

Interviewing Children with a History of Trauma-exposures: Special Considerations

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Rationale

There is little research on the special considerations researchers must make when researching young children, particularly those with special needs. Children who have been exposed to trauma have a difficult time trusting adults, developing and maintaining positive relationships, and participating in reciprocal conversations. Due to challenges in these areas, additional considerations should be made when interviewing children who have a history of trauma exposures. However, there is even less research on this topic. The purpose of this proposed research is to combine research-based practices for interviewing children and research-based best practices for interviewing individuals with a history of trauma exposures to create a guide for best practices for researchers aiming to conduct interviews with children who have a history of trauma exposures.

What is Trauma?

- EVENT** or series of events
 - EXPERIENCED** as physically or emotionally harmful
 - EFFECTS** lasting and adverse
- ❖ Extreme adversity in the absence of a supportive adult to help the child navigate the experience in a way that feels safe
 - ❖ Disruption of brain development resulting in psychological, emotional, and/or physical effects

(Hackney et al., 2023a)

Trauma-informed Approaches to Interviewing Children with a History of Trauma Exposures

Safety	Trustworthiness	Choice	Collaboration	Empowerment	Cultural, Historical and Gender
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The children and adults feel physically safe in the environment and emotionally safe in the interview procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trust between adults and children is developed through transparency and clarity throughout the interview process, including analysis and dissemination	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children have choice in voice in where and when the interview takes place, the durations of the interview, what they share, and what is published	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children and adults develop a partnership, discussing and making mutual decisions related to interview topic, interpretation of responses and, publication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Throughout the interview process, adults foster an internalized belief that they have agency at every point in the research process	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All interview and research processes are responsive to the racial, ethnic, and cultural needs of the children being interviewed

Special Considerations for Interviewing Children with a History of Trauma Exposures

Safety

- ❖ Conduct interviews in a location where the child is comfortable
- ❖ Consider including other adults the child trusts in the interview process
- ❖ Avoid use of scented, noisy, or other products that may be a trigger

Trustworthiness

- ❖ Be transparent about reasons for the research and the interviewing process
- ❖ Disclose relative, appropriate information about yourself
- ❖ Explain interview process and interview questions in child-friendly words

Choice

- ❖ Plan opportunities for children to ask some questions
- ❖ Allow child to pick where the interview will take place
- ❖ Allow child to pick icebreaker activities before the interview

(Alder et al., 2019; Ponizovsky-Bergelson et al., 2019; Morrison, 2013)

Collaboration

- ❖ Work with the child to determine the best time of day to conduct the interview
- ❖ Work with child to develop a plan for something “fun” to do/talk about after discussing difficult topics

Empowerment

- ❖ Plan opportunities for children to lead the conversation
- ❖ Encourage children to share their viewpoints and not just what they think you want them to say

Cultural, historical, and Gender

- ❖ Some children may prefer focus groups. Be conscious of their needs relative to grouping
- ❖ Plan interview length based on child’s attention span and developmental needs
- ❖ Interview environment should be specific to child’s cultural needs
- ❖ Ensure interview is accessible for all children (pictures, drawings, voice to text)
- ❖ Respect cultural norms when planning what to wear the day of the interview

(Gibson, 2012; Irwin & Johnson 2005; Wood et al. 2019)

Prevalence of Trauma

- In a classroom of 30 students, you can expect to find...
- 6 students with exposures to one traumatic event
 - 5 students with exposures to two traumatic events
 - 3 students with exposures to three traumatic events
 - 7 students with exposures to four to five traumatic events
 - 3 students with 6 exposures to six or more traumatic events
- ❖ 8 students who live with someone with substance abuse problems
 - ❖ 4 students who have experienced psychological abuse
 - ❖ 9 students who have experienced physical abuse
 - ❖ 6 students who have experienced sexual abuse
 - ❖ 5 students who have experienced emotional neglect
 - ❖ 3 students who have experienced physical neglect
- When preparing to interview children, it’s safe to assume they have a history of trauma exposures**

(CDC, 2020)

The Impact of Trauma

- ❖ communities with high rates of traumatic exposure have higher rates of suspension and unexcused absences, lower rates of graduation from high school and progression to post-secondary school than communities with relatively low prevalence of childhood trauma exposures.
 - ❖ causes reduced cognitive capacity, poor executive functioning, sleep disturbance, memory difficulties, anxiety, inattentiveness, language delays, and problems with self-regulation and peer relationships
- ❖ A child with a history of 4 or more exposures to trauma is 32 times more likely to be diagnosed with a learning or behavioral disorder than a child with no trauma exposures
 - ❖ A high rate of trauma exposures more accurately predicts dropping out of school than low standardized test scores or grades

(Cavanaugh, 2016; Hambrick et al., 2018; National Center for Child Traumatic Stress, 2017; SAMHSA, 2021)

(Plumb et al., 2016; De La Vega & Etow, 2019)

Importance of Interviewing Children

- ❖ The best way to develop best practices for interviewing children is to conduct interviews with children. We need more interviews to include children’s voices so we can improve research in this area
- ❖ Interviewing can be healing for children who have a history of trauma exposures as they have a chance to use their voice and telling their story
- ❖ The best way to learn about things impacting children (e.g., behavioral and academic interventions) is to ask them their thoughts about it.
- ❖ Children have their own views about the things we are researching and have the ability and right to communicate their views about research they are participating in or benefiting from.
- ❖ A researcher is able to enter the child’s world and see things through their vantage point through interviews
- ❖ Without including the child’s voice, research about children may be distorted and include their perspectives

(Alder et al., 2019; Ponizovsky-Bergelson et al., Wood et al., 2019)

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