

Part II: The Development of Language and Conceptual Abilities in Children

Introduction

The Challenge of Communicating with Children

Communicating with children can be challenging as well as exciting.

How children convey their thoughts and feelings, their needs, their understanding of their relationships, and their problems depends on their developmental level and their ability to use language.

Understanding what children are trying to convey also depends upon your own sensitivity to their cues, your skills at observation and assessment, and your ability to relate to them meaningfully and effectively.

Communicating for Risk Assessment

All comprehensive interviews in child abuse/maltreatment investigations should be conducted by specially trained child interview specialists, preferably in a multidisciplinary interview center.

However, caseworkers have ongoing responsibility for assessing children's safety and/or risk of harm. Part of the assessment will rest on the things that children tell caseworkers and caregivers as well as on what caseworkers observe when they meet children in their natural settings.

The information in the "What you should say or do" column is appropriate for use in both individual settings and in family groups.

The Variability of Children's Developmental Progress

Child development is characterized by enormous variability. The following chart presents the research findings of many experts in the field of child development, especially as found in *Clinical and Forensic Interviewing of Children and Families* (Sattler 1998), a fine, highly detailed resource that districts may wish to purchase as a reference for staff. Additional information about language development was also derived from a Newsweek article, "The Language Explosion" (Cowley 1997). See also Fernald, Marchman, and Weisleder, 2013.

However, individual children all follow their own individualized developmental clocks. If concerns arise about the appropriateness of a child's developmental progress in a given area, supervisors and caseworkers should be consulted to determine whether outside professional evaluation of the child should be sought.

