



Professional Tool Kits

Minimal Facts Interview - Child Abuse Disclosures

Purpose: This protocol is designed for individuals who are mandatory reporters or parents that may encounter situations where a child discloses information suggesting abuse or neglect. The objective is to conduct a minimal facts interview to gather essential information necessary for reporting to the appropriate authorities, while ensuring the integrity of the child's testimony and minimizing potential trauma to the child.

Scope: To gather only essential information, such as who, what, when, and where. Avoid exploring details or asking 'how' and 'why' questions. Aim to maintain the integrity of the child's testimony for later forensic interviewing. Focus on creating a safe and supportive environment for the child.

Creating a Safe Environment: Use age-appropriate language. Be patient and attentive. Ensure a non-threatening, comfortable setting. Offer reassurance and support.

Guidelines for Conducting the Interview:

- **Initial Comfort and Safety Check** - Example: "Hi, [child's name]. Is there anything you need before we start talking?"
- **Open-Ended Inquiry** - Example: "Can you tell me why you think you're here to talk to me?"
- **Facilitating Disclosure** - Example: "Is there something you think I should know about what's happening at home, school, or elsewhere?"
- **Clarifying Basic Facts** - Example: "You mentioned feeling unsafe. Can you tell me more about that?"
- **Identifying Involved Persons** - Example: "You said 'dad.' What is his name?"
- **Understanding the Context** - Example: "Where do these things usually happen?"
- **Closing the Interview Respectfully** - Example: "Is there anything else you want to share with me? Do you have any questions?"

Post-Interview Actions: Document the child's statements and your observations immediately. Note the child's demeanor, body language, and emotional expression. Report to CPS and law enforcement without delay.

Avoiding Suggestive Questions: Do not ask leading questions that suggest specific answers. Frame questions to allow the child to provide their own responses.

Examples of Poorly Phrased Questions vs. Appropriate Ones:

- **Poor** - "Were you touched in your privates?"
- **Better** - "Where on your body did he touch you?"
- **Poor** - "Did these things happen in your bedroom?"
- **Better** - "Where did these things happen?"

Documenting the Interview: Accurately record the conversation in a factual and objective manner. Example documentation: "[Date], I spoke with [child's name]. They appeared [describe demeanor]. [Child's name] shared that [summarize disclosure]."

Reporting the Disclosure: Contact **BOTH** CPS and law enforcement to report the disclosure. Provide a clear and concise summary of the interview findings.

Understanding Your Role: Recognize the legal and emotional implications of being an "outcry witness." Your goal is to facilitate the initial disclosure and report, not to investigate.

Supporting the Child: Always prioritize the child's well-being and emotional safety. Ensure the child feels heard, believed, and supported.

Final Note: Remember, your role is crucial but limited to initiating the reporting process. Detailed investigations and follow-up interviews should be conducted by professionals trained in forensic interviewing at a children's advocacy center.