

# Lightning Strikes

## Article Series - Volume 2

### *"A Simplified Interview Protocol"*

*in Interviewing Alleged Child Abuse Victims*

*by Lawrence W. Daly*

Shocked, feeling numb? Child protective services take your children? Have you been accused of a serious sexual assault case? Have you turned to the yellow pages and the attorneys and investigators all look the same? What should you do?

Confused and feeling helpless? If lightning was to strike in your life, would you know what to do? Who to call? How to protect your rights? If you don't know what to do, then you need to know the impact of what it means when lightning strikes in your life.

**Call us today at Systematic Investigations.** We not only know the answers to those questions when lightning strikes in your life, we have the know how and can resolve your problem in a positive fashion.

# "A Simplified Interview Protocol"

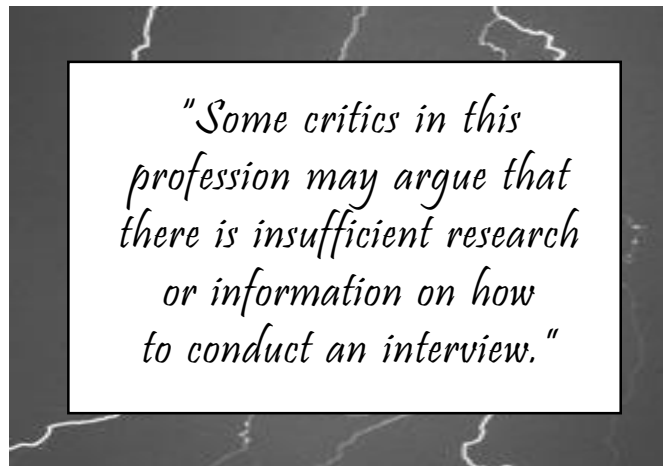
## *in Interviewing Alleged Child Abuse Victims*

by Lawrence W. Daly

I have developed a child interview evaluation program for child interviewers who are employed by me. I believe this protocol has been a step in reducing post event contamination by our child interviewers. The following guidelines have been established for child interviewers to follow:

### *Interview Protocol*

The first portion of this article has dealt with the lack of child interview protocols and child interviewers evaluation methods and technologies. Some of the critics in this profession may argue that there is insufficient research or information on how to conduct a proper child interview and/or to create specific standards, protocols or procedures on evaluating child interviewers. It is my opinion that the research that has been published in this area is available for child interviewers and should be implemented. Let us look at a protocol developed by several forensic psychologists, through the use of the State-ment Validity Analysis. (Raskin & Yuille, 1991) This protocol is now a national standardized protocol in the United Kingdom:



### Understanding the Five Phases of an Interview

(Yuille, 1991)

#### *1. Rapport Building*

You should meet the child and accompanying adult in waiting area. Address the child first, then the adult. Attention should be paid especially to the child. Say something positive about the child, like, "What a nice looking dress." Be enthusiastic and friendly. During first few minutes of interview, ask questions involving historical memory, specific events (such as birthdays), and other events that will spark conversation and begin to build the relationship.

#### *2. Introducing the Purpose of the Interview*

Questions about why the child has come to the interview may be discussed once rapport is established to flush out obvious signs of coaching. The importance of telling the truth should be addressed. Other general questions developed prior to the interview may be utilized to assist the child in providing a spontaneous disclosure about the alleged abuse. (Raskin & Yuille; Walsh, G. 1989) Use words and concepts within the child's frame of reference. Be alert to developmental differences in language and cognition (Cole & Loftus; Raskin & Yuille; Walsh G. 1989) and never assume that a child knows what he means by the use of a particular word. If there is any question in your mind, be sure to ask if the child knows what a word means.

#### *3. Free Narrative Phase*

This is the core of the interview. You must discover from the child the name(s) that he or she gives to body parts and private areas. Never identify for the child the body parts allegedly touched by the suspect, let the child name them without suggestion from you (Daly, 1988). Do not interrupt the child during the free narrative. Do not correct, interrupt or challenge the child during the narrative phase.

#### *4. The Open Questioning Phase*

The purpose of this phase is to allow the child to elaborate about details described during the free narrative. An open question is one that cannot be answered with a simple "Yes" or "No." Open questions should cause the child to provide information.

#### *5. Specific Question Phase*

The purpose of this phase is to provide an opportunity to clarify and extend previous answers (Raskin & Yuille, 1989).

Understanding the proper steps of how to conduct a child interview may determine eventual success or failure. In addition, it is necessary that the child interviewer

understand the Four Walls of Anxiety (Daly, 1991).

### *Understanding the Four Walls of Anxiety* (Daly, 1991)

- When the child and interviewer first meet for the interview .
- When the interviewer requests information from the child about the child's body parts (specifically the names of his/her private areas) .
- When the interviewer requests information from the child about the alleged incident of abuse.
- When the child does not provide any details of the alleged abuse but makes statements that he or she has been molested and/or the interviewer discovers that the child is providing false information.

Every interview will begin and end differently. It will have its individual characteristics. Sometimes a child will resist the child interviewers questions and/or provide what appears to be an obvious false disclosure. The child interviewer must understand how to deal with a difficult situation and child. (Daly, 1991).

### *Understanding how to deal with a difficult situation and child.* (Daly, 1991)

When the child professes to have been molested but provides no details of the alleged abuse, the interviewer must insure that the child provide the 6W's (who, what, where, when, why and how). The child might be asked specific questions which are refocused, rephrased, or restated in some way. Often a short break can help the

child relax before continuing the questions.

If the child's story is inconsistent, confront gently, as a confrontation may arouse anxiety, suspicion or anger. Manage this with tact, emphasizing that you missed what the child said.

The child who is being untruthful can be dealt with in a variety of ways. After the child has provided a free narrative of what allegedly occurred, the child should then be asked specific questions to try and obtain detailed information about the alleged incident. After this avenue has been explored, the next method is to rephrase, in an overview style, restating what the child allegedly said, but adding details that the child did not provide which you know to be untrue. If the child is agreeable to what is added, the inconsistencies of the two stories should be discussed with the child. This may provide an avenue for the child to save face with reference to why he or she is providing untruths or embellishments.

You always run the risk of destroying rapport if you are forced to confront false statements by the child. Confronting the child should therefore be a last resort. But confrontation may be your only option when all the inconsistencies have been pointed out and the child fails to take advantage of the "avenues for saving face" provided.

As a rule, the child should be held accountable for all statements made to you. Utilizing proper interview steps, understanding the four walls of anxiety and how to deal with a difficult situation and child will make your interview successful and effective.

*“ I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”      Matthew 18:18 NIV*