

FACILITATING DISCLOSURE OF ABUSE BY RELUCTANT CHILDREN: A TEST OF THE REVISED NICHD PROTOCOL

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Introduction: Professional guidelines for forensic interviews of children have emphasized cognitive factors associated with children's memory retrieval and paid less attention to the emotional factors that may inhibit the cooperativeness of reluctant interviewees.

Objectives: The current study explored whether an additional focus on rapport-building altered the dynamics of interviews with alleged victims of intra-familial abuse, and increased abuse disclosures.

Methods: 426 4- to 13-year-old suspected victims of intra-familial abuse were interviewed using either the NICHD Investigative Interview Standard Protocol (SP) or a Revised Protocol (RP) designed to enhance rapport between the child and interviewer.

Results: Children were more likely to make valid (corroborated) allegations of abuse when the RP was employed, with variation according to age, gender and prior disclosure. Similar patterns were evident in a larger sample of 1424 which included non-corroborated cases.

Subsequent analyses focusing on a subset of interviews (n=200) were designed to explore differences in the dynamics of the interviews using the SP or RP which may account for the increase of allegation rates using the RP.

Methods: The interviews were coded to identify expressions of the interviewers' support and the children's reluctance and uncooperativeness in the pre-substantive portions of the interviews.

Results: As expected, RP interviews contained more supportive comments and fewer unsupportive comments. Children interviewed in this way showed reduced reluctance, with remarkably fewer expressions of resistance and denial but also fewer omissions.

Conclusions: Focus on rapport-building altered the interview dynamics, rendering reluctant children more cooperative and more likely to disclose their abuse.