



Do's and Don'ts of Child-Friendly Interviewing

DO'S:

- **DO** use [child-friendly age-appropriate language](#).
- **DO** be friendly and welcoming. **Smile!** Put the child at ease with your body language and demeanor.
- **DO** arrange seating so that you can face and speak directly to the child. Ensure that you are eye-level with the child (and not standing over her or him).
- **DO** clearly introduce who you are to both the caregiver and the child. Explain the purpose of the interview and what the child and caregiver can expect.
- **DO** let the child know that she or he is free to take a break for water, to use the restroom, or to "take a breather" at any point in the interview.
- **DO** ask easy questions to start off to help build the child's confidence and comfort level.
- **DO** be creative with the interview. Use child-friendly activities. **DO** allow children to give [free-narrative responses](#); patiently take notes of any follow-up questions you have without interrupting the child. Start with broad questions, followed by more specific questions.
- **DO** go off-script. Although you may be using a checklist or form to direct the interview, the conversation will feel less stilted if you follow the flow of the conversation in an informal manner. At the end, look through your checklist to make sure you have not forgotten any important information.
- **DO** lead the child through the conversation so that she or he can easily follow the conversation. **It is best NOT to jump from question to question without introducing new topics.**
- **DO** observe the child carefully during the interview. Look for signs of distress and take appropriate action.
- **DO** take time in the conversation to **summarize what has been discussed**. Repeating back to the child what you have understood lets the child feel that her or his voice is being heard, and gives them an opportunity to correct any misunderstandings.
- **DO** take a deep breath to help handle any strong feelings and decide to process what you are feeling after the interview.

DON'TS:

- **DON'T** conduct interviews in non-confidential spaces or in places that are uncomfortable.
- **DON'T** act like a private investigator or intimidate the child with your way of questioning.
- **DON'T** cross-examine the child or **assume the child is lying if the story changes**.
- **DON'T** make assumptions about what children are thinking or feeling.
- **DON'T** show any frustration or skepticism during the interview.
- **DON'T** impose ideas or solutions or force a child to give information.
- **DON'T** interrupt a child who is in free narrative or answering a question, even if the information is not what you were expecting.
- **DON'T** fill silences which you find uncomfortable. Listen to the child carefully.
- **DON'T** ignore signs of distress, such as bruises, not talking, or uncontrollable crying. As a [mandated reporter](#), it is your job and obligation under law to report suspected child maltreatment.
- **DON'T** use closed questions that allow the child only to answer "Yes" or "No." ("Do you play soccer after school?" or "Do you love your aunt?"). Instead ask open-ended questions. ("What sports do you play afterschool?" or "What activities do you and your aunt do together?")
- **DON'T** ask two questions in one.
- **DON'T** further distress the child. **DON'T** leave the child in the middle of telling a traumatic story to go do something else.
- **DON'T** forget to balance your time and resources, which could force you to have to cut off an interview. **DO** leave time for children to ask questions or provide additional comments.
- **DON'T** ignore the questions that children ask you.
- **DON'T** make false promises.