

National Joint Investigative Interviewing (JII) Project

Emerging Learning – Dumfries and Galloway – Case Illustrations

December 2022

Introduction

This paper contains case illustrations provided by front line staff involved in the Scottish Child Interview Model in Dumfries and Galloway.

These illustrations are designed to highlight how the Scottish Child Interview Model was used to support seven children with different needs and circumstances to give their evidence in a joint investigative interview.

Pseudonyms have been used and some details altered to protect the identity of the children involved. The children have given permission for their stories to be used to raise awareness of the Scottish Child Interview Model.

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Alana is an 8-year-old child referred after her mother notified authorities that Alana had alleged abuse from her father. In her initial interview Alana made no disclosure. During the scheduled break, Alana opted to remain in the room with one of the interviewers rather than spend that time in the waiting area with mum. While this posed challenges for the interviewers (who use the break to review the interview plan and confer with a supervisor), the child's decision indicated that there may be some issues connected to mum – possibly Alana was feeling pressured by her mother. After being provided with further prompts in the interview, Alana made no further disclosures but did agree she would be happy to be interviewed again if required.

Managers overseeing the investigative strategy decided that no further interview would be required, and this decision was communicated to mum. Mum was not happy with this decision, and she insisted that Alana be interviewed again. This time, the interviewers went to see Alana in the school setting. The same interviewers were utilised, and Alana was provided support by a member of school staff of her choosing. Again, Alana made no disclosure. After the interview, the interviewers and school staff discussed the support available for Alana.

The police interviewer then spent additional time in the family home, supporting mum with understanding this outcome. With the previous model of joint investigative interviewing, this role would be undertaken by social work, or by uniformed officers. However, in these circumstances, the police interviewer was best placed to provide mum with the support she needed, and the new model of practice supports this.

The child protection investigation concluded that there was no evidence of risk to Alana at this time but the effective working relationships between professionals involved with the family, and the relationship developed between the police interviewer and the mother meant that effective support was provided to both Alana and her mother during this difficult time.

Bo

Bo is 11 years old, and a child protection investigation commenced due to serious risks being presented to them during visits to one of their parents who has complex mental health issues. Information shared during the Interagency Referral Discussion, and during follow up planning discussions, highlighted that Bo was very protective of this parent and did not want these visits to stop.

The interviewers expected that Bo would not wish to share any detail of the concerns due to wishing to protect their parent, and contact with them. This potential resistance to disclosing information had been debated during the discussion about whether to interview Bo.

In fact, Bo engaged with the interview process immediately. Bo responded to each stage of the interview protocol and shared extremely graphic, highly detailed, distressing incidents that they had witnessed while in the care of this parent. Bo had no hesitation in speaking and conveyed a sense of relief at having the opportunity to talk about what they had experienced. Some of Bo's account showed that they were processing some of the information while sharing it with the interviewers.

Unexpectedly, Bo then began to make disclosures of concern about his other parent.

The Scottish Child Interview Model explicitly allows for situations such as this. The interviewers used one of the scheduled breaks to devise a Topic Identification Plan for these new and emerging concerns. In this way, the interview plan is adjusted in response to new information from a child, allowing appropriate questioning structure to be developed for the new topics of concern.

These scheduled breaks allow for the child to have some refreshments, get support from their accompanying adult, and just have some time out with the interview. They also provide time for the interviewers to confer about the interview plan and to link with their supervisor about the overarching investigative strategy. In situations like this, a key deliberation is whether to continue to interview the child about the new concerns or schedule another interview for another day. The best interests of the child are the primary consideration.

In total, Bo was in the interview suite for nearly three hours, an incredibly long time for a child. But the interviewers were led by Bo's needs throughout and they wished to continue talking (with regular breaks for comfort). In these circumstances, interviewers will listen to the child's wishes but will also use other information to assess whether continuing with the interview is best or whether it should be continued another day. The interviewers are skilled in supporting children to remain within their window of tolerance* and this guides the pace (and schedule) of interview.

*Window of tolerance refers to a state of emotional arousal within which the child is emotionally regulated, helping them to remember, make sense of and communicate what has happened to them.

Carly

Carly is a 14-year-old girl who was referred for a joint investigative interview following being inappropriately touched by a peer at school. Carly had previously experienced a joint investigative interview under the 5-day-trained model due to being touched inappropriately by an adult.

The lead interviewer for Carly was newly trained in the Scottish Child Interview Model and had reservations about how well the young person would engage with the rapport building and episodic memory training phases of the interview protocol given her age and stage of development. Because this young person had made a clear disclosure and was aware of the reason for interview, the interviewer thought she might be resistant to those initial phases of the interview protocol.

As part of the planning for the interview, the lead interviewer spoke to Carly's mum to find out more about her needs and she also considered Carly's previous experience of joint investigative interviewing. A social work office was selected as an interview venue because it offered a degree of intimacy that felt appropriate. Prior to the interview commencing, the lead interviewer explained that there was a new approach to joint investigative interviewing which might look and feel quite different to Carly's previous experience.

Carly engaged very well with the phases of the interview protocol and, contrary to the interviewer's expectations, she responded well to the rapport building and episodic memory training phases.

After the interview, Carly offered the lead interviewer some feedback, comparing this experience favourably with her last experience. She said this interview felt unique to her. She indicated that she felt her needs were being attended to and said she felt listened to. She told the interviewer that she knew there might not be follow up in the justice system but that wasn't too important to her. Carly said that the questions she had been asked helped her to remember details she had forgotten and that the process of telling her full account in that way helped her feel better.

Dominic

Dominic is 6 years old and accommodated in foster care.

The allocated social worker had a very good understanding of the Scottish Child Interview Model because their Senior is one of the newly trained interviewers.

The allocated social worker was involved in making the decision about where and when to interview the child, as well as agreeing who would be the best person to support the child.

It was agreed that the child would be interviewed in the Category A suite at Dumfries Police Station and that the social worker would attend with them given their established relationship.

The social worker was also fully involved in all aspects of planning the interview. Knowing the child well, she was able to give the interviewers a lot of detail about likes/dislikes as well as detail of communication needs and the impact of some developmental delay. Having undertaken the Three Houses* previously with the child, the social worker was able to share the child's perspective and what had worked well with them previously.

All this information helped shape and inform the interview plan and the interviewers' approach to the child.

The allocated social worker helped to prepare the child for interview by telling them the interviewers names and describing what they looked like. This is one of the benefits of the relatively small workforce in Dumfries and Galloway: all interviewers are well known to the locality social work teams.

On arrival at the interview venue, the interviewers came to greet the child and they paid attention to the soft toy they had brought with them – speaking directly to the teddy as they welcomed the child. The allocated social worker observed this was very successful in helping to start to build rapport and commented that the interviewers' efforts to engage with the child were very evident and made a positive difference to the child's experience.

The child was very excited at being in the police station and a bit distracted having their social worker in another room as the support person. They repeatedly asked to go and see their social worker and were interested in the different rooms in the police building. They did engage in interview, though did not provide very much more detail other than repeating the earlier disclosure.

This child subsequently made further disclosures and those supporting the child were able to use this first experience of a joint investigative interview to continue to make adaptations to support their participation in future interviews.

*Three Houses is a tool used as part of [Signs of Safety](#) which has been implemented across Dumfries and Galloway. The tool supports a child to express and articulate their views about their family and what is happening in their lives which then informs care planning.

Elise

Elise is 16 years old and has had an allocated social worker for several years. After a recent abusive experience, it was agreed that a joint investigative interview would be undertaken as part of a child protection investigation.

The allocated social worker is an interviewer trained in the Scottish Child Interview Model.

Prior to the implementation of the Scottish Child Interview Model, Dumfries and Galloway had introduced a policy that joint investigative interviews would not be undertaken by the allocated social worker as a way of minimising unintentional bias. So, the joint investigative interview was allocated to a different social worker (also trained in the Scottish Child Interview Model).

In addition to being responsible for undertaking the child protection investigation, the key role for the allocated social worker was to support the young person to understand what was happening and to participate in the interview.

The allocated social worker tailored their explanation of the interview process and practice in a trauma-informed and developmentally informed way. Recognising the impact of previous abuse and neglect, and Elise's previous experiences of the child protection system (including a previous joint investigative interview), the social worker was able to allay the high levels of anxiety felt by this young person by explaining the Scottish Child Interview Model in some depth. Detail of the stages of the interview protocol were shared with the young person. This is detail that isn't usually shared as part of preparatory processes – it's not usually required. But the allocated social worker recognised that a previously successful strategy to assist this young person in managing anxiety was to provide a high level of technical detail. The social worker was in a position to be able to provide a high level of detail to the young person to support them in preparing for interview because they were trained in the Scottish Child Interview Model.

This worked very well in this circumstance and, not only did this help Elise to participate meaningfully in the interview, but there was also important learning here about ensuring other locality social workers have a high degree of knowledge about the Scottish Child Interview Model so they too can offer this additional degree of detail where it is in the best interests of the child or young person to do so.

Finn

Finn is 14 years old and witnessed a very serious crime. He has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder plus a range of other conditions, including a visual impairment.

Because of Finn's complex needs and the serious nature of the crime he witnessed; the decision was made locally to gather his evidence via the Scottish Child Interview Model.

Finn was very resistant to being interviewed. He was fearful of repercussions from the alleged perpetrator of the crime, and he didn't want to engage with any part of the investigation, or the support offered to him.

Due to these circumstances, the interviewers visited Finn and his mum at home. The interviewers were able to explain the interview process to Finn and his mum and listen to his fears directly. One of his key fears was being recorded on camera and the interviewers were able to assure him that his evidence could be audio recorded.

Finn's mum told the interviewers a lot of detail about his conditions and explained that he would struggle to engage in interview for longer than approximately ten minutes at a time.

The interviewers consulted with professional colleagues who had specialised knowledge about the conditions impacting on Finn. These colleagues did not know Finn personally, but their knowledge of his conditions helped equip the interviewers with the information they needed to adjust their interview plan to meet Finn's needs.

The interview plan created for Finn was able to meet his needs to the extent that he fully engaged in the interview and provided critical evidence for the ongoing investigation. He was supported to remain in his Window of Tolerance throughout – and this included him engaging for much lengthier periods of time than originally anticipated.

Finn's mum was not a witness in the case, so she was able to stay with him throughout, as a support. She fed back that she was very surprised at how long and how well Finn had been able to engage with the interview and she commented on the skills and abilities of both interviewers in providing highly valuable support before, during and after the interview.

Gabriela

Gabriela is 15 years old and has Downs Syndrome. There was a child protection investigation following her disclosure that a member of her family had physically assaulted her.

During the Interagency Referral Discussion (IRD), the need for a joint investigative interview for Gabriela was discussed at length. The initial investigative strategy was to determine whether evidence might be available via another route – to avoid the need for a forensic interview with Gabriela. This investigative activity did not result in sufficient evidence being obtained so the IRD reconvened to discuss next steps, at which stage it was decided that Gabriela should be interviewed.

Some information about Gabriela's needs was obtained at IRD: she has learning difficulties, speech, language and communication challenges and can be prone to aggressive outbursts when frustrated or distressed.

The interviewers spent a lot of time planning for Gabriela's needs. They consulted with her school, her speech and language therapist and the parent who was not part of the incident under investigation.

The school and the speech and language therapist provided the interviewers with more detailed information about her needs and, critically, shared tools that worked for her in other circumstances. Several tools were adapted for use in the interview – to facilitate Gabriela's participation, maintain her within her window of tolerance, support her emotional wellbeing and provide a degree of consistency in support tools being used in different environments.

Gabriela's parent gave lots of information about her likes and dislikes and was very sceptical that Gabriela would engage with the interview process. They explained that Gabriela was typically non-communicative with anyone she did not know well and that, furthermore, she was exceptionally apprehensive about police involvement, associating police with "being bad".

Due to the complexity of Gabriela's needs, it was agreed that the interviewers would visit her at home to introduce themselves and reassure her about their roles. This visit was successful in allaying Gabriela's anxieties, and she agreed to be interviewed. As a further support, it was agreed that Gabriela's classroom assistant would also be in the interview room while the interview was taking place.

One of Gabriela's main interests is food – cooking, baking and enjoying meals. The interviewers used this information to plan the timing of Gabriela's interview – choosing a day where Gabriela was scheduled to have a cooking lesson at the end of a school day.

On the day of the interview, interviewers were able to use this interest to facilitate initial and ongoing rapport building, as well as end the interview on a positive note as Gabriela was very much looking forward to her cooking lesson.

The extensive planning undertaken by the interviewers meant they were very well prepared for interviewing Gabriela and their interview plan was successful in helping Gabriela to participate in the interview. She made a full and detailed disclosure, which was instrumental in bringing charges against the person who had assaulted her. They subsequently pled guilty to assault.

Gabriela's parent was very surprised at the success of the interview and gave credit to the interviewers for their careful planning and attention to Gabriela's needs. They were very appreciative that this supported Gabriela to give information key to her future safety.