

## CHAPTER 1

# Interviewing Children About Abuse: An Overview and Introduction

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Kempe and his colleagues (1962) helped launch scholarly interest in child abuse with their landmark paper nearly 50 years ago. In succeeding years, professional (and popular) interest shifted from physical to sexual abuse, largely in response to dramatic increases in the numbers of reported cases, and awareness that many instances of abuse might go unrecognised because the victims, who were the only possible sources of information, seldom gave much information to investigators. As a result, researchers made considerable efforts to understand how children's testimony can be made as useful and reliable as possible. Since 1990, furthermore, highly publicised cases in the United States (California, Massachusetts, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Florida), Norway (Bergen), New Zealand (Christchurch), the UK (Cleveland and Newcastle), and Italy (Rignano Flaminio), among others, have drawn attention to the counterproductive ways in which alleged victims of sexual abuse are sometimes interviewed. In many such cases, inappropriate interview techniques appear to have compromised and contaminated the children's testimony, rendering it flawed and unreliable (Bruck, 1999; Ceci & Bruck, 1995). As explained in this introductory chapter, therefore, the book is designed to: 1) summarise the extant research on children's memory, communicative skills, and social tendencies; 2) describe the ways in which that research has been incorporated into a specific structured interview technique; and 3) review research involving more than 40 000 alleged victims documenting the

usefulness of that technique. As we explain in some detail, forensic interviews with children can be invaluable sources of information, but they should always be recognised as parts of the forensic investigation, not seen as synonymous with the investigation as a whole.

## THE BACKGROUND: INTERVIEWING AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Prompted in part by widespread publicity about the infamous cases just mentioned, research on children's capacities to provide reliable and valid information about their past experiences burgeoned in the last two decades, with many other researchers paying special attention to children's suggestibility (see reviews in the last decade by Jones, 2003; Lamb, Orbach, Warren, Esplin, & Hershkowitz, 2007; Memon & Bull, 1999; Pipe, Lamb, Orbach, & Esplin, 2004; Poole & Lamb, 1998). Initially, most researchers conducted controlled studies in the laboratory, but the ecological validity of these studies was often questioned (Doris, 1991; Lamb & Thierry, 2005) so interest in field research was stimulated too. Later studies conducted in both field and laboratory circumstances focused more narrowly on issues of particular relevance to forensic application and helped generate a remarkable consensus about children's limitations *and* competencies.

In brief, the research reviewed at greater length later in this book showed that, although children clearly *can* remember incidents they have experienced, the relationship between age and memory is complex, with a variety of factors influencing the quality of information provided. For our present purposes, perhaps the most important of these factors pertain to the interviewers' ability to *elicit* information and the child's willingness and ability to *express* it, rather than the child's ability to *remember* it. Like adults, children *can be* informative witnesses, and a variety of professional groups and experts have recognised this, offering recommendations regarding the most effective ways of conducting forensic or investigative interviews with children (e.g., American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC), 1990, 1997; Jones, 2003; Lamb, 1994; Lamb, Sternberg, & Esplin, 1998; Home Office, 1992, 2002; Orbach, Hershkowitz, Lamb, Sternberg, Esplin, & Horowitz, 2000; Poole & Lamb, 1998; Sattler, 1998; Warren & McGough, 1996). As Poole and Lamb (1998) pointed out, these books and articles reveal a substantial degree of consensus regarding the ways in which investigative interviews should be conducted, and a remarkable convergence with the conclusions suggested by a close review of the experimental and empirical literature. Clearly, it *is* often possible to

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obtain valuable information from children, but doing so requires careful investigative procedures as well as a realistic awareness of their capacities and tendencies. Specifically, accounts elicited using open ended questions (“Tell me what happened”) that tap recall rather than recognition memory are typically more accurate, regardless of the children’s ages. The completeness of these initially brief accounts can be increased when interviewers use the information provided by children in their first spontaneous utterance as prompts for further elaboration (e.g., “You said the man touched you, tell me more about that touching”) (Lamb *et al.*, 2003). Unfortunately, however, forensic interviewers frequently ask very specific questions (“Did he touch you?”) that draw upon recognition rather than recall memory. Such questions typically elicit less accurate responses than open-ended prompts and may even cause erroneous information to be incorporated into children’s testimony. What we have learned about children’s memories and reporting capacities, as well as the implications for forensic interviewers, are the focus of the next chapter.

Unfortunately, the research-based and expert-endorsed recommendations are widely proclaimed but seldom followed. As discussed more fully in Chapter 3, descriptive studies of forensic interviews in various parts of the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Sweden, Finland, Norway, and Israel consistently show that forensic interviewers use open-ended prompts quite rarely, even though such prompts reliably elicit more information than more focused prompts do and are universally recommended as the preferred means of eliciting information from young children (and, indeed, adults, too). To the distress of trainers, interviewers, and administrators, furthermore, such deviations from “best practice” were evident even when the interviewers had been trained extensively, were well-aware of the recommended practices, and often believed that they were adhering to those recommendations! Both intensive and brief training programmes for investigative interviewers appear to impart knowledge about desirable practices but have little if any effect on the actual behaviour of forensic investigators.

Because forensic interviewers often have difficulty adhering to recommended interview practices in the field, the authors and their colleagues developed a structured interview Protocol designed to translate professional recommendations into operational guidelines that were first published as an appendix to a report by Orbach and her colleagues (2000). The structured Protocol featured in this book guides interviewers by illustrating techniques designed to maximise the amount and quality of information elicited from alleged victims. As detailed in Chapter 4, the NICHD Protocol (named after the research institute where most of the developers worked and from which they received financial support for

their work) covers all phases of the investigative interview. In the introductory phase of the interview, the interviewer introduces him/herself, clarifies the child's task (the need to tell the truth and describe events in detail), and explains the ground rules and expectations (i.e., that the child can and should say "I don't remember", "I don't know", "I don't understand", or correct the interviewer when appropriate). In many jurisdictions, law enforcement agencies requested the inclusion of several questions designed to establish that children understood the difference between true and false statements.

The rapport-building phase that follows the introductory phase comprises two sections. The first is designed to create a relaxed, supportive environment for children and to establish rapport between children and interviewers. In the second section, children are prompted to describe a recently experienced neutral event in detail. This "training" is designed to familiarise children with the open-ended investigative strategies and techniques used in the substantive phase while demonstrating the specific level of detail expected of them.

In a transitional part between the pre-substantive and the substantive phases of the interview, a series of prompts are used to identify the target event/s under investigation non-suggestively and with prompts that are as open as possible. The interviewer only moves on to some carefully worded and increasingly focused prompts (in sequence) if the child fails to identify the target event/s.

If the child makes an allegation, the free recall phase begins with an invitation ("Tell me everything.") and other free-recall prompts or invitations are recommended. As soon as the first narrative is completed, the interviewer prompts the child to indicate whether the incident occurred "one time or more than one time" and then proceeds to secure incident-specific information using follow up ("Then what happened.") and cued invitations (e.g., "Earlier you mentioned a [person/object/action]. Tell me everything about that") making reference to details mentioned by the child to elicit uncontaminated free-recall accounts of the alleged incident/s.

Only after exhaustive free-recall prompting do interviewers proceed to directive questions (focused recall questions that address details previously mentioned by the child and request information within specific categories (e.g., time, appearance) such as "When did it happen?" or "What colour was that [mentioned] car?" If crucial details are still missing, interviewers then ask limited option-posing questions (mostly yes/no or choice questions referencing new issues that the child failed to address previously). Suggestive utterances, which communicate to the child what response is expected, are strongly discouraged.

## EVALUATING THE STRUCTURED PROTOCOL

When we developed the structured Protocol, we expected that its implementation would improve the organisation and quality of interviews with children of all ages so that interviewers using the Protocol would use more open-ended utterances and fewer option-posing and suggestive utterances and would postpone option-posing questions until later stages of the interview. Because children interviewed using the Protocol practiced responding to open-ended questions in the pre-substantive phase of the interview, furthermore, we predicted that they would provide absolutely and proportionally more details in response to the first free-recall open-ended substantive prompt and more details per open-ended utterances than children interviewed by investigators not guided by the Protocol. Because interviewers using the Protocol should offer more open-ended prompts, we also predicted that children interviewed in that way would provide absolutely and proportionally more details about the alleged abuse in response to the open-ended questions and fewer in response to option-posing and suggestive questions than children in comparison groups would.

As discussed in Chapter 5, independent field studies in four different countries (Orbach, Hershkowitz, Lamb, Sternberg, & Esplin *et al.*, 2000; Sternberg, Lamb, Orbach, Esplin, & Mitchell, 2001; Cyr, Lamb, Pelletier, Leduc, & Perron, 2006; Lamb, Sternberg, *et al.*, 2006) demonstrate convincingly that when forensic investigators employ recommended interview procedures by following the structured Protocol, they enhance the quality of information elicited from alleged victims. Interviewers employing the Protocol use at least three times more open-ended and approximately half as many option-posing and suggestive prompts as they do when exploring comparable incidents, involving children of the same age, without the Protocol. In each study, about half of the informative and forensically relevant details and more than 80% of the initial disclosures of sexual abuse were provided by preschoolers in response to free-recall prompts. Such findings suggest that the likely accuracy of information provided by alleged victims is enhanced when interviewers use free-recall prompts exhaustively before turning to more focused prompts. These findings also indicate that cued-invitations should be exhausted before 'wh' prompts are introduced because cued-invitations are input-free and thus foster retrieval of free-recall information without limiting responses to investigator-specified categories. Non-suggestive yes/no and choice questions, in which interviewers by definition introduce information, should be used only if essential information is still missing after free-recall and directive prompts have been exhausted, because these riskier alternatives are

more likely to elicit inaccurate information and their introduction may contaminate subsequent information. When priority was given to open-ended strategies and techniques, there were also significant increases in the number of facilitators and other supportive comments addressed to child witnesses (Hershkowitz, Orbach, Lamb, Sternberg, & Horowitz, 2006); this further enhanced the recall and reporting of information by encouraging children to be more cooperative.

Interviewers using the Protocol also introduce option-posing and suggestive questions later in the interview process than do peers not using the Protocol. Because option-posing and suggestive questions by definition involve the introduction of information by the investigator, they have the potential to contaminate later phases of the child's report, especially when younger children are involved and thus their delayed utilisation is forensically important. Clearly, forensic interviewers should provide children with opportunities to recall information in response to open-ended prompts before assuming that more risky interview techniques are needed. We have also shown that versions of the Protocol can be used when interviewing witnesses who are not also victims (Lamb, Sternberg, Orbach, Hershkowitz, & Horowitz, 2003) as well as youthful suspects (Hershkowitz, Horowitz, Lamb, Orbach, & Sternberg, 2004). These developments are also discussed in Chapter 5.

The Cognitive Interview (Fisher, Brennan, & McCauley, 2002), which has also been popular, especially in the United Kingdom, draws on many of the same cognitive principles as the NICHD Protocol, and it has been shown to help interviewers elicit more detailed and accurate information from children about staged events than 'standard' interview procedures do (Kohnken, Milne, Memon, & Bull, 1999). Although the Cognitive Interview has not been evaluated systematically in the field, some components, like Mental Context Reinstatement, have been shown to enhance the effectiveness of the Protocol (Hershkowitz, Orbach, Lamb, Sternberg, & Horowitz, 2001), and it is possible that other components might be similarly useful.

### IS THE PROTOCOL SUITABLE FOR INTERVIEWS WITH YOUNG CHILDREN?

Clearly, as discussed more fully in Chapter 6, there *are* important differences between the autobiographical memory retrieval strategies and capacities of preschoolers and those of older children (Schneider & Bjorklund, 1998). Younger children tend to remember less information and to provide briefer accounts of their experiences than older



children do. In addition, young children are more likely than older children both to respond erroneously to suggestive questions about their experiences and to select erroneous options when responding to forced-choice questions. On the other hand, although young children tend to remember less information and provide briefer accounts of their experiences than older children do, their reports are no less accurate. Despite this, some practitioners (e.g., Bourg, Broderick, Flagor, Kelly, Ervin, & Butler, 1999; Hewitt, 1999; Lyon, 1999; Saywitz & Goodman, 1996) have claimed that open-ended questions usually fail to elicit forensically valuable information from young children, especially preschoolers, even though the inadequacies and capacities of preschoolers had not been examined closely in forensic contexts.

We expected that older children would provide more details than younger children, but that use of the Protocol would increase the amount of information retrieved by recall from all alleged victims, including the youngest children. Indeed, because interviewers guided by the Protocol should use more open-ended prompts regardless of the children's ages, we predicted that use of the Protocol would especially enhance the performance of the younger children, ensuring smaller differences between preschoolers and older children than would otherwise be the case.

As expected (see Chapter 6), Lamb *et al.* (2003), found that children as young as four years of age *can* indeed provide substantial amounts of forensically important information about alleged abuse in response to free-recall prompts. On average, almost one-half of the information provided by the children came in response to free-recall prompts, regardless of age. Older children reported more details in total and in their average responses to invitations than the younger children did, but the proportion of details elicited using free-recall prompts did not increase with age. Moreover, our study showed that very young children are capable of providing most of the information (e.g., time, location, participants) needed by forensic investigators in response to free-recall prompts, thereby reducing reliance on the more risky (potentially contaminating) yes/no and forced-choice questions. Cued invitations, particularly those that remind children of actions they have previously mentioned, constitute effective ways of triggering the recall of information that is more likely to be accurate than information elicited using risky forced-choice and yes/no questions from alleged victims as young as four years of age. Interestingly, action-based cues (e.g., "Tell me more about the touching.") were consistently more effective than all other types of cues, regardless of age.

These compelling findings indicated that forensic interviewers need to provide children of all ages with opportunities to recall information

in response to free-recall prompts before assuming that more risky interview techniques are needed, especially because risky questions are even riskier when addressed to children aged six and under, and thus that forensic investigators need to make special efforts to maximise the amounts of information elicited from 4- to 6-year-olds using less risky, free-recall prompts.

Because use of the Protocol enhances the quality and informativeness of forensic interviews with alleged victims, it should enhance the value and conclusiveness of investigations into suspected incidents of sexual abuse by making it easier for interviewers to judge whether victims are telling the truth (because the children provide more information in a narrative form which is more amenable to credibility assessment) and by helping investigators to elicit more clues that may guide their search for corroborative evidence. These issues are explored more fully in Chapter 7.

One relevant study was designed to explore whether the credibility of children's statements regarding their alleged experiences of child sexual abuse could be assessed in a more valid and reliable way when investigative interviews were conducted using the Protocol rather than in an unstructured manner (Hershkowitz, Fisher, Lamb, & Horowitz, 2007). In many laboratory analogue studies, children are asked to lie about events that are not salient or emotionally meaningful, so the generalisation of findings to the assessment of credibility in forensic contexts is obviously problematic, whether or not efforts are made to include repeated suggestive questions about body contact, or to avoid introducing information not reported by the child. Hershkowitz *et al.* thus examined credible and incredible allegations of sexual abuse provided by children in the course of forensic investigations conducted in Israel by the professional youth investigators who have been required since 1998 to use the Protocol. Half of the interviews studied were conducted before and half were conducted by the same professionals after use of the Protocol became mandatory. The cases were individually matched with respect to the children's ages, the types of allegations, and the strength of the validating evidence.

Forty-two experienced youth investigators each assessed the credibility of allegations of sexual abuse made by alleged victims of sexual abuse when interviewed either with or without the Protocol. Half of the alleged incidents were judged likely to have happened ("plausible") on the basis of independent evidence, while half were deemed unlikely to have happened ("implausible"). Subsequent analyses showed that more non-Protocol than Protocol interviews were rated as "No judgement possible" rather than as either credible or incredible. Allegations made in Protocol interviews were more accurately rated as



credible or incredible when they were either plausible or implausible, respectively, than those made in non-Protocol statements. Levels of inter-rater reliability were also higher when Protocol interviews were rated. Such findings suggested that use of the Protocol facilitated the assessment of credibility by child investigators although incredible allegations (those describing incidents that were unlikely to have happened) remained difficult to detect, even when the Protocol was used. Again, it is important to recognise that forensic interviews are only part of the overall investigation, with information provided by child witnesses providing some of the information needed to understand what might have happened.

### **INTERVIEWING RELUCTANT AND NON-COMPLIANT WITNESSES**

Most of the published research on forensic interviewing has focused on interviews with cooperative alleged victims who were ready to disclose, had often made specific allegations of abuse prior to the formal investigation, and were especially responsive to open-ended prompts. However, there is ample evidence that many victims of abuse report the abuse belatedly, if at all, with many denying or failing to report the abuse even when they are directly asked or formally interviewed. The exact numbers cannot be calculated because an unknown number of victims never disclose their victimisation and because some proportion of those who initially offer denials and later make allegations may be doing so falsely, perhaps in response to repeated suggestive questioning. Debate about the relative sizes of the false positive and false negative groups is intense (London, Bruck, Ceci, & Shuman, 2005; Lyon, 2007), but there is consensus that many abuse victims cannot be protected or helped because they never disclose their experiences or do so belatedly. In one study, Hershkowitz, Horowitz, and Lamb (2005, 2007) examined all suspected cases of physical and sexual abuse investigated in the state of Israel between 1998 and 2002. All investigative interviews were conducted using a single standardised Protocol, the Protocol discussed in this book. Overall, 65% of the 26 446 children made allegations when interviewed, but rates of disclosure were greater in the case of sexual (71%) than physical (61%) abuse. Children of all ages were less likely to disclose or allege abuse when a parent was the suspected perpetrator. Rates of disclosure/allegation increased as children grew older, with 50% of the 3- to 6-year-olds, 67% of the 7- to 10-year-olds, and 74% of the 11- to 14-year-olds disclosing abuse when questioned.

A diverse array of factors, including veiled disclosure to non-professionals (e.g., family members and teachers) or to professionals (e.g., medical doctors, CPS workers or police officers), as well as suspicions that the child was abused, may trigger formal investigative interviews with children who are unwilling to disclose. Unlike cooperative informants, children who are reluctant to disclose may be less responsive to open-ended prompts and may require more guidance and more focused prompts before making allegations of abuse. As a result, those interviewing them face an inevitable tension between the desire to initiate the disclosure of information about what actually happened and the need to avoid contaminating the memories by suggestively implanting information (even prompting false allegations) by using leading and suggestive prompts. Aiming to minimise the amount of information provided by the interviewer, rather than the child, especially during the crucial early stages of the interview, recent work has focused on identifying techniques that might profitably be used when interviewing reluctant witnesses (Chapter 8).

In another study, Pipe, Sternberg and their colleagues (2007) focused on the numbers of children who disclosed abuse when formally interviewed. The younger children were not only less likely than older children to make allegations when formally interviewed, but they were also less likely to do so following a prior disclosure. Of course, the prior disclosures were reported by other people, and the reliability of their second hand reports may be questioned, especially when the reporters were not “disinterested”. It appears, however, that if the person to whom the child had reportedly made the prior disclosure was an immediate family member, presumably those most likely to have a strong interest, children were no less (or more) likely to make an allegation in the formal interview.

Although the suspect confessed to the abusive incident(s) in less than a third of all cases, confessions were not always associated with an allegation. Somewhat surprisingly, several of the older children did not make an allegation in the interview, when the suspect’s confession had been triggered suspicion in the first place. More detailed examination showed, however, that in these cases the abusive incident(s) had occurred several years earlier, and/or the nature of the abuse was such that the child might not have interpreted it as abuse at the time, as discussed by Cederborg, Lamb, and Laurell (2007). Nonetheless, to the extent that suspect confession is corroborative evidence, we can conclude that there were children in all age groups who had been abused, but did not report the abuse. The reasons for the non-disclosure are many and varied, and likely to differ developmentally, as a function of the nature of the abuse and the circumstances surrounding it.

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In the first field study to explore the dynamics of forensic interviews with non-disclosing victims (Hershkowitz, Orbach, Lamb, Sternberg, & Horowitz, 2006; Hershkowitz, Orbach *et al.*, 2007), we compared 50 children who did not disclose abuse in the course of forensic interviews, despite strong evidence that abuse occurred, with 50 children who disclosed abuse. Hershkowitz and her colleagues showed that forensic interviews which yielded allegations of abuse were characterised by quite different dynamics than interviews with children who seemed equivalently likely to have been abused but did not make allegations during the interview. When interviewing non-disclosers, interviewers made less frequent use of free recall prompts and offered fewer supportive comments than when interviewing children who made allegations of abuse. Children who did not disclose abuse were somewhat uncooperative, offered fewer details, and gave more uninformative responses, even at the very beginning of the interview, before the interviewers focused on substantive issues and before the interviewers themselves began to behave differently. These findings suggested that premature focus on substantive issues may prevent children who are not responsive in the episodic memory training phase from disclosing abuse. Identifying reluctant disclosers and making more extensive efforts to build rapport before substantive issues are broached, or interviewing such children in more than one session, may help suspected victims disclose their experiences.

Orbach, Shiloach, and Lamb (2007) also sought to determine whether there is a relationship between the type of prompting needed to elicit allegations of abuse and the amount of information disclosed by alleged victims during investigative interviews. All interviews were conducted by British or American police officers using the Protocol. Non-reluctant disclosers who made allegations in response to open-ended, free-recall, prompts provided significantly more forensically relevant information overall in response to free-recall prompts than a matched group of reluctant disclosers who made their initial allegations in response to focused (option-posing or suggestive) prompts. Positive correlations were found between the amount of information provided by children in the pre-substantive and the substantive phases of the interview. The findings demonstrated that reluctant witnesses are less communicative even in non-substantive portions of the interview, and continue to be reluctant and provide less information following disclosure.

Hershkowitz, Lanes, and Lamb (2007) focused on the ways in which children disclosed sexual abuse by alleged perpetrators who were not family members. Thirty alleged victims of sexual abuse were interviewed using the Protocol by six experienced youth investigators. The same principles were followed when the parents were asked to describe

in detail what had happened since the abusive incidents. The statements made by the children and parents were then content-analysed. Major characteristics of the children's and parents' reported behaviours were identified by two independent raters. More than half (53%) of the children delayed disclosure for between one week and two years, fewer than half first disclosed to their parents, and over 40% did not disclose spontaneously but did so only after they were prompted; 50% of the children reported feeling ashamed or afraid of their parents' responses, and their parents indeed tended to blame the children or act angrily. The disclosure process varied depending on the children's ages, the severity and frequency of abuse, the parents' expected reactions, the suspects' identities, and the strategies they had used to foster secrecy. The children's willingness to disclose abuse to their parents promptly and spontaneously thus decreased when they expected negative reactions, especially when the abuse was more serious. A strong correlation between predicted and actual parental reactions suggested that the children anticipated their parents' likely reactions very well.

Just as special techniques may be needed when interviewing children who are too scared or confused to talk, special techniques may be needed when interviewing children and adults with learning, communicative, or intellectual difficulties. Development of these techniques is especially timely because these individuals are at substantially increased risk of maltreatment (Crosse, Kaye, & Ratnofsky, 1993; Hershkowitz, Horowitz *et al.*, 2007; Sullivan & Knutson, 2000) and have less access to a criminal justice system that is often insensitive to their capacities and limitations (Cederborg & Lamb, 2007; Westcott & Jones, 1999). From a conversational perspective, we might expect children with learning disabilities to be even more reliant on their adult interlocutors to provide structure and support to enable them to participate than their typically developing counterparts. There have been relatively few studies that explore the ability of children with learning disabilities to provide complete and accurate accounts of personally experienced events, however. When interviewed using the kinds of questions advocated for non-learning disabled children, however, children with learning disabilities are able to give reliable accounts of brief witnessed or experienced interactions, although their performance relative to chronologically age-matched and mental age-matched controls has varied across studies. The special considerations that need to be addressed by investigators exploring the possible victimisation of children with learning, communicative, and mental difficulties are explored more fully in Chapter 9.

## IMPORTANCE OF TRAINING

As mentioned earlier, interviewer training depressingly often yields improvement in trainees' knowledge but no meaningful changes in the ways in which they actually interview alleged victims. Recognising this, training in use of the Protocol has always been accompanied by efforts to provide continued support, guidance, and feedback on interviewer behaviour in interviews conducted after starting to use the Protocol. The incremental value of verbal and written feedback during the course of training had been experimentally demonstrated previously in individual and group contexts, but only the NICHD training model includes feedback beyond the training period (i.e., in post training investigative interviews as well). Research on effective training strategies is discussed more fully in Chapter 10.

The importance of continuing quality control and feedback was initially assessed by comparing the effectiveness of four different training models designed to help interviewers implement recommended interviewing practices (Lamb, Sternberg, Orbach, Hershkowitz, Horowitz, & Esplin, 2002). In all training conditions, interviewers were first provided with a theoretical framework to help them understand how the recommended practices were consistent with basic research on children's memorial, linguistic, communicative, and social development and the performance of the interviewers was compared with that of the same interviewers conducting interviews with children of comparable age and circumstances in the six months prior to the training.

Meaningful long-term improvement in the quality of information obtained from young alleged victims of sexual abuse were observed only when well-established principles were operationalised in a clear and concrete fashion and when training was distributed over time, rather than provided in the form of a single initial session, however intensive. Didactic workshops and instruction in the utilisation of highly structured pre-substantive interview procedures thus had little effect on the number of open-ended prompts used to elicit information or on the amount of information elicited in this way, whereas intensive training in the use of a highly structured interview Protocol, followed by continuing supervision, monthly day-long seminars, and feedback on all field interviews, yielded dramatic improvements on these measures of the interviews.

In a related study, furthermore, Lamb, Sternberg, Orbach, Esplin, and Mitchell (2002) showed the adverse effects of the termination of supervision and feedback on investigators' performance. Forensic

interviews conducted by trained investigative interviewers who received close and continuing supervision and intensive individual feedback were compared with interviews conducted by the same interviewers in the six months immediately following the completion of training and the termination of the supervision-and-feedback. As predicted, the quality of the later interviews was inferior to that of the earlier interviews, as indexed by: 1) declines in the use of open-ended prompts; 2) corresponding increases in reliance on more focused prompts; and 3) the earlier introduction of focused prompts. The expected changes in the interviewers' questioning style were accompanied by decreases in the amount of information elicited using free-recall prompts.

These reports have important implications for those attempting to use the results of basic research in the real world. Clearly, it is possible to improve the quality of information elicited from alleged victims of child abuse, but these benefits are obtained only when extensive efforts are made not only to train interviewers to adopt recommended practices, but to ensure the maintenance of these practices as well. Regardless of their skilfulness, interviewers continue to maintain or improve their skills only when they regularly review their own and others' interviews closely, discussing their strategies, successes and mistakes with other interviewers.

## OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

As summarised above and detailed later in the book, intensive systematic research on both children's suggestibility and their capacities to provide reliable and valid information about past experiences has helped generate a remarkable consensus about children's limitations *and* competencies. In brief, although children clearly *can* remember incidents they have experienced, the relationship between age and memory is complex, with a variety of factors (including the interviewer's skills) influencing the quality of information provided. Like adults, children *can be* informative witnesses, and a variety of professional groups and experts have offered recommendations regarding the most effective ways of conducting forensic or investigative interviews with children. The book begins (Chapter 2) with a review of the relevant experimental and field research underlying the international consensus regarding the ways in which investigative interviews should be conducted. Clearly, it *is* often possible to obtain valuable information from children, but doing so requires careful investigative procedures as well as a realistic awareness of their capacities and tendencies.



Unfortunately, as we then show (Chapter 3), research-based and expert-endorsed recommendations are widely proclaimed but seldom followed. Descriptive studies of forensic interviews in various parts of the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Sweden, Finland, Norway, and Israel consistently show that forensic interviewers use open-ended prompts quite rarely, even though such prompts reliably elicit both more information and more accurate information than more focused prompts do. To the distress of trainers and administrators, furthermore, such deviations from “best practice” are evident even when interviewers have been trained extensively, are well-aware of the recommended practices, and often believe that they are adhering to those recommendations!

Because forensic interviewers often have difficulty adhering to recommended interview practices in the field, we worked with our colleagues to develop a structured interview Protocol designed to translate professional recommendations into operational guidelines. Chapter 4 explains and describes this Protocol, which guides interviewers through all phases of the investigative interview, illustrating free-recall prompts and techniques to maximise the amount of information elicited from free recall memory. The entire Protocol itself is included in Appendix 1.

We then turn (Chapter 5) to field studies designed to determine whether interviewers using the Protocol indeed conduct interviews that conform better to the universally recognised “good practices” described earlier in the book. Independent field studies in four different countries (Canada, Israel, the UK, and the US) demonstrate convincingly that interviewers using the Protocol use at least three times more open-ended and many fewer risky and suggestive prompts as they do when exploring comparable incidents, involving children of the same age, without the Protocol, and that the children, in turn, provide much more forensically relevant information (including disclosures) that is more likely to be accurate because of the ways in which it is elicited. In other studies, we have also shown that the Protocol can be used when interviewing witnesses who are not also victims and a version has been developed for use when interviewing youthful suspects. Contrary to widespread concerns that younger children could not be helped by use of the structured Protocol, research discussed in the book (Chapter 6) shows that children from four years of age benefit and are more informative when interviewed in this way. Younger and older children are different, of course, and we will explain strategies especially designed to capitalise on the capacities and tendencies of younger (4- and 5-year-old) children.

The broader implications and value of the Protocol for forensic investigators are then discussed (Chapter 7). We emphasise here that the Protocol operationalises the principles about which there has been

clear expert professional consensus and is the only investigative technique that has been shown to actually improve the behaviour of investigative interviewers by helping them to elicit information that is more likely to be accurate because it is recalled by the child freely rather than in response to information and probes provided by the interviewer. In addition, interviewers are better able to judge whether victims are telling the truth when the interviews were conducted using the Protocol, perhaps because the children are thereby encouraged to provide more information in narrative form. The Protocol also helped investigators to elicit more clues that may guide their search for corroborative evidence and substantiate allegations.

Of course, the structured interview Protocol is not a panacea. It emphasises techniques that help motivated children to report information about experienced events but it does not really address those motivational factors that make some children reluctant to disclose abuse and were the focus of a recent anthology (Pipe, Lamb, Orbach, & Cederborg, 2007). This is an important issue, because many suspected victims do not report abuse when formally interviewed. Accordingly, we devote a chapter (Chapter 8) to current efforts, in the field, to develop and evaluate variants of the Protocol that address the special circumstances that attend interviews with such reluctant witnesses. Similarly, special techniques are needed when interviewing children and adults with learning, communicative, or intellectual difficulties, not least because such individuals are at increased risk of maltreatment (Cross, Kaye, & Ratnofsky, 1993; Hershkowitz, Horowitz *et al.*, 2007; Sullivan & Knutson, 2000). We thus discuss ongoing research involving alleged victims who have learning difficulties in Chapter 9.

As mentioned earlier, interviewer training depressingly often yields improvement in trainees' knowledge but no meaningful changes in the ways in which they actually interview alleged victims. Recognising this, training in use of the structured Protocol has always been accompanied by efforts to provide continued support, guidance, and feedback on interviewer behaviour in interviews conducted after starting to use the Protocol. In the penultimate chapter (Chapter 10), we review what we have learned in the field about effective ways of training interviewers to continue following "best practice" guidelines.

The final chapter (Chapter 11) summarises the information provided in the preceding chapters and briefly describes what we do not yet know. Although we believe that development of the Protocol has permitted considerable progress in the way in which children are interviewed forensically, future research may further shed light on effective interviewing strategies and continue to inform forensic practices.

## CONCLUSION

The research reviewed in this book demonstrates both: 1) how much we have collectively learned about children's communicative and memory retrieval capacities and; 2) that this information can be used by interviewers to maximise the value of their investigative interviews with alleged victims of abuse. The Protocol operationalises the principles about which there has been clear expert professional consensus and has been shown to actually improve the behaviour of investigative interviewers by helping them to elicit information that is more likely to be accurate because it is recalled by the child freely rather than in response to information and probes provided by the interviewer.

Of course, the Protocol does not address all the problems facing those investigating the possible abuse of young children. Although it emphasises techniques that help children to report information about experienced events and shows interviewers how to build rapport with alleged victims, it does not really address motivational factors that make many children – more than a third of suspected victims and unknown numbers of children about whom no suspicions have been raised – reluctant to disclose abuse, or the special needs of children and adults with mental, intellectual and communicative difficulties. In all, although development of the Protocol has improved the way in which some children are interviewed forensically, considerably more work is needed before we can feel confident that we are collectively doing all we can both to protect vulnerable children from further abuse and to ensure that innocent adults are not accused of crimes they did not commit because forensic interviewers failed to elicit accurate information from young informants. The Protocol remains a “work-in-progress” and must continue developing to accommodate the results of new research.

