
- How did your [child's word for body part] feel when --?

#### Clarify

Wait to clarify smaller details after asking many open-ended prompts.

- Where were your clothes when --?
- Where were [suspect's clothes] when --?
- Tell me everything that happened with clothes.
- Tell me everything you did with your hands.
- Tell me everything [suspect] did with their hands.
- Where were [suspect's] hands /other hand when --?
- Tell me everything [suspect] did with their mouth.
- Tell me everything that happened with your mouth.
- What was the last thing [suspect] did?
- How did you feel the next time you went to the bathroom?
- I heard you say [child's word for body part], where is that?
- What other words do you know for [child's word for body part]?
- What does [caregiver/suspect] call that body part?
- What was [your/suspect's] body position when --?
- Where were your [hands/feet/head/back] when --?
- Where were [suspect's hands/legs] when --?
- Where was [your mom/everyone else] when --?
- You said --, how do you know that? / What helps you know that?
- I heard you say --, how did you learn that / figure that out?

#### Pattern of Questions

1 TMETH

2 Breadth →

3 Depth ↓

4 Sensory

5 Clarify

# Washington State Child Forensic Interviewing Guidelines

## Additional Helpful Prompts for Substantive Stage

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### Substantive Stage

#### Other Abuse Narratives

- Tell me everything that happened another time / the time you remember most / the last time / the first time.
- Tell me everything that happened a time something different happened / [suspect] did something different.
- What more has happened?
- Where are all the places [suspect] did something that made you feel [child's feeling word]? Tell me everything that happened the time [in/at location].
- Tell me everywhere it happened. Tell me everything that happened the time [in/at location].
- Was there a time someone saw / heard / almost saw / almost heard?
- Was there a time [suspect] worried someone was going to find out?
- What happened with mouths?
- Who else has tried to do something [like that/creepy-use child's word] to you?

#### Disclosure Narratives

- Who all knows about what happened?
- How did they find out?
- Tell me everything that happened when you told --.
- What were your thoughts about telling?
- What made it hard to tell?
- What helped you tell now?
- What did you tell --?
- What did -- say?
- What did -- do after you told?
- What were you thinking when you told --?
- What did you think after you told --?
- How has your [caregiver] been doing since you told?
- What have other people told you since you told?
- How have you been feeling since you told?

#### Manipulation/Other Dynamics

- Tell me about meeting [suspect].
- What did you think about [suspect] when you first met?
- Tell me everything that [suspect] gave you / [your family / friends]?
- How did you feel about [suspect] before [he touched you]?
- What did you like about [suspect]?
- Tell me everything [suspect] did that was [nice/helpful] to you / [your mom].
- Tell me everything [suspect] has said about you.
- Tell me everything [suspect] told you about themselves.
- Tell me everything [your mom] has said about [your dad].
- What did [suspect/caregiver] say about talking to people about what happened?
- Tell me everything [your dad/mom] said about [the police/cops/CPS].
- Did [suspect] want other people to know? Tell me everything about that.
- What did [suspect] say what would happen if other people found out?
- How do you feel about everything that has happened?
- What do you think should happen now?
- What do you hope will happen now?

#### Communication/Technology

- Has someone showed you something that made you feel uncomfortable?
- Tell me all the ways [suspect] talked to you, like phone calls, video calls, apps, texting.
- What happened with pictures / videos / phones / computers / apps?
- Tell me everything you remember about his phone / computer.
- What happened the last time you saw/talked to [suspect]?