Appendix K
Tips for interviewing children and young people

Basic Principles

- Your starting point should be that every child or young person is competent to give evidence.
- Every child and young person is different and how their account unfolds in an interview will be different.
- Take a child-centred and trauma-informed approach. Seek to understand and meet the individual needs of the child or young person to maximise their ability to participate and make choices.
- Respect the rights of the child or young person being interviewed. Each has a right to:
  - his or her own opinions, views, and ideas which may differ from yours
  - a fair hearing
  - refuse to participate
  - choose what information to disclose, when, and in what detail
  - refuse a request for information
  - object to or to counter information or evidence, arguments or proposals
  - have feelings and express them if they choose to do so
  - make mistakes or get things wrong
  - be themselves.¹

¹ Eric Shepherd and Andy Griffiths, Investigative Interviewing the Conversation Management Approach (2nd edn, OUP 2013) 15.
Determine whether an interview is required:

» Consider whether there is the potential for an interview with a child or young person to have any adverse impact.

» Always consider obtaining a version of events from the affected child or young person. Do not automatically assume that it will not be necessary to interview a child or young person again.

  ▶ The child’s or young person’s parents, carer or guardian should be consulted unless there are good reasons not to do so (see Guideline 1).

» It may not be necessary to conduct a formal interview with a child or young person if a child has already been interviewed by police, or the child protection authority, as part of a related investigation.

  ▶ You may be able to obtain a copy of the interview transcript or recording instead of reinterviewing the child or young person.

» If a child is not interviewed, the organisation still needs to consider what other communication with the child or young person will be necessary.

  ▶ For example, you may need to let them know that you will rely on an earlier record of interview with police, so that they know that their version of events is being taken into account.
Keep written records of:

- the interview planning process
- pre-interview contact with the interviewee
- any decision not to interview a child or young person, including your rationale for making the decision
- the interview (preferably an audio-visual recording and always with consent)
- a chronological summary (running sheet) of the actions taken to plan, prepare for and conduct the interview.

Gather critical information about the allegation to be investigated, such as:

- the type of incident or conduct that is alleged to have occurred
- approximately when it occurred
- the location where it occurred
- how and to whom, the incident was first reported
- whether it appears that a criminal offence may have been committed—if yes, or you are unsure, contact the police or your relevant child protection authority prior to commencing an interview.

Before you meet the child or young person, talk to the people who know them best such as:

- family
- support worker/advocate
- health workers/medical practitioners (with consent)
- guardian.

Find out about the child or young person’s preferred communication methods:

- Obtain first-hand information from the child or young person where possible about their communication needs and abilities.
- Ask the child or young person if they would like a support person to be present during the interview and, if so, who they would like it to be.
- Make sure that the proposed support person does not have a potential conflict of interest. Always explain the role (and limits) of the support person to both the support person and the child or young person.
- Remember, the role of a support person is to provide emotional support to the interviewee. They should not control the process; provide answers on behalf of the interviewee; or influence the interviewee’s responses in any way.
- Consider whether the child’s age and level of development means that they have any particular support needs.
- Always use the child’s preferred communication methods!
Find out about the child or young person’s communication support needs and what adjustments might be needed:

- Consider their age, gender, language preferences, cultural and religious background.
  - Cultural norms may mean that an interviewee may be more comfortable speaking to a person of the same gender or cultural background. While this might not always be possible, a support person chosen by the witness who attends the interview may help to make them more at ease.
  - Eye contact, volume, tone and body language may all be influenced by a person’s cultural background and care should be taken not to misinterpret such behaviours.²
- Current emotional state and the best way to make them feel comfortable and relaxed during the interview.
- Consider the child’s trauma history, and any implications this may have for communication during the interview.
- Identify any ‘red flag’ topics and/or behaviour to avoid.
- What are the child’s or young person’s interests, likes and dislikes?
- Preferred way for you to introduce yourself (e.g. an easy English letter).
- Preferred times of day/days of week to schedule the interview.

Get the interview off to the right start by making sure that when you first meet the child or young person being interviewed you:

- have all necessary supports in place – interpreter/support person/communication assistant and/or communication aids
- build rapport – take the time to communicate about their interests and to encourage the person to be relaxed
- check with them that the personal information you have gathered is correct
- explain your role and what the interview involves
- explain the interview ground rules:
  - You don’t have to do the interview if you don’t want to.
  - You can stop/have a break or rest any time.
  - If you don’t know the answer say so/indicate that you don’t know.
- use ground rules cards if helpful
- practice the ground rules if you are unsure whether they have been understood
- conduct a ‘practice narrative’ with the interviewee about a neutral topic
  - Encourage children and young people to provide an explanation of what happened in their own words. Using a ‘narrative interview approach’³ is more likely to elicit accurate and reliable information.

Encourage children and young people to provide an explanation of what happened in their own words. Using a ‘narrative interview approach’ is more likely to elicit accurate and reliable information.

There is a strong evidence base for undertaking a ‘practice narrative’ with a child or young person about a neutral or fun event, to help prepare for the interview and build rapport. You can use the practice narrative to establish the ‘ground rules’ for communication before you ask the child or young person about the matter that is being investigated ask them questions about their weekend or what they like doing.

» explain and ask for consent to record the interview if possible and appropriate.

Choose the right location for the interview:

» Choose an interview location that is neutral, private, convenient and accessible for the interviewee and their support person, and any other people who needs to attend.

» It is important for the child or young person to feel safe when being interviewed.

» The proposed location should be discussed with the interviewee and, where needed, an appropriate support person.

» Enables use of a communication support tool: Children may want to hold onto a comfort object (e.g. toy) or even a pet when they are participating in an interview. Organisations should be open to a range of requests from children and young people and make reasonable adjustments to their interview process.

The interview

Be sure to maintain/re-establish rapport:

» It is important to build and maintain rapport with children when conducting investigative interviews. Evidence shows that where rapport is absent, the accuracy and amount of information provided by an interviewee decreases.

» Remind the interviewee of the ground rules.

» Ask again for consent to the interview and to record the interview.

» Have all adjustments in place.

» Follow the basic principles of good questioning.

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3 A ‘narrative interview approach’ means encouraging the interviewee to tell you in their own words what happened in relation to the issue/events being investigated.

4 Also known as a ‘practice interview’ or ‘practice recall’, often undertaken in relation to something unconnected with the focus of the investigative interview to help prepare for the interview and build rapport.

4 R. Marchant and P. Cooper, ABE interviews: the importance of recording what happens off camera, Family Law, 2016, p.971.
Free narrative and the basic principles of good questioning:

» Encourage the interviewee to give their evidence in a ‘free narrative’ – that is, without interruption and with prompts to continue and expand.

» Adopt an open and accepting manner to all evidence – avoid facial expressions and comments which may suggest disbelief, disapproval or approval of particular evidence.

» Listen to the child or young person – adopt an open, relaxed posture, use prompts and open questions which reflect back on what the interviewee has said, be flexible and respond to the evidence provided rather than sticking to an interview plan.

» Pause frequently and allow for silence.

» Be open about misunderstandings and mistakes – do not pretend to understand if you don’t!

» Use simple, short questions that are (as far as possible) non-leading and open-ended questions. This style of questioning does not come naturally to most people, and takes considerable practice and skill.

» Avoid leading or suggestive questions or comments.

» Inconsistencies do not equal lies. Ask about inconsistencies only if they are relevant and only after open questioning has ended.

» Look out for signs of tiredness or distraction – allow for breaks and make clear how the interviewee can ask for a break.

Constructing your questions

» Use open-ended questions and prompts

✓ Tell me more about that

✓ What happened next?

» Questions should be short and simple

✓ What did you say?

✗ So, you were outside and you told me before that you were scared, what did you say then?

» Avoid complicated words and phrases

✗ I asked you earlier about your bedroom, and before I ask you about the kitchen, did you say that you had a kettle in your bedroom?

» Questions should use names in preference to pronouns

✓ What did Jim tell you?

✗ What he did tell you?
Questions should use everyday language
- Was the shop in a busy area?
- Rather than: Was the shop in a vibrant area?

Questions should use the interviewee’s vocabulary
- What else happened on church day? (If the interviewee refers to Sunday as ‘church day’)
- ‘What else happened on Sunday?’

Avoid leading questions
- The shop must have been busy at that time, mustn’t it?
- Tell me more about what you saw at the shop?
- You were very angry, weren’t you?
- How were you feeling?

Avoid non-literal language
- Did you keep an eye out for him?
- Did you watch for him?

Forced choice and multiple-choice questions should be used with caution
- Was there anyone in the street or was no one there or don’t you know?
- What did you see in the street?

Avoid using the present tense when asking about past events
- So, you are on the train and he comes up to you…Then what…?
- What happened on the train? Then what happened?

End the interview on a positive note and return to neutral topics of conversation:
- Regardless of the outcome of the interview, every effort should be made to ensure that the child or young person is not distressed at the end of an interview, and leaves with a positive mindset.
- During or immediately after the interview, make a note of the demeanour, attitude and behaviour of the child or young person, or anything else that might be relevant. Take care when interpreting someone else’s demeanour, as this is heavily influenced by culture and background.

Keep your interview records safe and secure.