Literature on Child Forensic Interviewing from January 2022 to February 2025: Other Topics

Theodore P. Cross, PhD, FAPSAC; Kennedi Foster

Abstract

This article reviews selected findings from research published from 2022 to February 2025 that pertains to other aspects of child forensic interviewing not directly related to questioning methods (a companion article examines research on questions and related methods). The review is divided into five broad categories: specific child populations, child psychological factors, professional factors, forensic interviewing supports, and general reviews of the field. The article then discusses implications for child forensic interviewing practice.

Keywords: *child sexual abuse, child forensic interviewing*

The companion article in this issue (Cross, 2025) examined research from January 2022 to February 2025 pertaining to questioning methods in child forensic interviews, but many articles and reports have been published during that time period that deal with a variety of other aspects of child forensic interviewing. The current article discusses a selection of these articles and reports. As mentioned in the companion article, we conducted searches in the EBSCO and Scopus research databases and Primo online library catalog to find articles, using the term "child forensic interviewing." We also searched the Child Abuse Library Online (CALIO™, see NCAC CALIO, 2021; Wells, 2025) and used several of CALIO's bibliographies. Focusing on those years, we also searched the table of contents of several prominent journals that regularly publish articles about child forensic interviewing: *Child Maltreatment*, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, and the *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*. We also looked in the reference lists of studies to find additional studies. The articles reviewed in this current article address a wide array of topics and some examine the field of forensic interviewing as a whole. We have organized our review into five broad categories: specific child populations, child psychological factors, professional factors, forensic interviewing supports, and general reviews of the field.

Specific Youth Populations

Adolescents

Deck, Quas and Powell (2024) studied expert insights and recommendations regarding forensic interviews with adolescents. Research interviews were conducted with 21 American child forensic interviewers who, on average, had completed more than 16 interviews per month and had been conducting interviews for more than 14 years. The interviews asked participants to provide an overview of their experiences conducting forensic interviews with adolescents, describe the strategies they used to support adolescents, and talk about the challenges they encountered with adolescents they were interviewing and how they dealt with them. Deck, Quas and Powell identified four general themes. The first theme was that interviews with adolescents could be longer, ask about more complicated information, and yield more detailed narratives, but adolescents were often more reluctant to disclose than younger children. The second theme was the importance of respecting adolescents' identity and need for autonomy. The third theme concerned interviewers showing unconditional respect and understanding the potential consequences of disclosure for adolescents. The fourth theme concerned the adaptations interviewers needed to make for adoles-

cents in the preparatory stage of the interview. The review of ground rules needs to be conversational, as adolescents will perceive a rote presentation of the ground rules as "disingenuous" (p. 7) and think that the interviewer has an "agenda" (p. 7). Adaptations are also needed because adolescents often perceive as "childish" (pp. 7–8) such preparatory elements as explaining the interviewing process and practicing ground rules and narratives. Building rapport and trust with adolescents is necessary but takes longer than with younger children. The participants recommended that interviewers choose rapport-building topics that adolescents were excited about and had some expertise in.

Dianiska and colleagues (2024) reviewed international research on establishing rapport with adolescents in forensic interviews. This can be challenging because of adolescents' increasing autonomy, frequent distrust of adults, and reluctance to disclose information about disapproved behaviors. Despite an extensive literature search, the authors found only one relevant experimental study (Sauerland et al., 2018), which found that adolescents who were shown a video about a theft provided more details about the video when the researchers provided substantial rapport-building. Dianiska et al. provide specific ideas for new research, such as testing strategies for rapport-building that emphasize adolescents' attachment to peers. An example of such a strategy is appealing to adolescents' loyalty and protective instincts by discussing how their help can keep their peers safe.

Using cases from Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) in Southern California, Nogalska et al. (2023) examined adolescent child sexual abuse victims' reluctance to disclose abuse in a forensic interview, which previous research has identified as an issue in some samples of adolescents. However, in Nogalska's sample of adolescent victims, 93% of whom had disclosed abuse prior to the forensic interview, only 8% of responses expressed reluctance. Reluctance was measured by coding specific responses during the interview, such as actively resisting the interviewer, using passive avoidance, and attempting to redirect the conversation. Not surprisingly, a comparison sample of commercially sexually exploited adolescents who had contact with police, most of whom had not previously disclosed, had a much higher rate of reluctance: 26% of responses.

Children with Disabilities

The Zero Abuse Project (2022) published a guide on forensic interviews with children with disabilities. He points out how vulnerable children with disabilities are to abuse and maltreatment, while at the same time their impairments often make it more difficult to disclose abuse. Interviewers should collaborate with caregivers and multidisciplinary team members to grasp the child's specific needs, such as the need to consider sensory sensitivity, assistive devices (e.g., communication boards or speech-generating devices), and accommodations in the interviewing environment. While sensitivity to individual needs is necessary for all child forensic interviews, additional preparation might be needed for children with disabilities. For example, it may be helpful to allow extra time for response, adjust the lighting, and try to remove any distractions for sensory sensitivities. The use of specially designed visual aids, like diagrams, can help to facilitate disclosure and clarify responses. It is also crucial to build rapport through patience and flexibility. Interviewers should adapt their questioning style and be sensitive to the child's individual needs. Post-interview, teams need to carefully discuss and work through how to support the child going forward. It is also important to be able to justify accommodations made during interviews if a case goes to court.

Children of Different Religious-Ethnic Backgrounds

Mordi and Katz's Israeli study (2024) examined how the conduct and outcomes of forensic interviews differed depending on children's religious-ethnic background. They coded data from forensic interviews to compare children in the following categories: Arab Muslim, secular Jewish, religious Jewish, and ultra-Orthodox Jewish. Arab Muslim children scored higher than Jewish children on richness of their report, based on the number of details they

provided, but the three Jewish groups did not differ. The researchers thought that the influence of traditional Arab societal norms of obedience, discipline, and deference to adult authority and the prohibition of perjury by Sharia law and the Quran might explain this difference. They thought the lack of difference between the different Jewish groups might be explained by the interviewers' skill in adapting their methods to the needs of children with different forms of involvement with Judaism.

Young Suspected Sexual Offenders

Hershkowitz and Lamb (2024) reported on an adaptation of the NICHD protocol that was implemented in Israel to interview youths who are suspected of committing sexual abuse. They point out that many of these youths are themselves victims of child sexual abuse, and most pose minimal future risk of reoffending if they are identified quickly and provided effective therapy. This protocol includes a developmentally sensitive module informing young suspects of their rights such as their right to remain silent and their right to have a supportive adult present during the interview. Standard methods leave many young people in the dark about their rights. The new protocol also includes evidence-based methods to increase rapport with young suspects and stress the use of open-ended questions. Compared to youths interviewed with a previous protocol, youths interviewed with the new protocol understood their rights better, responded more during rapport-building, responded more to interviewer support, and made full rather than partial confessions more frequently. In the interview, they were also less reluctant, more emotionally expressive, and more informative.

Child Psychological Factors

Children's Emotions

Using Israeli cases, Karni-Visel and colleagues (2022) coded data on the emotions children experience at each conversation turn in a forensic interview and related it to the information they provided. Coding revealed that when children verbalized negative emotions, they produced more central and peripheral details and more specific information. When they verbalized positive emotions, they also produced more peripheral details and more specific information. Information related to negative emotions was remembered in greater detail and more vividly. The authors suggest the value of facilitating children's emotional expression during the forensic interview while recognizing that the expression of negative emotions can be difficult for children.

Karni-Visel and colleagues also coded data on children's non-verbal emotions in Israeli forensic interviews (Karni-Visel et al., 2023). They found that nonverbal expressions of emotion preceded verbal expressions of emotion and were more than 10 times as frequent as verbal expressions of emotions. When interviewers made supportive comments, such as "You're doing a great job" or "It's okay to take your time," children's nonverbal expressions of emotion were more likely, and in turn children were more likely to provide forensically relevant details.

Children's Justice Goals

Holder and colleagues' (2023) Australian study explored what "justice goals" children revealed in forensic interviews, that is, what they hoped would be achieved in the criminal justice system in their cases. Analyzing 243 forensic interview transcripts, the authors found that 82% of children hoped for one or more forms of acknowledgment, which included acknowledgement that they were a victim (57%), that they were harmed (40%), that they were believed (19%), and that they should not be blamed (34%). They found that 64% of children stated the wrongfulness of what the perpetrator did. Another common justice goal was a desire for protection (41%), which included protection for themselves (29%), for themselves and others (8%), just for others (2%), and for the perpetrator (2%). Children who expressed a wish for the perpetrator to be held accountable and/or take responsibility for the abuse were 33% of the sample. Only 14% expressed wanting punishment for the perpetrator, and 1% expressed a wish for rehabilitation for the perpetrator. Children were more

likely to express a justice goal if they had experienced penetration and if they had suffered through multiple acts of sexual victimization.

Children's Memory

Danby (2024) reviewed research to explain *why* best practice in forensic interviewing supports children's memory. Knowing why may help forensic interviewers follow best practice. Much of the research she cites focuses on younger children, especially preschool and early primary school-aged children who tend to forget peripheral details more quickly than adolescents. She first points out that children's rate of forgetting information requires interviews that are prompt, though not unplanned and hasty. Children's memory for peripheral details deteriorates rapidly, although their recall of the central events of the abuse stabilizes and can remain intact for extended periods, even months or years. Danby states, however, that "memory loss concerns cannot justify conducting these interviews hastily or without appropriate preparation" (p. 2). Even when interviews must be conducted rapidly because of safety concerns— the need to collect physical evidence or the suspect not being in custody—some degree of preparation is imperative to conduct a trauma-informed interview that maximizes the child's comfort. When interviews are conducted, using initial invitations such as "Tell me everything that happened" and other open-ended questions (see, e.g., Powell & Snow, 2007) facilitate a "deep level" (Danby, 2024, p. 4) of memory retrieval that tend to be accurate. Forced choice or yes-no questions, on the other hand, lead to a "superficial memory retrieval process" (Danby, 2024, p. 4) which is more likely to be erroneous; children may not remember the specific detail asked about and guess.

Danby recommends that interviewers prioritize children completing the account of abusive episodes and wait until later to ask about related factual details. Episodic memory is hard for children, she explains, involving a different memory system from remembering facts. It is difficult for children to switch back to episodic memory from a different memory system. It is especially hard for children to recall individual episodes of abuse when children have been abused multiple times. The memory system gravitates to what is generic to all the episodes, but filing criminal charges and obtaining convictions requires the details of individual episodes. Danby reviews techniques to help children remember one particular episode; often children's memory is best for the first or the last time that it happened.

Because episodic memory is reconstructive, involving pulling together stored details at the time of remembering, Danby (2024) cautions that some memory errors in child forensic interviews are to be expected. Its reconstructive nature also means that leading questions and post-event information can influence memory. Principe and London (2022) expressed concern about one specific possible influence on children's memory: informal conversations the child has had with family members after the child has been abused but before the forensic interview is conducted. They review research that shows that the conversations parents normally have with their children about events in the child's life can influence the child's memory about what happened to them. In talking to parents about their child's life, parents may supply their own details. ("Remember how you cried in the backseat?") or use forced choice questions ("Were Lisa or Amy mean to you?") or leading yes-no questions ("Tommy offered you a cigarette, didn't he?).

To study the effect of parental influence on children's memory, Principe and London (2022) conducted laboratory research in the United States in which experimenters staged a magic show for children (Principe et al., 2013. They gave half of the children's mothers false information about it, asked the mother to talk with their child about the show, and then conducted an interview with the child about the show. When mothers were given false information, children's memory in the interview was less likely to be accurate, particularly if the mother controlled the pre-interview conversation with the child and elaborated with questions and statements. In a follow-up study (Principe, Kirkpatrick & Langley, 2022), some mothers were both given false information and asked to elicit an accurate account from children—this led mothers to be more controlling and offer more suggestions.

This increased children's memory errors and even led to "novel embellishments" (p. 292) in which children provided incorrect information not suggested by their mothers. Moreover, instructing mothers to elicit correct information from their children led to memory errors even when mothers were *not* given false information. Mothers in this situation were prone to use leading or suggestive questions (such as those listed above) that can affect children's memory.

The effect of parent-child interactions on the accuracy of children's memory is usually benign in everyday life, but Principe and London (2022) argue that it can be problematic in the context of a child abuse investigation, although there are no data indicating the frequency with which parent interactions lead to memory errors in actual forensic interviews. They recommend that when parents are making initial reports of abuse to law enforcement, children should not be allowed to hear the parent's report. They suggest that minimal facts interviewing of the child (see Northeast Regional Children's Advocacy Center, 2023) and rapid forensic interviews may minimize the parental influence on children's memory. They also recommend that professionals be trained in and are alert to possible parental influence.

In a commentary on Principe and London (2022), Brown and Lamb (2022) point out that the differences between a laboratory analogue study about a magic show and an actual child abuse investigation may be so different that we cannot yet know the implications of Principe and London's study. Brown and Lamb think that Principe et al.'s research suggests that parental influence *can* affect children's memory but not whether it *typically* affects children's memory. Brown and Lamb point out that we also lack information about whether good forensic interviewing practice can help counter the effects of parental influence. They recommend more research examining whether parental interactions with children around suspicions of abuse lead to memory errors in child forensic interviews and interviewing methods that would minimize the potential effect of parental influence on memory.

Wu and colleagues (2023) studied the memory accuracy of American adults 20 years after they had been forensically interviewed in child maltreatment investigations. The researchers checked participants' current recollections against documents compiled at the time of the forensic interview. Just over one-third of participants had no memory of the forensic interview. Using age as a continuous variable, they found that those who were older at the time of the forensic interview remembered more abuse-specific information from the forensic interview than those who were younger. Those with a higher Trauma Symptom Checklist score (measuring symptoms such as anxiety, sleeplessness, and dissociation) remembered more information from the forensic interview about trauma and personal safety. The memory problems that participants had tended to be memory lapses; they did not tend to recall incorrect information.

Professional Factors

Mock Training Interviews

Powell and colleagues (2022) reviewed research supporting the use of mock interviews as a training tool for child forensic interviewing. Mock interviews offer the opportunity to practice skills, receive feedback on one's skills, facilitate the discussion of challenges in interviewing, and assist trainers with assessing trainees. Because trainees often play the role of interviewee in mock interviews, it also offers trainees insight into the experience of interviewees. The experiential learning inherent to mock interviews offers greater opportunities for trainee self-reflection. Powell and colleagues suggest that it is particularly important for learning how to ask open-ended questions, which is difficult to teach solely through trainers' verbal instruction. One challenge in using mock interviews is that the interviewee is an adult who may have difficulty simulating the responses of a child. This is not optimal for learning interviewing skills that match a child's developmental level. Mock interviews are more effective when interviewees are highly trained to respond to well-constructed and poorly constructed questions in a way that a child would respond.

Powell et al. describe a multi-stage process of developing effective scenarios to use, using standardized procedures for playing the role of a child, and rehearsing playing a child and responding in a life-like way to well-constructed and poorly constructed questions. An alternative to using adult actors is to use children recruited to be interviewed about a harmless event, although there is some concern that children in this situation may disclose actual abuse. Powell and colleagues (2022) also summarize the use of computer avatars in mock interviews (for more literature on avatars, see below).

Nicol and colleagues (2023) examined preparedness following initial training of forensic interviewers in Scotland by coding data on mock interviews of adult actors playing the role of a child. They found that trainee interviewers were inconsistent about communicating interview principles and about preparing the interviewees to provide narrative accounts, which is needed to enhance the quality of the narratives children provide about the abuse they have experienced. The substantive phase of the interview about the abuse tended to be conducted well, although directive questions were used just as frequently as invitations, which are the recommended type of questions to elicit the most information from children. Focused questions tended to be used prematurely, before children had finished a free narrative account of their experience.

Developing Avatars as a Training Tool

From 2022 to 2024, several publications from research teams based in Europe reported on the development of experimental virtual reality forensic interviewing training environments using avatars. Such publications as Hassan et al. (2022a, 2023) and Salehi et al. (2022) discuss the technical details. Segal et al. (2024) measured psychology students' emotional reactions to avatars in child sexual abuse scenarios and found students' experienced more anger, sadness and disgust when the avatar reported details that confirmed abuse and relief when the avatar's details disconfirmed abuse.

Studies have utilized mock forensic interviewing of avatars conducted by university students in child welfare, social work, and psychology (Hassan et al., 2023; Roed et al., 2023; Segal et al., 2024); child maltreatment and child protection professionals (Baugerad et al., 2025; Hassan et al., 2022b, 2023); and police investigators (Kask et al., 2022). Across several studies, participants gave moderate to high ratings on average on the quality of the experience and the functionality and usefulness of the avatar programs (Baugerad et al., 2025; Hassan et al., 2022b, 2023), though Baugerad et al. (2025) reported that some participants had mixed or negative attitudes about the avatar. The systems tested by Hassan et al. (2023) and Roed et al. (2023) demonstrated substantial accuracy in classifying type of interview question, suggesting promise in developing a system that can provide data on the quality of the mock forensic interviews with the avatars. Baugerud et al. (2025) found that the avatar gave more informative responses to recall questions that elicit more information from children in interviews, indicating that the program is responsive to the quality of the mock interviewing. Kask et al. (2022) found that providing feedback to police investigators who were using an avatar program improved the quality of the mock interviews and of subsequent real forensic interviews they conducted. For example, they used more open-ended invitations that elicit narrative responses. Several studies also reported limitations of the avatar programs such as a lack of visual realism and noticeable delays in response time, which reduced participants' sense that the interaction was natural interaction. Several of these studies (e.g., Baugerud et al, 2025; Hassan et al., 2023) report that further development of avatar programs is needed and in progress.

Peer Review

Danby and colleagues (2022) tested whether a 19-item interview assessment checklist used in Australia could help interviewers provide accurate peer reviews of interviews conducted by others. The checklist included sections assessing the opening and transitional phases and three sections for the sub-

stantive phase—questioning, repeated abuse considerations, and evidential requirements. The researchers prepared mock interview transcripts in which some of the phases were well-conducted, some were poorly conducted, and some were mixed in quality. A sample of 56 recently trained police interviewers peer reviewed the mock transcripts using the checklist. The peer reviewers accurately perceived the well-conducted interview phases but had poor or mediocre accuracy on the mixed quality or poorly conducted interview phases. The researchers concluded that the checklist was "too rigid" (p. 721) for interviews in which adherence to best practice was mixed and recommended developing peer review tools that used rating scales and written comments.

Professional Identity

Deck, Powell and Cordisco-Steele (2024) studied American forensic interviewers' professional identity in the same interviews that were used in Deck, Quas and Powell (2024), discussed above. To "avoid eliciting stereotypical or idealized responses" (p. 934), Deck and colleagues did not ask about professional identity directly. Instead, they identified themes related to professional identity from participants' responses to a question about their experiences as a forensic interviewer and questions asking them to describe the strategies they employed and the challenges they encountered as forensic interviewers.

One theme was the forensic interviewer as holder of the child's information. The interviewer's personality recedes to the point that the child may not recognize them later, and the interviewer focuses totally on facilitating the child's having a "positive experience" (p. 936) sharing their account. Participants used two metaphors that illustrate this theme. One is of the interviewer as a "sponge" absorbing the child's account, and the other is of the interviewer "unpacking" the child's account and then neatly packing it up again by the end of the interview.

A second theme was forensic interviewers as protectors of the "integrity and reliability" (p. 938) of the evidence. To do this, forensic interviewers employ best practice interviewing methods, utilize knowledge of children's development and memory, and support children in ways that maintain interviewers' neutrality (e.g., by responding empathically but noncommittally when children ask them questions such as "Has this ever happened to you?"). A third theme was prioritizing the child's well-being. Participants defined a successful interview as one in which the child felt "valued and respected," regardless of what the child shared. Sincerity, respect, and attention to helping the child feel comfortable and respected characterizes the interaction with the child. A fourth theme was being adaptive and using best practice skills flexibly in response to each child's needs and characteristics. Examples of flexibility included spending more time on rapport building if necessary or temporarily stopping questioning to help children with emotions that arose. The authors point out that knowledge gained from this line of research can inform the support of forensic interviewers' professional identify formation, which can positively influence decision-making in their work.

Forensic Interviewing Supports

Screening for Suicidality

Shepard and colleagues (2024) created and implemented a tool for CACs in Utah to screen for suicidality among youth aged 11 to 18 who present for forensic interviews. They screened 1,651 children and revealed that 46.2% endorsed thoughts of suicide or self-harm harm with 13.6% being high risk for suicide. The study highlights the need for integrating suicide screenings into the forensic interview process to identify and address the mental health needs of this population.

Use of Ground Rules

Lee and Chung's (2023) analogue study in Korea had potentially useful findings on the use of ground rules in child forensic interviews. One researcher engaged children in a play activity for 15 to 20 minutes and then, 10 minutes later, a qualified interviewer interviewed the children about the play activity, following the NICHD protocol. Parents completed the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire on their

children, which includes a scale for prosocial orientation (e.g., being considerate of others' feelings). Half of the children were given ground rules at the beginning of the interview, modeled after ground rules in a real forensic interview. For example, they were told to tell the truth, not to guess, and to tell the interviewer if they did not understand something or correct them if they said something incorrect. Ground rules had no effect on the free recall and resistance to suggestive questions of children with a prosocial orientation. Ground rules did, however, have a positive effect on these outcomes for children who lacked a prosocial orientation.

Note-taking

Williams and McWilliams (2024) surveyed 137 forensic interviewers across Canada and the U.S. and asked about note-taking during the forensic interview. A majority (81%) of forensic interviewers take notes to aid their memory recall and guide their follow-up questions. Note-taking usually involves strategic methods such as recording keywords. Interviewers who did not take notes cite concerns that they would distract the child and disrupt eye contact. Only half of forensic interviewers had training on note-taking, suggesting that this is a gap in forensic interviewer training programs.

Facility Dogs

Cyr and colleagues' Canadian study (2024) compared forensic interviews in which a facility dog was present to comfort the child versus forensic interviews without a dog. There were no differences between the groups in case characteristics. The presence of the dog had no impact on the quality of the questions asked by the forensic interviewer and rarely led to interruptions to the interview. The researchers raised questions about whether the dog had any effect on the interviews. They noted that the interviewers commented on the dog more than the children did, apparently to encourage the child to feel comfortable with it (e.g., "You can pet him," or "He is there for you"). However, the children's responses to the dog—typically neutral or observational questions such as "Is he old?" or offhand comments like "He snores"—suggest that they may not have viewed the dog as a source of comfort. Instead of expressing affection or seeking closeness, the children often seemed just curious or indifferent, indicating that the presence of the dog did not necessarily produce a comforting effect.

Interpreters

Two publications from the same research team concerned interpreter-mediated child forensic interviews in Sweden (Ernberg et al. 2023; Koponen et al., 2024), though the results are relevant for child forensic interviews everywhere. This is a particularly important topic in Sweden, where, due to substantial immigration in recent decades (see, e.g., Chutel, 2024), nearly a third of school-age children do not speak Swedish in their homes (Parkvall, 2019, as cited in Ernberg et al., 2023). Koponen and colleagues conducted an online survey with Swedish interpreters of child forensic interviews. On rating scales, most interpreters reported that interpretation generally worked well and gladly accepted these interpreting jobs, though a majority also reported that it was emotionally challenging. Several themes emerged from text responses about their experience of interpreting child forensic interviews:

- the pressure on interpreters,
- how much both children and interviewers vary,
- the challenges of communicating with children because of their developmental limitations,
- the need for interpreters with experience with children and understanding of child forensic interviewing,
- the challenge of faithfully reproducing what the interviewer asked while still responding to the immediate demands of the situation.

Ernberg and colleagues analyzed written documentation of the verdicts in court cases and found results that contradicted the interpreters' positive self-appraisal found by Koponen et al. Courts frequently expressed concern about language difficulties, confusion, and misinterpretation in interpreter-mediated

interviews. Often, these problems were cited as reasons for reduced value of the interviews as evidence and caution was given about using them to make decisions. Among this research team's recommendations are improved communication with children about the interpreter's role, improved guidelines for best practice, and specialized training for interpreters.

Interview Monitors

Interview monitors (also known as interview observers) observe the child forensic interview through a closed-circuit TV system or one-way mirror system in which they can communicate with the interviewer through audio electronics and/or during breaks (Price & Brand, 2024). They can provide immediate support and feedback to the interviewer, identify gaps in a child's account, help clarify inconsistent statements, suggest certain questions, and fact-check time-sensitive details. Price and Brand interviewed 13 experienced Canadian interviewers and monitors about their experience with and perceptions of interview monitoring. This resulted in the following recommendations (pp. 13-14):

1. Provide clear guidelines for interview monitors.
2. Ensure sufficient time for a pre-interview meeting in which expectations for the monitor and interviewer are clear and the objectives of the interview are understood by all parties.
3. Discuss the method of within-interview communication prior to the interview.
4. Breaks to confer should focus on actionable items that enhance the quality of the child's statement.
5. Allow time for immediate feedback on interview and interview monitoring after the interview.
6. Integrate peer review feedback from monitors into regular practice.

Cross Examination of Defense Experts Challenging Forensic Interviews

In a recent Zero Abuse Project publication, Victor Vieth, former director of the National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse, provided advice on how to counter court challenges to forensic interviews by defense experts (Vieth, 2022b). The primary audience for this publication is prosecutors in the United States, but forensic interviewers and multidisciplinary teams will find it useful, as will legal professionals in other countries. The article stresses the importance of collaboration between prosecutors and forensic interviewers, who may have expertise and court experience that can help prosecutors prepare for the cross-examination of the defense expert. Prosecutors should research the defense expert's background to see what training and experience they have had with forensic interviews, and, if indicated by this research, file pre-trial motions to limit or exclude the expert's testimony. In the direct examination of the forensic interviewer by the prosecutor in the trial, any interviewing errors should be proactively acknowledged. The direct examination should also review forensic interviewing standards; the forensic interviewer's training, experience, membership in professional organizations, and adherence to practice guidelines; and the science behind interview protocols. In cross-examination, the prosecutor should:

- Query the defense expert on their credentials.
- Examine the ethical guidelines of the expert's profession.
- Ask the expert for specific examples of flaws in the forensic interview (assuming it is sound) and not let them get away with general criticisms of it or ask the expert what the forensic interviewer did correctly.
- Ask the expert to define the components of a good interview and then show how the interviewer provided those components.

- Cross-examine the expert on any prior inconsistent statements they made.
- Point out research that contradicts the defense expert's report or claims.
- Cross-examine the expert to show the victim's consistency and explain any alleged inconsistencies in their statements.
- Counter claims that therapy tainted the child's interview by critiquing the ethics of delaying treatment.
- Highlight evidence that corroborates the child.
- Consider cross-examining the expert on their compensation, particularly if they are opposed in court only by the forensic interviewer, who is testifying as part of their job.

Vieth offers many specific suggestions for questions to ask in the direct examination of the interviewer and cross-examination of the defense expert. These are beyond the scope of this article, but readily accessible to those who seek out this publicly available document.

General Reviews

Three articles conducted different types of general reviews on child forensic interviewing. Fernandes and colleagues (2024) conducted a review of 146 research studies from around the world to determine which child forensic interviewing protocols were used in them. Some version of the NICHD protocol was used in 46.5% of studies. The next most common protocol studied was the Memorandum of Good Practice from the United Kingdom (6.5% of studies), and in 25.9% of studies, no particular protocol was used. Some protocols that have been commonly used in the United States, such as the APSAC protocol and the Cornerhouse RATAC protocol were represented in only a handful of studies. Fernandes et al. concluded, however, that the protocols had a similar structure, and thus research findings can often be generalized across protocols.

In another article, 23 international experts on child forensic interviewing and/or child abuse investigation and prosecution collaborated to discuss urgent issues in child forensic interviewing that future research needs to address (Talwar et al., 2025). The authors include such luminaries as Thomas Lyon, Gail Goodman and Linda Cordisco Steele. The article was organized around a set of 10 commentaries that were independently written, and most authors contributed to one commentary. Thus, the recommendations represent an array of different experts' opinions and not a consensus list. The ten topics for which future research was recommended were as follows:

- rapport in child forensic interviews
- investigative interviewing with adolescents
- interpreter-mediated interviews
- adolescent victims of trafficking
- enhancing the ecological validity of research on multiple interviews (in other words, conducting research more closely related to the fact that children often have multiple informal and formal opportunities to recount what happened to them)
- how training and organizational environments can facilitate or interfere with best practice interviewing
- lessons from exoneration of alleged perpetrators in child sexual abuse cases
- the impact of psychotherapy on children's memory
- questioning children about sexual abuse who have never disclosed
- expert testimony about child sexual abuse.

A team of experts from the European Association of Psychology and Law issued a white paper with 10 key research-based recommendations on forensic child interviewing (Korkman et al., 2024). Among the practices recommended are the use of forensic interviewers trained to understand all relevant aspects

of child development, the use of evidence-based interview protocols, a phased approach to the interview, hypothesis testing by the forensic interviewing, electronic recording of interviews, and specialized training of forensic interviewers. One recommendation opposes individuals other than the interviewer and child being present during the forensic interview. Another recommendation opposes the use of dolls or props in forensic interviews and opposes using doll play or drawings to make interpretations of possible abusive experiences.

Discussion

The amount of new literature on a variety of aspects of forensic interviewing is encouraging, though much more needs to be learned, as the plethora of recommendations for new research made by Talwar and colleagues (2025) emphasizes. New research that we cite is beginning to address some of the needs that Talwar et al. (2025) identified: the needs for research on investigative interviewing with adolescents, interpreter-mediated interviews, and how training can facilitate best practice interviewing. But even these are initial studies and the gulf between what is known and what we need to know remains great.

We found new literature that examines child forensic interviewing with specific child populations: adolescents, children with disabilities, children of different religious-ethnic backgrounds, and young suspected sexual offenders. Forensic interviewers who interview children and youth in these populations could enhance their skills by studying these texts. The research we reviewed on child psychological factors provides perspective on how children's emotions, memories and goals vary in ways that can affect their experience of the forensic interview and influence their responses. Careful study of these articles can help attune forensic interviewers to children's psychological experience before and during the interview and adapt their interviewing accordingly. Wu's (2022) study illuminates how memories for information reported in the forensic interview often persisted over two decades and reminds us of the long-term impact of the abuse children endure and the investigations they are involved in.

The literature on professional factors that we reviewed focuses on methods of developing, maintaining, and improving the quality of child forensic interviewing. Several articles contribute to the very sparse literature on training and peer review, areas that need more research. The largest number of articles we found was on the use of computer avatars as a training tool. Given the rapid growth of artificial intelligence and its enormous potential, it seems inevitable to us that this will be developed much further in coming years, and we recommend that forensic interviewers be proactive in forging relationships with developers of this new technology. Deck, Powell and Cordisco-Steele's (2024) work on the professional identity of forensic interviewers could play a valuable role in helping recruit, train, and support child forensic interviewers, by articulating and communicating the mission of child forensic interviewing.

The fact that forensic interviewers perform a specialized task in a special room with a special protocol might encourage the idea that they are separate and distinct, but they are a part of the multidisciplinary team and need its support. The work we reviewed in the forensic interviewing supports section suggests that professionals such as interview monitors, interpreters, and prosecutors can make a big difference in facilitating the forensic interview and enhancing its impact. Forensic interviewers need to build strong relationships with other members of their multidisciplinary team to support the interviewers' work and to maximize the value of forensic interviewing for multiple disciplines. Likewise, multidisciplinary teams need to treat support of forensic interviewers as an important part of their mission and collaborate extensively with their forensic interviewers.

The challenges of interpreter-mediated forensic interviewing are concerning but its use is inevitable in a world with increased migration and linguistically diverse populations. As two of the articles reviewed here and another article in this special issue make clear, the challenges of interviewing a child who

primarily speaks a second language need increased attention. In other articles we reviewed on supports to forensic interviewing, we found useful information on note-taking, research results specifying the impact of ground rules in forensic interviewing, and research findings indicating no effect of facility dogs on forensic interviewing. We think forensic interviewers and the organizations in which they work could use the information we reviewed to help develop better supports for forensic interviewing.

Our review suggests that research can be a sort of laboratory for forensic interviewers, helping to generate enhancements and improvements. Several articles we reviewed illuminate existing practices that have rarely been the subject of inquiry: use of ground rules, note-taking, facility dogs, interpreter-mediated interviews, interview monitors, mock interviews, and peer review. Other articles we reviewed examine innovations: screening for suicidality, a protocol for interviewing young suspected sexual offenders and the use of avatars as a training tool. Testing and elaboration of these practices and innovations in the field could have a broad positive impact.

Dialogue between researchers and practicing forensic interviewers is essential but challenging to develop. Forensic interviewers lack much of the infrastructure that could support this: a national organization, academic programs, and dedicated conferences and journals. The use of webinars, podcasts, and social media focused on child forensic interviewing is underdeveloped. The APSAC Colloquium and APSAC publications are indispensable but insufficient. We urge forensic interviewers, researchers, and leaders in the child abuse professional field to work on developing an infrastructure that would support useful exchanges between forensic interviewers and researchers and experts in fields such as law and medicine that can support forensic interviewing. One avenue for doing so would be to build on established forensic interviewing training programs such as APSAC's Forensic Interviewing Clinics (American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children, 2025), the National Children's Advocacy Center's Forensic Interviewing Training Model (NCAC, 2025), and the Zero Abuse Project's (2024) ChildFirst® Training. Another idea would be for the National Children's Alliance (2025), the membership organization of Children's Advocacy Centers, to undertake an initiative on developing an infrastructure to support child forensic interviewing.

In the meantime, we can appreciate how much research and expert practitioner attention is being devoted to forensic interviewing, much more than in many other important areas in the child abuse professional field and other professional fields such as family advocacy, law enforcement, and child protection investigation. This work contributes to constant improvement in the practice of child forensic interviewing.



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Authors Bio

Theodore P. Cross, PhD, FAPSAC *has been conducting research on the system response to child abuse and neglect for more than thirty-five years. He was the principal investigator of the Multi-Site Evaluation of Children's Advocacy Centers and has numerous publications on such topics as investigation and prosecution of child abuse, the use of DNA evidence in sexual assault cases, Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners, polygraph testing in child abuse cases, simulation training in child welfare, well-being and permanency outcomes for children in foster care, and Child Advocacy Studies for undergraduates and graduate students. He served on the APSAC Board Directors and is currently the editor of the APSAC Advisor and APSAC Alert. He was the 2018 recipient of the Mark Chaffin Outstanding Research Career Achievement Award from APSAC.*

Contact: tpcross@illinois.edu

Kennedi Foster *is a Chancellor's Scholar and McNair Scholar at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, where she is pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Clinical Psychology with a minor in Adult Development (expected May 2026). She is a research assistant in the Learning and Achievement Motivation Processes (LAMP) Lab, where she contributes to projects that address inequalities in education and explore how racial and social identity factors influence learning, achievement, and performance. Ms. Foster's independent research interests focus on risky behaviors in emerging adults and how surrounding environments influence the decisions they make today. She has co-authored research on child forensic interviewing and contributed to projects exploring student mindsets in online learning. She aspires to pursue a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology, beginning in the Fall of 2026.*

Contact: Kfost5@illinois.edu