

This book is a must-have text for any researcher who is engaging with the critical incident technique. It is skillfully crafted to be useful to novice and experienced researchers alike. I wish the authors had written it years ago when I first discovered the delights (and the complexities) of this most interesting research approach.

—Caroline Bradbury-Jones, PhD, Professor, School of Nursing & Midwifery, Medical School, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, United Kingdom

Learn how to deconstruct complex experiences and understand the turning points that shaped them. This accessibly written book is your guide to applying critical incident technique, providing a clear step-by-step framework and practical examples to support researchers, students, and academic supervisors as they uncover valuable research findings.

—Stephanie Finan, DPsych, Assistant Professor of Psychotherapy, Dublin City University, Dublin, Ireland

Schwartz and Holloway's fresh presentation of the constructivist critical incident technique provides researchers with the guidance they have needed while preserving the flexibility that has been a hallmark of the approach. This practical and engaging book is one I wish I had had years ago!

—Rodney Goodyear, PhD, Emeritus Professor, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA, and University of Redlands, Redlands, CA, United States

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INTRODUCTION

Some of our favorite research in developmental psychology explored children's ability to explain something to another person. In a typical study, children saw a picture with four geometric shapes and tried to describe it so a listener could draw it accurately. Because each shape had a position, size, and color, children needed to explain many pieces of information for the listener to succeed. This usually did not happen. In one sample, third graders mentioned only six features of the drawing, on average, which was not enough to cue listeners to the true state of affairs. Transcripts of children describing a game to a blindfolded listener were charming. For example, one second grader said, "This side is red and you're supposed to put it, um, go on these. This side is blue, and you're supposed to go on these. You put these in your hand, um, you choose, um, which pig you want. Told ya!" (Flavell, 1975, p. 98).

We would laugh less at children if we contemplated our own confusing (and sometimes embarrassing) directions and correspondences. The truth is that children do not have a monopoly on ambiguous communication. Put children and adults together and you have the question that has fascinated us for decades: What is the best way to talk to children when we need to learn what they know?

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Interviewing Children: The Science of Conversation in Forensic Contexts, Second Edition,
by Debra Ann Poole and Jason J. Dickinson

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This question gripped the hearts of researchers and helping professionals in the 1980s and early 1990s, when people around the world learned about a series of high-profile day care cases in which preschool children made inconsistent and sometimes bizarre allegations of abuse (Ceci & Bruck, 1995). Behavioral researchers who were eager to study a practical topic responded by recording what legions of children said when assistants used the techniques that interviewers had used in these cases, such as repeating questions, asking many yes/no questions, and suggesting events that never occurred (Schreiber et al., 2006). The interviewing guidelines that emerged from these efforts mirrored recommendations from scientists who were studying the best ways to build trust and gather information from adult eyewitnesses, suspects in criminal cases, and patients in medical offices. The result was a general framework for information gathering interviews that inspired the first edition of this book.

Since that edition, new findings have filled in the broad strokes of this interviewing style. Today, there is more information about how to create socially supportive environments, how to phrase interview prompts and transition children to the topics under investigation, and how to accommodate adolescents' developmental needs. New guidance is also helping interviewers modify their usual practices to meet the needs of individual cases, from working with translators to investigating child trafficking.

Because the science of conversation is broad, the breadth of topics covered in this book is also broad. Chapter 1 (The Science of Interviewing Children) explains how adults usually question children, why this style impedes investigative goals, and the types of studies researchers conduct to look for solutions. Chapter 2 (The Forensic Perspective) introduces characteristics of the forensic perspective, explains the differences between forensic and clinical roles, and discusses the benefits and limitations of blind versus informed interviewing. Chapters 3 to 6 translate the forensic perspective into three "C" skills: conversational habits (Chapter 3), conventional content (Chapters 4 and 5), and case-specific decisions and exploration (Chapter 6). *Conversational habits* are general skills, such as the nonverbal behaviors that put children at ease and the question forms that children understand. *Conventional content* includes the instructions and interview phases in protocols, whereas *case-specific decisions and exploration* involve the decisions interviewers make to customize interviews. Dividing skills into these groups establishes foundational skills before introducing skills that are more difficult to master and more dependent on an interview's context. Finally, Chapter 7 discusses interview protocols and the characteristics of effective training programs.

We designed these chapters for busy professionals who will put down this book and either apply what they just read or analyze what someone else has

done. To be useful for forensic interviewers, clinicians, attorneys, and the other professionals who rely on children's testimony, the narrative is action oriented. We illustrate research-based practice recommendations with example dialogue, include Quick Guides that synthesize core ideas and skills, and summarize practice recommendations in chapter recaps. Principles to Practice sections answer questions about child interviewing, and learning activities in the Appendix help readers sharpen their skills. Throughout, our goal is to illustrate evidence-based practice, not to imply that a single approach is best for every situation.

It is also important to mention what is not in this book. Obviously absent is the enormous body of knowledge that professionals need to fulfil their roles as child protection workers, advocacy center interviewers, special victim and arson investigators, prosecutors, defense attorneys, judges, mental health workers, physicians, and mandated reporters in schools. Although general principles of talking to children apply across a wide variety of situations, conversational skill is only one component of the training needed for effective practice in these lines of work. Also absent are discussions of interview strategies that have not attracted enough research to support evidence-based guidelines, although we hope these gaps will be filled in the years to come.

As guidelines continue to evolve, the primary goal of conversations with child witnesses will remain the same: to help children describe events in their lives as completely, accurately, and unambiguously as they can. The obstacles blocking this goal, and the techniques that overcome those obstacles, make up the science of conversation in forensic contexts.