

## Interviewing Children & Child Development

### **Child Development**

<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Stage</b>	<b>Education Setting</b>
Birth to 2 Years	Infant	Nursery
2 to 3 Years	Toddler	Preschool
3 to 6 Years	Early Childhood	Preschool/Kindergarten
6 to 13 Years	Middle Childhood	Elementary School/Middle School
13 to 18 Years	Adolescence	High School

### **Language Acquisition – Birth to Age 3+ (Menyuk, 1971)**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Language Milestone</b>
Birth – 4 Months	Cooing & chuckling
6 – 9 Months	Babbling
12 – 18 Months	First words (development of 20 word vocabulary)
18 – 21 Months	2 word phrases, 200 words
24 – 27 Months	2-3 word phrases, 300 – 400 words
30 – 33 Months	3- 4 word sentences “functionally complete”
36 – 39 Months	1000+ words

### **Basic Guidelines for Interviewing Clients**

Know as much as possible about your client before the interview (age, special needs/disability, history of abuse, neglect and trauma, family and placement history, linguistic preference, nicknames, etc.)

Go into the interview with a plan for areas to cover during the interview but be prepared to be flexible. Be mindful of the attention span of your client.

When interviewing a child remember to:

Slow down your rate of speech and shorten your sentences

Allow the child time to process questions and allow them time to respond, avoid interrupting them

Ask questions that are simple, open-ended, concrete, free of abstract ideas, and free of suggestions or double negatives

Ask the client to repeat back what you have stated if you need to ensure clarity.

## Techniques for Effective Communication

**Attending Behavior (Ivey, 1994)** – encourages clients to talk freely. Before you say anything you are communicating with attending behavior. It is the equivalent of a M.D.’s “bedside manner”. Attending Behavior is communicated through four components: body language, vocal qualities, eye contact, and verbal tracking.

Attentive Body Language- Clients will know that you are interested in them if you have an expressive face and if you are using facilitating gestures. **When interviewing children try minimizing your stature by interviewing the client at eye-level. This may mean sitting on the floor or crouching/kneeling down – Don’t Be Afraid. Maintaining a proximity that is comfortable for the client is also important.**

Vocal Qualities – Pay attention to vocal tone and speech rate. How you say, “I am really interested in what you have to say”, can vary greatly depending on vocal tone and speech rate.

Eye Contact – should be directed at the client (occasional focus on note-taking should be explained to the client). **This may not always generate a comfortable atmosphere for clients and can be quite disrespectful to some clients.**

Verbal Tracking – if the client has come to us with a concern, keep to the topic indicated by the client. **Some child clients may not have initiated representation so the interviewer will need to be more responsible for the verbal tracking.**

**\*\*\*Linguistic and Cultural Differences** – Establishing appropriate attending behaviors when working with a client with a significantly different cultural or linguistic background can be particularly challenging. Choosing the most appropriate modifications to your attending behavior is even more critical in these situations. The bolded text offers modifications that can be made when working with children. Be willing to ask the client (or family) to educate you about cultural values, practices or beliefs. Be sensitive and respectful when doing this.

### **Directive and Non-Directive Interviewing**

Should the interviewer be using directive or non-directive questioning or both?

#### **Open questions**

Cannot be answered in a few words

Encourages clients to talk and yields richer information

Children’s responses tend to be most accurate when asked open ended questions (Nathanson & Crank, 2004).

Example:

“Tell me about you visit with you father?”

## **Closed questions**

Can be answered in a few words

Allows the interviewer to focus the interview but places the responsibility for conversation on the interviewer.

Example:

“Did you have a good visit with your father?”

Sometimes there is a necessity for closed-ended questioning:

“How old are you?”

\*\*\* Once the interview is flowing the distinction between open and closed questions is less important. If a topic is of deep interest to the client the client will likely elaborate whether the questions are open or closed.

## **Leading Questions (Suggestive Questioning)**

Examples of leading questions:

“Are you visiting with your brother every weekend?”

“Are you happy living with your grandparents?”

Alternatives:

“Tell me about your visits with your brother?”

“What’s it like living with your grandparents?”

## **Collateral Interviewing**

Some information will not be available from our clients and will need to be gleaned from other sources such as caregivers, teachers, child welfare workers, etc. Such information can include: client’s last medical exam, parent’s participation in a recovery program, client’s most recent IEP.

## **Additional Considerations**

### **Language**

The client’s language base will have a limit.

The larger the client's language base increases the likelihood that interviewer and interviewee will understand one another. The client's language base should increase as they age chronologically.

A client with more developed language will present the interviewer with more options to form questions and the more options the client has in forming responses.

Detecting influence from others

Some terms not so easily explained:

Court, hearing, judge, foster care, child protective services, etc.

### **Conversational Tracking**

Getting clients to talk about the target topic in response to open-ended questions

“What did you do at school today?”

“Tell what it's like to live with your aunt?”

Interviewer should take responsibility for of tracking children's conversation

Example:

“Is there anything else you would like to tell me?” vs. “Can you tell me about anything else you did at school today?”

Be careful of abruptly changing topics.

### **Source Monitoring**

Distinguishing between the child's concept of fantasy & reality.

Is the child presenting information they have received through their own experience or from other sources (e.g. parents or family members)?

Interview should be grounded reality (without presenting unrealistic options).

### **Memory**

Related to time – use markers relevant to the child's life (holidays, summer vacation, birthday, grade in school, etc.

### **Conclusion**

It can take multiple visits to accomplish one “productive” interview.

Your “genuineness” is always being communicated.

You must pay attention to yourself – both verbal and non-verbal (attending behavior) communication (with all clients).

Adults and children do not speak the same language, the responsibility for clear communication lies with the adult.

### **References**

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