

Interviewing Adults and Children with Disabilities

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Agenda

- Defining disabilities
- Understanding the special needs of adults and children with disabilities
- Cultural considerations
- The importance of implementing a protocol

Developmental Disability

- Describes life-long disabilities attributable to mental and/or physical or combination of mental and physical impairments
- Manifested prior to age 22
- Other terms include:
 - Learning disability
 - Intellectual disability : I/DD
 - Cognitive disability

Developmental Disability

- Refers to affecting daily functioning in 3 or more of the following areas:
 - Capacity for independent living
 - Economic self-sufficiency
 - Learning
 - Mobility
 - Receptive and expressive language
 - Self-care
 - Self-direction

Most Common Disabilities

- What am I most likely to encounter?
- What is the severity of the disability?
 - Autism
 - Cerebral Palsy
 - Hearing Impairments
 - Vision Impairments
 - Cognitive or intellectual disabilities

What's the Difference?

- Developmental Disability
- Mental Illness
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Substance Abuse/Alcohol Intoxication

Respecting People with Disabilities

- Abilities, not limitations
- Avoid labels
- Avoid excessive praise or attention: “the cat voice”
- Let the person speak for self
- Use age-appropriate names
- Person first language

Disability Considerations

- Interview special ed teacher to understand type of disability and level of functioning
- Be aware of communication devices
- Allow support person to come with client to the interview
- Recognize that anxiety exacerbates disability

Disclosure Process

“Disclosure is a process...not an event”

~Sorenson and Snow

Cultural Considerations

- Private parts in native language
- Cultural norms around talking about privates with family and outsiders
- Acknowledging historical trauma/system intervention trauma
- Know your community resources/cultural brokers

How Physical Disabilities Affect the Interview

- Limitations of drawing
- Assessment of skills important
- Alternative activities needed
- Activities may draw attention away from questioning

Alternative Activities for Rapport & Screening

- Simple puzzles
- Naming activities
- Play dough – one can & cookie cutters
- Anatomy identification
- Prepositions

Alternative Activities: Abuse Focus

- May be able to show what they cannot tell
- Can dolls be used
- May demonstrate on own body or your body
- Paper activities less useful

Cognitive Limitations

- Abstract thinking
- Classification
- Source monitoring
- Recognition of other's point of view
- Meta-cognition
- Representational shift?

Interview Suggestions

- Let them say it how they say it
- Disclosure is shorter
- Limit follow-up questions
- Do not expect clarification
- Interviewer must monitor child's engagement with the topic

Cognitive Development: Memory

- Product of environment
- Increased with rehearsal
- Simple internal cognitive structures
- Better at "script" memory
- Cultural influence dominant

Cognitive Development: Suggestibility

- More suggestible than other people
- Poor source monitoring / source attribution
 - Fantasy/reality blurred
 - Adult's statements are "real"

Interview Suggestions

- Assess child's skills:

Can child report on known events?

Is child on target with question response?

Can child make representational shift?

Can This Adult or Child Be Interviewed?

- Can you understand their language?
- Can he or she respond to questions with relevant information?
- Can he or she provide accurate information about known events, people?

Language Skills: Receptive

- May respond to a word rather than whole question
- Follows their known rules of conversation
- Sensitive to non-verbal
- Guidelines not helpful

Language Skills: Expressive

- Can be understood by most adults
- May have articulation problems
- Narrative ability varies
- Does not organize accounts
- Uses words incorrectly at times

Interview Suggestions

- Keep questions simple, concrete, brief
- Allow time for narrative ability to unfold
- Use their words
- Ask questions as child would
- Make topic transitions clear

Attentional Limitations

- Short attention span
- Difficult to accomplish all tasks in one session
- Cannot attend to questions for sustained period of time
- Lives “in the moment”
- Easily distracted

Interview Tools

- Dolls
- Anatomical dolls
- Demonstration
- Drawing

Interview Suggestions

- Assess child's ability before introducing tool
- Use for specific task, then remove
- Select materials yourself
- Ask child to provide language with actions

Interview Suggestions

- Interview in the morning
- Limit distractions
- Have your game plan
- Prioritize
- Multiple, brief interviews safer than one which goes too long

Forensic Evaluation

- Outgrowth of traditional interview process not working for pre-schoolers
- Works well with pre-schoolers and children and adults with disabilities
- Part of the investigatory process—discovery of facts

Children Referred for FE

- Child does not disclose in interview but has made previous disclosures or has behavioral indicators
- Child gives incomplete or confusing disclosure
- Child is anxious or frightened

Children Referred for FE

- Child has experienced multiple traumatic events
- Child is difficult to understand because of age or cultural differences or disabilities
- Child's temperament is cautious and needs time for comfort

Purposes of FE

- Determine the likelihood of abuse
- Identify suspected perpetrators
- Allow time and non-threatening environment
- Gather forensically sound information from the child
- Provide other recommendations

Differences Between Therapy and FE

- Time limited
- Discovery of facts
- MDT is client/not child & family
- Tools used to encourage verbal account
- Stance is neutral and objective

Differences Between Forensic Interview and FE

- Conducted by M.H. professional
- Allows for a number of sessions
- Interviewer can collect information from others prior to the child sessions
- Administration of child focused inventories

Referral Process

- Initial investigative interview
- MDT or investigative team makes the referral
- Information may serve dual process of criminal investigation and exploring protection concerns

WE MUST BE WILLING TO
LIVE WITH WHAT OUR PRE-
SCHOOLERS AND CHILDREN
WITH DISABILITIES GIVE US

~Linda Cordisco-Steele
