

## **Protocol for Forensically Sensitive History from a Child**

### **Establish rapport:**

Talk about school, television, play or recent activities. Ask open-ended questions that require the child to describe things in a sustained narrative. Then ask them to tell you more, what happened next, etc. get them used to talking

### **Introduce your role:**

Tell the child that you are their physician today, and need to talk to them so that you can take care of them. Tell them you need to ask some hard questions, which might be personal or embarrassing, but you need the information to take care of them. Ask them to help you by answering the questions truthfully. Some researchers feel that eliciting a promise to tell the truth is helpful. Do not, however, test the child's ability to determine truth from lie.

### **Attempt to elicit a narrative of the abuse:**

The cleanest history occurs when you provide no information. You may begin by asking, "what happened to you so that you need to see the doctor today", or similar question.

Many children will answer "I don't know." You may set the stage, providing progressively more background information, until they respond.

"Has something happened to your body that was a problem?"

Remind them of antecedent events. "did you tell your mommy something that made her want you to see the doctor" etc.

Elaborate on your role. "I'm a special doctor, for when a big person, or kid, touches or hurts another kid. Has something like that happened to you?"

Situations will dictate whether you provide more information, or ask more direct questions. Never ask a question that might be construed to suggest a correct or preferred answer.

If a child begins a narrative, ask them to continue it. "Please tell me all about that." "Tell me everything about the last time that happened."

A child may need help structuring the narrative, "tell me what happened first", "what happened next", what happened before that."

Who, what and where questions can help get more information. When questions are hard for children, up to age ten or so. Why questions are often difficult at all ages. If asked, they must be prefaced so as to avoid suggesting that the child is culpable.