

Washington State

CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

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Traumatic Stress**

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***In cooperation with the WA State Department of Social
and Health Services***



The **Washington State Child Interview Guide** was developed by
Harborview Center for Sexual Assault & Traumatic Stress and
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Overview

*This **Child Interview Guide** was created by the WA State Criminal Justice Training Commission and the Harborview Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress and is based on the NICHD Investigative Interview Protocol developed by Michael Lamb, Kathleen Sternberg and colleagues. (See: “A structured forensic interview protocol improves the quality & informativeness of investigative interviews with children: A review of research using the NICHD Investigative Interview Protocol,” Child Abuse & Neglect, Volume 31, Issues 11-12, November-December 2007, Pages 1201-1231; Michael E. Lamb, Yael Orbach, Irit Hershkowitz, Phillip W. Esplin and Dvora Horowitz.) We gratefully acknowledge their work, as well as that of Thomas D. Lyon, J.D., Ph.D., Professor of Law & Psychology at USC (<http://works.bepress.com/thomaslyon>) which continues to guide and inform our efforts.*

***Use of the Guide:** This Guide presents suggested strategies for interviewers/ investigators conducting investigative (forensic) interviews with children. It is meant for use by law enforcement, CPS workers, specialized child interviewers, and others who conduct investigative interviews. These professionals are encouraged to coordinate their efforts in order to minimize the number of unnecessary interviews of individual children.*

*The **Guide** provides an empirically based method of interviewing that helps interviewers incorporate research-based interviewing techniques with their own styles while allowing for the individual differences of each child. It is aimed at encouraging accurate and complete narratives from children. The Guide works best with grade-school-age children. Many of the techniques are useful with pre-school age children and adolescents. Keep in mind that concerns about suggestibility are no greater with developmentally normal teens than with adults.*

*The **Guide** is set up in stages, but the interviewer can be flexible regarding following the exact order. Generally, begin by briefly engaging child in a warm, friendly manner with short, simple, general ‘get acquainted’ type questions. The introduction, explanation of documentation, ground rules, and rapport building should usually be addressed prior to exploring the reason for concern. If, however, the child begins to discuss the suspected abuse on his/her own, **don’t** interrupt – once the child is done talking, indicate that it’s important for you to get everything right and simply ask if everything he/she reported really happened, and use open-ended techniques to gather more details as appropriate.*

Be patient. Listen to what the child says. Take time to think and formulate your next question. Whenever possible, use what the child has just said in your next question (and use the child's words.)

It is important to remember that there is no such thing as a perfect interview, and that there is no single correct way to interview children. Because every child is unique and every case is different, it is possible to deviate from these guidelines and still generate reliable information from children. Also, the interview is only one part of a complete investigation. The interviewer should keep in mind that information generated during a skilled interview may lead to corroborative evidence, i.e., it may provide the basis for and/or information that will be useful in interviews with other witnesses and suspects, as well as searches for physical evidence.

The Guide begins with definitions of key concepts. Explanations regarding the central framework and principles of good interviewing follow, and are paired with examples of questions and statements that can be used during each stage of the interview in boxes on the right side of each page.

(Unless specifically stated, the term "younger children" refers to children 11 years old and younger.)

DEFINITIONS

Open-ended questions, prompts or invitations: *Broad requests using open-ended inquiries or statements that encourage the child to talk.*

These questions are designed to increase the details & accuracy of responses without suggesting answers. They encourage the child to give narrative responses and talk “in paragraph form” about an event or topic, without input or interruption from the interviewer. These questions trigger **recall memory**. The interviewer may begin by repeating something the child has just said, if in the child’s exact words.

Examples:

- “You said _____. Tell me more.”
- “Tell me all about daycare.”
- “Tell me everything, from the beginning to the end.”
- “Then what happened?” “What happened next?”

Focused or direct questions: *Questions that focus on a particular person, body part, action, location, or circumstance of the abuse concerns, often starting with “who,” “what,” or “where.”*

These questions usually elicit brief answers with relevant information, but do not suggest expected answers. They are more specific than open-ended questions and may be carefully used to introduce a new topic. These questions trigger **recognition memory**. They should not include information that hasn’t yet been mentioned by the child or they may become inappropriately leading or suggestive.

Examples:

- “Where were you when your mom hit you?”
- “What part of your body did the coach touch?”
- “Who was the first person who found out?”

Forced choice/closed questions: *Yes/no and multiple-choice questions.*

These may be helpful and necessary if the child is not responding well to more open-ended techniques. They can be useful to cue the child’s memory, but should be carefully phrased to minimize new information introduced in the question. Multiple-choice questions should include an open-ended option that will not limit the choices presented (e.g., “...or someone else?” “...or somewhere else?” “...or something else?”) These questions also trigger recognition memory and may be suggestive, so should be followed by/ paired with open-ended invitations to provide further information from recall memory.

Examples:

- *“Did Mary touch you on some other part of your body?”*
- *“Was Uncle Rob in the house, in the yard, or someplace else?”*

“Paired” questions: *Open-ended questions or narrative invitations that follow focused, direct or closed questions.*

Examples:

- *Focused question: “Where did Tommy touch you?”*
- *Child’s answer: “On my winkie.”*
- *Paired open-ended follow-up: “Tell me all about how he touched you on your winkie.”*

- *Closed question: “Did Tommy touch you somewhere else?”*
- *Child’s answer: “Yes.”*
- *Paired open-ended follow-up: “Tell me all about where else he touched you.”*

Tag questions: *Statements followed by short questions which encourage or compel the child to agree and confirm. (Anne G. Walker, 1999)*

Tag questions are highly suggestive, and as a general rule, should be avoided during a forensic interview.

Examples:

- *“Your Daddy touched your pee-pee, didn’t he?”*
- *“You were too scared to tell anyone, weren’t you?”*

Coercive questions or techniques: *Questions or techniques that involve compelling or inducing the child to cooperate with the interview or provide information the interviewer wants. (Kathleen Coulborn Faller, 2007)*

As a general rule, coercion should be avoided during a forensic interview.

Examples:

- *“I’ll let you go [...to the bathroom; ... to see mom] after you answer my questions.”*
- *“You see that stuffed animal over there? You can take it home with you when we are all done.”*

Time segmentation questions: *Questions that break down a reported event into smaller segments of time and probe for additional details.*

Time segmentation questions are an excellent way to try to generate additional reliable details during a forensic interview.

Example:

“You told me about your birthday party. Tell me everything that happened from the time your friends first got there until you opened your presents.”

Sensory focus questions: *Questions that focus on the senses, especially sight, hearing, smell, and taste.*

Sensory focus questions are an excellent way to try to generate additional reliable details during a forensic interview.

Examples:

- *“Think about what it looked like, and tell me everything you saw.”*
- *“Think about the sounds, and tell me everything you heard.”*
- *“How did that make you feel?”*
- *“How did that make your body feel?”*

Substantive questions: *Questions related to abuse concerns.*

Examples:

- *“You said Tommy touched you in a way you didn’t like. Tell me about that.”*
- *“Tell me about how Tommy touched you with his hands, from the beginning until he stopped.”*

I. Preparing for the Interview

- Always consider the child’s age and developmental level. Adjust your vocabulary and approach accordingly throughout the interview.
- Take time before the interview to find out if the child has special needs. If the child has needs related to developmental and/or physical disabilities, try to consult with a specialist who knows the child and can provide input into how the disability may impact the child’s ability to provide and receive information. Adjust your interview accordingly.
- When interviewing a child from a cultural or ethnic background different than your own, consider consulting a specialist from that background about ethnic/cultural factors that may impact the interview process. Adjust your interview accordingly.
- Know ahead of time if an interpreter is required and arrange for a qualified one to be present for the interview. Meet with the interpreter ahead of time to prepare him/her and explain your expectations. (Do not use another child or family member to interpret.)
- **Location:** Ideally, the interview location should be neutral, private, informal, comfortable, child-friendly, & free from unnecessary distractions.
- **Presence of Others:**
 - A single interviewer is generally preferred, with the option for other involved professionals to observe via a one-way mirror or CCTV.
 - Children should be interviewed individually and not with other children present.
 - RCW 26.44.030 (10) requires the interviewer to “...determine whether the child wishes a third party to be present ... and, if so...make reasonable efforts to accommodate the child's wishes. ... **so long as the presence of the third party will not jeopardize the course of the investigation.**”
 - If support persons are present, they should be instructed to refrain from any involvement in the interview.
 - It is recommended that parents or other caretakers of the child not be present during the interview, but sometimes a child will refuse to separate; if this occurs, instruct the parent/caretaker not to talk or try to “help” the child during the interview.
 - Suspected offenders should not be present, should not accompany the child to the interview, and should not be in the interview vicinity.

- **Documentation:** Interviewers should document questions asked and answers received as accurately as possible. Video recording is the best way to document interviews, but is not always possible. If the interviewer is unable to record the interview (either video or audio), “near-verbatim” notes should be taken. Even when the interview is being taped, you may wish to take notes to organize your thoughts and keep track of information you wish to clarify and follow up on.
- If possible before the interview, find out from the child’s caretaker or accompanying adult about a neutral event (e.g., a birthday, a holiday, a field trip, etc.) in the child’s life that may assist in establishing rapport, practicing narratives, and assessing the child’s memory ability and developmental level.
- Take time before the interview to **consider alternative explanations** for the statements or behavior leading to concern about the possibility of abuse. Abuse may or may not have occurred. This will enable you to ask questions to more fully and objectively explore what the child may have experienced. **Keep an open mind.**
- Take time before the interview to formulate specific questions (especially “transition” questions) based on the information available related to the reasons for concern about the possibility of abuse.
- Avoid stereotype induction. Be careful not to introduce positive or negative characterizations of the people or events involved with the suspected abuse. Use objective language with the child.

II. Introduction

- Begin with a brief, simple introduction and neutral explanation of your job and role.

- *“Hello, my name is [name]. My job is to talk with [children/kids/teens] about things that have happened.”*
- *“I’m [a police officer/ a social worker]. What do you think my job is? “/“What do you think I do?”*
- *“It’s my job to get everything right.”*

- Introduce anyone else who will be in the room or observing the interview.

- *“Detective [name] is here today & will be sitting in with us.”*
- *“This is [name]. He will be watching behind the mirror.”*

III. Documentation

- Tell the child about the documentation method(s) you are using.
- Explain why you are documenting the interview.
- If video or audio recording, obtain the child’s consent (if required).

- **If audio or video-taping:**
“Today is [date] & it is now [time]. I am interviewing [name] at [location].”
- *“As you can see, there is a [video camera/tape recorder] here. It will record us, so I can remember everything you tell me.” (Implied consent)*
- *“Is it okay with you if I record our talk today?” [A: Yes/No] (Informed consent—required for DSHS only)*

If taking notes: *“I will be taking notes about what we talk about today, so that I can remember everything you tell me. Sometimes I might need your help to make sure I get everything right.”*

If needed, before moving on to ground rules, spend a moment getting acquainted to help the child feel welcome and at ease. Engage in friendly neutral conversation.

- *“So, before we get started, tell me what you like to do for fun.”*
- *“Tell me what you were doing before you came to see me.”*

IV. Ground Rules

- **Instructions or “ground rules” are important to explain expectations and permissible responses to the child. Otherwise, children (who seek adult approval) may guess, assume an adult knows what happened, or think they must give an answer.**
- **They should be presented to the child one at a time and in simple language. Be slow and methodical. Have younger children, those with developmental disabilities, and children from diverse cultural backgrounds practice key rules to demonstrate understanding and ability to comply** (as indicated below).
- Instruct all children about these rules in age-appropriate language. Elicit acknowledgment. There is no need to practice with children 12 years and older unless the child seems confused, has developmental disabilities, or is from another culture and may be reluctant to disagree with the interviewer.

☆☆**Interviewer Lack of Knowledge:** Inform the child that you weren't there and don't know what happened, so you need the child to tell you what happened.

“I don't know the answers to my questions. So when we talk today, I need you to tell me everything in your own words, because I wasn't there and I don't know what happened.”

☆☆**Permission to Correct Interviewer:** Give the child permission to correct you and request that he/she tell you if you make any mistakes. **Check out a young child's ability/willingness to do so** by mis-stating a fact about a neutral topic and see if the child will correct you. Follow up with the child to explain and elicit correction.

“If I make a mistake or get something wrong, tell me.”

For younger children (11 & under) and for children who may be shy or deferential to authority, practice:

- *“So if I said that your name is [use an incorrect name], what would you say?”* (Wait for response.) *“Oh, that's right. Thanks for correcting me—if I make any other mistakes please tell me.”*
- If the child does **not** correct you, say: *“I think I got your name wrong—it's really okay to tell me if I make a mistake. So what would you say if I said you were 30 years old?”* (Wait for response.)
- *“Thank you for correcting me. Now you know it's okay to tell me if I make a mistake or say something that isn't right. You should tell me if I get something wrong, okay?”*

☆☆**Okay to Say ‘I don’t know’**: Encourage the child to admit any lack of knowledge. Tell the child there is no guessing and that it’s okay to admit when s/he doesn’t know the answer. **Check out a young child’s ability/willingness to do so** by asking a question to which the correct answer is ‘I don’t know.’

*“If I ask a question & you **don’t know the answer**, just say, ‘I don’t know’ & don’t guess. But if you **do know the answer**, tell me.”*

For younger children (11 & under) and for children who otherwise seem likely to guess and unwilling to admit when they don’t know:

- “So, if I ask you, ‘What’s my dog’s name?’ what would you say?”
(Wait for an answer.)
- **If the child says, “I don’t know,” say:** “Right. You don’t know, do you? But if I asked you ‘Do you have a dog?’ what would you say? (Wait for an answer.) “Good - you can tell me because you do know.”
- **If the child offers a guess about your dog’s name, say:** “That was a guess, wasn’t it? ... because I haven’t told you my dog’s name. When you don’t know the answer, don’t guess - it’s okay to say that you don’t know.”
- **Practice again with a new question** - e.g., “What’s my cat’s name?”

☆☆**Okay to Say ‘I don’t understand’**: Encourage the child to admit any lack of understanding. Tell the child it’s okay to say s/he doesn’t know what you mean. **Check out a young child’s ability/willingness to do so** by asking something s/he is unlikely to understand.

*“If I ask you a question and you **don’t know what I mean**, I want you to tell me ‘I don’t get it’ or ‘I don’t know what you mean,’ and I’ll try to ask it another way.”*

For younger children (11 & under) and for any other children for whom it seems appropriate, practice:

- “So, if I ask you, ‘What’s your **gender**?’ what would you say?”
- **If the child says, “I don’t know what you mean,” say:** “Okay, cause ‘gender’ is a hard word. What I mean is, ‘Are you a boy or a girl?’”
- If the child knows what ‘gender’ means, you might try asking how many **siblings** s/he has.

☆**Okay to Say ‘I don’t remember’**: Encourage the child to admit any lack of memory. As needed, reinforce that there should be no guessing.

*“If I ask you a question and you **don’t remember**, it’s okay to say you don’t remember.”*

☆**Explain Repeated Questions**: Explain to the child why you might ask the same question more than once.

*“If I ask you **the same question more than once**, it doesn’t mean your first answer was wrong. Maybe I just forgot or got confused. If your first answer was right, just tell me again.”*

☆**Permission Not to Answer**: Especially if s/he seems hesitant, reluctant or embarrassed, you may want to give the child permission to tell you that s/he does not want to answer an uncomfortable question “right now.”

*“If I ask you a question you **don’t want to answer** right now, just tell me ‘I don’t want to talk about it right now.’”*

☆**Motivating Instructions**: These include statements that convey the interview’s importance and encourage the child.

- *“When we talk today it’s really important and serious.”*
- *“So when we talk, try your hardest to tell everything you remember.”*
- *“Do your best.”*
- *“It’s very important that you tell me everything you remember about what happened. You can tell me both good things and bad things.”*

☆☆**Promise to Tell the Truth/Competency Assessment**: Research shows that, while it doesn’t guarantee truth telling, having a child promise to tell the truth does reduce the incidence of lying. Interviewers also often assess a young child’s competency to testify by having him/her demonstrate understanding of the difference between telling the truth and telling lies, and of the importance of telling the truth.

- Inform the child that it’s important to tell the truth and talk only about things that really happened.

For children 11 and under:

- *“I talk with lots of children. It’s important that they tell me only the truth and about things that really happened.”*
- *“I only want you to tell me things you saw with your own eyes, heard with your own ears, and felt with your own body.”*

- Examples work best to demonstrate that young children understand the difference between telling the truth and telling a lie. **Do not** ask younger children to define truth and lie or to explain the difference.
- ***For children pre-school through age 7,*** use the Lyon-Saywitz **picture tasks** included in the **Appendix** to assess Truth/Lie understanding & to show that the child understands it is wrong to lie.
- ***For children ages 8-11,*** use a **scenario example** to demonstrate the child understands Truth/Lie & that there are negative consequences for lying.

- *“I want you to listen to this and answer some questions:*

- Joe ate all the cookies. Joe’s mom asked if he ate the cookies and Joe said ‘No, the dog ate the cookies.’

- What is Joe doing?” (Wait for response)

- *A: “Joe’s telling a lie because he really ate the cookies.”*

If child demonstrates understanding of the difference between telling the truth & telling a lie, assess understanding of the importance of telling the truth:

- *“Is it [right or wrong/good or bad] to [tell the truth/tell a lie]?” (Wait for response)*

- *“What happens when someone lies/to people who tell lies?” (Wait for response)*

- ***For children 11 & under:*** Whether or not a full understanding of truth/lie concepts is demonstrated, request a commitment to tell the truth, phrased as follows (in case the child does not understand the word “promise”):

- *“It’s important that you only tell the me truth today.”*

- *“Do you promise that you will tell me the truth?”*

- This can be followed by asking: *“Will you tell me any lies?”*

- ***For children ages 12 and older:***

- Emphasize that it is important for the child to be truthful during the interview. There is no need to use examples or assess competency with older children (unless developmentally delayed).

V. Rapport-Building and Narrative Practice

- Narrative practice is a critical component in most interviews, to encourage interviewers to ask open-ended questions and have children practice giving narrative responses from free recall memory. It is also the best way to engage the child, build rapport, and get a sense of the child's developmental level and ability to use and understand language.
- Invite the child to give narrative accounts about neutral topics with open-ended invitations and questions. Request elaboration and more details with open-ended follow-up questions. Aim for answers from the child that are longer than interviewer questions.

• *“Tell me all about things you like to do/the people you live with.”*
• *“Tell me more.”*

- Keep in mind that in some cases, a family member may be the suspected abuser. Consequently, the topic of family may not be a neutral subject.
- **Then ask the child to tell you everything about a specific event from beginning to end. This gives the child the opportunity to provide a comprehensive narrative and demonstrate memory abilities.**

• *“Tell me all about the day you got the puppy.”*
• *“Tell me everything that happened from the beginning to the end.”*

- **Specific Event Narrative:**
 - Try to identify a neutral or positive event the child recently experienced, e.g., the first day of school, a birthday party, a holiday celebration, a vacation or field trip, etc. Ask about that event.
 - Start with open-ended invitations to get a narrative account. Ask the child to tell all about the event from beginning to end. Follow with requests to elaborate, using time segmentation and sensory focus questions to try to get more information. Use the recommended pattern of questions below to exhaust information about the event:
 - **INVITE**
 - **ELABORATE**
 - **FOCUS (time, senses, key facts)**
 - **CLARIFY AND ELABORATE**

- **Invite and Elaborate - Special Event**

- “A few [days/weeks] ago was [holiday/ birthday party/ the first day of school/ other event]. Tell me everything that happened then.” OR
“You told me you like to play soccer [or some other activity]- tell me everything that happened during [your last soccer game].”
- “You were telling me about [activity or event]. Tell me everything you can remember from the time [event] began until it ended.”
- “And then what happened?”
- “Tell me more.”

- **Focus - Use *Time Segmentation* questions to probe for more details.**

- Examples: “Think hard about [activity or event] and tell me what happened on that day from when you got up that morning until [some portion of the event mentioned by the child in response to the previous question].”
- “Tell me everything that happened from [one portion of the event mentioned by the child] to [another portion].” (E.g., “Tell me everything that happened from the time you scored the goal until the time the game ended.”)
 - “Tell me everything that happened after [some portion of the event mentioned by the child] until you went to bed that night.”
- Continue **open-ended follow-ups** and **requests to elaborate:**
- “Tell me more about [activity mentioned by the child].” Or
 - “Earlier you mentioned [activity of child]. Tell me everything about that.”

- **Focus - Use *Time Framing* questions to gather additional information.**

- “What happened right before?”
- “What happened right after?”

- **Focus - Use *Sensory Focus* questions to generate more details.**

- “Think about what it looked like – tell me everything you saw.”
- “Think about the sounds and tell me everything you heard.”
- “How did that make you feel?”

- **Yesterday or Today**: If unsuccessful in eliciting narrative information about a specific event from a young child, try asking about what s/he did “yesterday” or “today.”
 - Asking about what a young child did “today” before the interview may work better than asking about “yesterday.”
 - Begin with open-ended prompts, and follow with requests for elaboration, time segmentation and sensory focus questions using the same recommended pattern of questions to elicit as many details as possible: **INVITE, ELABORATE, FOCUS (time, senses, key facts), CLARIFY AND ELABORATE.**

• *“I really want to know more about you. Tell me everything that happened yesterday from the time you woke up until you went to bed.”*

OR

• *“Tell me everything that happened to you today, from the time you got up until [I came to talk to you/you came to see me.]”*

• *“I don’t want you to leave anything out. Tell me everything that happened from the time you woke up until [some activity or portion of the event mentioned by the child in response to the previous question].”*

- Language, pacing, and complexity of questions should match the child’s pace, speech, and developmental level. Aim for one idea per question, keep your language simple (without talking down to the child), and keep adjusting as needed throughout the entire interview.
- Preschool age children will often need more cues, direction, and focus to provide information that they remember, but they also tend to be the most susceptible to suggestion. Consequently, it is especially important to carefully phrase questions to pre-schoolers as non-suggestively as possible and use a **funnel approach** - starting with the most open-ended and least suggestive questions and only gradually narrowing focus as needed. Be sure to pair any focused and direct questions with open-ended follow-up invitations to provide additional details.
- A separate formal developmental assessment is generally not necessary, especially if you are successful in getting the child to respond at this stage with complete narratives. Developmental concepts can be addressed as needed any time during the interview by checking to ensure that the child’s understanding of specific words is the same as yours (particularly with conceptual terms such as “over/under,” “up/down,” “in/out,” “before/after,” “today/yesterday/tomorrow,” etc.).

VI. Transition to Substantive Issues

- Take time before the interview to formulate specific transition questions and statements based on the background information you have. Be sure these suggest as few details as possible and utilize a funnel approach.
- Write these questions & invitations down and have them ready in case you need to use them, **but try using the general questions suggested below first. As soon as the child responds with information about possible abuse, proceed to section VII.**
- Begin with an **open-ended invitation** to the child to tell you why s/he came to talk with you today (or why you came to talk to him/her today).

- *“Now I want to talk to you about [why you are here today/why I came to talk to you today.]”*
- **“Tell me how come you came to talk to me.” OR**
- *“Tell me why I came to talk to you.”*

- **If the child doesn’t respond, say:** *“It’s really important for me to know why you came to talk with me to today.”*

- If the child does not answer, move down the list below. If these invitations are not successful, ask the more focused questions you formulated based on the background information you have – see examples.

- Invite the child to tell you why s/he thinks you want to talk to him/her.

- *“Tell me why you think I came to talk to you today.” OR*
- *“Tell me why you think you came to see me today.”*
- *“Tell me why you think [accompanying person] brought you here to talk to me today.”*

- Ask what s/he was told by the person who accompanied him/her and whether anyone said anything about why s/he was being interviewed.

- *“What did [person who brought you here] tell you about why I wanted to talk to you?”*
- *“Did anyone [talk to you/tell you anything] about why I’m talking to you?” “What did [name] say?”*

- If the child hasn't responded to these initial questions, indicate you understand something may have happened and invite the child to tell you what happened.

"I understand that something may have happened - tell me what happened."

- If the child has observable signs of an injury (such as a bruise, bandage, etc.), ask the child directly to tell you everything about what happened to cause it.

"I see that you have [a burn/cut/cast/bandage/bruises] on your _____. Tell me everything about that."

- If the child responds to any of these inquiries that s/he already told someone else, ask him/her to tell you what happened, because you weren't there and don't know what happened, and need to hear it from the child.
- **If the child has previously told someone else** about the suspected abuse, refer to the fact that you're aware s/he talked to that person "about something that happened" and ask the child to tell you what happened.

"I heard that you talked to [name] about something that happened. It's important for me to understand, tell me what happened."

- If these open-ended techniques do not elicit a response, narrow the focus of questions very gradually as needed (funnel approach), rather than jumping to more direct questions right away.
- Ask the child if someone (*possibly the person who reported*) is **worried about** something that happened, and ask the child to tell you what that person is worried about.

*"Is someone [possibly name the person who reported] **worried about** something that happened? Tell me what [he/she] is worried about."*

- Indicate that you heard that 'someone might have **bothered**' the child, and ask him/her to tell you about that.

*"I heard someone might have **bothered you**. Tell me what happened."*

- Indicate that you heard that 'someone may have done **something that wasn't right**,' and ask the child to tell you about that.

*"I heard that someone may have done **something that wasn't right**. Tell me everything about that."*

- Ask appropriate **contextual questions**, especially when the child has not previously reported abuse to anyone.

- “*What happens when you go to [location]?*” [Wait for response]
“*Tell me all about that.*” **OR**
- “*What are some [fun/not so fun] things that happen at [location]?*”
- “*Tell me about the people who live with you.*”
- “*Tell me some things you [like/don’t like] about [name].*”

Specific examples:

- “*Tell me things you like about daycare.*”
- “*Tell me things you don’t like about daycare.*”
- “*Tell me all about the teachers at your daycare.*”
- “*Earlier you talked about visits to your dad’s. Tell me what happens at your dad’s.*”
- “*Who helps you get ready for bed?*”
- “*Tell me more about tuck-in time.*”

- Carefully consider asking more focused questions, in the least suggestive way, & refer to the questions formulated during your preparation for the interview. In general, it is preferable to inquire about the location and timing of the suspected abuse first, followed by asking balanced questions about the suspected abuser.
- Bringing up the name only of the suspect is not problematic if s/he is someone who is routinely in the child’s life. Asking the child to tell you things s/he likes and doesn’t like about that person is acceptable as a way to transition. Be sure to balance these by asking similar questions about other people in the child’s life.
- Inquiring about the suspected abusive behavior or activity should be done carefully and with as few descriptive details as possible.
- The least preferred way to transition to talking about the reason for concern would be to ask a question that links the suspect and the suspected abusive behavior or action, except as indicated below.

- “*I heard something might have happened at [location].*”
- “*I heard something might have happened when [time of alleged incident].*”
- “*I heard something might have happened with [alleged offender].*”

Follow all of the above with:

- “*Tell me about that.*” **OR** “*Tell me what happened.*”

- If abuse-related conduct was previously discussed or observed, summarize it in the least suggestive way, and ask child to elaborate, clarify or correct the interviewer.

- *“I heard you talked to [‘someone’ or name] about [a problem you were having/a picture that you drew/etc.].” [Pause] “Tell me about [the problem/picture/etc.]”*
- *“I heard you were doing something at [location] – [touching other children/saying bad words/ etc.]. Tell me about that.”*
- *“I heard you talked to [name] about [brief description of event]. Tell me what happened.”*
- *“Did [name] do something [you didn’t like/that bothered you/that shouldn’t have happened]?”*
- If child answers yes, then follow up with *“What did [name] do?” “Tell me all about [repeat child’s words describing event].”*
- *“Did somebody [briefly summarize allegations or suspicions without specifying suspect name or providing too many details]?”*

Specific examples:

- *“Did somebody hit you?” OR “Did somebody touch you?”*

- When applicable (and if open-ended options have not worked), carefully consider whether to tell the child about solid proof or evidence of abuse that you may have, e.g., pictures or videos, offender confession, etc.
- If outside information strongly suggests or confirms abuse (e.g., photos exist, the suspect has admitted, an eyewitness gives a credible account, etc.), focused questions are much less risky – you can ask directly about something for which you have good independent evidence. Such questions should always be followed with open-ended requests to elaborate.
- Be alert for any signs of reluctance or anxiety - acknowledge & address them.

- *“I see you’re crying. Tell me why.”/“You’re very quiet. Tell me why.”*
- *“What do you think will happen if you tell?”/“How come you think that?”*
- *“What makes you think you might be in trouble?”/“Tell me more about that.”*
- *“Is it really that you don’t know/don’t remember, or is this just something you don’t want to talk about?”*

If the child does not report abuse, carefully assess the need to either continue questioning or stop the interview. More direct questions may be needed if there is a concern that the risk to the child is high. Remember, abuse may not have occurred.

VII. Investigating the Incidents

Once the child acknowledges that something happened, questioning should maximize use of techniques that encourage narrative responses and utilize the recommended pattern of questions described below [SEPARATE, INVITE, ELABORATE, FOCUS (time, senses, key facts), CLARIFY AND ELABORATE].

SEPARATE

- As soon as the child indicates something happened, get a general statement describing what happened and then clarify whether there was a single incident or whether there were multiple incidents, before asking for details. (Normally, you should not ask *how many times* something happened.)

- “*Tell me what happened.*” When the child responds, follow up with:
 - “*Did that happen one time or more than one time?*”

- If the child indicates there was only one incident, utilize the recommended pattern of questions described below to generate narrative descriptions and exhaust his/her memory for the incident.
- If the child indicates there was more than 1 time, tell him/her that you want to start by asking about the most recent incident - “*the last time it happened.*” Use the pattern of questions below to gather detailed information and exhaust the child’s memory for that event before moving on to other incidents.

“*Tell me everything about the last time [event, in child’s words] happened.*”

- After you have fully explored this event, move on to another incident, e.g., “*the first time you remember.*” Use the pattern of questions to gather detailed information about each occurrence before moving on to another. Identify other events the child can remember by asking about “*the time you remember most,*” and/or “*another time you remember.*”

- “*Tell me everything you remember about the first time it happened.*”
- “*Is there another time you remember the most?*”
- “*Tell me everything about that time.*”
- “*Is there another time you remember?*”
- “*How do you remember that time?*”
- “*Tell me everything about that time.*”

INVITE: Use open-ended invitations to elicit narratives.

- *“Tell me all about [child’s words describing the allegation].”*
- *“Tell me everything that happened, from the beginning to the end.”*
- *“Tell me everything, even the little parts you don’t think are important.”*

ELABORATE

- Follow a child’s responses, whether narratives or short answers, with open-ended requests to elaborate. This type of request should appear frequently throughout your interview and should also follow responses to direct and focused questions.

- *“Then what happened?”*
- *“Tell me more.”*
- *“What happened next?”*
- *“Tell me more about [person/ object/ activity mentioned by the child].”*
- *“You mentioned [person/ object/activity], tell me everything about that.”*
- *“Tell me what he looked like, from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet.”*

FOCUS: Gather additional details with these techniques.

Time: **Time Segmentation Questions**

Use **time segmentation** questions to generate additional details about a specific period of time within the event already described by the child.

- *“Think back to that [day/night]. Tell me everything that happened from [some previous event mentioned by child] until [alleged abusive incident described by child].”*
- *“Tell me everything that happened after [some portion of the abusive incident mentioned by the child] until it was over.”*
- *“Tell me everything about [one segment of the event] until [another segment of the event].”*

Time: **Time Framing Questions**

- *“What happened right before?”*
- *“What happened right after?”*

Senses: Sensory focus questions

Use sensory focus questions to generate additional details related to sensory perceptions such as what was seen, heard, felt, tasted, etc.

- *“Think about what it looked like when [event]. Tell me everything you saw.”*
- *“Think about what it sounded like. Tell me everything you heard.”*
- *“How did that make you feel?”*
- *“How did that make your body feel?”*

Key Facts: Focused questions based on information provided by child

- Carefully phrase additional questions to generate information about key facts not yet mentioned by the child, such as location, other people present, implements used and other possible physical evidence, others who were told, motivation for reporting or not telling, other incidents, etc.
- Direct questions are used here when some central details of the allegation are still missing or unclear after exhausting open-ended questions, but should be paired with open-ended follow-up invitations to provide further information. First focus the child’s attention on the detail mentioned, and then ask the direct question.
- The **general format** of these focused questions is:

“You [said/talked about] [person/object/activity]. “Tell me [ask for specific information].” OR
“[How/when/where/who/which/what] [ask for specific information]?”

Specific examples:

- *“You said that one of your friends saw [event]. What was [his/her] name?” [Pause, wait for response] “Where were you when that happened?” “Where was your friend?” “Tell me what [name of friend] was doing there.” “How do you know that [name] saw what happened?”*
- *“You said you were watching TV. What were you watching?” “Tell me everything that happened when you were watching ____.”*
- *“You talked about your daddy ‘messing with you.’ Tell me what exactly he did when he ‘messed with you’.”*
- *“Earlier you said that your uncle used Vaseline. Tell me everything that happened with the Vaseline.”*

CLARIFY & ELABORATE

- Ask clarifying questions to make sure that you clearly understand what the child means.
- Ask for more details and attempt to have the child expand on the information already provided.
- When direct, focused or closed questions are used, always pair them with open ended follow up requests for more information.

- *“You’ve told me a lot, and that’s really helpful, but I’m a little confused. To be sure I understand, tell me again [how it all started/exactly what happened/how it ended/etc.]”*
- *“Let’s see if I’ve got this right. [Briefly summarize each segment of the event].” [Pause after each segment and elicit response as to accuracy.] “Is that right?”*

VIII. Use of Interview Tools

- Interviewers should focus on eliciting complete verbal narrative accounts whenever possible from children. Tools such as body diagrams or drawings should be used cautiously, and only when needed.
- Have paper and pens, markers or crayons available so that the child can write or draw about the event if s/he wishes. Before using them, carefully assess whether or not these tools will help to clarify abuse-related information.
- Many interviewers encourage children to free style draw as a way to engage them or to give them something to do with their hands. However, experts recommend allowing free style drawing only if needed, rather than automatically providing it in every interview.
- Do **not** determine a child’s terminology for body parts before s/he has made a statement about abuse. Terms may be clarified as needed during the substantive stage of the interview **after** the child has described something happening involving his/her or someone else’s body - ask what s/he calls that body part, where it is located, and what it’s used for. During the rest of the interview, the interviewer should use the words used by the child to describe body parts.

- *“What do you call that body part ?” / “Where is that?”*
- *“Tell me what [child’s word] looks like.”*
- *“Is there another word for that part?”*
- *“What do you use your [child’s word] for?”*
- *“Put an ‘X’ where [child’s word] is?” (gingerbread person)*

- Do **not** use body diagrams or drawings during the transition stage of the interview as a way of introducing the topic of concern.
- Body diagrams may be used to **clarify abuse-related statements** already provided by the child during the course of the interview, or after a disclosure to clarify the child's terms for body parts, but should only be introduced after the interviewer has attempted to elicit as complete a verbal account as possible. Try using the least suggestive tools first, for example –a “gingerbread” outline of a person instead of anatomical drawings.
- If a child has difficulty talking, it is permissible to offer them the option to draw or write about what happened. The interviewer should then ask questions and encourage the child to explain and elaborate verbally.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“What would make it easier for you to tell me? Would you be able to [draw it/write it down] for me?”</i> • <i>“Where did ____ happen? Draw a picture of the place where it happened.”</i> • <i>“Draw a picture of what happened in the [location].”</i> • <i>“You don’t want to say it out loud? How about writing down the word for me?”</i> <p><u>Specific examples:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“You said that Jamal licked you on your ‘coochie.’ Show me on this picture where your ‘coochie’ is.”</i> • <i>“Draw a picture of what Jamal did.”</i> • <i>“Draw a picture of where you were when Jamal licked your ‘coochie’.”</i> • <i>“You said Nina put her finger in your ‘pookie.’ Show me on this picture how she put her finger in your ‘pookie.’”</i> • <i>“You told me that you had to kiss David’s ‘icky.’ Draw a picture of David’s ‘icky.’” OR “Draw a picture of the time you had to kiss David’s ‘icky.’”</i>

- “Feeling faces” may be used when needed, to help young children indicate how they feel about certain people or situations. This can be especially helpful for children with developmental disabilities.
- Any tools used in the course of the interview will be considered part of the record and should be carefully preserved by the interviewer (e.g., child’s drawings, body diagrams, child’s written work regarding the allegation, etc.).

IX. Break (Optional)

- Take this break as needed. It is especially useful when others are observing the interview. If the interview is for a more limited safety assessment, a break may not be needed.
- Tell the child why you are taking a break (and ask if he/she needs to use the restroom).

- *“Now I want to figure out if there are other things I should ask you. I’m going to take a short break and [think about what you told me/go over my notes/go and check with (name)] to see if there’s something else I need to ask you.”*
- *“Do you need to go to the bathroom?”*
- *“Would you like a drink of water?”*

During the Break:

- Do **not** turn the audio or video recorder off – **leave it running**.
- Review your notes, and/or check with interview observers to see if they have ideas for additional questions or areas needing clarification.
- Refer to Section X. below for possibilities for additional questioning.
- Plan the rest of the interview and write notes regarding additional questions.

After the Break:

- Resume questioning based on your reflection and consultation during the break. Make sure to continue utilizing open-ended follow-up questions.

- *“I’m kind of confused—tell me again about _____.”*
- *“Tell me more about [unclear information].”*
- *“What else happened when _____?”*
- *“Then what happened?”*
- *“Tell me everything about that.”*

X. Eliciting Additional Information Not Yet Mentioned

- The interviewer should ask additional focused questions only after trying other open-ended approaches and if forensically important information is missing, including information related to concerns about the child’s safety.
- If there are multiple incidents, direct the child to the relevant event in his/her own words, and ask focused questions only after giving him/her a chance to elaborate on central details.

- “When you told me about [specific incident identified by time or location] you [said/mentioned] [person/object/activity]. Did/was [focused question]?”
- Follow-up invitation - “Tell me [all/everything/more] about that.”

Specific examples:

- “When you told me about the time in the basement, you said Sam took off his pants. Did something happen with your clothes?” “Tell me all about that.”
- “You told me about a time it happened on the playground. Did somebody else see what happened?” “Who?” “Tell me more about that.”
- “When you told me about the last time it happened, you said your coach touched your chest. Did she touch you on top of your clothes, on your skin, or somewhere else?” “Tell me everything about that.”

- Other areas of inquiry may include other potential victims and/or offenders, and determining when and to whom the child may have previously disclosed.

- “Do you know if something like that happened to other children?” “How do you know?” “Tell me everything about that.”
- “Did someone else ever [touch you/make you touch them] like that before?” “Who?” “One time or more than one time?” “Tell me everything [about that].”

- Learning about prior abuse-related statements made by the child may help in considering possible contamination, exploring alternative explanations, and assessing consistency in the child’s reports.
- If you are aware of previous statements made by the child, indicate general knowledge of these, and cue the child to the person s/he talked to previously, without reference to the specific content.

- “I heard you talked to [name] at [place]. Tell me what you talked about.”
- “I heard you said something about [summarize allegation without incriminating details if possible]. Tell me everything about that.”
- “Tell me everything you can about how [name] found out.”
- “What exactly did you tell [name] about what happened?” “What did [name] say to you?”

- When you know details about the content of prior statements and the child has not relayed that information, briefly summarize concerns without mentioning all specific details. Then ask for clarification, correction or elaboration.

“I heard that you told [name] [general description of child’s prior statement]. Tell me [about that/about how come you said that.]”

- If the child has not mentioned telling anyone, seek information to clarify how the abuse information became known by the person who reported, whether the child told someone else, and/or why the child did not tell anyone else.

- *“Tell me what happened after [specific incident].”*
- *“Does somebody else know about what happened?”*
 - *“Who else knows about what happened?”*
 - *“How did [name] find out about what happened?”*
- *“I want to understand how other people found out about [abuse behavior].”*
- *“Who was the first person (besides you and [suspect’s name]) who found out about what happened?”*
 - *“How did [name] find out?”*
- *“Did [name of suspect] want other people to find out about what happened? “*
 - *“How do you know?”*
 - *“What exactly did s/he say?”*
- **Specific example:** *“You said your best friend Mario was the first person you told about what happened. [How come you decided/what made you decide] to tell him?”*

- When additional direct questions are necessary, be sure to pair them with open-ended follow-up questions.

- *“Did someone touch your _____?”* If the response is affirmative ask: *“Tell me everything that happened.”*
- *“What did [name] touch your _____ with?”* [Wait for response.] *“Tell me all about that.”*

XI. Closing

- Thank the child for his/her effort, **not** the content.

*“You have [answered lots of questions/told me lots of things] today. **Thank you for talking with me.**”*

- Ask the child if there is something else s/he wants to tell the interviewer about what they talked about, or that s/he wants to ask the interviewer.

• “Is there something else [you feel like telling me right now/you want me to know]?”
• “Are there any questions you want to ask me about what we talked about today?”

- Discuss a safety plan if you are concerned about potential risk to the child.

• “Who can you tell if you are worried about something?”
• “Who can you get help from if you are hurt or something bad or scary happens to you?”
• “Why do you think [name] can help you?”
• “What can [name] do to help you?”

- Refocus and talk to the child briefly about a neutral topic.

• “Now you are going to go back to class. What will you do when you get back to class?”
• “Thanks for talking with me. What are you going to do after we’re done here?”
*• **As appropriate, briefly explain next steps.** “Now I’m going to talk to [name] about what you told me.”*

- Offer your business card to the child and invite him/her to call with any questions or thoughts about your talk today.

For taped interviews:
“It’s [specify time] and this interview is now finished.”

APPENDIX

Truth/Lie Picture Tasks for Children Age 7 and Under

The purpose of these materials is to assist in “determining whether a child witness understands the difference between the truth and lies, and appreciates the importance of telling the truth.” They are adapted from “*Qualifying Children to Take the Oath: Materials for Interviewing Professionals*,” by Thomas Lyon and Karen Saywitz, revised May 2000. You can download this article at: <http://works.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1008&context=thomaslyon>

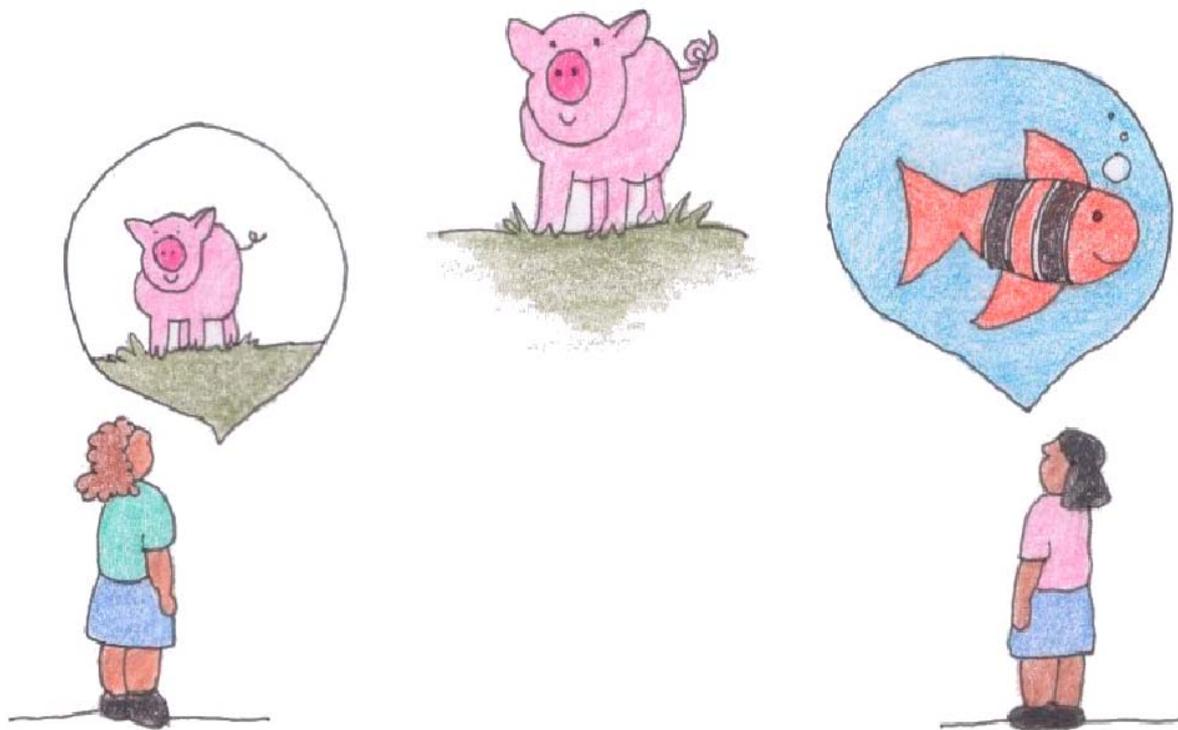
Because common techniques used to qualify young children often miscalculate children's true capacities, Lyon & Saywitz designed these materials, based on research conducted with actual children involved in child protection proceedings, to both minimize the difficulties children face in defining and discussing the concept of truth and lies, and to ensure that children will not falsely appear competent due to guessing or following the lead of the questioner.

There are two tasks. The first task (truth vs. lie) evaluates whether the child understands the words "truth" and "lie." The second task (morality) determines whether a child understands the negative consequences of telling a lie, for example, that telling a lie will result in "trouble."

- Give the child 4 truth vs. lie problems and 4 morality problems. If a child answers 4 of 4 correctly, this demonstrates good understanding of the concepts. (There is only a 6% likelihood that a child would answer 4 of 4 problems correctly by chance.)
- Read the words to the child exactly as written on the scripts. Emphasize the words that appear in all capital letters. Do not paraphrase or you may inadvertently change the meaning.
- Once a child gives an answer to an item question, say "OK" in a friendly way that does not indicate whether they answered correctly.
- Always start with the boy/girl on the left side of the picture.

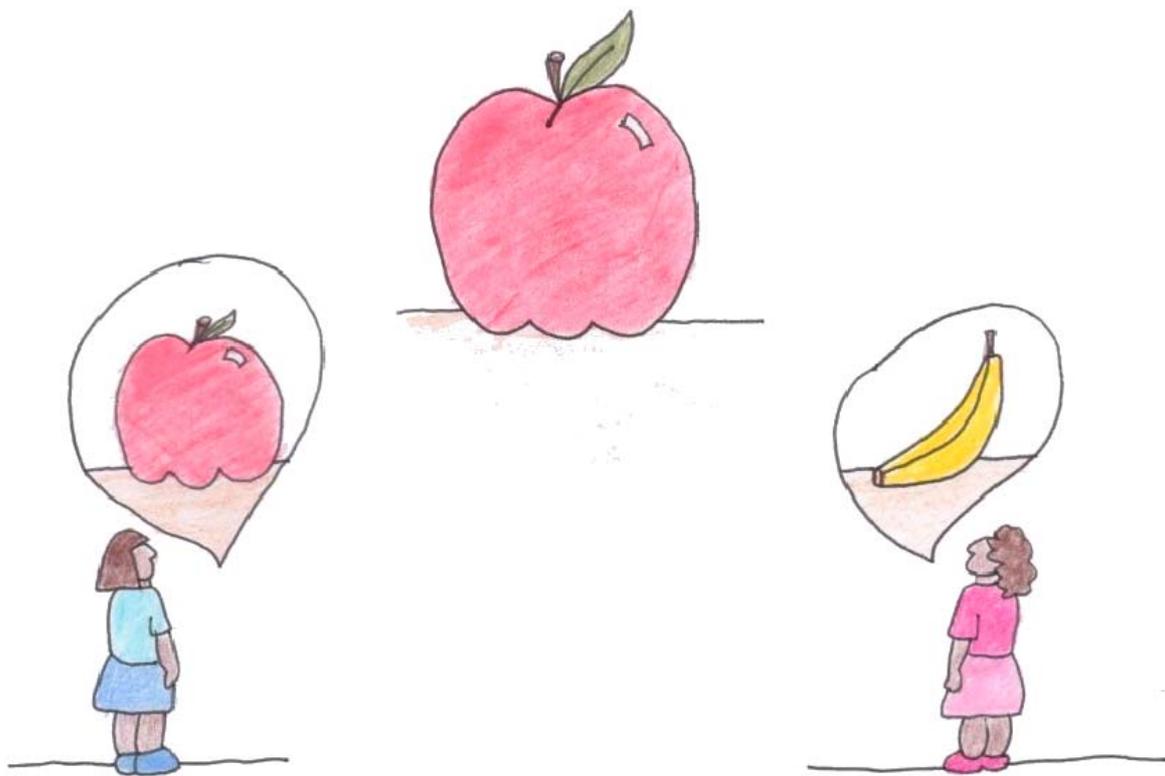
If the child shows good understanding on the first two items of each task, some of the language may be omitted for the last two items:

- For the truth/lie task, "*One will tell a lie and one will tell the truth,*" may be omitted.
- For the morality task, "*Well, one of these girls/boys is going to get in trouble for what she/he says,*" may be omitted.



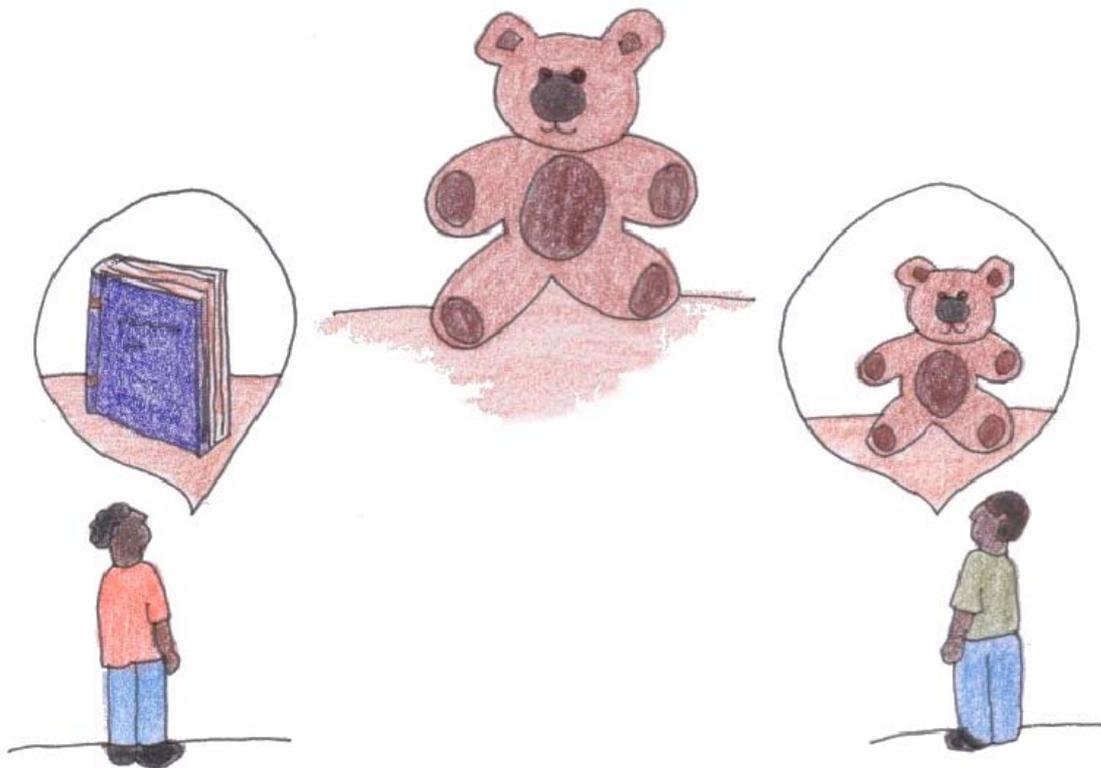
TRUTH VS. LIE TASK 1

- Here's a picture. Look at this animal--what kind of animal is this?
- **OK**, that's a [*child's label*].
- **LISTEN** to what these girls say about the [*child's label*]. One of them will tell a **LIE** and one will tell the **TRUTH**, and **YOU'LL** tell **ME** which girl tells the **TRUTH**.
- (*point to girl on the left*) **THIS** girl looks at the [*child's label*] and says "**IT'S** a [*child's label*]."
- (*point to girl on the right*) **THIS** girl looks at the [*child's label*] and says "**IT'S** a **FISH**."
- Which girl told the **TRUTH**? (*Correct answer is girl on the left.*)



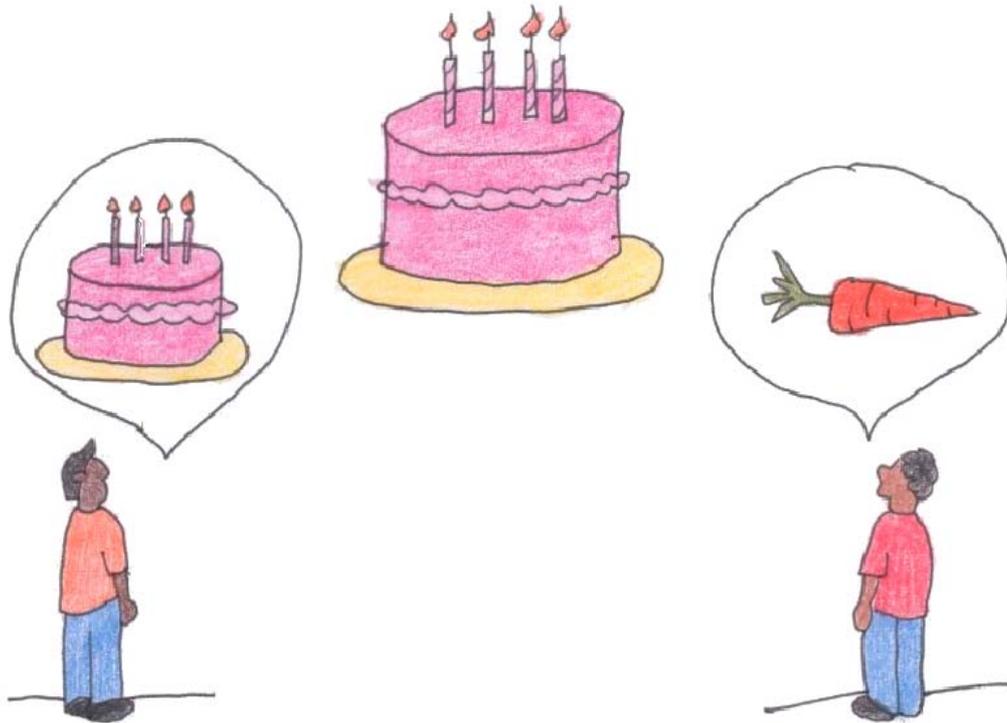
TRUTH VS. LIE TASK 2

- Here's another picture. Look at this food--what kind of food is this?
- **OK**, that's a [*child's label*].
- **LISTEN** to what these girls say about the [*child's label*]. One of them will tell a **LIE** and one will tell the **TRUTH**, and **YOU'LL** tell **ME** which girl tells the **TRUTH**.
- (*point to girl on the left*) **THIS** girl looks at the [*child's label*] and says "**IT'S** a [*child's label*]."
- (*point to girl on the right*) **THIS** girl looks at the [*child's label*] and says "**IT'S** a **BANANA**."
- Which girl told the **LIE**? (*Correct answer is girl on the right.*)



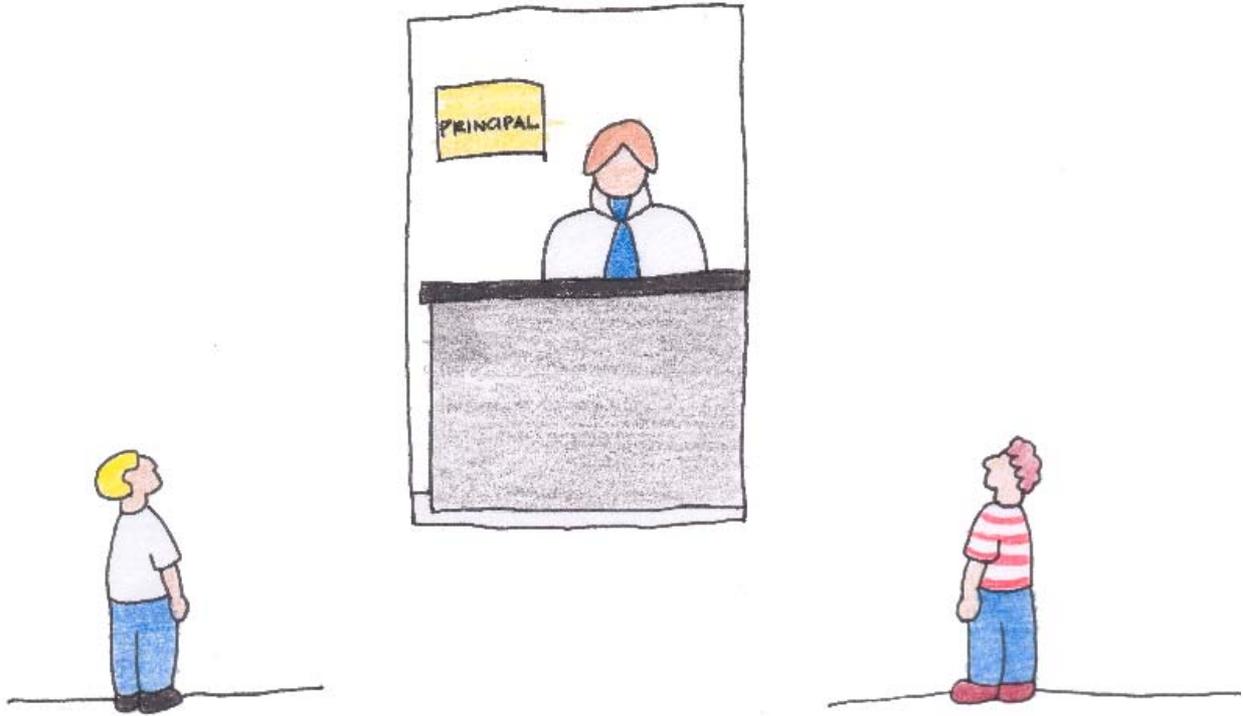
TRUTH VS. LIE TASK 3

- Here's another picture. Look at this toy--what kind of toy is this?
- **OK**, that's a [*child's label*].
- **LISTEN** to what these boys say about the [*child's label*]. One of them will tell a **LIE** and one will tell the **TRUTH**, and **YOU'LL** tell **ME** which boy tells the **TRUTH**.
- (*point to boy on the left*) **THIS** boy looks at the [*child's label*] and says "**IT'S** a **BOOK**."
- (*point to boy on the right*) **THIS** boy looks at the [*child's label*] and says "**IT'S** a [*child's label*]."
- Which boy told a **LIE**? (*Correct answer is boy on the left.*)



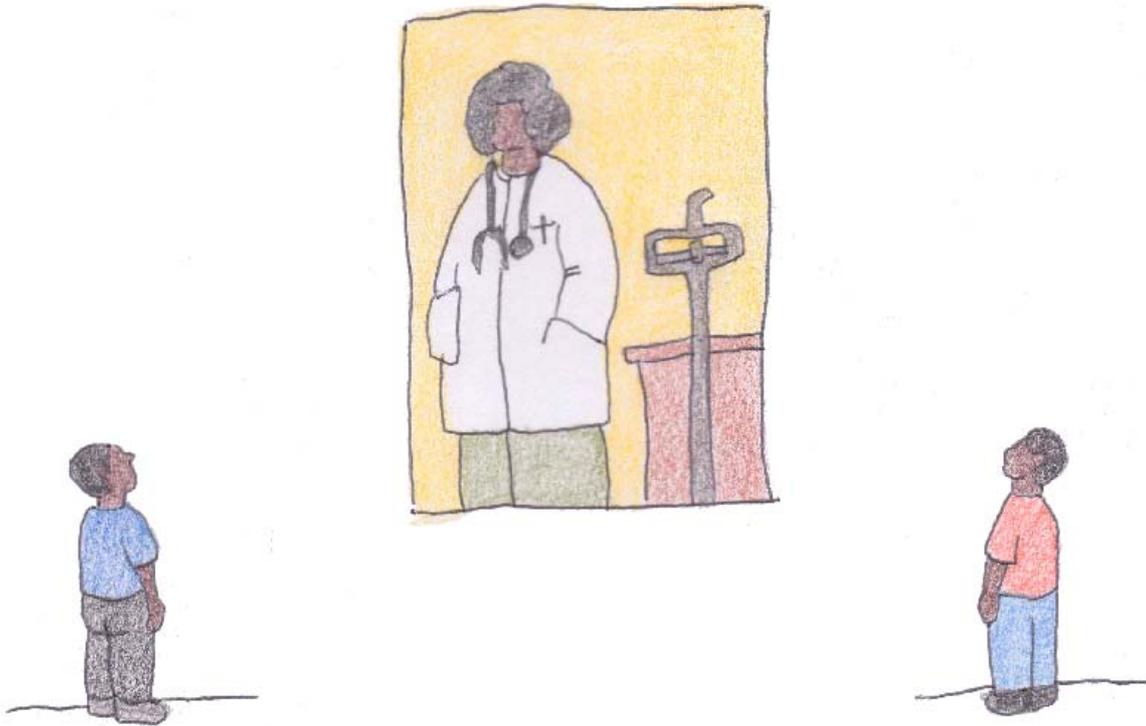
TRUTH VS. LIE TASK 4

- Here's another picture. Look at this food--what kind of food is this?
- **OK**, that's a [*child's label*].
- **LISTEN** to what these boys say about the [*child's label*]. One of them will tell a **LIE** and one will tell the **TRUTH**, and **YOU'LL** tell **ME** which boy tells the **TRUTH**.
- (*point to boy on the left*) **THIS** boy looks at the [*child's label*] and says "**IT'S** a [*child's label*]."
- (*point to boy on the right*) **THIS** boy looks at the [*child's label*] and says "**IT'S** a **CARROT**."
- Which boy told the **TRUTH**? (*Correct answer is boy on the left.*)



MORALITY TASK 1

- Here's a School Principal. He wants to know what happened to these boys.
- Well, **ONE** of these boys is **GONNA GET IN TROUBLE** for what he says, and **YOU'LL** tell **ME** which boy is **GONNA GET IN TROUBLE**.
- **LOOK** [*child's name*],
- (*point to left boy*) This boy tells the **TRUTH**.
- (*point to right boy*) This boy tells a **LIE**.
- Which boy is **GONNA GET IN TROUBLE**? (*Correct answer is boy on the right*)



MORALITY TASK 2

- Here's a School Nurse. She wants to know what happened to these boys.
- Well, **ONE** of these boys is **GONNA GET IN TROUBLE** for what he says.
- **LOOK** [*child's name*],
- (*point to left boy*) This boy tells a **LIE**.
- (*point to right boy*) This boy tells the **TRUTH**.
- Which boy is **GONNA GET IN TROUBLE**? (*Correct answer is boy on the left*)



MORALITY TASK 3

- Here's a Teacher who comes to visit these girls at home. He wants to know what happened to these girls.
- Well, **ONE** of these girls is **GONNA GET IN TROUBLE** for what she says.
- **LOOK** [child's name],
- *(point to left girl)* This girl tells a **LIE**.
- *(point to right girl)* This girl tells the **TRUTH**.
- Which girl is **GONNA GET IN TROUBLE**? *(Correct answer is girl on the left)*



MORALITY TASK 4

- Here's a Grandma. She wants to know what happened to these girls.
- Well, **ONE** of these girls is **GONNA GET IN TROUBLE** for what she says.
- **LOOK**, [child's name],
- *(point to left girl)* This girl tells the **TRUTH**.
- *(point to right girl)* This girl tells a **LIE**.
- Which girl is **GONNA GET IN TROUBLE?** *(Correct answer is girl on the right).*

