

## Handout 3.2 Guidelines for Interviewing Children<sup>1</sup>

### A. Basic principles when interviewing a child

- Ensure that you comfortable doing the interview. If you are not comfortable, seek support from colleagues who are willing to talk with the child.
- Ensure that the child is comfortable. Establish a feeling of permissiveness so that the child feels free to express his/her feelings.
- Be alert in recognising the feelings that the child is expressing.
- Understand the child's feelings, behaviour, needs and situations from the child's point of view and not your own point of view.
- Help the child recognise and be aware that he/she is not alone in resolving his/her present difficulty.
- Take the child seriously at all times, even though his/her story might seem strange, unreal and not meaningful. It might be his/her way of telling the story.
- Accept the child for who he/she is. The child might have different experiences from what you expect children to have.
- Explain that you need to know what happened so as to provide effective care.

### B. General interviewing skills

- Establish rapport and trust.
  - Identify a topic of interest.
  - Share a toy.
  - Sit at eye level with the child.
  - Establish eye contact.
  - Pursue discussion of a topic that the child is interested in if time permits and is related to the goal of the session.
- Observe the child's behaviour and body language.
- Use simple language and the child's vocabulary.  
*e.g., Child says: "my dada touched my kuku".*  
*Appropriate response : "How did your dada touch your kuku?"*
- Clarify any questions or statements from the child.
- Some children might tell fanciful stories involving a third person. Note those stories are ways of telling their own story.
- Show the child that you are really listening by restating what he/she has said to check whether your understanding of what has been said by the child is consistent with his/her meaning.
- Be aware of the reasons why a child might not want to participate in an interview. A child might not want to participate in an interview for the following reasons:-
  - The abuser has coerced or threatened the child if the child speaks out.
  - The child feels that he/she has to protect the abuser, e.g., he/she does not want his/her parent to go to jail.
  - The child does not want to recount the experiences because they have been too traumatic
  - The child might be scared of you or does not trust you.
  - The child might feel responsible for the abuse and might feel guilty.

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<sup>1</sup> Some extracts from Training Manual for Community Facilitators , by Helen Braganza Guillermo for Everychild Guyana

- Reassure the child that he/she did not do anything wrong in telling you and your colleagues.
- Ask the child where he/she would like to go to feel safe.
- Follow up with the necessary referrals.
- Pay attention to what the child is saying.
- Allow the child to speak freely.
- Be cautious about touching the child, especially one who has been physically or sexually abused.
- Allow the child to accept, reject or modify messages received.

### **C. Things to avoid when interviewing a child**

- Do not correct the child's grammar or vocabulary.
- Do not be judgmental.
- Do not command or dictate to the child what he/she is supposed to do.
- Avoid warning or threatening the child.
- Do not give direct advice or provide solutions to their problems.
- Do not argue or persuade the child to do something which he/she may not like to do.
- Do not label the child negatively (*"You were a bad girl, that is why your mummy did that to you"*).
- Do not ask leading questions which could put ideas into the child's head. The child could start telling you what they think you want to hear.
- Do not ask 'Why' questions for these may feel like accusation or rejection, often resulting in defensive or withdrawn responses from the child. For example, do not ask "Why did your daddy touch your kuku?"
- Never make promises or reassurances without knowing if these can be fulfilled.