

# CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

**Harborview Center for Sexual Assault & Traumatic Stress**

1401 East Jefferson, 4<sup>th</sup> floor

Seattle, WA 98122-5570

206-521-1800

*Contact: Laura Merchant, M.S.W., Assistant Director*

lmerchan@u.washington.edu

**Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission**

19010 First Avenue South

Seattle, WA 98148-2055

*Contact: Patti Toth, J.D., Program Manager – Child Abuse Training*

206-835-7293

ptoth@cjtc.state.wa.us

# CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

## Section One

*This **Child Interview Guide** was developed by the WA State Criminal Justice Training Commission and the Harborview Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress. The Guide is based on the NICHD Protocol for Investigative Interviews of Alleged Sex Abuse Victims (Michael Lamb, Kathleen Sternberg, Phillip Esplin, Irit Hershkowitz, and Yale Orbach).*

***Use of the Guide:** This Guide is intended to **assist** the interviewer/investigator through an investigative interview with children. It is meant for use by law enforcement, CPS workers, specialized child interviewers, and others who have responsibility to conduct the investigative interview. These professionals are encouraged to coordinate their efforts in order to minimize the number of interviews of individual children.*

*The **Guide** provides an empirically based method of interviewing that helps interviewers incorporate research-based interviewing techniques with their own styles while allowing for the individual differences of each child. It is aimed at encouraging accurate and complete narratives from children. The Guide works best with grade-school-age children. Many of the techniques are useful with pre-school age children and adolescents. Keep in mind that concerns about suggestibility are no greater with developmentally normal teens than with adults.*

*The **Guide** is set up in stages but the interviewer can be flexible regarding following the exact order. Generally, begin by engaging child in a warm, friendly manner with simple, general “get acquainted” type questions. Address introduction, documentation, ground rules, and rapport building prior to exploring the reason for concern.*

*Be patient. Listen to what the child says. Take time to think and formulate your next question. Whenever possible, use what the child has just said in your next question (and use the child’s words.)*

*It is important to remember that the interview is only one aspect of a complete investigation. The interviewer should keep in mind that information generated during a skilled interview may lead to corroborative evidence, such as providing the basis for interviews with other witnesses and searches for physical evidence.*

*The first section of the Guide provides the interviewer with the central framework and principles of good interviewing. Definitions of key concepts are included.*

*The second section of Guide provides the interviewer with examples of questions and statements that can be used for each stage of the interview.*

- *Unless specifically stated, in this Guide the term “younger children” refers to children 11 yrs and younger.*

# CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

## I. Preparing for the Interview

- Always consider the child's age and developmental level when talking to the child. Adjust your interview and vocabulary accordingly.
- Take time before the interview to find out whether the child has special needs. If the child has needs related to developmental and /or physical disabilities, try to consult with a specialist who knows the child and can provide input into how the disability may impact the child's ability to provide and receive information. Adjust your interview accordingly.
- When interviewing a child from a cultural or ethnic background different than your own, consider consulting a specialist from that background about ethnic/cultural factors that may impact the interview process. Adjust your interview accordingly.
- Know ahead of time if an interpreter is required and ensure a qualified one is present for the interview. (Avoid using another child or family member to interpret.)
- If possible before the interview, find out about a neutral event (birthday/holiday/activity) in the child's life that may assist in establishing rapport, practicing narratives, and assessing the child's memory and developmental level.
- Take time before the interview to consider alternative explanations for the statements or behavior leading to concern about the possibility of abuse. Abuse may or may not have occurred. This will enable you to ask questions to more fully and objectively explore what the child may have experienced. **Keep an open mind**
- Take time before the interview to formulate specific questions (especially "transition" questions) based on the information available related to the reasons for concern about the possibility of abuse.
- Be alert to negative stereotyping. Be careful not to put a value judgment on what the child says. Use objective language with child.

## II. Introduction

- Begin with introducing yourself and give a neutral explanation of your job and role.
- Introduce anyone else in the room/anyone observing.
- Engage child with general get-acquainted type questions to help child feel more welcome and at-ease.

## III. Documentation

- Tell the child about the documentation method you are using.
- Explain the purpose of documenting the conversation.
- Explain if anyone is observing the interview & introduce as appropriate.

## IV. Ground Rules

### Truth/Lie:

- Inform the child that he/she should talk only about things that really happened.
- **For children pre-school through age 7**, use Appendix A to determine Truth/Lie understanding.
- **For children ages 8-11**, use scenarios to demonstrate the child understands the difference between telling the truth and telling a lie. Refer to scenario in this Guide.

## CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

- **For children ages 12 and older**, establish that child understands what it means to be truthful, in terms the child can understand.
- **For all children**, establish that the child understands it is wrong to lie. (Refer to Appendix A for children pre-school through age 7).
- **For all children**, elicit an agreement to tell the truth or to talk only about things that really happened.

### **Other Ground Rules:**

- Instruct all children about these rules. Elicit acknowledgment. There is no need to practice with children 12 years and older unless the child seems confused.
- Inform the child that you don't know what happened and need the child to tell you everything he/she remembers in his/her own words.
- Give the child permission to correct you. **Check out** the child's ability /willingness to do so by mis-stating a fact about a neutral topic and see if the child will correct you. Follow up with the child to explain and elicit correction.
- Encourage the child to admit any lack of knowledge, understanding, or memory. **Check out child's ability/willingness to do so.**
- Explain that a repeated question doesn't mean the child was wrong or wasn't believed, but that maybe the interviewer forgot, got confused, or needed clarification.
- Give the child permission to decline to answer uncomfortable questions "right now."

### **V. Rapport Building/Developmental Assessment/Practicing Narratives**

- Encourage the child to give narrative accounts about neutral **events** by asking open-ended questions. Request the child elaborate and provide more details.
- The child's answers should be longer than interviewer questions.
- Begin by addressing neutral topics such as school, hobbies, after-school activities, and family. (Keep in mind that in some cases, a family member may be the suspected abuser. This may prevent the topic of family from being a neutral subject.)
- **Then ask child to tell about a specific event from beginning to end. This gives the child the opportunity to provide a comprehensive narrative, and demonstrate memory abilities.**

#### **Special Event:**

- If possible, identify an event the child recently experienced: first day of school; birthday party; holiday celebration; vacation or field trip; etc. Ask about that event.
- Start with open-ended invitations to get a narrative account. Ask the child to tell all about the event from beginning to end.
- Follow with requests to elaborate, using time segmentation and sensory focus questions to try to get more information. Continue questioning as indicated.

#### **Yesterday or Today:**

If unsuccessful in eliciting narrative information about a specific event, try asking about what the child did "yesterday" or "today."

## CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

- Young children may have trouble with the concept of “yesterday”, so interviewer may use “today.”
- Begin with open-ended prompts, and follow with requests for elaboration, and time segmentation and sensory focus questions.
- Language, pacing, and complexity of questions should match child’s pacing and speech, and developmental level.
- Preschool age children will often need more focused questions to provide information, but also tend to be more susceptible to suggestion. Be sure to pair focused questions with open-ended follow-up invitations.
- Address developmental concepts as needed. Use concrete, simple questions for younger children. When using conceptual terms (over/under, up/down, in/out, before/after, today/yesterday/tomorrow), ensure that the child understands.

*End this section with a statement reiterating the need for the child to tell only about things that really happened.*

### VI. Transition to Substantive Issues

- Take time before the interview to formulate specific questions based on information previously provided. Write these questions down. Be sure these questions suggest as few details as possible.
- Begin with open-ended questions: ask if the child knows why you’re talking to him/her, what s/he was told by person who accompanied him/her, and/or why child *thinks* you want to talk to him/her.
- Indicate you understand something may have happened and ask the child to tell you what happened. (Use this technique if the child doesn’t respond to initial questions about why s/he is there.)
- Emphasize that the interviewer wasn’t there and doesn’t know what happened.
- Ask appropriate contextual questions, especially when the child has not previously reported abuse to anyone. (Use the questions you formulated as you prepared for the interview).
- Narrow the focus of questions a little at a time as needed (funnel, or hourglass, approach), rather than jumping to the more direct questions right away.
- If the child gives information related to abuse concerns, clarify whether there was a single incident or whether there were multiple incidents. **Don’t ask** young children to tell you **how many times** something happened. Then focus on the most recent incident and return to open-ended follow-ups, requests to elaborate, time segmentation and sensory focus questions to gather detailed information about that incident before moving on to other incidents.
- Always consider using time segmentation and sensory focus questions (sights, sounds, etc.) to elicit more details.
- Be alert for any signs of reluctance or anxiety and address them.
- If the child doesn’t report abuse, the interviewer must assess the need to either continue questioning or stop the interview. More direct questions may be needed if, based on the information already provided, there is a concern that the risk to the child is too high to stop the interview. Remember, abuse may not have occurred.
- If outside information strongly suggests or confirms abuse (e.g., photos exist, the suspect has admitted, an eyewitness gives credible account, etc.), focused questions are much less risky – you can ask directly about something for which you have good independent evidence. Follow up with open-ended prompts and requests to elaborate.

## CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

### VII. Investigating the Incidents

*Once the child has said something related to abuse concerns, questioning should maximize use of techniques that encourage narrative responses:*

- **Separate** Separation of incidents (last, first, another time); attempt to explore each incident separately
- **Invite** Open-ended invitations
- **Elaborate** Requests to elaborate
- **Focus**
  - **Time** Time segmentation
  - **Senses** Sensory focus
  - **Key Facts**
    - Focused questions relating to the specific incident mentioned by the child
    - Focused questions relating to other incidents mentioned by the child
- **Clarify & Elaborate**
  - When direct questions are asked, pair them with open ended followed up questions
  - Ask clarifying questions

### VIII. Use of Interview Tools

- It is appropriate to allow children to free style draw as a way to engage them or to give them something to do with their hands.
- Carefully assess whether or not tools will clarify abuse related information provided by the child during the interview.
- Body maps may be used to clarify abuse related statements already provided by the child during the course of the investigative interview. Try using the least suggestive tools first, for example – a “gingerbread” outline of a person instead of anatomical drawings.
- Use of body diagrams as the initial entry into abuse content, should be the **exception** and not the rule.
- Once a child has indicated that abuse has occurred, you may clarify their terms for body parts through body diagram or body parts inventory.
- Having the child draw or write about the abuse (if child has already acknowledged that abuse has occurred) may be a helpful as well as powerful way to explain the abuse when the child has difficulty talking about what happened. (This becomes part of the client record or case.)
- “Feeling faces” may be used, when needed, to help young children demonstrate/report/talk about how they feel about certain people or situations. This can be especially helpful for children with developmental disabilities.
- The child can talk on a toy telephone, or use a puppet if that enables him/her to tell you things. [**Interviewer must be clear with the child that this is a tool to help talk and it is not an opportunity to “play” or “pretend.”**]

## CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

### IX. Break (Optional)

- Take this break as needed. It is especially useful when others are observing the interview. If the interview is for a more limited safety assessment, a break may not be needed.
- Tell the child why there is a break.
- Do **not** turn the audio or video recorder off – **leave it running** during this break.
- During break time, review notes, and/or check with interview observers to see if any additional information is needed. Plan the rest of the interview and draft notes for possible focused questions.

#### After the Break:

- Resume questioning based on reflection and consultation during break.

### X. Eliciting Information That Has Not Been Mentioned by the Child During the Interview

The interviewer should ask these focused questions if s/he has tried other approaches and still feels that forensically important information is missing, such as information related to concerns about the child's safety.

- Ask about **other potential victims and other possible offenders** as appropriate.
- If there are previous known conversations in which the child has provided information, indicate knowledge of those conversations. This cues the child to the person s/he talked to previously, without reference to content.
- If details about prior statements by the child are known and the child has not told interviewer, briefly summarize concerns without mentioning specific details if possible. Then ask for clarification, corrections or elaboration.
- If an abuse-related incident was observed, let the child know what was observed, summarizing it in the least suggestive way, and ask child to elaborate, clarify or correct interviewer.
- If the child talks about having told someone else about the incident(s), ask the child to tell the interviewer about what happened, because you need to hear it from child.
- Find out the circumstances surrounding any previous statements made by the child.
- Address prior abuse related statements made by the child. This will help in considering any contamination, exploring alternative explanations, and assessing consistency in the child's report.
- Consider telling the child that you have information about the abuse such as solid proof/evidence of abuse, e.g. pictures/offender confession/video.

### XI. Closing

- Thank the child for his/her effort, **not** the content.
- Ask the child if there is anything he/she wants the interviewer to know, or wants to ask the interviewer. Talk to the child briefly about a neutral topic.
- Address a safety plan if you are concerned about potential risk to the child.
- Offer your business card to the child and invite him/her to call with any questions or thoughts about your talk today.

# CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

## Definitions

**Narrative invitations/Open-ended prompts:** Broad invitations using open-ended questions or statements to encourage the child to talk. These questions are designed to increase the details and accuracy of responses without the use of focused questions. They encourage the child to talk “in paragraph form” about an event or topic, without input or interruption from the interviewer. These questions trigger recognition memory.

### Examples:

- *“Tell me about...”*
- *“Tell me all about daycare.”*
- *“I’d like to know you better. Tell me about what you like to do.”*
- *“Tell me everything that happened, even the little parts you don’t think are important.”*
- *“Tell me about your family.”*
- *“What happened next?”*

**Focused questions:** Questions that focus on a particular person, body part, action, location, or circumstance of the abuse concerns. These questions often elicit relevant information but are not leading. These questions are more specific than open-ended questions and may be used to introduce a new topic. These questions trigger recall memory.

### Examples:

- *“I heard you talked to your teacher about something that happened to you. Tell me what happened.”*
- *“You said you and Miguel were in the garage. Tell me what happened when you and Miguel were in the garage.”*

**Direct/closed questions:** Questions that are yes/no and multiple-choice follow-up inquiries to elicit additional details from the child. These questions may be necessary if the child is not responding well to narrative and more open-ended techniques. These questions may be useful to cue the child’s memory but should be carefully phrased to reduce the amount of new information introduced in the question. Multiple-choice questions should include all relevant options and a catchall category (e.g., “Was Uncle Rob in the house, in the yard, or someplace else?”) These questions often combine the identity of a person with potentially abusive action and therefore are more suggestive than focused questions.

### Examples:

- *“Was Uncle Rob in the house, in the yard, or someplace else?”*
- *“Did Mary touch you on some other part of your body?”*

**Paired questions:** When compelled to use focused or direct questions, follow up with an open-ended question or a narrative invitation that allows for a narrative account by the child.

### Example:

- After child reported that Tommy touched his “winkie”, interviewer asked: *“Tell me everything about the time Tommy touched your winkie.” [pause for response] “Did Tommy touch you with some other part of his body?” [Pause for response] “Tell me all about that time.”*



## CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

**Time segmentation:** Probing for details by asking about a particular time during an event described by the child - breaking down a reported event into smaller segments of time.

**Example:**

- *“You told me about your birthday party. Tell me what you did from the time your friends came to your party until you opened your presents.”*

**Sensory focus questions:** Questions that focus on the senses, especially sight, sound, smell, and taste.

**Examples:**

- *“Think about what it looked like, and tell me everything you saw.”*
- *“Think about the sounds, and tell me everything you heard.”*

**Substantive questions:** Questions related to abuse concerns.

**Examples:**

- *“You said Tommy touched you in a way you didn’t like. Tell me about that.”*
- *“Tell me about how Tommy touched you with his hands, from the beginning until he stopped touching you.”*

# CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

## Section Two

### I. Preparing for the Interview

- Remember to use your pre-interview preparation.

### II. Introduction

“Hello, my name is [Name]. My job is to talk with [children/kids/teens] about things that happen to them.”

“I’m a police officer/a social worker. What do you think my job is/What do you think I do?”

“Detective [Name] is here today. She’ll be sitting in with us.”

“This is [Name]. He’s here to listen/help take notes.”

### III. Documentation

#### If audio or video-taping:

“Today is [date] and it is now [time]. I am interviewing [child’s name] at [location]”

“As you can see, there is a video-camera/tape recorder here. It will record us, so I can remember everything you tell me. Sometimes I forget things and the recorder lets me listen to you without having to write everything down.” (Implied consent)

“Is it alright with you if I record our talk today?” [Yes/No] (Informed consent)

#### If taking notes:

“I will be taking notes about what we talk about today, so that I can remember everything you tell me. Sometimes I might need your help to make sure I get everything right.”  
[Note any response from the child.]

### IV. Ground Rules

#### Truth/Lie:

#### For younger children (11 and under):

“I talk with lots of children. It’s always important that they tell me the truth. So, before we begin, I want to make sure that you understand how important it is to tell the truth.”

“I want to make sure you know the difference between what is true and not true/what it means to tell the truth and to tell a lie/what is real and not real.”

#### For children pre-school through age 7:

#### Use Appendix A.

Then, “Today as we talk, will you promise to tell the truth/talk only about this things that really happened?” [Wait for a response]

## CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

### For children ages 8 to 11, use the following:

“I want you to listen to this story and tell me what you think:

Joe ate all the cookies. Joe’s mom asked if he ate the cookies and Joe said ‘No, the dog ate the cookies.’ Is Joe telling the truth or telling a lie?” [Wait for response]

“That would be a lie/would not be true, because Joe really ate the cookies.”

[If child demonstrates understanding, move to assess the child’s understanding of the importance of telling the truth:]

“Is it right or wrong/good or bad to tell the truth/tell a lie?” [Wait for response]

“What happens when someone lies/to people who tell lies?” [Wait for response]

“I see that you understand what telling the truth means/what is real and not real. It is very important that you only tell me the truth today. You should only tell me about things that really happened to you.”

### For children 12 and over:

“I talk with lots of kids and it’s always important that they tell me the truth.”

*For all children, elicit a promise or agreement to tell the truth/talk only about things that really happened.*

“Today as we talk, will you promise to tell the truth/talk only about this things that really happened?” [Wait for a response]

### Other Ground Rules:

- “**I don’t have all the answers.** So when we talk today, I need you to tell me everything in your own words, because I wasn’t there and I don’t know what happened to you.”
- “If I make a mistake, **I want you to tell me/correct me.**”
- “If I ask a question and you **don’t know the answer**, just say, ‘I don’t know.’ Okay?”
- “If I ask you a question and you **don’t remember**, it’s okay to say you don’t remember.”
- “If I ask you the same question more than once, it doesn’t mean your first answer was wrong, maybe I forgot or got confused. If your first answer was right, just tell me again.” [Wait for response]
- “If I ask you a question you **don’t want to answer**, just tell me ‘I don’t want to talk about it right now’.”

## CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

**For younger children (11 and under) and for children who may be shy or deferential to authority, practice “If I make a mistake”:**

“So if I said that your name is [use an incorrect name], what would you say?”  
[If the child does not correct you, say:]  
“What would you say if I made a mistake and called you [an incorrect name]?”  
[Wait for response.]  
“That’s right. Now you know it’s okay to tell me if I make a mistake or say something that is not right.”  
“And if I say things that are wrong, you should tell me. Okay?”

**For younger children (11 and under) and for any other children for whom it seems appropriate, practice “I don’t know”:**

“So, if I ask you, ‘What is my dog’s name?’ what would you say?”  
[Wait for an answer.]  
**If the child says, “I don’t know,” say:**  
“Right. You don’t know, do you?”  
**If the child offers a guess, say:**  
“No, you don’t know because I haven’t told you my dog’s name. When you don’t know the answer, don’t guess - it’s okay to say that you don’t know.”  
Have the child practice again. [Pause.]

### V. Rapport Building/Developmental Assessment/Practicing Narratives

“Now I want to get to know you better/to find out more about you.”  
“Tell me about things you like to do.”  
[Wait for response.]  
[If the child does not answer, gives a short answer, or gets stuck, you can ask:]  
“I really want to know you better. Tell me more about [from previous short answer]. Or, “Tell me about things you like to do with your friends.”  
[Wait for response.]  
“Tell me more about [activity the child has mentioned in his/her account or ask about special interests, hobbies, activities, sports groups the child is involved in – [AVOID FOCUSING ON TV, VIDEOS, AND FANTASY].  
[Wait for response.]  
“Now that I know about some of the things you like to do, I want to hear about your school/pre-school. Tell me all about your school/pre-school.” “Tell me some things you like/don’t like about school.”

## CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

[Wait for response]

[If the child does not answer, gives a short answer, or gets stuck, you can ask:]

“Tell me about your favorite subject/your teacher.”

[Wait for response.]

“Tell me about the other children in your class.”

[Wait for response. Once topic is exhausted, move to questions about family.]

“I would like to know about your family. Tell me about your family.”

[Wait for response.]

“What else can you tell me about your family?”

### **Invite and Elaborate - Special event**

**At this point, move to having the child tell about a specific event. The purpose is for the child to practice giving a complete narrative about a single event from beginning to end.**

“A few [days/weeks] ago was [holiday/ birthday party/ the first day of school/ other event]. Tell me everything that happened then.”

“You were telling me about [activity or event]. Tell me everything you can remember from the time [event] began until it ended.”

“And then what happened? Tell me more.”

### **Focus - Use time segmentation to probe for more details:**

“Tell me everything that happened from [one portion of the event mentioned by the child] to [another portion].”

Continue **open-ended follow-ups** and **requests to elaborate:**

“Tell me more about [activity mentioned by the child].” **Or**

“Earlier you mentioned [activity of child]. Tell me everything about that.”

### **Focus - Sensory focus to probe for more details:**

“Think about [previously mentioned event]. Tell me about [the sounds you heard/the things you saw.]”

**Yesterday or Today (for children 11 and younger) (Only use if asking about a specific event did not elicit a comprehensive narrative and account)**

“I really want to know about things that happened to you. Tell me everything that happened yesterday from the time you woke up until you went to bed..”

**Or**

“Tell me everything that happened to you today, from the time you got up until [I came to talk to you/you came to see me.]”

“I don’t want you to leave anything out. Tell me everything that happened from the time you

## CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

woke up until [some activity or portion of the event mentioned by the child in response to the previous question].”

### VI. Transition to Substantive Issues

Begin by stating, “Now I want to talk to you about why you are here today/why I came to talk to you today.”

**Open-ended questions:** (If the child does not report abuse after one open-ended question, move to other open-ended questions, and if necessary, ask more focused questions – see examples. If the child makes a report about abuse, move to section # VII)

“Tell me why you think [I came to talk to you today/you came to see me today].”

“As I told you, my job is to talk to kids. Tell me why [you are here/ you came here/ why you think I came to talk to you today]”

“Did anyone say anything to you about why I’m talking to you?”

“What did [person who brought you here] tell you about why I wanted to talk to you?”

“Tell me why you think [accompanying person] brought you here.”

“I understand that something may have happened to you. Tell me everything that happened from the beginning to the middle to the end.”

[If the child has made a prior statement:] “I heard that you talked to [identified person] about something that happened to you. It’s important for me to understand, tell me what happened.”

“Tell me about [context/location of alleged abuse].”

### Vague concerns/allegations:

“Tell me about the people who live with you.”

“Tell me some things you like/don’t like about [person].” [Wait for response.] “What don’t you/do you like about [person]?”

“What happens when you go to [location]?” [Wait for response] “Tell me all about that.” OR “What are fun/not so fun things that happen at [location]?”

### Specific examples:

“Earlier we talked about daycare, tell me about the teachers who work there.”

“Earlier you talked about visits to your dad’s. Tell me what happens at your dad’s.”

“Who helps you get ready for bed?” “Tell me more about tuck-in time.”

*If these contextual questions don’t elicit information from the child regarding abuse concerns, you have the option to move to carefully considered focused questions.*

### Focused questions:

“Tell me more about [location/time of alleged incident/ alleged offender]. What are some things you [like/don’t like]. Why?” “Tell me about that.”

## CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

### Respond to non-verbal actions or specific concerns of the child:

“I see you’re crying. Tell me why.”/“You’re very quiet. Tell me why.”  
“What do you think will happen if you tell? Why?”  
“What makes you think you might be in trouble?” “Tell me more about that.”

### More focused transition questions:

“I heard you talked to [identified person] about [a problem you were having/ a picture that you drew, etc.].” [Pause] “Tell me about [problem/picture/etc].”

[If no response ask:]

“Your [mom/teacher/counselor/friend] is worried that something might have happened to you. Do you know what [your mom/teacher/counselor/friend] is worried about?”

“I heard you were doing something at [location] – [touching other children/saying bad words, etc]. Tell me about that.”

“I heard you talked to [identified person] about [brief description of event]. Tell me what happened.”

“Did somebody [briefly summarize allegations or suspicions without specifying names of alleged perpetrator or providing too many details].”

### Specific example:

“Did somebody do something wrong to you/do something you didn’t like?”

## VII. Investigating the Incidents

### SEPARATE: Separation of incidents and exploration of specific incidents

*As soon as you get an indication about possible abuse from the child, clarify whether there was a single incident or multiple incidents.*

“Did that happen one time or more than one time?”

*If child says “one time,” ask questions as indicated below & maximize use of open-ended technique and use recommended pattern of questions [INVITE, ELABORATE, FOCUS (time, senses, key facts), CLARIFY AND ELABORATE ]to exhaust information about the event.*

### INVITE: Open-ended invitations

“Tell me everything about [child’s words describing the allegation].”

[With older children, you can simply say, “Tell me everything about that.”]

“Tell me everything that happened, from the beginning to middle to end, even the little parts you don’t think are important.”

## CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

### **ELABORATE: Requests to elaborate**

“Then what happened?”

“What happened next?”

“Tell me more about [person/ object/ activity mentioned by the child].”

“You mentioned [person/ object/ activity mentioned by the child], tell me everything about that.”

### **TIME: Time segmentation**

“Think back to that [day/ night]. Tell me everything that happened from [some previous event mentioned by child] until [alleged abusive incident described by child].”

“Tell me everything about [one segment of the event to another segment of the event]”

### **SENSES: Sensory focus**

“Think about what it looked like when [event]. Tell me everything you saw.”

“Think about what it sounded like. Tell me everything you heard.”

### **KEY FACTS: Focused questions relating to specific incident mentioned by child:**

*The general format of a focused question is:*

“You said/talked about [person/object/activity]”. “[Ask for specific detail]”.

#### **Specific examples:**

“You said that one of your friends saw [event]. What was [his/her] name?” [Pause, wait for response] “Tell me what [name of friend] was doing there.”

“You said you were watching TV. What were you watching?” “Tell me everything that happened when you were watching\_\_\_\_\_.”

“Earlier you said that your daddy ‘messed with you.’ Tell me what you mean by ‘messed with you’.”

“Earlier you said that your uncle used Vaseline. Tell me exactly what [your uncle] did.”



## CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

*If child indicates there was “more than one” incident, start by asking about most recent time: Use pattern of questions [INVITE, ELABORATE, FOCUS (time, senses, key facts), CLARIFY AND ELABORATE] to exhaust information about first event. Then explore other incidents as appropriate:*

“Tell me everything about the **last time** [event mentioned by child] happened.”

*Use pattern of questions to exhaust information about most recent event. Then,*

“Tell me everything about the **first time** [event mentioned by child] happened

*Use pattern of questions to exhaust information about most recent event. Then,*

“Tell me everything about [another time you remember].”

“Tell me about the time in [a location mentioned by the child].”

“You mentioned [person]. Tell me all about what happened the time [person] was there.”

“Tell me everything about [previous event mentioned by child].”

### **CLARIFY and ELABORATE:**

“You’ve told me a lot, and that’s really helpful, but I’m a little confused. To be sure I understand, tell me again [how it started; how it ended/etc.]”

“Let’s see if I’ve got this right. [Briefly summarize each segment of the event]. [Pause after each segment and elicit response as to accuracy of each segment].”

## **VIII. Use of Tools**

“**Where** did \_\_\_\_ happen? Tell me everything about where it happened/draw a picture of where it happened.”

“Draw me a picture of what happened in the [location].”

“You don’t want to say it? How about writing down the word for me.”

### **Specific examples:**

“You said that Jamal licked you on your coochie. Show me on this picture/doll where your coochie is.” “Draw me a picture of what Jamal did.” “ Draw me a picture of where you were when Jamal licked your coochie.”

“You said Nina put her finger in your pookie. Show me on this picture/doll how she put her finger in your pookie.”

“You told me that you had to kiss David’s ‘icky’. Draw me a picture of David’s ‘icky’.” **OR** “Draw me a picture of the time you had to kiss David’s ‘icky’.”

## CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

### IX. Break (Optional)

“Now I want to make sure I understand what happened to you. I will just [think about what you told me/go over my notes/go and check with (name of observer)] to see if there’s anything else I need to ask you.”

#### After the Break:

“Tell me more about [unclear information].”/“What else happened?”/ “Then what happened?”/“Tell me everything about that.”

### X. Eliciting Information That Has Not Been Mentioned by the Child

“When you told me about \_\_\_\_\_ you said \_\_\_\_\_. [focused question]?”

Follow with an invitation - “Tell me [all/everything/more] about that.”

#### Specific examples:

“You told me about the time in the basement, when Sam took off his pants. What happened to your clothes?” “ Tell me all about that.”

“You told me about the time on the playground. Did somebody else see what happened?” “Who?” “Tell me more about that.”

“Do you know if something like that happened to other children?” “How do you know?” “Tell me everything about that.”

“Did someone else ever [touch you/make you touch them] like that before?” “One time or more than one time?” “Tell me everything [about that].”

#### If child fails to mention information previously provided by others:

“I heard that you talked to [person’s name] at [time/place]. Tell me what you talked about.”

“I heard [summarize allegation, specifically but without mentioning incriminating details if possible]. Tell me everything about that.”

“I saw/heard [summarize knowledge/proof]”. “Tell me in you own words about what happened.” It is okay to ask direct questions about known facts. Then ask child to tell in his/her own words.

“Has something happened to you at [place/time]? Tell me everything about that.”

If needed:

“I heard that someone saw [summarize what was seen in the least suggestive way possible]. Tell me everything about that.”

#### Carefully assess whether to use more specific questions such as:

“Did somebody touch you on your privates when you were at grandma’s?” If response is affirmative ask: “ Tell me about that.”

## CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

### If the child talks about having told someone else about the incident(s):

“Tell me everything you can about how [the person mentioned by the child] found out.”  
“Tell me everything you talked about with [person child talked to].”  
“Does someone else know about [alleged abuse as described by the child]? Who? Tell me what [name] knows about it.”

### When direct questions are necessary, pair with open-ended questions.

“Did someone touch your \_\_\_\_\_?” If response is affirmative ask: “Tell me everything that happened.”  
“What did [person] touch your \_\_\_\_\_ with?” [Wait for response] “Tell me all about that.”

### If during the investigative interview, the child didn't mention telling anyone, seek information to clarify how the abuse information became known.

Open-ended invitation: “Tell me what happened after [specific incident].”  
More-focused: “Does somebody else know what happened?” “Who?”  
Another way to try: “I want understand how other people found out about [the specific incident].”  
Another way to try: “Who was the first person besides you and [the alleged offender] to find out about [alleged abuse as described by the child]?”  
How did [person to whom child reported incident, who then made report which brought the allegation to your attention] find out about what happened?”

## XI. Closing

“You have answered lots of questions/told me lots of things today. **Thank you for talking with me.**”  
“Is there something else you feel like telling me right now/is there something else you want me to know right now?”  
“Are there any questions you want to ask me about what we talked about today?”  
Ask the child safety questions:  

- “Who can you tell if you are worried about something?”
- “Who can you get help from if you are hurt or something bad or scary happens to you?”
- “Why do you think [person named] can help you?”
- “What can [person named] do to help you?”

Refocus child to neutral topic – “Now you are going to go back to class. What will you do when you get back to class?” “Thanks for talking with me. What are you going to do after we are done here?”  
As appropriate, briefly tell child your next steps. “Now I'm going to talk to [name].”

# CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

## APPENDIX A

### Truth/Lie Tasks

The purpose of using Lyon/Saywitz **Materials for Interviewing Professionals** is to assist the child interviewer in “determining whether a child witness understands the difference between truth and lies, and appreciates the importance of telling the truth.” (Lyon/Saywitz, **Qualifying Children to Take the Oath: Materials for Interviewing Professionals**. Revised May 2000).

*For the purposes of use with the Washington State Child Interview Guide, these tasks will be conducted with children pre-school through age 7.*

The following is a synopsis of the above-mentioned article by Lyon and Saywitz, which includes the actual materials for use in the interview. For a copy of their article, go to <http://hal-law.usc.edu/users/tlyon>.

Lyon and Saywitz developed tasks for the purpose of minimizing young children’s difficulties with defining and discussing truth and lies, and to ensure that young children will not falsely appear competent due to guessing.

The first task, (**truth vs. lie**) evaluates whether the child understands the words “truth” and “lie.” The second task (**morality**) determines whether a child understands the consequence of telling a lie.

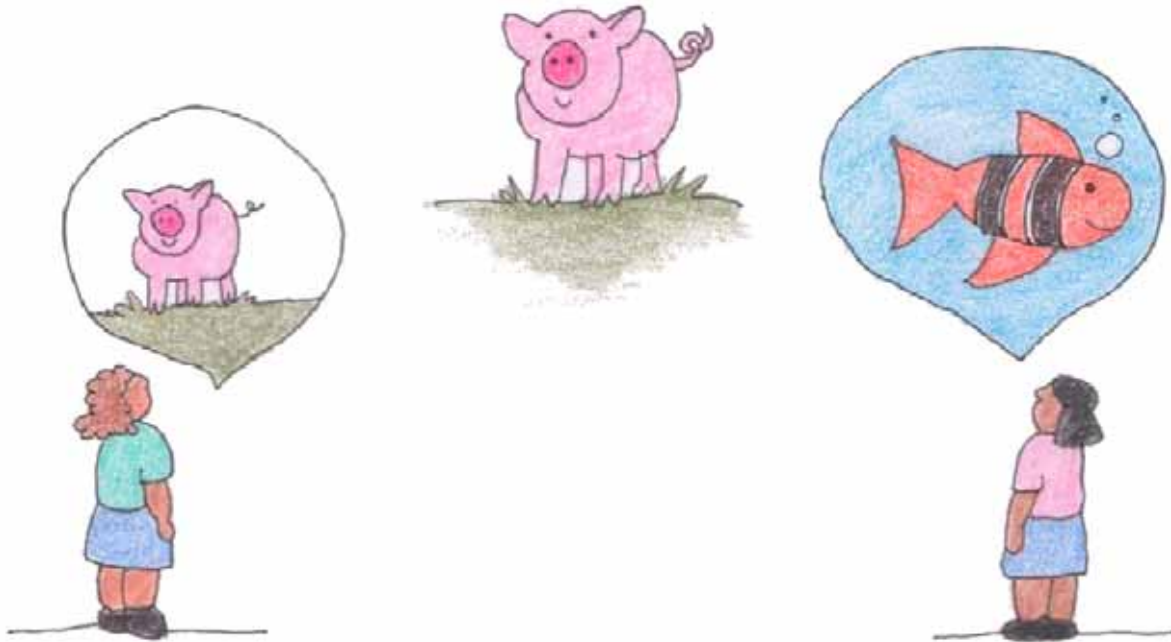
- Give the child four different **truth vs. lie task** problems. If the child answers four of the four problems correctly, this demonstrates good understanding of the concept.
- Emphasize the words that appear in the capital letters in the script when reading the script to the children.
- Once the child gives an answer to an item question, say “okay” in a friendly manner that does not indicate whether they answered correctly.
- Always start with the boy/girl on the left side of the picture.
- Give the child four different **morality task** problems. If the child answers four of the four problems correctly, this demonstrates good understanding of the concept.
- Emphasize the words that appear in the capital letters in the script when reading the script to the children.
- Once the child gives an answer to an item question, say “okay” in a friendly manner that does not indicate whether they answered correctly.
- Always start with the boy/girl on the left side of the picture.

If the child shows good understanding on the first two items of each task, some of the language may be omitted for the last two items:

- For truth/lie task, “one will tell a lie and one will tell the truth,” may be omitted.
- For morality task, “well, one of these girls/boys is going to get in trouble for what she/he says,” may be omitted.

## CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

### TRUTH VS. LIE TASK



Here's a picture. Look at this animal--what kind of animal is this?

**OK**, that's a [child's label].

**LISTEN** to what these girls say about the [child's label]. One of them will tell a **LIE** and one will tell the **TRUTH**, and **YOU'LL** tell **ME** which girl tells the **TRUTH**.

(point to girl on the left) **THIS** girl looks at the [child's label] and says "**IT'S** a [child's label]."

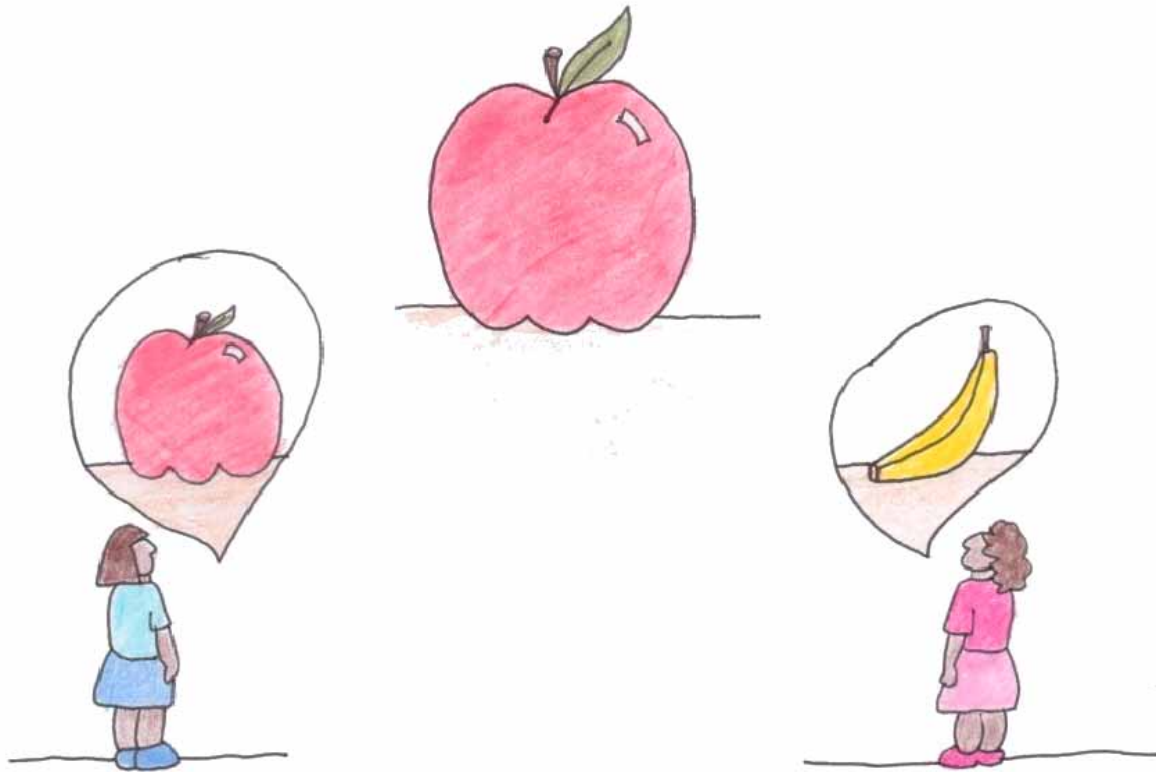
(point to girl on the right) **THIS** girl looks at the [child's label] and says "**IT'S** a **FISH**."

Which girl told the **TRUTH**? (Correct answer is girl on the left)

\* Truth vs. Lie tasks from Lyon/Saywitz, *Qualifying Children to Take the Oath: Materials for Interviewing Professionals*.

# CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

## TRUTH VS. LIE TASK



Here's another picture. Look at this food--what kind of food is this?

OK, that's a [child's label].

LISTEN to what these girls say about the [child's label]. One of them will tell a LIE, and one will tell the TRUTH.

*(point to girl on the left)* THIS girl looks at the [child's label] and says "IT'S an [child's label].

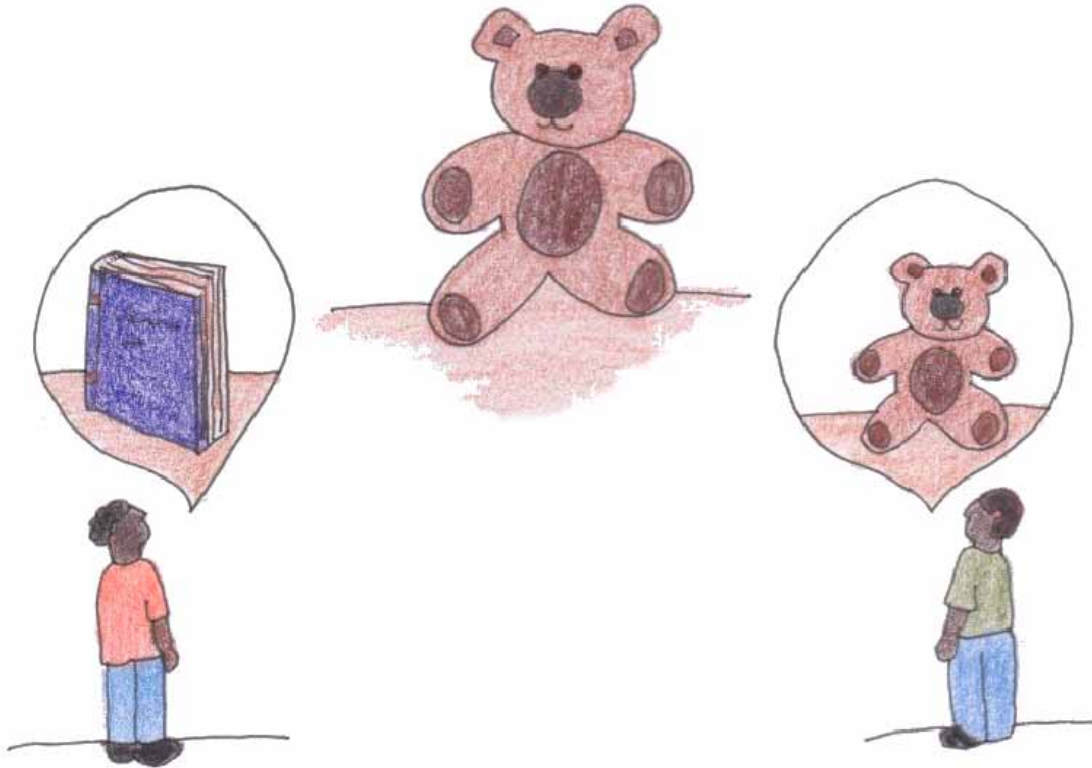
*(point to girl on the right)* THIS girl looks at the [child's label] and says "IT'S a BANANA.

Which girl told the TRUTH? *(correct answer is girl on the left)*

\* Truth vs. Lie tasks from Lyon/Saywitz, *Qualifying Children to Take the Oath: Materials for Interviewing Professionals*.

# CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

## TRUTH V. LIE



Here's another picture. Look at this toy--what kind of toy is this?

OK, that's a [child's label].

LISTEN to what these boys say about the [child's label]. One of them will tell a LIE, and one will tell the TRUTH.

*(point to boy on the left)* THIS boy looks at the [child's label] and says "IT'S a BOOK.

*(point to boy on the right)* THIS boy looks at the [child's label] and says "IT'S a [child's label].

Which boy told the TRUTH? *(correct answer is boy on the right)*

Which boy told a LIE? *(correct answer is boy on the left)*

\* Truth vs. Lie tasks from Lyon/Saywitz, *Qualifying Children to Take the Oath: Materials for Interviewing Professionals*

## CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

### TRUTH VS. LIE TASK



Here's another picture. Look at this food--what kind of food is this?

**OK**, that's a [child's label].

**LISTEN** to what these boys say about the [child's label]. One of them will tell a **LIE** and one will tell the **TRUTH**.

(point to boy on the left) **THIS** boy looks at the [child's label] and says "**IT'S** a [child's label].

(point to boy on the right) **THIS** boy looks at the [child's label] and says "IT'S a **CARROT**."

Which boy told a **LIE**? (Correct answer is boy on the right)

\* Truth vs. Lie tasks from Lyon/Saywitz, *Qualifying Children to Take the Oath: Materials for Interviewing Professionals*.



# CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

## MORALITY TASK



Here's a School Principal. He wants to know what happened to these boys.

Well, **ONE** of these boys is **GONNA GET IN TROUBLE** for what he says, and **YOU'LL tell ME** which boy is **GONNA GET IN TROUBLE**.

**LOOK** [child's name],

(point to left boy) This boy tells the **TRUTH**.

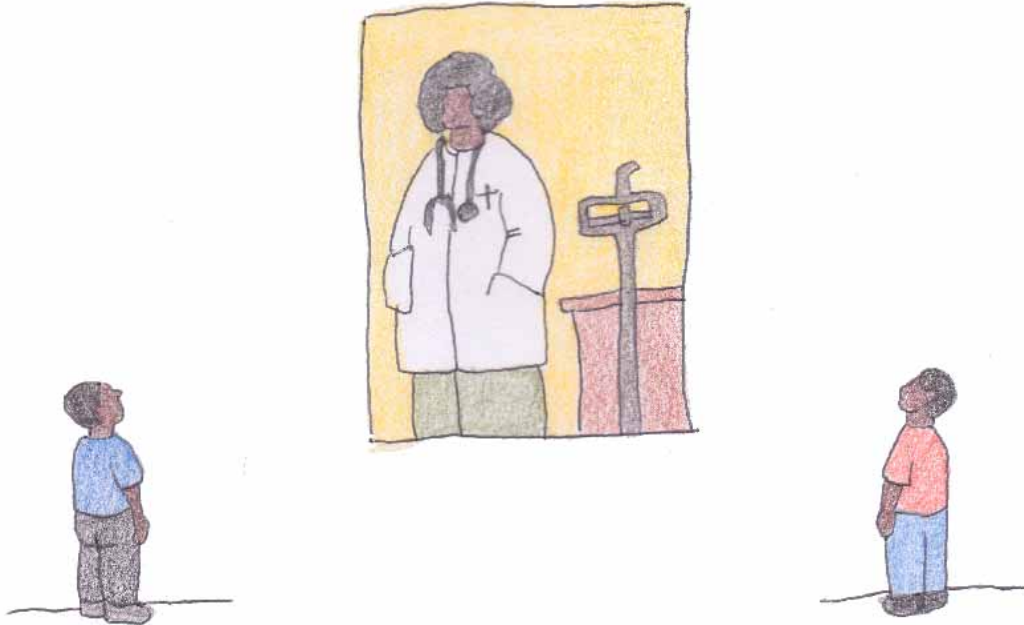
(point to right boy) This boy tells a **LIE**.

Which boy is **GONNA GET IN TROUBLE**? (Correct answer is boy on the right)

\* Morality tasks based Lyon/Saywitz, *Qualifying Children to Take the Oath: Materials for Interviewing Professionals*.

# CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

## MORALITY TASK



Here's a School Nurse. She wants to know what happened to these boys.

Well, **ONE** of these boys is **GONNA GET IN TROUBLE** for what he says.

**LOOK** [child's name],

(point to left boy) This boy tells a **LIE**.

(point to right boy) This boy tells the **TRUTH**.

Which boy is **GONNA GET IN TROUBLE**? (Correct answer is boy on the left)

\* Morality tasks based Lyon/Saywitz, *Qualifying Children to Take the Oath: Materials for Interviewing Professionals*.

# CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

## MORALITY TASK



Here's a Teacher who comes to visit these girls at home. He wants to know what happened to these girls.

Well, **ONE** of these girls is **GONNA GET IN TROUBLE** for what she says.

**LOOK** [child's name],

(point to left girl) This girl tells a **LIE**.

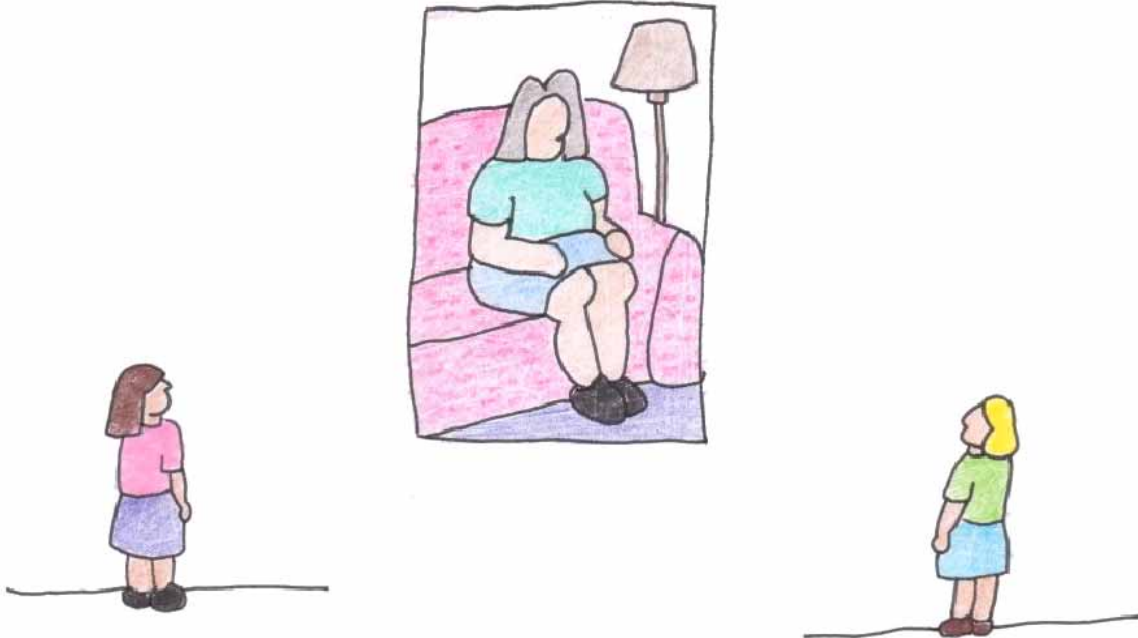
(point to right girl) This girl tells the **TRUTH**.

Which girl is **GONNA GET IN TROUBLE**? (Correct answer is girl on the left)

\* Morality tasks based Lyon/Saywitz, *Qualifying Children to Take the Oath: Materials for Interviewing Professionals*.

# CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

## MORALITY TASK



Here's a Grandma. She wants to know what happened to these girls.

Well, **ONE** of these girls is **GONNA GET IN TROUBLE** for what she says.

**LOOK**, [child's name],

*(point to left girl)* This girl tells the **TRUTH**.

*(point to right girl)* This girl tells a **LIE**.

Which girl is **GONNA GET IN TROUBLE**? *(Correct answer is girl on the right).*

\* Morality tasks based Lyon/Saywitz, *Qualifying Children to Take the Oath: Materials for Interviewing Professionals*.