

Scottish Child Interview Model for Joint Investigative Interviewing

Evidence Based Interviewer Practice – Research Series

Topic: Multiple Interviews

What does the research tell us?

Forensic interviewing of children is grounded in a robust international evidence base, which consistently demonstrates that effective practice is both structured and flexible. Research guides key principles—such as the use of open-ended questioning, rapport building, and phased interview structure—while practice experience continues to refine how these principles are applied across real-world contexts in Scotland and beyond. Emerging from both research and practice for some time has been the reality that children’s disclosure of abuse is rarely a single event; rather, it is a process that unfolds over time (e.g. Cordisco Steele & Wells, 2026; Alaggia, 2004; McElvaney, 2015).

A rights-respecting approach

This dynamic approach is also aligned with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which emphasises that children have the right to be heard (Article 12) and that their best interests must be a primary consideration in all actions concerning them (Article 3). In the context of forensic interviewing, this reinforces the need to create conditions where children can share their experiences safely, at their own pace, and in a manner that supports both their wellbeing and their right to participate meaningfully in processes that affect them. Importantly, a rights-based and trauma-informed approach recognises that participation must not be compelled. Children should be supported to exercise choice about if, when, and how they participate, ensuring that engagement in the forensic interview process is safe, respectful, and responsive to their individual needs and experiences.

Mitigating the risk of harm

Contrary to persistent myths, the use of structured multiple interview sessions or further interviews is not inherently retraumatising. When interviews are conducted with a clear purpose, careful planning, and appropriate questioning techniques, children are not harmed by having more than one opportunity to talk. In fact, the belief that a child should only be interviewed once can place undue

pressure on them, increasing anxiety and limiting their ability to recall and communicate effectively. A well-conducted further interview can instead reduce this pressure, allowing children to engage at a pace that feels manageable and safe, consistent with a child-centred and rights-respecting approach.

A key concept underpinning this approach is reminiscence. La Rooy, et. Al. (2005). Memory is not static; rather, it is a dynamic process that continues to develop after an interview has ended. When children are asked about past experiences, they report the information that is accessible to them at that moment. However, ongoing cognitive processing, reflection, and associations triggered by earlier recall can lead to the later retrieval of additional information. Research has consistently demonstrated that children may remember new details across further interviews, a phenomenon known as reminiscence. The emergence of such information should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of inconsistency, unreliability, or deliberate withholding, but instead reflects a well-established characteristic of human memory. Consequently, further interviews can provide an important opportunity for children to share newly recalled information in a supportive, structured, and developmentally appropriate manner (Korkman, J., Otgaar, H., Geven, L. M., Bull, R., Cyr, M., Hershkowitz, I., et al. (2025).

Child sharing their account- a developmental and relational process

There are several legitimate reasons why a child may require more than one interview. Some children need more time to feel comfortable, particularly in the early stages where anxiety, fear, or shyness may limit engagement. Others may experience fatigue or emotional distress, especially when recounting multiple or complex incidents, which can affect their ability to continue.

In cases involving repeated or varied forms of maltreatment, the cognitive demand of recalling multiple events may necessitate breaking the process into more manageable parts. Children may initially find it difficult to share their account due to shame, fear of consequences, or concern about others' reactions, only becoming ready to disclose at a later stage as circumstances change or as they mature. Children with trauma, mental health needs, or developmental differences may also benefit from interviews that are paced and adapted across more than one session. Providing this flexibility reflects a commitment to the child's best interests, ensuring both their welfare and their ability to contribute meaningfully to the process.

A balancing act- purposeful and proportionate use

Within this context, further interviews should always be purposeful and non-duplicative. They are not intended to repeat previous questioning, but to build on prior sessions—focusing on areas not yet explored, clarifying relevant details, or allowing space for new information that the child introduces. Interviews conducted using the Scottish Child Interview Model require careful pre-interview planning between the forensic interviewer and all relevant multiagency and investigative partners. It should ensure that each session has clear objectives and is aligned with the overall investigative needs.

At the same time, it is essential to maintain a balanced and proportionate approach. While there is no fixed limit on the number of interviews a child may require, an excessive number of interviews conducted using the Scottish Child Interview Model would be a cause for concern. The emphasis must always be on achieving best evidence while safeguarding the child's wellbeing. This reflects both good practice and the UNCRC principle of acting in the child's best interests.

This means that children should be interviewed the minimum number of times necessary to obtain the required information, with each session justified, planned, and conducted to a high standard. It is therefore not the number of interviews that determines quality, but the skill, structure, and integrity of the process.

Summary

Evidence supports a flexible, child-centred, rights-based approach to forensic interviewing, where multiple sessions may be beneficial. The Scottish Child Interview Model allows planning for further interviews, as when used appropriately, this can enable children to disclose information more fully, at their own pace, and in a way that reflects the realities of memory, communication, and trauma. The key is to balance this flexibility with professional discipline—ensuring that every interview is necessary, purposeful, and firmly grounded in the child's rights, choices, and best interests.

Written by Jennifer Morrison, Social Work Team Manager, on behalf of the National JII Team, August 2026

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