

	INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SERVICES CHILD WELFARE POLICY	
	Tool: Tips for Child Interviews	Effective Date: October 1, 2007
	Reference: 4.A (4.9 – Interviewing Children)	Version: 1

Tips for a Successful Interview

1. Greeting the child. It is important to ask the child directly what name they prefer to be called. You may also ask someone who knows the child (e.g. parent, guardian, custodian, teacher, social worker, etc.) what name the child prefers. The purpose of this interaction is to build a rapport with the child, allowing him or her some sense of control. Take time to get to know the child and make the child as comfortable as possible. The initial focus should be on the child and not on the allegation.
2. Introduce everyone present. The Family Case Manager (FCM) should always tell the child his or her name. You may introduce everyone by title or full name, but reassure the child that they may call them by their first name. Ideally, there should only be one (1), at the most two (2), individuals (professionals involved in the assessment) present when the child is being interviewed.
3. Attempt to accommodate any size differentials. The FCM may sit on the floor, be either at eye level or below the child’s eye level. Attempt to interview in a private area, as space may allow.
4. Explain why the FCM is there. Tell the child it is your job to help and protect children; to find out if they are okay; and if they are not, to find ways to protect them. The choice of words should meet the developmental level of the child.
5. Explain in general terms the purpose for the interview. An appropriate response might be, “Remember how I said earlier my job is to find out if kids are okay? Someone asked me to talk to you because they were worried that you might not be okay.” Do not offer rewards to the child or incentives.
6. Affirm the reason for the visit. Acknowledge the accuracy of the response if the child indicates that he or she knows the reason for the visit.
7. Address any feelings expressed by the child. It is helpful to acknowledge children’s feelings and assure them that all children have different feelings. An example of a statement a FCM may use in assuring the child, “I know this subject is hard to talk about, but I talk to a lot of kids about the same thing, so there is nothing that you can say that I haven’t heard before,” and “In this room you can say anything as long as it is the truth. If I say something that isn’t right then it is okay to tell me that it isn’t right, because I want to make sure I understand everything that you are telling me and want me to know.”
8. Gather information and make a behavioral observation. Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations. In addition to gathering information, the FCM must document the observed behavior of the child, (e.g. – whether the child’s behavior is consistent with what is expected for his or her age. Document thoroughly any inconsistencies in behavioral expectations for the child’s age and development). Do not show any signs of disbelief or disgust during the interview, as this may shut the child down. The FCM needs to be aware of their own body language as well as the child’s. More than likely, the child is reading the FCM’s body language too. While gathering information, it is of utmost importance not to encourage right answers that you are looking for or respond to or “discourage” wrong answers. Be as neutral as possible but encouraging to the actual answering of questions. Using “What happened next?” is a very good way to get details

from children, and promotes active listening on your part, expressing to the child that you are listening and interested. Be aware of the child's level of comfort, and if he or she becomes distracted or fidgety, use critical thinking skills on how to proceed (e.g. – continue interview or allow for a short break before continuing the interview). Don't utilize the interview time to determine if the child is telling the truth. Results of the FCM's interviews will assist in assessment determination.

9. Determine whether the child can make a differentiation between the truth and a lie. It is essential that the FCM establish whether the child knows the difference between the truth and a lie and documentation must describe the child's ability to discern. The FCM should also assure the child understands that it is okay to "not know the answer" to a question. An example of determining this would be, "If you (the child) were wearing a blue shirt, and I stated that your shirt was yellow, would that be a truth or a lie?" When using this kind of example it is essential to make sure that the child knows their colors. Also, you may ask the child "What happens if you tell a lie? What happens when you tell the truth?"
10. Allow the child to name the alleged perpetrator. **Do not disclose the name of the alleged perpetrator until after the child says the name.** It is important that the child discloses the name of the perpetrator without prompting. Also, keep in mind if assessing sexual abuse, the FCM should not call any body part by any name until the child identifies that particular body part. The FCM should then refer to that particular body part using the same name as the child. Depending on availability and resources, have the child identify the particular body part on a picture or by what that specific body part is used for.
11. Determine how the incident happened. When possible use a statement or directive, rather than a question. Use non-leading and open ended questions (e.g. – Tell me, Describe, How did, What, When, etc.). A statement such as, "I need to find out how you got the bruises on your back" or a directive such as, "Tell me about the bruises on your back" gives the child greater latitude to respond. You can determine time frames by the season, night time, day time, what was on television, etc. Keep in mind the developmental level of each child during your assessment.
12. Summarize the Interview. It is important to summarize what was said during the interview in the child's own words to verify that the FCM has understood the child and to clear up any misunderstanding. Summarizing can also provide the FCM the opportunity to identify additional areas that have not been discussed. After summarizing, ask the child if there is anything else he or she would like to tell you. Ask them if you understood correctly what they told you or if there was something they wanted to change that the FCM had stated incorrectly. Again, it is important not to offer the child any rewards or incentives.
13. Assure/affirm the child. Assure the child that he or she has done the right thing by telling the truth. It is important for this to be said to the child in simple, unconditional terms to counteract what may have been told to the child or what the child may think. Most children are understandably concerned about "telling on" an adult caretaker. Thank the child for talking to you.
14. Provide the child an opportunity for questions. Provide the child the opportunity to ask any questions or explore any issues not previously discussed in the interview.