

In Forensic Interviews with Children: Visual Aids

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Perspective

Children's testimony is crucial to the outcome of both criminal and care and protection investigations when they are interviewed about mistreatment. Interviewers may use a range of tactics, such as more focused questioning or visual aids (e.g., dolls, diagrams, drawings) to encourage children in responding to their questions, if their initial explanations of what happened lack sufficient depth for critical judgments to be made.

In our study, we looked at how frequently interviewers utilised such tools in their conversations with children about sexual assault suspicions. In the bulk of the 98 interviews we looked at (62 percent), we discovered that aids were used: The most typical technique used, especially with older children, was to have them sketch a map of where the supposed events took place. We also wanted to see if interviewers utilised different questioning techniques when using visual aids in their interviews compared to when they didn't use them. When interviewers employed assistance, they primarily asked particular questions (for example, "wh" queries like "what were you doing?"). We compared the likelihood of children answering productively (with relevant information) to questions in interviews with and without help because interviewers may employ aids to increase children's responses. Visual aids had no effect on children's productivity (or vice versa). Regardless of whether or not assistance was employed, children's response styles were consistent—they were either non-productive or productive. Our findings imply that aids may not have the desired effect on children's responses, and that they may be linked to an interviewing approach that isn't evidence-based.

When interviewing children about suspected mistreatment, forensic interviewers must strike a balance between two potentially opposing goals: getting very precise accounts from children about the alleged occurrences while minimising the risk of children inserting false details in their reports. Unfortunately, interviewers' attempts to emphasise information may actually increase error, particularly if visual aids (such as dolls, body diagrams, or drawings) are utilised to elicit specifics about the alleged occurrences during the substantive section of the interview. The evidence on how visual aids affect children's testimony differs depending on the sort of help. Overall, evidence reveals that, while anatomical dolls and body diagrams may enhance the quantity of knowledge children report, they do not increase the amount of information they report. In contrast, the evidence on the impact of having children to draw and talk is more ambiguous: some research show that sketching while recalling allows children to report more without sacrificing accuracy.

Despite research concerns about the impact of some aids on the

reliability of children's testimony (Brown, 2011; Poole & Bruck, 2012; Poole, Bruck, & Pipe, 2011), many professional protocols and guidelines include recommendations on how and when to use visual aids in interviews with children (e.g., APSAC, 2012; Ministry of Justice, 2011). As a result, it's conceivable that forensic interviewers utilise such tools with youngsters; however, we don't know how often this practise is. As a result, the primary purpose of our study was to see if assistance use is widespread in forensic interviews with children. During the substantive portion of the interview, where children's narratives of alleged mistreatment were obtained, we concentrated on the use of aids (e.g., various types of drawings, body diagrams, dolls) given the well-known disparity between research-based recommendations for kid interviews and actual practise.

In our research, we looked at the kind of questions interviewers asked with aids and predicted that invitation prompts would be unusual, with interviewers preferring to ask direct ("wh-"), closed-ended questions instead. We also looked into whether the number of different prompt kinds differed across interviews with and without visual aids. We anticipated that interviews with visual aids would include fewer invitations and more direct or closed-ended cues than interviews without them. Many protocols that make provisions for the use of visual aids as part of questioning about allegations in an interview (including that used by all interviewers in this study) advise that their use should be restricted to the latter stages of the substantive part of the interview.

Early research indicated that interviewers often prematurely introduce aids before children have exhausted their verbal recall about the abuse allegation. We looked at when interviewers used aids in the interview to see if this was still the case in modern practise; we predicted that their use would not be limited to the end of the interview. We also looked at whether include an aid was related with higher rates of productive responding to interviewer prompts by the children, confirming their usage, and whether, on the other hand, productive responding reduced after their use, indicating negative impacts on children's reporting. To accomplish so, we employed sequential analysis to see if there was a difference in the connections between question types and productivity across interviews with and without an aid. Finally, we looked into whether interviewer or allegation characteristics influenced whether or not visual aids were used. Because these were exploratory studies, no definite predictions could be made.

Our data reveal that visual aids are often utilised in forensic interviews with children, and that their presence is linked to deviance from evidence-based recommendations in terms of questioning strategy and the timing of the introduction of aids in an interview. When it comes to responding to interviewer questions, visual tools do not help youngsters be more productive. Our findings, when combined with previous research, show that aids are unlikely to support children's accurate and detailed recall.

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