

Relieving Reluctance: The Power of Holding Space for Appropriate Reactions Through the Disclosure Process in a Forensic Interview

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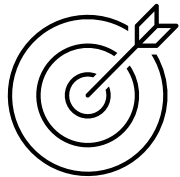
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We want to hear your story of **impact.**

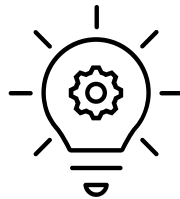
TELL US **YOUR STORY** 



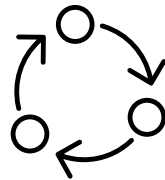
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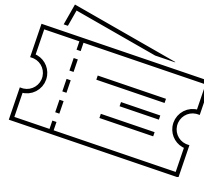
Highlight Success



Inspire Others



Foster Change



Earn Perks

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Objectives



DISCUSS POSSIBLE PRESENTATIONS OF YOUTH WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED TRAUMA AND WHY THOSE PRESENTATIONS SHOULD BE ANTICIPATED



EXPLORE CAUSES AND TYPES OF RELUCTANCE



LEARN STRATEGIES TO MOVE THROUGH RELUCTANCE AND INTO DISCLOSURE IN A FORENSIC INTERVIEW

Developmental Mastery

AGE	Who	What	Where	How	Sequencing	When	#Times
3							
4							
5-6							
7-9							
10-12							
13+							

Lighter green: some children might be able to answer.

Darker green: typically developing children master these concepts at this age.

Developmental considerations

- Assume normal intelligence
- Make every effort to understand identified disability and communication styles
- Going beyond developmental capacity impacts quality of information obtained—also can create discord in interviewer/interviewee relationship
- Question types
 - Narrative inviting
 - Open-focused
 - Multiple choice
 - Y/N



“Culture is a set of learned behaviors and symbols that allow people to live in groups. It is the way of life characteristic of a particular human society.”

Gina South (Cultural Competency: Play well with others)

“Culture influences perception of experiences, memory formation, and language development. Culture may also impact values of family, loyalty and privacy.”

Lisa Aronson Fontes (Psychologist, author, and activist U of Mass Amherst)

The National Equity Project reminds us that every person is set-up to believe the norms of our own cultures are the barometer for how things should/could go.



<https://www.nationalequityproject.org/>

Critical Considerations

- Professional obligation to understand personal biases and the ways these biases show up in our work
<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>
- Alternative hypotheses + bias inventory prior to interacting with each client, colleague, child
- Word choice matters thoughts/ideas/feelings are not facts
- Working alliance with youth and nonoffending caregivers
- Slow down, assess, and ensure families are fully informed and questions are answered—anticipatory guidance begins at hello!
- WHY?



Surviving Child Abuse

- Traumatic event(s)
- Impact on memory
- “Double Blinds” (Herman, 1997)
- Impacts on cognitive, behavior, social-emotional development
- Management
- Disclosure is a process that most avoid



Process of Disclosure

- Accidental
- Purposeful
- Forced

Reluctance: unwillingness or disinclination to do something

Note: a behavior not a character trait



Reluctance is an important and protective superpower

Reluctance is reasonable, reluctance is resilience



Possible Presentations

Links between
physical abuse and
aggressive behavior

May present with
multiple diagnoses
(potentially
misdiagnoses)

May present with
depressive
symptoms, self-
injurious behaviors,
or suicidality

Distrust in
authority/systems

Hypervigilant

May appear just fine

**Henderson,
H. et. al,
(2021)**

Police interviews of 8 female victims (15-17), courtroom transcripts of 6 female victims 15-17 years of commercial sexual exploitation (same trafficker)

16 reluctance tactics identified

Henderson, H. et. al, (2021)

Refusal to Answer	Silence	Sidetrack	Don't like/want
Expresses discomfort	Expresses frustration	Challenges motivation	Challenge Question
Question is Repetitive	Answer is unnecessary	Denies assertion	Quasi-acquiescent
Underinformative (uninformative, echo, minimize, maximize)	Profanity	Interrupt	Uninvited question

Nogalska , A. et. al, (2023)

Researchers examined reluctance of 119 female victims 10-17 years old using the scheme of the CSEA study

Prior disclosure had been made to the interview

Just 8% (compared to 26% of CSEA) victims responded with reluctance

Disclosure type may be the better explanation for reluctance

Barriers to disclosure = Roots of reluctance

Age

Shame/Blame

Immediate
reactions/responses
from outcry witnesses

Cultural
Considerations

Loss of control of
Story

Interviewer/interview
dynamics

Mistrust in systems

Connection to
victim/Offender

Threats from
Offender

Fear of not being
believed

Barrier Assessment



Part of the RADAR protocol



During and/or after rapport building



Explore feelings: "How are you feeling...how are you feeling about being here today?"



Explore thoughts..."Tell me what you are thinking about...what do you think about being here today?"



Can ask about observed emotions

"I notice that you Can you tell me about that?"

Additional causes of reluctance

- Friction between interviewer and youth
- Lack of clarity about roles and expectations



Impacts

- Challenging interview
- Less detail
- Partial truths
- Recantation
- Overall safety

How reluctance shows up

Quiet

Scared/timid

Compliant
but not
forthcoming

Denial

Interview
role reversal

I don't know,
I don't
remember

Silly



Withdrawing support and rushing to the substantive phase is often the response...

refrain...hold space

Studies done on NICHD revised protocol which adds supportive interventions shows:

- Increased valid disclosure rates
- Disclosures with fewer prompts
- More forensically relevant information provided

Responding to expressions of reluctance with support effectively manages reluctance

Blasbalg, U., Hershkowitz, I., & Karni-Visel, Y. (2018). Support, reluctance, and production in child abuse investigative interviews. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 24(4), 518-527.

Interview Preparation

- MDT plan for interview, is a multi-session interview an option?
- Anticipate barriers
 - Circumstances of disclosure
 - Information from team and family
 - How is child feeling about being here
- Fold supportive statements into all interviews

Interview

- Intentionally spend time in rapport to establish conversation and connection
- Utilize NEP and anticipatory guidance
- Pay attention to reluctance cues (“I don’t know, I don’t remember,” shifts in demeanor, or more obvious disengagement) and get curious!
- Manage with support and breaks
- Be ready to pivot

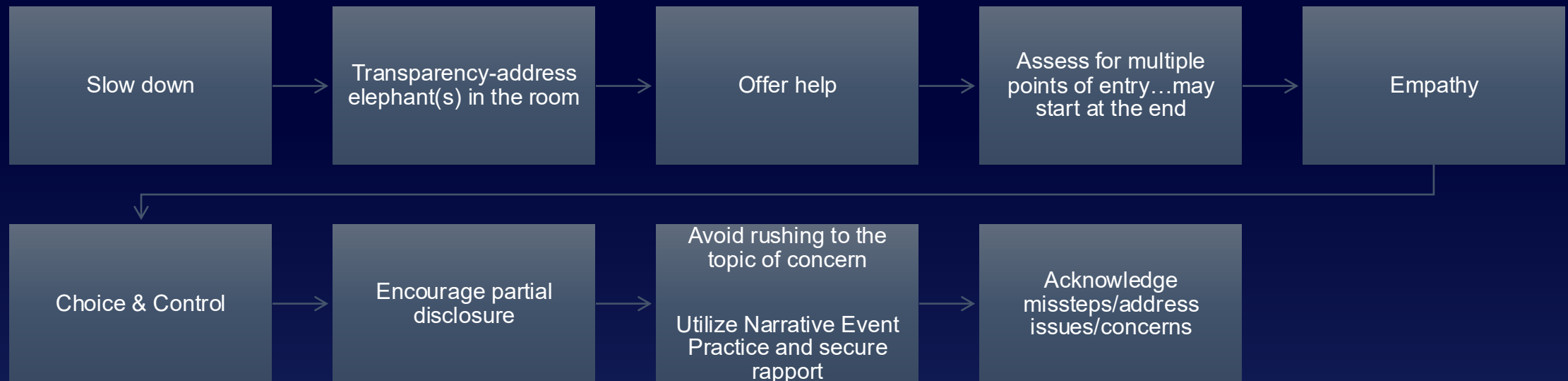
Notice → Source → Respond

Be attuned to reluctance behaviors, identify the source/cause, move through not around

A 3D maze with a central circular opening, symbolizing complexity and navigation. The maze is constructed from thick, light-colored stone or concrete walls, creating a series of concentric and intersecting paths. The lighting is dramatic, with strong shadows and highlights that emphasize the three-dimensional nature of the structure. The overall tone is somber and contemplative.

Navigating the Topic of Concern

Ways to connect...ways to engage



Possible Phrases

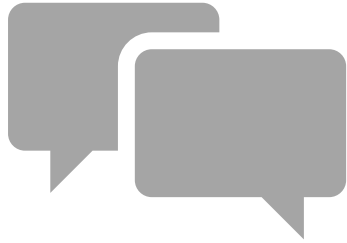
- “Is there anything I can do to help make this more comfortable?”
- “How are you feeling now that we have been talking about some of this?”
- “I understand this may feel (child’s word), I speak with youth everyday about things that have happened in their lives, and I want you to know that I am here to listen to you...please let me know if I can do anything to make this easier for you...”

How can we support youth in the FI?

- Forced disclosure
- Displaced from home
- NOC does not believe
- Fear of not being believed
- Fear of getting into trouble/other consequences
- Pressure from family/siblings not to tell



Post-interview



Discuss plan for next interview (if applicable)



Intentional triage with mental health and advocacy

Peer and Self-Review

Look for reluctance cues and responses you've provided—how can we continue to do better?



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Questions & Comments

Thank You

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