Incorporating Narrative Practice in Child Forensic Interviews

“START FROM THE BEGINNING AND TELL ME EVERYTHING YOU REMEMBER”

WHERE ARE WE HEADED TODAY?

- Understanding Narrative Practice: What, Why, & How
- Practice Makes (Narrative) Practice
- Reflection, Questions, Wrap-Up
UNDERSTANDING NARRATIVE PRACTICE

What is it? Why do it? And how?

WHAT IS NARRATIVE PRACTICE?

- Also known as practice narratives, practice interview, narrative training, or episodic memory training

- A “critical component of the forensic interview” which “consists of asking the child to tell about a neutral or positive event in a way that maximizes open-ended questioning and encourages narrative responses.” (APSAC, 2012, p. 18)
WHY DO NARRATIVE PRACTICE?

- Because there is agreement in the field
- To align your practice with best practice recommendations
  - APSAC Guidelines
  - OJJDP White Paper

WHY DO NARRATIVE PRACTICE?

- Because it’s in your protocol
  - Child First
  - NCAC
  - CornerHouse
  - RADAR
  - NICHD
  - 10 Step Investigative Interview
- Because research supports it
  - See NCAC’s annotated bibliography (NCAC, 2016)
A forensic interview is a novel experience for most children

- Uninformed adult
- Power dynamics
- Usual “rules” of conversation do not apply

(Steele & NCAC, 2010)

- Child practices remembering information
  - Retrieving
  - Recounting
- Interviewer practices using question types
  - Narrative invitations
  - Open-ended questions
  - Detail (WH) questions

(Roberts, Brubacher, Powell, & Price, 2011)
Informs the child about the interview
- What type of information the interviewer wants to know (i.e. what is forensically relevant)
- How to communicate it (i.e. child does most of the talking and shares details they remember)

(APSAC, 2012)

Informs the interviewer about the child
- Development and abilities
- Speech patterns
- Willingness to engage
- Response patterns to different types of questions
- Testimonial competency (ability to accurately perceive, remember, and communicate about an event)

(APSAC, 2012)
Substantial research shows that children provide longer and more detailed responses in the substantive (allegation) phase when narrative practice is part of the rapport-building phase.

(Newsom, et al., 2015; Roberts, Brubacher, Powell, & Price, 2011; Saywitz, Lyon, & Goodman, 2018; Steele & NCAC, 2010)

**WHEN & HOW DO I DO IT?**

- Early in the interview
  - During the rapport-building phase
  - Prior to transitioning to the topic of concern
  - Refer to your forensic interviewing protocol or model for specific guidance

- Rapport-building ≠ Narrative practice
Non-narrative Rapport Building vs. Narrative Practice

Common topics for narrative practice *(APSAC, 2012)*
- Something mentioned by child or shared by caregiver prior to the interview
  - Interest
  - Activity
  - Recent event
- Last birthday
- What the child did prior to arriving at CAC

**AVOID** topics involving the setting or people indicated in the allegation

**Five minutes should be long enough** *(Saywitz, Lyon, & Goodman, 2018)*
Don’t try to get sequence

Ask about a topic that you know they know something about
  ▪ Daily routine
  ▪ Favorite activity reported by caregiver

Use their language
Child transitions to allegation before you initiate narrative practice
Child has communication differences or disability
Other situations?
Ask yourself:
  Do I have a reason to skip it?
  Can I justify my decision in court if needed?
NARRATIVE PRACTICE PARTNER EXERCISE

- Two minutes: Find a Partner
  - Someone you don’t know or don’t know well; NOT a colleague
  - Decide who will be in the role of the forensic interviewer first (Partner A) and who will be interviewed first (Partner B)
NARRATIVE PRACTICE PARTNER EXERCISE

- Five minutes: Choose Your Own Adventure
  - Option One: Use one of the child profile examples
  - Option Two: Get creative and come up with your own “character”
  - Option Three: Be yourself

SEE HANDOUT

REFLECTION, QUESTIONS, & WRAP UP
REFERENCES

Cordisco Steele, L., & National Children’s Advocacy Center (2010). Narrative practice (What is it and why is it important?): A research-to-practice summary. Huntsville, AL: National Children’s Advocacy Center.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Lydia Johnson Grady, MSW, LSW
ljohnsongrady@gmail.com
304.704.5677