



# ENCLAVE

Enhancing the capacity of legal & justice  
professionals on forensic interview procedures  
for child victims and witnesses of violence



## Training Manual for Criminal Justice & Legal Professionals on the Forensic Interviewing of Child Victims of Sexual Abuse

University of Crete  
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Webinar, 20.01.2023

# Assessment of needs of professionals



**Target Group:** criminal justice & legal professionals (e.g. judges, police officers, prosecutors and forensic interviewers if existing) in the participating countries

**Aim:** to assess their training needs

**Methodology:** interviews or focus groups under WP3

+ Elicit information from WP2 survey & interviews:

*Transnational Comparative Report & Benchmark Protocol!*

+Literature review +Other Projects (e.g. RE-TREAT)



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# Main findings – Basic Needs



## Legislations, Policies, Protocols & Guidelines:

- Adequate legislations but gaps in the practical implementation of the law
- Steadier application of both the main international and national instruments
- Link children's rights with specific interests and measures



- Upholding the ‘best interests’ of minors;
  - Effectively communicating with them;
  - Ensuring meaningful access to complaints procedures and forms of redress;
  - Increasing their involvement in decision-making;
  - Providing specialized training, especially on forensic interviewing, and ongoing professional development, and
  - Addressing barriers to implementing recommended practices
- To reform law → more child-friendly & sensitive (specialized units!)



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# Main findings – Basic Needs

## Training on:

- a) Fundamental knowledge
- b) Fundamental skills
- c) Knowledge of minors' characteristics and the corresponding skills
- d) Specialized knowledge and skills are also needed as part of specialized training focused on the recognition of child abuse; the safety planning; the acknowledgement, recognition of signs, prevention and/ or making amends for secondary victimization; the purpose of the child forensic interview; the models and the protocols of the forensic interview; the best practices available for interviewing minors in cases of alleged abuse, etc.



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# Main findings – Basic Needs



## Multi-agency cooperation

Need for:

- Policies, protocols and guidelines regarding cases of minor victims and witnesses of violence
- Corresponding training for professionals and services involved on how to effectively create networks and collaborate
- Promotion and adoption of a multidisciplinary approach that would ensure the protection of the rights of the child is required
- Strong links between the CJS and the social sector
- Formal and effective coordination mechanisms with adequate geographic coverage
- Holistic approach promoting minor victims and witnesses' of violence recovery, encompassing a continuum of interventions, namely before, during and after criminal procedures



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## Development of training material for professionals

“The consortium will *develop a comprehensive training set of materials on the practical aspects & tips on the application of legal framework concerning the forensic interview procedure for child victims and witnesses of abuse, relevant for the whole EU and in line with Directive 2012/29/EU*”



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# Topics:



## **Chapter 1 - Exploring the disclosure of child sexual abuse**

- 1.1 Child sexual abuse accommodation syndrome (CAAS)
- 1.2 Factors affecting the process of disclosure
- 1.3 After the disclosure
- 1.4 Guidance for professionals

## **Chapter 2 – Quality Standards of Forensic Interviewing**

- 2.1 Child Sexual Abuse Forensic Protocols - Forensic Interviewing Models
- 2.2 Interview Structure
  - 2.2.1 Rapport-building phase
    - Memory functioning
    - Factors influencing children' s memory
  - 2.2.2 Substantive Phase
  - 2.2.3 Closure phase



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# Topics:



## Chapter 3 - The Use of tools

3.1 Advantages

3.2 Disadvantages

3.3 Anatomical Diagrams

3.4 RATAAC

3.5 Advantages & Disadvantages

## Chapter 4 - Forensic Interviews of children with special needs

4.1 Deterrents to disclosing sexual abuse: Why do children with special needs have bigger difficulties in revealing the sexual abuse?

4.2 Preparing the forensic interview

4.3 The Forensic Interview

4.4 The use of extra-verbal communication aids



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# Topics:



## Chapter 5 – Cultural competency and diversity

- 5.1 Preparing the forensic interview
- 5.2 Conducting the forensic interview
- 5.3 The role of the interpreter

## Chapter 6 - Important Considerations

- 6.1 Basic knowledge
- 6.2 Basic guidelines
  - 6.2.1 Developmental stage of the child being tested
  - 6.2.2 Investigating the Knowledge and capacities of the child in questioning
  - 6.2.3 Wording and content of the questions
  - 6.2.4 Objectivity of the interviewer, flexibility and avoidance of suggestive techniques
  - 6.2.5 The Effective Interviewer



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# Topics:



## Chapter 7 – Assessment of the credibility of the allegations

7.1 Criteria for assessing allegations' credibility

7.2 Common mistakes in assessing the credibility of claims

7.3 Significant evidence that strengthens the credibility of a child's allegations of sexual victimization



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## FUNDAMENTAL KNOWLEDGE:

- **Child Sexual Abuse:** types, prevalence & main characteristics
- **Perpetrators'** characteristics and relationship to the victim
- **Manifestation** of CSA in all levels/contexts: in real life, on-line life, global crises and emergency periods (e.g. COVID-19)
- **Consequences** of CSA & **Trauma:** typical behaviours & impact on all levels, such as:
  - mental health (e.g. PTSD);
  - physical health (e.g. injuries, sexually transmitted infections and diseases, pregnancy);
  - financial (e.g. job loss, inability to work);
  - legal (e.g. secondary victimisation from CJS involvement) and
  - social (e.g. stigmatisation, no support by family members, relationship strains)
- Typical Characteristics of **Disclosure:** process, delays, recalls, attitudes, beliefs and reactions
- **Secondary victimisation** by the CJS: prevalence, context, characteristics and impact on victims
- **Basic Counseling Skills:** Empathy, active listening, body language, etc.



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## FUNDAMENTAL SKILLS:

- **Basic Counseling Skills:** *Empathy, active listening, body language, etc.*
- **Cooperation & Collaboration** with other professionals & agencies/ services
- **Keeping boundaries**
- **Self-reflection**
- **Recognition of blind-spots, stereotypes & prejudices**
- **Role description & Distinction of roles**
- **Recognise difficulties & Ask for help and/or supervision**



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## KNOWLEDGE OF CHILDRENS' CHARACTERISTICS & NEEDS:

- Memory and credibility
- Suggestibility
- Age issues
- Developmental stages
- Children with disabilities and/or complex communication Needs  
(intellectual disabilities etc.)
- Cultural effects



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## SPECIALISED KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS:

- Recognise CSA
- Acknowledge, recognise the signs and/or eliminate their influence, misleading, undermining, leading or hurting towards minor victims
- Recognise, Prevent and/or make Amends for Secondary Victimization
- Acknowledge and understand the benefits, importance and necessity of Forensic Interviewing – protocols and procedures



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## SPECIALISED KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS:

- Purpose of the Child Forensic Interview
- Forensic interview models & protocols
- Best Practices for interviewing children in cases of alleged abuse
- Forensic interview principles
- Forensic interview structure & stages
- Recognition of True – False allegations of CSA
- Basic Rules and considerations



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# Forensic interviews procedures



- Understanding the disclosure process (Roland Summit)
- Trauma (David Finkelhor)
- Memory and credibility (Elizabeth Loftus)
- Purpose of the Child Forensic Interview
- Forensic interview models /protocols – Best Practices for interviewing children in cases of alleged abuse
- Forensic interview structure
- True – False allegations of CSA
- Basic Rules and considerations
- Culture
- Age/ Development (pre- school children)
- Children with disabilities and/or complex communication Needs (intellectual disabilities,
- Building counseling skills (Empathy, active listening, body language, etc).



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# Understanding the disclosure process (Roland Summit)



Disclosure happens along a continuum ranging from denial to nondisclosure to reluctant disclosure to incomplete disclosure to a full accounting of an abusive incident (Olafson and Lederman, 2006).

Some children also disclose less directly, over a period of time, through a variety of behaviors and actions, including discussions and indirect nonverbal cues (Alaggia, 2004).

A review of contemporary literature reveals that when disclosure does occur, significant delays are common. In a recent analysis of child sexual abuse disclosure patterns, Alaggia (2010) found that as many as 60 to 80 percent of children and adolescents do not disclose until adulthood.



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# Trauma (David Finkelhor)



- Two models of the traumatic impact of child sexual abuse:  
the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Model & the Four Traumagenic Dynamics.

Four Traumagenic Dynamics Model is more complex and accounts for more of the variety of effects.

It posits four dynamics:

- a. traumatic sexualization
- b. Betrayal
- c. Stigmatization
- d. Powerlessness

The trauma is distorting a child's self-concept, worldview, and affective capacities. The four dynamics are described, and are matched to specific symptoms that have been noted in the literature.



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# Purpose of the Child Forensic Interview

The forensic interview is the most important tool / component of a comprehensive child abuse investigation.

The main purpose is to:

- a. Minimize the risk of secondary abuse and re-victimization of the child
- b. Reduce the risk of a false legal decision/judgment
- c. Protect the Rights of the Child



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## Forensic interview models /protocols – Best Practices for interviewing children in cases of alleged abuse

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (1999). *NICHD forensic interview protocol*. National Institute of Child Health and Human

(Lamb, Orbach, Sternberg, Espilin, & Hershkowitz, 2002)

- Revised Investigative Interview Protocol Version 2014 <https://nichdprotocol.com/>

National Children Advocacy Center (2018). *Forensic Interview Structure*. Alabama, USA.

State of Michigan. (2005, April). *Forensic Interview Protocol* (DHS Publ. No. 779, Rev.). Lansing, MI: Governor's Task Force on Children's Justice and the Michigan Department of Human Sciences.

Washington State Child Interview Guide (2007). *Washington State Child Interview Guide*. Harborview Center for Sexual Assault & Traumatic Stress and WA State Criminal Justice Training Commission, in cooperation with the Department of Social and Health Services, Revised 9/07

Home Office (1992). *The Memorandum of Good Practice on Video Recorded Interviews with child witnesses for Criminal Proceedings*. London, UK, HMSO.



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# Role of the Interviewer

- Forensic interviewers should encourage the most accurate, complete, and candid information from a child
- Interviewers must balance forensic concerns with decisions about how much information to
- They should be attentive to the possibility that their preconceived ideas may bias the information gathered—particularly if the interview is conducted in an unduly leading or suggestive manner—and should avoid such practices
- Alternative Hypotheses



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# Forensic Interview structure



Forensic interview models they vary from highly structured/scripted to semi-structured to flexible (interviewers have greater latitude).

All models include the following phases:

1. The initial rapport-building phase
2. The substantive phase
3. The closure phase



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# STAGE 1 (Rapport)



- Introduction
  - Introduce self/role
  - Age-appropriate explanation of process
  - Answer questions/address concerns
- “Truth Versus Lies” Discussion
- Early Engagement
  - Allow child to become comfortable
  - Engage child in conversation regarding topics that are interesting to the child
  - Learn about child’s interests/day-to-day life
- Interview Instructions
  - Explain instructions/ground rules/expectations  
(Correct me • Don’t know/don’t guess • Don’t understand)



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# Narrative Practice (Episodic Memory Training)



- Select topic(s) of interest  
(Invite child to “tell me all about...”)

*“Tell me some things about yourself”*

*“What do you like to do for fun?”*

*“What did you do this morning?”*

- Teach child about need for forensic details
- Listen without interruption
- Do not interact/ correct / criticize /characterize
- Follow with responses that encourage further narrative



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➤ Do not interrupt this narrative, as it is the primary purpose of the forensic interview.

➤ Open-ended invitations

*“Tell me more”*

*“What happened next?”*

➤ Cued narrative requests

*“Tell me more about [fill in with child’s word]”*

Free narrative elicit longer, more detailed, and less self contradictory information from children and adolescents



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## “Wh” questions

- “Wh” questions are the least leading way to ask about important but missing details and can either be open-ended (“What happened?”) or more direct (“What was the man’s name?”)
- Never ask “Why”



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## STAGE 2 (Substantive Phase)



### ➤ Transition

- Question(s) which invite child to discuss substantive issues (Start broad and become progressively more focused):

-“How come you’re here today?”

- “What did your mom/dad tell you about coming here today?”

-“Has something happened that we need to talk about?”

More direct prompts may be used if needed



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## ➤ Narrative Description

- Elicit narrative using recall prompts  
(*“Tell me from beginning to end and not to leave anything out”*)
- Ask for explanation or further description
- Avoid rush to specific questions
- Follow-up Questions
- Questions eliciting further details
- Keep questions as open as possible



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The closure phase helps provide a respectful end to a conversation that may have been emotionally challenging for the child.



- Summarize
- Ask the child if there is something else the interviewer needs to know
- Ask the child if there is something he or she wants to tell or ask the interviewer
- Answer questions or concerns
- Try to encourage the victim
- Thank the child for his or her effort rather than for specific content
- Provide a contact number for additional help
- End with a discussion about a neutral topic (desensitization)



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## Multidisciplinary team

Forensic interviews are best conducted **within a multidisciplinary team context**, as coordinating an investigation has been shown to increase the efficiency of the investigation while minimizing system-induced trauma in the child



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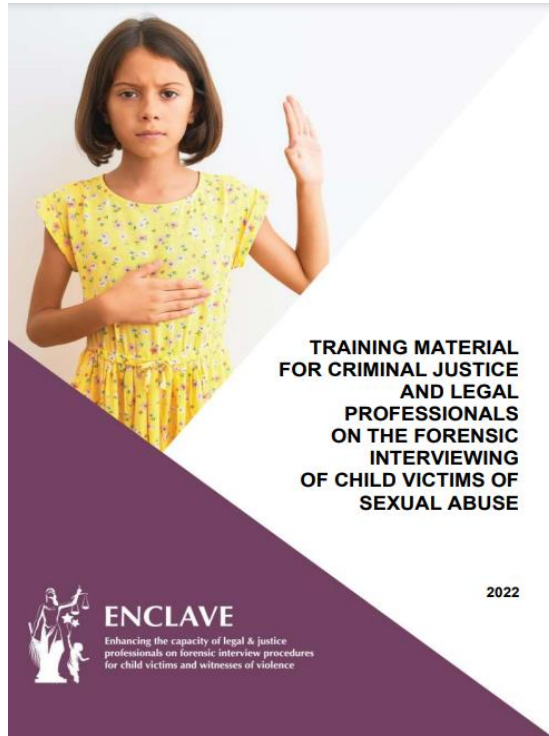
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## Training Manual

- Available at ENCLAVE's website: [enclaveproject.eu](https://enclaveproject.eu)
- Download for free!



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