

# HARD CONVERSATIONS

Effective Interviewing of Children  
about risk factors including Intimate  
Partner Violence

# RAPPORT

- Children and adults are more ACCURATE in the presence of a non-authoritative interviewer (Ceci et al., 1987b; Goodman, et al., 1991; Goodman, et al., 1995, Tobey & Goodman, 1992)
- 3-4 year olds with non-nurturing interviewer had DOUBLE the error rate in Saywitz et al., 1992.
- Develop rapport using open-ended questions and children provide more detailed reports throughout the interview (Lamb et. al)

# RAPPORT

- Sitting below someone's eye level reduces perception of threat and authority—yielding less guarded, more open answers
- Convey slowness and softness in demeanor and surroundings—soothing environment reduces anxiety, increases accuracy (cushions, blankets, soft toys—have a “kiddie interview” bag)

# RAPPORT

- Tell me all about you.
- Tell me what you like to do for fun
- Tell me what you are good at. Sports? Reading? Getting along with people?
- Tell me about your plans for...(summer, winter break, spring break, vacation)
- \_\_\_\_\_
- Tell me about your family...your pets...your friends

# GROUND RULES

- Explication of ground rules of the interview reduces suggestibility and enhances resistance to misleading questions (Toglia, et. al., 1992; Warren et al., 1991)
- Can this child distinguish between truth and lie, between fantasy and reality? Can he/she understand the obligation to tell the truth?
- Interview protocols (Lamb, Saywitz) instruct professionals to practice having a child say I don't know to avoid confabulation to please adult

# GROUND RULES

- Keep it simple—one statement, three questions and a promise
- One statement—I just met you today, so I don't know much about your life. I would like to know you better, and I'm relying on you to tell me about you, since you're the expert on you.

# GROUND RULES

- Three questions:
  - If you **don't know** the answer, I need you to be honest and just say that. Let's practice: What is my cat's name? Good. You don't know because we just met. Her name is Emmy
  - If you **don't understand** my question, I need you to tell me and I can ask a different way. Let's practice. What is your ocular hue? What is your eye color?
  - If I make a mistake I want you to **correct me**. Let's practice. You are X years old (get it wrong). Good, you are actually Y years old. Thank you for helping me get it right

# GROUND RULES

- The promise: “It’s important today that we only talk about the truth. Things that you know are true and real. It is important that I understand the truth about you. That is why I want you to tell me if you don’t know an answer, or you don’t understand a question or I get something wrong. Will you promise to tell me the truth today while we talk?”
- You can add lawyer language here if age-appropriate



# HOW TO TALK

## The TOP 5 Questions

- **Tell me everything that happened**, from the beginning to the end. Don't leave anything out. I wasn't there and I really want to know.
- **Tell me more about that**
- **Then what happened or What happened right before that**
- **You mentioned \_\_\_\_\_**. Tell me more about that (reminder question)
- **Tell me everything that happened from \_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_** (segmenting question)

# HOW TO TALK

## What's good about the TOP 5

- Yield 3-4 times as much information
- The information is ACCURATE
- They give NO INFORMATION to the child
- They take less work: Don't work so hard

# HOW TO TALK

## Specific Questions

- NOTE-Use the TOP 5 after ALL of these
- Does Mommy like Daddy? Does Daddy like Mommy? Tell me everything you know....
- What does Mommy say about Daddy? What does Daddy say about Mommy?
- Tell me what happens when your parents are mad at each other?
- Tell me what happens when your parents fight?

# HOW TO TALK

## Specific Questions

- Do your parents live together? Was there a time when your parents decided to live apart?
- Where is (incarcerated or removed parent) living now? Tell me how that happened.
- Tell me who you are with when you are safe. Tell me what is happening when you are safe.
- Tell me who you are with when you are not safe. Tell me what is happening when you are not safe

# HOW TO TALK

## Specific Questions

- Part of my job is to help things be better for you in your family (safer, calmer, happier).  
What is the most important thing I could do to help your family get better?
- If you could change one thing about your Mom, what would it be? If you could change one thing about your (other parent) what would it be?
- What do you do already to keep yourself safe?