

TARGET ARTICLE

How Parents Can Shape What Children Remember: Implications for the Testimony of Young Witnesses

Gabrielle F. Principe¹ and Kamala London²

¹ Department of Psychology, College of Charleston, United States

² Department of Psychology, University of Toledo, United States

Forensic investigations involving children carry heavy consequences and often present immense challenges. Most child maltreatment allegations first occur in an informal setting, where young witnesses discuss legally relevant information with parents before official interviews. After decades of developmental research on how various qualities of formal interviews can shape children's forensic reports, a growing body of work examining parent–child memory-sharing exchanges demonstrates that informal conversations with others outside of investigative interviews are a powerful source of mnemonic influence. Not only can suggestions offered by parents intrude into children's later independent accounts, they also can lead children to make novel and elaborate reports of nonoccurring events. Despite the potency of parental conversations on children's recollections, children typically fail to recognize parents as the source of memory errors. We offer suggestions for future research and legal practice.

General Audience Summary

Memory-sharing conversations among parents and children have received much research attention among developmental scientists. Such exchanges play a central role in the development of autobiographical memory and in the growth of children's broader social and cognitive skills. Parents scaffold young children's narratives, teaching them the structure and function of recounting life's experiences with others. In the present article, we review a growing body of work focused on the role of parent–child conversations about past events. Extant studies demonstrate that, regardless of their accuracy, when parents hold beliefs about what their children experienced, parents are prone to mold their conversations to elicit reports from their children consistent with those beliefs. Parents who exert greater structure and control in these exchanges tend to intensify false reports in their children. Compared to their everyday conversations, when parents are motivated to elicit accurate accounts, they paradoxically produce more false information from their children. The influence of parents' contributions is evident not only during parent–child discussions but also later during formal interviews with children by an unfamiliar person who employs neutral open-ended questioning strategies. Importantly, children may recall little about the initial parent–child conversations, even if the conversations were highly suggestive. Young children are unlikely to recognize the suggestive nature of even highly leading conversations. Likewise, older children and adults alike perform poorly in recalling the structure and content of prior conversations. In child maltreatment investigations, children almost always talk with one of their parents (or other concerned adults) before reaching authorities, so this topic has much forensic relevance. Given the mnemonic effects of parent–child discussions, combined with the way most child sexual abuse cases reach authorities, we argue that such exchanges present the single most important challenge faced by contemporary child maltreatment investigators. We conclude by offering recommendations for evaluating the potential impact of parent–child conversations in child maltreatment investigations.

Keywords: parent–child conversations, suggestibility, informal influence, children, eyewitness memory

Editor's Note. Qi Wang served as the action editor for this article.—QW

Gabrielle F. Principe  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7142-9873>

Kamala London  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7524-8105>

This article is published in the memory of Sarah Kulkofsky who was a trailblazer in the field and whose work left a lasting impact.

Gabrielle F. Principe played an equal role in conceptualization, writing of original draft, and writing of review and editing. Kamala London played an equal role in conceptualization, writing of original draft, and writing of review and editing.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Gabrielle F. Principe, Department of Psychology, College of Charleston, 55 George Street, Charleston, SC 29424, United States. Email: principeg@cofc.edu

Many criminal offenses that bring children to court, such as sexual abuse and other forms of molestation, typically lack other witnesses or corroborating evidence (Cross & Whitcomb, 2017; Otgaar et al., 2017). As such, children's testimony often serves as the sole piece of evidence against defendants in such cases. Given that children's testimony is elicited in interviews, developmental researchers have focused much attention on the mnemonic effects of various questioning techniques. This substantial literature has revealed that even though children as young as 3 years of age can provide reliable accounts of personal experiences (see Gordon et al., 2001; Peterson, 2012, for reviews), suggestive interviewing practices can seriously derail children's accuracy and even lead to entirely false accounts that are relayed with such believability that professionals wrongly judge them as true (see Bruck et al., 2002, 2007, for reviews).

Interviewer bias has been identified as the driving force of suggestive questioning (Ceci & Bruck, 1995). Interviewer bias occurs when interviewers hold a priori beliefs about what happened and consequently mold their questioning to elicit accounts that confirm their beliefs. This bias can be communicated to children by a range of suggestive techniques such as providing new details, asking forced-choice probes, repeating questions, referencing stereotypes, making requests to visualize, offering praise or bribes, and mentioning that others already have reported information consistent with adults' beliefs about what occurred (see Ceci & Bruck, 1993; Schreiber et al., 2006).

Prompted by findings demonstrating the profound modifiability of children's reports in response to biased questioning, various research groups developed empirically based forensic interview protocols, such as the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) protocol (e.g., Lamb et al., 2008; Poole, 2016). In short, these protocols encourage interviewers to use open-ended prompts to maximize the amount of information children provide in their own words (Newlin et al., 2015) and to avoid biased techniques (Poole, 2016).

Despite the effectiveness of approaches like the NICHD protocol in improving the amount and accuracy of children's event reports (see Lamb et al., 2007, 2018; Saywitz et al., 2011; Teoh & Lamb, 2013), developmental researchers have become increasingly interested in examining sources of bias outside of the formal interview environment. This shift has been prompted by studies demonstrating that even when interviewed in an optimally unbiased manner, children at times will report events that never happened (Ornstein et al., 1998; Poole et al., 2014; Poole & Lindsay, 2001; Principe & Smith, 2007; Principe et al., 2000).

One potential source of extra-interview influence that has been gaining attention is the informal conversations children have with family members and close others before being brought to authorities. Parents are especially significant to instances of suspected abuse because such concerns often arise during interactions with a nonoffending caregiver, such as a parent (Hershkowitz et al., 2007; London et al., 2005; Malloy et al., 2013). In fact, parents' beliefs about what happened to their children typically are shared with the investigation team prior to questioning (Rivard & Schreiber Compo, 2017) and as such may create preexisting notions that trigger interviewer bias and consequently jeopardize the accuracy of children's statements. Thus, a critical issue for child witness research is understanding how exchanges with parents can affect the reliability of children's accounts.

In the remainder of this article, we provide a scientific foundation to argue that understanding the mnemonic impact of informal conversations with parents, particularly mothers, is the single most important challenge facing contemporary investigations of child sexual abuse (CSA). Our article is divided into four main sections. We begin with a review of classic work on mother-child memory-sharing exchanges and discuss the insights that research and theory in this area gives us for considering maternal influence in the legal arena. Next, we work through the growing stream of studies examining how conversations with mothers about nonshared events can influence young children's subsequent independent remembering, with a particular focus on dialogues where mothers have been exposed to misleading information about their children's experiences. This focus is motivated by findings discussed above that demonstrate the potency of a priori beliefs to bring about biased questioning styles that can put children at risk for making reporting errors (see Ceci & Bruck, 1995). Indeed, the concept of interviewer bias is not limited to forensic interviewers but can include any conversational partner who has an agenda when talking with children about past events (Bruck et al., 2002). In situations involving allegations of child abuse, mothers rarely have definite knowledge about what happened, yet they often talk with their children prior to making official reports (Lawson et al., 2018). Thus, examining the conditions under which beliefs or suspicions about the possibility of abuse might trigger parents to engage in behaviors characteristic of interview bias to elicit accounts from their children is paramount to our understanding of factors that can influence children's forensic accounts. Our emphasis on parental misinformation is not meant to downplay the importance of studying the impact of parents who have accurate information about their children's experiences (see Lawson et al., 2018, for a review). In the penultimate section, we review the scientific literature on children's and parents' ability to remember the details of their conversational interactions.

We conclude with recommendations for handling parental influence in forensic practice. It is important to point out that our knowledge of the ways in which parents can affect children's memory in experimental settings far exceeds our ability to predict how any given parent might influence their child's testimony in a forensic context. Moreover, most of the work in this area has been conducted with Western middle-class families and largely has focused on mothers to the exclusion of fathers. As such, many of the recommendations we make will evolve and become more nuanced as research in this area grows and we come to better understand the complex network of factors, including cultural, that affect how parents can shape children's reports of their experiences. Nonetheless, we believe the current state of scientific knowledge about parental influence is sufficient to inform the treatment of young witnesses in the legal system.

The Structure and Function of Everyday Parent-Child Memory Sharing

The earliest research on parent-child reminiscing centers on the ways parents' guide their children's recollections of shared experiences. In line with most research on parent-child interactions (Paquette, 2004), most studies in this area have centered on

mothers, but fathers show similar reminiscing styles (see Fivush, 2019a). In everyday life, parents frequently engage their children in conversations about their past for a variety of practical purposes, such as to build a shared history, maintain emotional bonds, reduce negative affect, foster self-understanding, and direct future behavior (Kulkofsky, 2011). In fact, studies focusing on such discussions in the home have found that they occur multiple times an hour (see Fivush, 2019a). Across the early years, these dialogues also provide the foundation for children's developing autobiographical remembering skills (see Nelson & Fivush, 2020, for a review).

This view of autobiographical memory as shaped by parent-child reminiscing is motivated by Nelson and Fivush's (2004) social cultural developmental theory. In this view, by participating in parent-guided conversations of the past, children gradually internalize a framework for organizing their experiences, formulating their own personal memories, and relaying these recollections to others in a narrative form. This model is based on observations that as soon as children begin to talk, parents draw them into conversations about shared experiences (see Fivush, 2019a). At first, children contribute very little. Rather parents provide most of the narrative by using prompts that children may affirm or deny, probing for details that children may produce, and providing their own memories when children are not remembering. Even though these early stories are largely a function of the questions parents pose and the memories parents share, the resulting narratives provide children an organizational structure to use in their own autobiographical remembering (Reese & Brown, 2000).

As children move through the preschool and elementary school years, they become less dependent on their parents' scaffolding and participate more actively in memory exchanges by adding onto their parents' contributions, offering original information, and asking their own questions (Nelson & Fivush, 2004). Parental scaffolding continues to build children's autobiographical skills by drawing out additional details, validating and expanding on what children report, and providing connective threads among responses.

Given children's early and essential reliance on parents to scaffold their recall into a coherent story, it seems likely that how children retrieve and relay a certain experience, especially at young ages, would be particularly sensitive to how that event had been reconstructed in prior conversations with parents. In fact, there is some evidence that parent-guided reminiscing after an event is more powerful in shaping children's subsequent recollections than parent-guided narration during an experience (Conroy & Salmon, 2006). The literature on parent-child reminiscing, however, cannot offer much insight into questions about how parents can shape what children recall about an experience because accuracy for a specific event rarely has been a dependent variable in this line of research (for an exception, see Leichtman et al., 2000). Generally, the experiences studied in this tradition are undocumented past occurrences and therefore do not permit objective assessments of the veracity of memory.

The inattention toward accuracy in the reminiscing literature comes, in part, from the appreciation that parent-child memory exchanges can serve their typical functions even when children's recollections do not exactly represent the past (Kulkofsky & Klemfuss, 2008). In fact, parents at times may tolerate and even encourage some degree of error, depending on the goals of retelling an event in any particular moment (see Pasupathi, 2001). For instance, an embellished story can be more engaging to listeners than a precisely accurate account. In fact, listeners feel closer to their conversational partners when they tell exaggerated

stories as opposed to giving accurate accounts, even when listeners know the facts of the past (Cole & Beike, 2018). Likewise, parents may offer fabricated knowledge or a differing appraisal of the past to prompt a revision in memory that serves to help children repair an injured sense of self or decrease their emotional distress (Bluck & Alea, 2009; Pillemer, 2009). Furthermore, the tendency to encourage embellishments may be especially pronounced at young ages given children's proclivity for pretense and parents' willingness to play along (see Principe & Smith, 2007).

Everyday Versus Forensic Memory Sharing

Against this backdrop of everyday memory sharing, parent-child discussions about events that have forensic relevance present an unusual setting for joint remembering. In everyday life, coconstructing the past with parents is successful to the extent that it facilitates personal storytelling, nurtures connectedness, regulates negative emotion, or guides future behavior. By contrast, in recalling forensically relevant events with parents, precise accuracy is the sole goal. Remembering is successful to the extent that parents and children "tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." Thus, when children and parents recount events that have forensic relevance, unique demands are placed on memory that are at odds with the way that children's memories typically are reconstructed in their everyday discussions.

Recognizing this mismatch between the functions of everyday parent-child memory-sharing and forensically relevant exchanges gives us a useful lens to consider the potential impact of such exchanges on children's accuracy. From this vantage, some of the techniques parents commonly use to elicit information from children during everyday conversations (see Fivush, 2019b, for examples) would be considered suggestive or biased in the vernacular of the forensic interviewing literature (see Ceci & Bruck, 1995). For instance, when children are not remembering, parents often supply their own details (e.g., "You don't remember? Remember when you ate too many cookies and got a bellyache?"), offer their own interpretations (e.g., "That made you angry when Max broke your glasses, right?"), ask forced-choice questions (e.g., "Who put gum in your hair, Sophie or Eva?"), or speculate with yes/no probes (e.g., "Daddy overslept, didn't he?"). In everyday exchanges, such questions and statements effectively scaffold young children's contributions and teach them how to relate their personal experiences in a socially valued way (see Fivush, 2019a). Even if parents' suggestions include false information, they likely would be without serious consequence and even may go unnoticed. However, questions of these very same forms could have dire consequences in the forensic arena if the information suggested by parents is inaccurate and children later report it as fact. Indeed, studies examining how parents question their children about simulated crimes demonstrate that parents naturally rely on these sorts of probes to elicit recall (Warren & Peterson, 2014), suggesting that even when parents are working to extract the truth, they may use what would be construed as biased questions in the forensic interviewing arena. Thus, given that parents use the kinds of questions that can elicit false reports in both everyday and forensic recall settings, understanding the conditions that can prompt parents to do so and the resulting influences on children's accuracy is a critical issue for the study of children's eyewitness testimony.

Mnemonic Consequences of Parent-Guided Conversations

Given the seeming mnemonic potency of parental misinformation shared in conversation, next we move to a discussion of research that explores the impact of misleading information introduced during such exchanges by parents on children's event recollections. In the earliest work in this area, experimenters prepared scripted materials for parents to present to their children that referenced an event staged by experimenters and experienced by children, such as a play session or science demonstration. Specifically, parents read aloud stories or questions that contained both accurate and inaccurate information about the earlier event. When later questioned by an unfamiliar interviewer, children's reports were likely to include nonexperienced details suggested by their parents, demonstrating that parents' postevent suggestions can serve as a source of memory error (Laimon & Poole, 2008; see Lawson et al., 2018, for a review; Poole & Dickinson, 2011, 2014; Poole & Lindsay, 1995, 2001, 2002; Schaaf et al., 2015).

Findings of parental influence under scripted conditions prompted developmental researchers to explore the impact of unscripted exchanges with parents on children's subsequent event remembering. Unscripted discussions were used to more closely mirror natural memory exchanges parents have with their children. To illustrate, consider the following dialogue between an unfamiliar experimenter and 4-year-old Layla, who was asked to recall what happened the day a magician named Magic Mumfry put on a magic show in her preschool.

- Exp: *Tell me everything that happened when Magic Mumfry came to your school.*
- Child: *His rabbit, he go in my lunch bag and he eat my carrots!*
- Exp: *Whose rabbit?*
- Child: *Magic Mumfry!*
- Exp: *Ok so Magic Mumfry's rabbit ate your carrots?*
- Child: *Yeah, I feed him and he drink water.*
- Exp: *He drank water, ok. Did anything else happen?*
- Child: *Hide.*
- Exp: *What?*
- Child: *The rabbit.*
- Exp: *The rabbit hid?*
- Child: *Yeah, he hide under the table.*
- Exp: *He did?*
- Child: *Yeah, he don't come to me.*
- Exp: *He didn't come to you?*
- Child: *No, he's eating carrots and then I want to pet him. But he don't come out.*

There are several noteworthy aspects of this exchange. First, Layla's contributions demonstrate that, like most children of her age, she can provide a coherent and convincing event report. Second, and more relevant to the theme of this article, none of the things that Layla relayed happened—her entire account is a fabrication. How then did these false details make it into Layla's report to the experimenter's neutral prompt, "Tell me what happened"? The answer is her mother. Prior to this interview, Layla's mother was exposed to misinformation about the magic show, namely that Magic Mumfry's rabbit may have gotten loose. She was instructed to talk with Layla about the show and ask if a rabbit got loose—nothing more. Nonetheless, Layla's mother went beyond the simple request and asked other questions consistent with the idea of a loose rabbit. For example, she asked Layla if the rabbit hid anywhere. As the dialogue above shows, the maternal suggestion about hiding seeped into Layla's later independent account. But there is more to the story: During their conversation, neither Layla nor her mother mentioned anything about the rabbit eating carrots or drinking water. These details—although very much in line with the theme of the misinformation given to her mother—were original constructions invented by Layla during the interview.

In the investigation in which Layla was a participant (Principe, Greenhoot, & Ceci, 2013), 3- to 5-year-old children saw a scripted magic show in their preschools. During the show, a magician named Magic Mumfry tried to pull a live rabbit out of his hat. After several failed efforts, he gave up and left the school. One week later, children were questioned by an unfamiliar interviewer about the show and instructed to report "only things that you remember happening to you—things that you really did or remember seeing with your own eyes." On the morning of the interview, mothers were asked to talk in a natural manner with their children about the show. Some mothers also were given a false suggestion that the magician's rabbit may have gotten loose during the show and were instructed to ask their children about this possibility.

Layla's account during the formal interview is characteristic of those relayed by many of the children whose mothers were exposed to the misinformation about the loose rabbit. More than half of the children whose mothers were misinformed reported a loose rabbit, indicating that misinformation encountered by mothers can intrude into children's memory—without any direct instructions to suggest nonoccurring events. A good number of children, like Layla, recalled this nonevent at an open-ended level of questioning, demonstrating that errors can appear even in free recall when mothers have been exposed to misleading information. Furthermore, nearly all children who later reported the loose rabbit in the interview peppered their reports with some of the very details suggested earlier about this nonevent by their mothers. However, many children, like Layla, improvised novel embellishments that went beyond their mothers' suggestions, discrediting the belief among some child maltreatment professionals that it is easy to detect false reports resulting from adult influence because children purportedly would simply parrot copy adults' words (see Ceci et al., 2007). Importantly, none of the children whose mothers were not exposed to the misinformation mentioned a loose rabbit, even when directly asked if anything had happened to Mumfry's rabbit. Further demonstrating the potency of misinformed mothers on memory, the rates of false reports and fictitious elaboration in this investigation were as high or higher than those elicited in extant studies in the suggestibility literature where unfamiliar adults

induce false reports in children using scripted suggestive techniques (for a review, see [Bruck et al., 2006](#)).

Why do mother-guided conversations lead to such potent mnemonic effects? Consider an excerpt from the preinterview conversation between Layla and her mother:

Mother: *Did anything happen with a rabbit? With Magic Mumfry's rabbit?*

Child: *Yeah.*

Mother: *What happened with the rabbit?*

Child: *I didn't see it.*

Mother: *You didn't see it? Why not? Did it get out and run away?*

Child: *I don't know.*

Mother: *Did he pull it out of his hat? Mumfry?*

Child: *No.*

Mother: *No?*

Child: *He go, "Hocus pocus!"*

Mother: *Those are magic words, right? Hocus pocus! What happened when he said that?*

Child: *Nothing.*

Mother: *Nothing? Come on. What happened to the rabbit? Did it come out of the hat or stay in there?*

Child: *Come out.*

Mother: *Ok! It came out. Where'd it go?*

Child: *I don't know.*

Mother: *Why? You got to know. I know you remember. Did it run away?*

Child: *Yeah.*

Mother: *Ok, where'd it go? Did it hide, hide somewhere?*

Child: *Hide.*

Mother: *It hid. Where? Did you see it?*

Child: *Under my table.*

Mother: *Ah just like you do after school. Who got it out or did it just come out by itself?*

As this excerpt demonstrates, Layla's mother, like many of the misinformed mothers in this study, used strategies typical of biased interviewers. For instance, she asked questions that introduced new information consistent with a belief that a loose rabbit occurred (e.g., "Did it get out and run away?"), posed forced-choice questions implying that one of two possibilities in line with that belief (e.g., "Did it come out of the hat or stay in there?"), repeated questions when Layla failed to provide the desired response, confirmed

responses consistent with the belief (e.g., "Ok! It came out. Where'd it go?"), and offered pressure when Layla was not remembering (e.g., "You got to know. I know you remember."). Indeed, these mothers likely had no intention to mislead, but their natural tendency shape the conversation to elicit reports consistent with the belief that Mumfry's rabbit was loose inadvertently created a biased memory-sharing context (see [Ceci & Bruck, 1995](#)) that based on studies in the suggestibility literature (see [Bruck et al., 2007](#), for a review) would be expected to lead children to make false reports.

Parent-Child Conversational Style Matters

Despite the potency of mothers' suggestions to engender high levels of error in children's reports, not all children in [Principe, DiPuppo, and Gammel's \(2013\)](#) study whose mothers were misinformed made false claims. Thus, mere exposure to misinformation from mothers does not invariably lead to later memory errors in all children. Given this individual variation in vulnerability to maternal misinformation, researchers have begun to search for characteristics of exchanges with misled mothers that might put children more or less at risk for subsequent errors. For instance, [Principe et al. \(2017\)](#) used their magic show paradigm to explore the impact of various aspects of mothers' memory-sharing style. Specifically, they found that preschool-aged children whose mothers naturally offered high levels of elaborative structure (defined as elaborative questions and statements) and controlled the conversational agenda (defined in terms of functional control of conversational turns; see, e.g., [Cleveland & Reese, 2005](#)) during the preinterview conversation were particularly prone to concurrent and later memory errors in line with maternal misinformation.

Why might the combination of high structure and high control be especially damaging to children's memories when mothers have been misinformed? Examination of the mother-child dialogues indicated that the combined tendencies of high-structure mothers to offer new information when their children are not remembering and high-control mothers to promote a particular conversational agenda, rather than supporting their children's autonomy in telling their experience, was particularly damaging when mothers have been exposed to misinformation. Specifically, their questioning bared close similarity to the sorts of biased techniques identified in the suggestibility literature as characteristic of forensic interviewers who are motivated to get children to confirm their a priori beliefs (see [Bruck et al., 2007](#)). These mothers, like Layla's mother, were especially likely to use *multiple* forms of biased utterances when talking with their children, such as introducing new details consistent with the maternal misinformation, suggesting a particular response in line with this misinformation, and asking forced-choice questions consistent with its theme, as opposed to limiting their utterances about the misleading information to a singular form. This is a particularly important finding because studies in the suggestibility literature (e.g., [Bruck et al., 2002](#); [Garven et al., 1998, 2000](#); [Leichtman & Ceci, 1995](#)) reveal the highest levels of interference emerge when interviewers question children using multiple biased strategies as opposed to limiting themselves to only one suggestive technique.

Confirming the potency of multiple forms of bias in a mother-child context, [Principe et al. \(2017\)](#) found the majority of children (82%) whose mothers used two or more types of conversational techniques that conveyed a bias in line with the misinformation

subsequently reported experiencing the loose rabbit, whereas only 37% of children whose mothers limited themselves to one biased form recalled this nonevent. Furthermore, children whose mothers used multiple forms of bias were more than eight times more likely than those whose mothers used a singular biased technique to recall seeing a loose rabbit with their own eyes rather than just hearing about it. These children also provided exceptionally detailed accounts that were heavily saturated with the very details introduced earlier by their mothers as well as with novel embellishments confabulated during the interview but that fit with the theme of the maternal suggestions. Finally, mothers who held stronger beliefs about the likelihood of a loose rabbit before talking with their children questioned them in an increasingly biased manner, confirming a direct link between belief and bias among mothers, as would be expected based on the interviewer bias literature (Ceci & Bruck, 1995).

Conversational Goals Matter

One factor that may limit the generalizability of the studies reviewed thus far to forensic situations is that mothers were asked to talk with their children as they would in everyday life. This is the usual instruction to mothers in the reminiscing literature (see, e.g., Haden et al., 1997), but a concern for translation to the forensic area because, as discussed above, everyday conversations usually have practical goals, whereas discussions about forensically relevant events have the sole goal of accuracy.

To explore whether a focus on accuracy as opposed to everyday goals might alter the way that mothers elicit their preschool-aged children's recall of a past event and use misinformation to which they have been exposed, Principe et al. (2022) modified their magic show paradigm by manipulating mothers' goal orientation during the preinterview conversation. Specifically, some mothers were asked to elicit an accurate account from their children (accuracy-focused) and others were told to talk as they would naturally in everyday life (natural-focused). Considering studies showing that mothers who focus on the goal of helping their children remember correctly are more controlling than those who center on learning their children's perspective on an event (Cleveland et al., 2007), a focus on accuracy following exposure to false information was expected to steer mothers' conversational agenda and consequently children's memory in the direction of the misinformation.

As expected, among misinformed mothers, those focused on accuracy were more controlling and offered more suggestions consistent with the misinformation in their preinterviewer conversations with their children compared to mothers asked to talk as they normally would. In fact, accuracy-focused mothers made almost twice as many biased utterances related to the misleading information as natural-focused mothers, with 43% of their utterances being biased in the direction of the maternal misinformation. Furthermore, accuracy-focused mothers were more likely than natural-focused mothers (70% vs. 40%) to use multiple forms of bias rather than limit themselves to only one form of bias.

During the subsequent formal interview, among children with misinformed mothers, those in the accuracy-focused condition were twice as likely to wrongly recall experiencing the nonoccurring event, three times more prone to do so at the open-ended level of questioning, and three times more likely to claim to have seen the nonevent with their own eyes compared to those in the natural-

focused condition. Also, during the formal interview, compared to children of natural-focused/misinformation mothers, those in the accuracy-focused/misinformation condition generated higher levels of details in line with the maternal misinformation and proportionally more of their errant embellishments overlapped with things related to the misinformation their mothers had uttered in the earlier conversation. Nonetheless, the bulk of children's false accounts provided during the formal interview was composed of original constructions that transcended the suggestions about the rabbit uttered by their mothers, indicating that an accuracy-focused not only increases the likelihood that children will later echo some of the very false details suggested by their mothers but also augments children's tendency to invent novel embellishments.

Errors Without Misinformation

An unexpected finding in the Principe et al.'s (2022) experiment was that even without exposure to misinformation (i.e., mothers who were simply asked to talk with their children about the show and given no information about it), a maternal focus on eliciting an accurate account led to an increase in children's false reports during the subsequent interview. Specifically, children in the accuracy-focused/no misinformation condition produced four times the number of inaccurate details during the interview than those in the natural-focused/no misinformation condition. Why might a focus on accuracy even in the absence of maternal misinformation boost children's errors? These mothers generated a high level of statements and questions that would be considered as biased from the vantage of the forensic interviewing literature (see Ceci & Bruck, 1995). In fact, they produced more than double the number of biased utterances compared to mothers in the natural-focused group, demonstrating that a mere focus on accuracy, even without exposure to misinformation, can trigger higher levels of coercion than if mothers are guiding their children's recall as they would in everyday life. Whereas the content of accuracy-focused mothers' suggestions were centered around the theme of the misinformation, the suggestions of the no misinformation mothers were quite broad and tapped into multiple possibilities that necessarily were based on personal guesses or inferences about what might have happened. Nonetheless, they were strong enough to generously infiltrate children's later accounts during the formal interview.

Collectively, these findings suggest that *more is less* in the domain of parent-child conversations. As mothers become increasingly motivated to extract accurate statements from their young children, they become increasingly prone to use biased questioning that can produce serious errors in children's later remembering. Importantly, this is the case even when mothers have not been exposed to misinformation. When mothers worked harder to elicit accurate information, they resorted to increasingly biased forms of questioning, likely in attempts to disambiguate unclear statements, dislodge information, or suggest possibilities when children were not remembering. As a result, during the later formal interview, the children of accuracy-focused mothers, like those with misinformed mothers, provided embellished reports in line with their mothers' earlier false suggestions.

Given the mnemonic potency of suggestions from mothers, the next logical question is whether parents or children are likely to recollect the true nature of their disclosure conversations. To what extent can either recognize and recall bias that took place during

earlier discussions? If forensic interviewers can elicit accurate memory for the details of the disclosure conversation, then they may be able to countermand any parental misinformation effects. Next, we turn our attention to the issue of distinguishing parental-induced false reports in children.

Recall for Conversations

In most CSA cases, the very first report to authorities is made by parents who relay what their children allegedly have told them. The parent's recollection of their child's statements thus forms the foundation of these investigations. Then, parents are asked to repeat their account of the disclosure conversation during subsequent meetings with forensic investigators. Children, too, typically are asked to recount earlier allegation-eliciting informal conversations. For instance, the NICHD protocol contains a section that guides interviewers to question children about the discussion that led to their abuse disclosure (Lamb et al., 2007, 2018). Likewise, attorneys frequently ask children to whom they have talked about the allegations (Stolzenberg & Lyon, 2014).

Despite the usual practice among legal practitioners to query children and parents about their prior conversations, such efforts may be insufficient to discover the true nature of disclosure conversations. A large scientific literature in psycholinguistics indicates that even adults struggle to recall the nature of questions and answers during earlier dyadic exchanges. To do so, individuals must be able to recall not just what was said but who said it. To convey whether children's statements were spontaneously provided versus suggestively induced, one needs to remember, for example, whether the child freely volunteered "Grandpa touched me," or simply said, "Yes" after multiple suggestive prompts about grandpa and touching.

Although adults often can recall the gist (the major ideas, the content), their memory is limited regarding the exact words used or the sequences of interactions between speakers. Such linguistic information rapidly fades from memory, minutes after the interactions have occurred (Holtgraves, 2008; Rayner & Pollatsek, 1989). Specific to parent-child conversations, Bruck, Ceci, and Melnyk (1999) found mothers could recall the gist of conversations with their children reasonably well. However, they tended to underreport the extent to which children's information emerged as a function of highly directive questions. Mothers also switched the identity of speakers and quoted their conversations incorrectly. This finding echoes a pattern seen among forensic interviewers. Even experienced professionals misremember information regarding the specific details children supplied spontaneously versus those extracted with leading questions (Bruck, Ceci, & Melnyk, 1999) and greatly underestimate the number of specific and leading probes they ask (Warren & Woodall, 1999).

Children, like adults, have limited memory for the specific dynamics of conversations (Lawson & London, 2015, 2017). Further, children may fail to recognize the mnemonic potential of maternal suggestions during conversational remembering. In fact, preschool-aged children may lack the cognitive sophistication to recognize their mothers as a source of incorrect knowledge about their experiences, even if the exchange happened just moments earlier. This is because young children have not yet developed a set of interrelated abilities involved in understanding their own and others' mental states known as theory of mind. Young children have

difficulties distinguishing the sources of information in memory (Gopnik & Graf, 1988; Wimmer et al., 1988). Furthermore, when young children pick up new information, they tend to wrongly claim that they have always known it rather than having just learned it (Taylor et al., 1994). Until obtaining the prerequisite social cognitive skills, preschool-aged children think that everyone has the same correct beliefs about the world. Consequently, young children are unaware that others can hold false beliefs or impart misinformation to them (Wellman, 2018). Even beyond the preschool years, children (and sometimes adults as well) sometimes confuse things they heard with things they saw, and vice versa (e.g., Johnson & Foley, 1984; Lindsay et al., 1991).

Given these cognitive limitations, it should be no surprise that, despite the mnemonic impact of the mother-child conversations in the above Principe et al.'s (2022) experiments, *not a single child* who reported false information in line with the misinformation mentioned their mother as the source. During the formal interviews, when directly asked if the nonexperienced details they just reported were heard from someone versus actually seen with their own eyes, even those who said they heard rarely reported that the mother was the source of the misinformation. Related work indicates this is typical. During a neutral formal interview about an earlier event, 62% of 4- to 7-year-olds reported experiencing misinformation suggested earlier by their parents. When directly asked if they ever had talked to anyone about the event, over half reported that they had *never talked to anyone* about the event (also see Schooler, 2001). When children did recall talking to their parents about the event, they erroneously recollected their own contributions as more spontaneous and their parents' questions as less suggestive than in reality.

One might argue that children would at least recognize the contaminating role of parental conversations if such suggestions were adequately salient. However, even when parents are overtly suggestive, young children may fail to recognize the conversations as the source of any false reports. London et al. (2011) showed 6- to 13-year-olds a video of a child protagonist who falsely claimed he was hit following aggressive suggestions by an adult. The 6- and 7-year-olds performed poorly at recognizing the suggestive prompts as the root of the protagonist's errant claim. In contrast, the older children were better at recognizing the suggestive probes as triggering the suggestively induced false claim. Thus, young children seem lack the competency to recognize the potential contaminating influence of even *highly* suggestive conversations. Collectively, these data suggest that when children report experiencing events suggested by their mothers, even if relayed in a highly coercive manner, the identification of parental influences in a forensic setting is a highly complex matter.

Limitations of Research

Before discussing the forensic implications regarding the mnemonic impact of biased parent-guided conversations on children's memory, in this penultimate section, we highlight several limitations of the research. In general, the limitations result because the body of work is relatively newly emerging and might be considered a new generation of research on child witnesses. In the child suggestibility generally, for over 30 years, researchers have identified a host of individual difference and developmental factors that underlie memory accuracy. Along that vein, future studies are needed to

better understand the parameters of parental influence on children's memory.

To date, studies exploring the mnemonic impact of parent-child conversations have focused mainly on mother-guided conversations with preschool and school-aged typically developing children, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings. To our knowledge, studies have not examined the role of biased parent-child conversations among adolescents, though related developmental studies indicate adolescents also would be susceptible to parental conversational influence (e.g., [Chen et al., 2021](#); [McGuire et al., 2015](#); [Wright et al., 2010](#)). In addition to the truncated age range, like the developmental literature more broadly ([Lamb, 2000](#)), fathers rarely have been a focus in parent-child conversation work ([Lawson et al., 2018](#); Table 3).

Another gap in the existing literature pertains to how culture affects parental influence. There are robust cultural differences in how parents guide discussions about past events with their children. For example, European American mothers engage in more elaborative reminiscing that focuses on children's personal experiences and perspectives compared to Chinese mothers, who are more didactic and more controlling in conversations about the past (see [Wang, 2021](#), for a review). These cultural differences may play out in how parents use misinformation or their children's vulnerability to bias. Yet, because most of the research in this area has been conducted with Western mothers and their children, additional studies are needed to specify the mnemonic influence of culture.

Finally, caution is required in generalizing the work reviewed here to situations involving children as witnesses because the paradigms used differ in important ways from most legal experiences. The ecological validity of suggestibility studies has been debated elsewhere (e.g., [Warren & Marsil, 2002](#)). We believe the parent-child conversation studies represent progress in ecological validity in that the conversations are unscripted and naturally occurring. Nonetheless, the to-be-remembered events in the studies do not involve abuse and instead involve enjoyable events (but see [Kuehn et al., 2020](#); [Lawson et al., 2020](#); [Valentino et al., 2019](#); [Warren & Peterson, 2014](#)). Therefore, one might question the extent to which children could be led astray involving events like child maltreatment. Along the same line, children in these studies are not highly pressured to make false reports. The level of parental motivation and bias in the studies likely pales in comparison to situations where a parent develops a concern about abuse. In such situations, parents understandably would be highly motivated to get to the bottom of their concerns. Admittedly, parents' questioning style and children's susceptibility to maternal bias may differ when centered on legally relevant events, though [Lawson et al. \(2021\)](#) found that maternal reminiscing styles predicted children's disclosure of maltreatment in forensic interviews. Below, in the final section, we conclude by further discussing the forensic implications of the parent-child studies and by offering several recommendations for forensic practice.

Implications for Forensic Practice

The work reviewed above demonstrating the link between parental beliefs and biased questioning highlights the importance of informal conversations that lead to outcries of child maltreatment. Although we say "parents" here, the caretaker also could be a stepparent, a grandparent, and so forth. One might argue that parents

would exert caution when talking to their children about CSA suspicions given the high stakes involved. While this certainly is a possibility, it seems unlikely that parents would routinely adjust their highly directive default questioning styles to employ more open-ended techniques when concerns about abuse arise. In one unique study, [Korkman et al. \(2014\)](#) analyzed 19 disclosure conversations where parents recorded their exchanges and later submitted them to authorities as evidence of abuse. Out of the 19 recorded conversations, only four parents ever used a *single* open-ended question. Parents predominately relied on highly directive and suggestive questions. In 70% of the interviews, children provided no new information—that is, all the new information throughout the entire conversation was provided by the parents. In the [Korkman et al.'s \(2014\)](#) study, parents turned over their recordings to officials as evidence of abuse despite their interviews being highly biased, perhaps illustrating lack of awareness of the potentially biasing nature of their recorded conversations. While additional studies are needed give [Korkman et al.'s](#) small sample size, logically, to the extent parents are unaware that certain questioning styles run a risk of contaminating children's reports, they are unlikely to adjust their questioning styles.

What Might Spuriously Launch Parents' Concerns in the Direction of Abuse?

Given that biased conversations are the driving force behind suggestive questioning, the question becomes whether and to what extent parents might develop faulty concerns about abuse? Why would a parent come to suspect abuse if it never happened? We argue that false beliefs may result from genuine but misguided concern from parents.

Societal awareness of CSA has changed a great deal since [Summit \(1983\)](#) first published an article arguing that children would be unlikely to disclose sexual abuse because adults would not believe them. In the contemporary "me-too" era, adults recognize and even overestimate the prevalence of CSA. In a U.S. national survey conducted in 2021, adults, particularly women, greatly overestimated the likelihood of sexual abuse during childhood ([Miller, 2022](#)). Women estimated 50% of all children would experience CSA, while men estimated 28% would be sexually abused ([Miller, 2022](#)). Contrast laypeople's estimates with a recent national sample of over 13,000 U.S. children and adolescents revealing 5.6% of girls and 1.9% of boys had reportedly experienced CSA ([Gewirtz-Meydan & Finkelhor, 2020](#)). [Miller et al. \(2021\)](#) also found the majority of adults endorsed high-pressured tactics would be necessary to elicit an abuse disclosure from children: 69% of participants expressed the belief that sexually abused children deny abuse when asked directly, and 65% indicated children will only disclose abuse after prolonged questioning. These estimates are worrisome to the extent that when parents with such beliefs about the prevalence of abuse and children's reluctance to disclose come to suspect abuse in nonabused children, they may push until they get statements in line with their beliefs.

Today, millions of websites, books, and child welfare organizations offer parents advice on how to detect sexual abuse in their children. For example, an internet search of "How to tell if my child has been sexually abused" yields about half a billion hits in less than one half seconds (July 17, 2022). Of course, such sources are available not just to parents but to other individuals who may

interact with the child such as grandparents, psychotherapists, or even to children themselves. Many websites list “indicators” of sexual abuse that are remarkably long and include behaviors such as bed-wetting, thumb-sucking, sleep disturbances, stomachaches and headaches, fearfulness or other changes in mood, suicidal ideation, and self-injurious behavior.

These lists may make intuitive sense to some parents who see worrisome behaviors in children. For example, parents might feel unease if their young child shows interest in their own genitals or plays with dolls in what the adult deems a sexual manner. Parents might entertain sexual abuse risks if their child manifests behaviors like anxiety or engages in nonsuicidal self-injurious behavior. They may worry their child is “acting out” due to sexual abuse. Parents may be particularly apt to interpret such behaviors as indicative of abuse in certain situations (e.g., when searching for an explanation for their child’s behavioral problems or during highly conflictual divorces and custody battles). Such contexts may provide a ripe context for mothers to interpret ambiguous behaviors as diagnostic of abuse, which then triggers them to begin to question their children. However, there is no behavioral indicator or set of behaviors specific to CSA (Kendall-Tackett et al., 1993; Poole & Wolfe, 2009; Wood & Wright, 1995) and, as such, working “backwards” to infer abuse is baseless. Even though popular media that offers red flags of abuse may provide qualifiers that such behaviors are not diagnostic of abuse, worried parents may not be reassured by such claims, especially if they are unaware of how frequently nonabused children exhibit the same behaviors for many other causes (for a review, see Poole & Wolfe, 2009). Parents’ perceptions about the probability of abuse given behaviors on these lists may be distorted due to the combined overestimation of the prevalence of abuse and/or failure to consider base rates of abuse (Miller, 2022; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974).

In terms of its frequency of occurrence, the true prevalence of parent-induced false memories is difficult to estimate. In another unique study, Korkman et al. (2019) estimated the prevalence of false abuse concerns in a sample of over Finnish 11,000 adolescents and about 2,500 adults. They found 1.5% of adolescents and 1.9% of adults had been involved unfounded concerns of CSA (e.g., where someone worried they had been sexually abused). Of the unfounded suspicions, 14.5% and 9.1% of adolescent and adults, respectively, reported the unfounded concerns ultimately resulted in them going before authorities for maltreatment assessment. To the extent that mother-child conversations engender highly detailed and believable false memories in children, such cases may go undetected as involving errant recollections. However, with 73 million children in the United States, even if just one half of one percent of nonabused children were brought before authorities ($73 \text{ million} \times 0.005$), these rates would result in 365,000 unfounded cases coming before authorities each year.

Despite the potential for parent-child conversations to contaminate children’s reports, we are not arguing that CSA cases should be invalidated if earlier exchanges took place, and parents certainly are not on trial here. In their everyday memory-sharing dialogues with young children (see Fivush, 2019b), parents tend to use questioning techniques that trained forensic interviewers are taught to avoid due to their risk of eliciting false information. When faced with nondisclosing children, even highly trained interviewers tend to become increasingly directive and ask fewer recall questions (Hershkowitz et al., 2006). The fact that parents use highly directive styles is not a

criticism of parents, but simply a function of the usual—and usually harmless—style they and other adults use when talking about the past with children in everyday life. When beliefs about what happened arise, interviewer bias may unwittingly seep into conversations and act to intensify an already highly directive style that most parents employ when talking with young children about the past.

To the extent that bias affects their questioning, parents are in good company in that a priori beliefs affect even seasoned forensic scientists and forensic pathologists in their assessment of “hard” physical evidence like fingerprints and cause of death determinations (e.g., Dror et al., 2021; National Research Council, 2009). Instead of *seeing is believing*, sometimes *believing is seeing*. The extra danger involved in suggestive parental interviews is that the evidence itself may morph. When biasing information causes forensic technicians to make faulty fingerprint analyses, their misidentifications do not change the actual fingerprints. Misleading interviews with children can morph the child’s initial statements and even children’s autobiographical memory. Such questioning by parents need not be motivated by malicious intent but rather by genuine concern for their child. But with increased questioning, the beliefs may gain momentum, becoming plausible to both the parent and the child. By the time they reach law enforcement officials, children’s statements may look quite different than their initial statements to parents. As our review highlights, developmental researchers have made considerable progress in understanding the conditions under which the accuracy of young children’s accounts of their experiences are prone to be affected by conversations with parents. Translating this literature into an effective set of recommendations to be followed by forensic professionals, however, is a difficult and complicated task because much remains to be learned about how parents can influence children’s remembering. Yet, such guidance is necessary because, as we argued at the outset, informal conversations with family members, particularly mothers, are the single greatest challenge facing law enforcement officials in contemporary investigations involving allegations of CSA.

Recommendations for Forensic Practice: Assessing for and Minimizing Parental Influence

How can investigators assess the possibility that parents may have intentionally or unintentionally misled, misunderstood, or misrepresented their children’s accounts? Though forensic interviewers tend to work hand-in-hand with police and prosecutors, forensic interviewers must remember their goal is one of objective truth finding, not one of collecting confirmatory evidence (Bull, 2019). Based on the research available to date, we offer the following recommendations.

1. *When parents are providing their initial reports to police dispatch or responding officers, be sure the child cannot hear the parent’s report.* Officers should not interview parents in the presence of the children (nor children in the presence of the parents). If the parent did suggestively elicit information from the child or misunderstand, then overhearing the parent’s account would only serve to bolster the suggestions.
2. *Police administrative officials should consider a policy where street officers collect minimal (if any) information*

from the child. Such a policy has been adopted in the state of Oregon (<http://www.doj.state.or.us/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/OIG-2021-Final.pdf>). The number of interviews with children should be kept to a minimum. Responding street officers usually are not trained in child forensic interview techniques, and they may not have recording equipment. In addition, quiet appropriate interview areas may not be available during the initial police call. If the parent tells the officer ample information to warrant interviewing the child, officers could bring the child to a facility where a trained child investigative interviewer can conduct an electronically recorded interview in a controlled setting. The interview should take place as soon as possible, especially if there is reason to suspect parent–child conversations may take place.

3. *Professionals should be trained about and be alert for potential parental influence.* Investigators should explain to parents not to further question or discuss the event in question with their child. When a parent provides a history, interviewers should keep in mind they may not have all sides of the story. Professionals ought to be particularly mindful if divorce or custody battles are involved.

The potential impact of preinterview parent–child conversations is difficult to assess given these interactions almost never are recorded. Even when recorded interviews exist, parents may have engaged in additional questioning before turning on their recorder when children begin making statements that confirm the parents' suspicion. Evidence-based guidelines currently do not exist on how to question children or parents about past conversations (but see Dickinson & Lytle, 2022). However, simply asking children a question like "Did anyone tell you what to say to me today" and "Did anyone tell you what not to say to me" may not be adequate to cue children's memory for suggestive mother–child conversations. This is in part because, during biased parent–child conversations, parents are unlikely to explicitly tell their children, "When you go in that room, I want you to say . . ." Misleading parental questioning may be unintentional and implicit and therefore is unlikely to involve direct orders for a child to go before authorities to tell some specific lie.

Until evidence-based guidelines evolve, investigators should continue to consider the hypothesis that maltreatment suspicions could be driven by inaccurate beliefs from the initial informal disclosure recipient, particularly if an objective timeline indicates that certain beliefs preceded parents' questioning of their child. Much like recording child forensic interviews, whenever possible, investigators' discussions with parents should be recorded so their accounts of the initial disclosure conversations are preserved. As research described above suggests, children and adults may not fully remember or even recognize suggestive conversations. As such, investigators must *read between the lines* in evaluating potential informal influence. Did the parent (or potentially other concerned adults) develop a belief the child was maltreated before the child ever came forward? Does the parent allude to the child being resistant to reporting? Does the parent have an explicit motive or implicit bias against the accused party? Over what time period did the parent question the child? Did the parent disbelieve initial denials? Does the parent report needing to use special techniques to eventually elicit the report from the child?

Child forensic interviewers should give careful attention to statements made by children that allude to potential parental influence. In our own consultations, we have seen children deny ever talking to anyone, then, minutes later during the same forensic interview, make a statement about talking to their parent. In one recent case, the interviewer asked the child if anyone had told her what to say. She replied her mother just told her to tell the truth. Later in the interview, she mentioned that her mother showed her unclothed body diagrams and talked to her about the events in question the night before the interview "in order to make sure she remembered the right words." In that case, the interviewer appropriately followed up to further question both the child and her mother about this conversation. In another recent case, the child denied ever talking to anyone about the allegations then spontaneously mentioned she knew what a penis looked like because her mother had shown her a diagram the night before as they were making sure she "remembered" everything for her interview the next day.

Though we reviewed the literature indicating mothers can have a potent impact on children's reports, we are not proposing all CSA cases are invalidated if the initial disclosure took place in an informal setting. We have been asked by defense attorneys to consult on cases where an initial disclosure was made to the mother, yet no discernible issues of bias or contamination could be identified. For example, in one case, a mother picked up her child after a routine visit with her father. As they were driving away, the girl broke down and told her mother that her father had gotten drunk during the visit and sexually assaulted her. The mother reported being shocked and asked her daughter if she was sure. The girl responded affirmatively. The mother brought the daughter to the hospital, and the daughter offered an account primarily in response to open-ended questions. Although the mother–child conversation was not recorded, no signs or discernible motives for maternal bias were evident. Since mothers often are the disclosure recipients in valid abuse cases, children's allegations should not be discounted simply because an informal disclosure was made.

We recommend investigators, experts, and fact finders keep in mind that once parents (or other adults) suggestively converse with children, children may give reports consistent with their parents' belief, regardless of whether their initial belief was correct. When suggestive conversations or interviews occur, children's resulting statements suffer in reliability given the context under which the allegations unfolded. This is different than assessing the credibility or ultimate issue of whether abuse did or did not occur. Just like when a suspect is coercively interviewed, the suspect still may be guilty despite that their allegations arose during the coercive interview. However, the evidence garnered during high-pressured or suggestive interviews suffers in reliability since the manner in which the statements unfolded is likely to elicit a confession (or allegations) regardless of the objective truth.

4. *Investigators and other child professionals should be trained about bias and view the parental hearsay report with healthy skepticism.* When concerned about possible abuse in their children, parents may consult professionals such as nurses, pastors, therapists, social service workers, and police officers who begin seeing the child to "get to the bottom" of the behavior the parents report as troublesome. Such professionals then begin their

exchanges with the child with the knowledge of the parent's account of what their child has divulged. However, the parental account likely leaves out the nature of the original disclosure conversation.

Training also may help dispel professionals of some false beliefs about mother-child conversations. Much like detectives trained in the reed method of suspect interrogation are trained to watch for certain interviewee behaviors that are supposed to signal deception, some child abuse professionals believe they can detect a misled child during interviews because they will provide sparse accounts where they simply parrot what their parent told them to say (see Bruck et al., 2002). This is an oversimplification of the process of parental influence, as the research we reviewed here demonstrates that children's false reports engendered by mothers often go well beyond parent's suggestions and include original details invented by children. Thus, an interviewer could conclude they see no signs of "coaching" and that the child's reports seem spontaneous. Yet, the interviewer must consider that earlier questioning could have morphed the child's reports. Training could target not only forensic interviewers but also others such as sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE) nurses, social workers, therapists, and custody evaluators. Finally, training may help professionals resist bias. In domains outside of forensic science, researchers have provided education on base rates to different professional groups which have been met with some success in reducing bias (Dror & Kukucka, 2021; Gigerenzer et al., 2007; Zapf et al., 2018). Such training may provide forensic professionals with the information to remain objective and with information they can provide to parents who sometimes view nondisclosure of abuse as a failed interview rather than believing they might have had faulty concerns.

Parental influence does not stop at the child. Rather, parents' beliefs may lead to numerous downstream forensic effects. Parents make decisions about whether to alert authorities based on what they believe their children experienced. If a case moves forward, parents provide their own beliefs about what happened as well as their own version of their children's statements to investigators who then proceed with interviewing children with the parents' report forming the foundation of their investigation. If parents elicited false information from their children, even if done in good faith on the part of worried (but inaccurate) parents, then the parental information can create *bias cascade effects* where investigative professionals elicit statements from children that the investigators deem as consistent with the statement provided by parents (Dror et al., 2017).

Conclusion

Since the 1990s, forensic interview protocols have been developed worldwide. When used properly, these constantly evolving practices can help children provide the most accurate and complete accounts while minimizing the likelihood of false allegations. However, it is important to emphasize that no matter the promise of these interview techniques, these do not by themselves discard the prior influences of mother-child conversations.

Children's reports should not be discredited simply because the initial disclosure occurs during informal, unrecorded conversations. At the same time, investigators should realize parents (and adults in general) primarily use highly directive probes when questioning their children about events. Parents' questions,

especially if intentionally or unintentionally motivated by strong a priori beliefs, may undermine children's accuracy. Inaccurate parental beliefs may cause parents to misinterpret the probability of abuse in their children. Since mother-child discussions are rarely recorded, the limited memory of both mothers and children for the content of their informal conversations may be of limited value. Instead, investigators can evaluate the impetus of the mothers' questioning and, as best as possible given a lack of recordings, map out the ontogeny of the child's allegations.

Child abuse investigators should pursue a balance between seeking to protect maltreated children yet realizing certain methods can ultimately cause nonmaltreated children to make reports of abuse and potentially to incorporate false trauma narratives into their life story. The studies reviewed in this article highlight the complex challenge facing investigative interviewers as well as the critical need for investigators to give systematic and objective consideration to the potential role of maternal influence.

References

- Bluck, S., & Alea, N. (2009). Thinking and talking about the past: Why remember? *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 23(8), 1089–1104. <https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.1612>
- Bruck, M., Ceci, S. J., & Hembrooke, H. (2002). The nature of children's true and false narratives. *Developmental Review*, 22(3), 520–554. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0273-2297\(02\)00006-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0273-2297(02)00006-0)
- Bruck, M., Ceci, S. J., & Melnyk, L. (1999, March). *The effect of interviewer bias on the accuracy of children's reports and interviewer's reports* [Paper presentation]. Paper presented to the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Albuquerque, New Mexico.
- Bruck, M., Ceci, S. J., & Principe, G. F. (2006). The child and the law. In W. Damon, R. M. Lerner, K. A. Renniger, & I. E. Sigel (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 4. child psychology in practice* (6th ed., pp. 776–816). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470147658.chpsy0419>
- Bruck, M., Ceci, S. J., & Principe, G. F. (2007). The child and the law. In W. Damon & R. M. Lerner (Series Eds.) & K. A. Renniger & I. E. Sigel (Vol. Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 4. Child psychology in practice* (6th ed., pp. 776–816). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470147658.chpsy0419>
- Bull, R. (2019). *Investigating the truth: Selected works of Ray Bull*. Routledge.
- Ceci, S. J., & Bruck, M. (1993). Suggestibility of the child witness: A historical review and synthesis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 113(3), 403–439. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.113.3.403>
- Ceci, S. J., & Bruck, M. (1995). *Jeopardy in the courtroom: A scientific analysis of children's testimony*. American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/10180-000>
- Ceci, S. J., Kulkofsky, S., Klemfuss, J. Z., Sweeney, C. D., & Bruck, M. (2007). Unwarranted assumptions about children's testimonial accuracy. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 3(1), 311–328. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.clinpsy.3.022806.091354>
- Chen, Y., Cullen, E., Fivush, R., Wang, Q., & Reese, E. (2021). Mother, father, and I: A cross cultural investigation of adolescents' intergenerational narratives and well-being. *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition*, 10(1), 55–64. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jarmac.2020.08.011>
- Cleveland, E. E., Reese, E., & Grolnick, W. S. (2007). Children's engagement and competence in personal recollection: Effects of parents' reminiscing goals. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 96(2), 131–149. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2006.09.003>
- Cleveland, E. S., & Reese, E. (2005). Maternal structure and autonomy support in conversations about the past: Contributions to children's autobiographical memory. *Developmental Psychology*, 41(2), 376–388. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.41.2.376>

- Cole, H. E., & Beike, D. R. (2018). Tall tales make fast friends: Exaggerating when retelling previous experiences fosters relational closeness. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 36(8), 2287–2306. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407518787344>
- Conroy, R., & Salmon, K. (2006). Talking about parts of a past experience: The impact of discussion style and event structure on memory for discussed and nondiscussed information. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 95(4), 278–297. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2006.06.001>
- Cross, T. P., & Whitcomb, D. (2017). The practice of prosecuting child maltreatment: Results of an online survey of prosecutors. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 69, 20–28. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2017.04.007>
- Dickinson, J. J., & Lytle, N. E. (2022, March 16–19). Enhancing parents' recall for children's disclosures of bodily touch by a stranger. In M. Lawson (Chair), *Children's disclosures to parents and eliciting evidence of parent child discussions* [Symposium]. American Psychology and Law Society Annual Conference, Denver, Colorado, United States.
- Dror, I., Melinek, J., Arden, J. L., Kukucka, J., Hawkins, S., Carter, J., & Atherton, D. S. (2021). Cognitive bias in forensic pathology decisions. *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 66(5), 1751–1757. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1556-4029.14697>
- Dror, I. E., & Kukucka, J. (2021). Linear Sequential Unmasking-Expanded (LSU-E): A general approach for improving decision making as well as minimizing noise and bias. *Forensic Science International: Synergy*, 3, Article 100161. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fsisyn.2021.100161>
- Dror, I. E., Morgan, R. M., Rando, C., & Nakhaeizadeh, S. (2017). The bias snowball and the bias cascade effects: Two distinct biases that may impact forensic decision making. *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 62(3), 832–833. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1556-4029.13496>
- Fivush, R. (2019a). Sociocultural developmental approaches to autobiographical memory. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 33, 489–497. <https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.3512>
- Fivush, R. (2019b). *Family narratives and the development of an autobiographical self: Social and cultural perspectives on autobiographical memory* (1st ed., p. 204). Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429029158>
- Garven, S., Wood, J. M., & Malpass, R. S. (2000). Allegations of wrongdoing: The effects of reinforcement on children's mundane and fantastic claims. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 85(1), 38–49. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.85.1.38>
- Garven, S., Wood, J. M., Malpass, R. S., & Shaw, J. S., III. (1998). More than suggestion: The effect of interviewing techniques from the McMartin Preschool case. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 83(3), 347–359. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.83.3.347>
- Gewirtz-Meydan, A., & Finkelhor, D. (2020). Sexual abuse and assault in a large national sample of children and adolescents. *Child Maltreatment*, 25(2), 203–214. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559519873975>
- Gigerenzer, G., Gaissmaier, W., Kurz-Milcke, E., Schwartz, L. M., & Woloshin, S. (2007). Helping doctors and patients make sense of health statistics. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 8(2), 53–96. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1539-6053.2008.00033.x>. PMID: 26161749.
- Gopnik, A., & Graf, P. (1988). Knowing how you know: Young children's ability to identify and remember the sources of their beliefs. *Child Development*, 59(5), 1366–1371. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1130499>
- Gordon, B. N., Baker-Ward, L., & Ornstein, P. A. (2001). Children's testimony: A review of research on memory for past experiences. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 4(2), 157–181. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1011333231621>
- Haden, C. A., Haine, R. A., & Fivush, R. (1997). Developing narrative structure in parent-child reminiscing across the preschool years. *Developmental Psychology*, 33(2), 295–307. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.33.2.295>
- Hershkowitz, I., Lanes, O., & Lamb, M. E. (2007). Exploring the disclosure of child sexual abuse with alleged victims and their parents. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 31(2), 111–123. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2006.09.004>
- Hershkowitz, I., Orbach, Y., Lamb, M. E., Sternberg, K. J., & Horowitz, D. (2006). Dynamics of forensic interviews with suspected abuse victims who do not disclose abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 30(7), 753–769. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2005.10.016>
- Holtgraves, T. (2008). Conversation, speech acts, and memory. *Memory & Cognition*, 36(2), 361–374. <https://doi.org/10.3758/MC.36.2.361>
- Johnson, M. K., & Foley, M. A. (1984). Differentiating fact from fantasy: The reliability of children's memory. *Journal of Social Issues*, 40(2), 33–50. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1984.tb01092.x>
- Kendall-Tackett, K. A., Williams, L. M., & Finkelhor, D. (1993). Impact of sexual abuse on children: A review and synthesis of recent empirical studies. *Psychological Bulletin*, 113(1), 164–180. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.113.1.164>
- Korkman, J., Antfolk, J., Fagerlund, M., & Santtila, P. (2019). The prevalence of unfounded suspicions of child sexual abuse in Finland. *Nordic Psychology*, 71(1), 39–50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19012276.2018.1470554>
- Korkman, J., Juusola, A., & Santtila, P. (2014). Who made the disclosure? Recorded discussions between children and caretakers suspecting child abuse. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 20(10), 994–1004. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1068316X.2014.902455>
- Kuehn, M., Lawson, M., Speidel, R., & Valentino, K. (2020). The association between maternal reminiscing and maternal perpetration of neglect. *Child Maltreatment*, 25(4), 468–477. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559520916241>
- Kulkofsky, S. (2011). Characteristics of functional joint reminiscence in early childhood. *Memory*, 19(1), 45–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09658211.2010.535542>
- Kulkofsky, S., & Klemfuss, J. Z. (2008). What the stories children tell can tell about their memory: Narrative skill and young children's suggestibility. *Developmental Psychology*, 44(5), 1442–1456. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0012849>
- Laimon, R. L., & Poole, D. A. (2008). Adults usually believe young children: The influence of eliciting questions and suggestibility presentations on perceptions of children's disclosures. *Law and Human Behavior*, 32(6), 489–501. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10979-008-9127-y>
- Lamb, M. E. (2000). The history of research on father involvement: An overview. *Marriage & Family Review*, 29(2–3), 23–42. https://doi.org/10.1300/J002v29n02_03
- Lamb, M. E., Brown, D. A., Hershkowitz, I., Orbach, Y., & Esplin, P. W. (2018). *Tell me what happened: Questioning children about abuse* (2nd ed.). Wiley-Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118881248>
- Lamb, M. E., Hershkowitz, I., Orbach, Y., & Esplin, P. W. (2008). *The psychology of crime, policing and law. Tell me what happened: Structured investigative interviews of child victims and witnesses*. Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470773291>
- Lamb, M. E., Orbach, Y., Hershkowitz, I., Esplin, P. W., & Horowitz, D. (2007). A structured forensic interview protocol improves the quality and informativeness of investigative interviews with children: A review of research using the NICHD Investigative Interview Protocol. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 31(11–12), 1201–1231. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2007.03.021>
- Lawson, M., Jaeger, B., McManus, E., Speidel, R., & Valentino, K. (2021). Maternal reminiscing is associated with preschoolers' reports of maltreatment during forensic interviews. *Child Maltreatment*, 26(1), 105–114. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559520925180>
- Lawson, M., & London, K. (2015). Tell me everything you discussed: Children's memory for dyadic conversations after a 1-week or a 3-week delay. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 33(4), 429–445. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bsl.2184>
- Lawson, M., & London, K. (2017). Children's memory for conversations after a one-year delay. *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition*, 6(3), 328–336. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jarmac.2017.07.001>
- Lawson, M., Rodriguez-Steen, L., & London, K. (2018). A systematic review of the reliability of children's event reports after discussing

- experiences with a naïve, knowledgeable, or misled parent. *Developmental Review*, 49, 62–79. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dr.2018.06.003>
- Lawson, M., Rodriguez Steen, L., London, K., & Coleman, E. (2022, March 16–19). Parental bias, children's event reports, and memory for suggestive parental questioning. In M. Lawson (Chair), *Children's disclosures to parents and eliciting investigative evidence of parent-child discussions* [Symposium]. American Psychology-Law Society Annual Conference, Denver, Colorado, United States.
- Lawson, M., Valentino, K., Speidel, R., McDonnell, C. G., & Cummings, E. M. (2020). Reduced autobiographical memory specificity among maltreated preschoolers: The indirect effect of neglect through maternal reminiscing. *Child Development*, 91(1), 271–288. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13153>
- Leichtman, M. D., & Ceci, S. J. (1995). The effects of stereotypes and suggestions on preschoolers' reports. *Developmental Psychology*, 31(4), 568–578. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.31.4.568>
- Leichtman, M. D., Pillemer, D. B., Wang, Q., Koreishi, A., & Han, J. J. (2000). When Baby Maisy came to school: Mothers' interview styles and preschoolers' event memories. *Cognitive Development*, 15(1), 99–114. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0885-2014\(00\)00019-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0885-2014(00)00019-8)
- Lindsay, D. S., Johnson, M. K., & Kwon, P. (1991). Developmental changes in memory source monitoring. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 52(3), 297–318. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-0965\(91\)90065-Z](https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-0965(91)90065-Z)
- London, K., Bruck, M., Ann Poole, D., & Melnyk, L. (2011). The development of metasuggestibility in children. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 25(1), 146–155. <https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.1653>
- London, K., Bruck, M., Ceci, S. J., & Shuman, D. W. (2005). Disclosure of child sexual abuse: What does the research tell us about the ways that children tell? *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 11(1), 194–226. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1076-8971.11.1.194>
- Malloy, L. C., Brubacher, S. P., & Lamb, M. E. (2013). "Because she's one who listens": Children discuss disclosure recipients in forensic interviews. *Child Maltreatment*, 18(4), 245–251. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559513497250>
- McGuire, K., London, K., & Wright, D. B. (2015). Developmental trends in false memory across adolescence and young adulthood: A comparison of DRM and memory conformity paradigms. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 29(3), 334–344. <https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.3114>
- Miller, Q. C. (2022). *An empirical test of cognitive bias: Does contextual information influence assessments of child sexual abuse cases?* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Toledo].
- Miller, Q. C., London, K., & Wright, D. B. (2021, August). *Laypeople's beliefs about children's disclosure patterns of sexual abuse* [Paper presentation]. Virtual European Association of Psychology and Law Conference.
- National Research Council. (2009). *Strengthening Forensic Science in the United States: A Path Forward*. National Academy of Sciences.
- Nelson, K., & Fivush, R. (2004). The emergence of autobiographical memory: A social cultural developmental theory. *Psychological Review*, 111(2), 486–511. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.111.2.486>
- Nelson, K., & Fivush, R. (2020). The development of autobiographical memory, autobiographical narratives, and autobiographical consciousness. *Psychological Reports*, 123(1), 71–96. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033294119852574>
- Newlin, C., Steele, L. C., Chamberlin, A., Anderson, J., Kenniston, J., Russell, A., Stewart, H., & Vaughan-Eden, V. (2015). *Child forensic interviewing: Best practice* (pp. 1–20). U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Ornstein, P. A., Merritt, K. A., Baker-Ward, L., Furtado, E., Gordon, B. N., & Principe, G. (1998). Children's knowledge, expectation, and long-term retention. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 12(4), 387–405. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1099-0720\(199808\)12:4<387::AID-ACP574>3.0.CO;2-5](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1099-0720(199808)12:4<387::AID-ACP574>3.0.CO;2-5)
- Otgaar, H., de Ruiter, C., Howe, M. L., Hoetmer, L., & van Reekum, P. (2017). A case concerning children's false memories of abuse: Recommendations regarding expert witness work. *Psychiatry, Psychology, and Law*, 24(3), 365–378. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13218719.2016.1230924>
- Paquette, D. (2004). Theorizing the father-child relationship: Mechanisms and developmental outcomes. *Human Development*, 47(4), 193–219. <https://doi.org/10.1159/000078723>
- Pasupathi, M. (2001). The social construction of the personal past and its implications for adult development. *Psychological Bulletin*, 127(5), 651–672. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.127.5.651>
- Peterson, C. (2012). Children's autobiographical memories across the years: Forensic implications of childhood amnesia and eyewitness memory for stressful events. *Developmental Review*, 32(3), 287–306. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dr.2012.06.002>
- Pillemer, D. B. (2009). Commentary: Twenty years after Baddeley (1988): Is the study of autobiographical memory fully functional? *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 23(8), 1193–1208. <https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.1619>
- Poole, D. A. (2016). *Interviewing children: The science of conversation in forensic contexts*. American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/14941-000>
- Poole, D. A., & Dickinson, J. J. (2011). Evidence supporting restrictions on uses of body diagrams in forensic interviews. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 35(9), 659–669. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2011.05.004>
- Poole, D. A., & Dickinson, J. J. (2014). Comfort drawing during investigative interviews: Evidence of the safety of a popular practice. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 38(2), 192–201. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2013.04.012>
- Poole, D. A., Dickinson, J. J., Brubacher, S. P., Liberty, A. E., & Kaae, A. M. (2014). Deficient cognitive control fuels children's exuberant false allegations. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 118, 101–109. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2013.08.013>
- Poole, D. A., & Lindsay, D. S. (1995). Interviewing preschoolers: Effects of nonsuggestive techniques, parental coaching and leading questions on reports of nonexperienced events. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 60(1), 129–154. <https://doi.org/10.1006/jecp.1995.1035>
- Poole, D. A., & Lindsay, D. S. (2001). Children's eyewitness reports after exposure to misinformation from parents. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied*, 7(1), 27–50. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1076-898X.7.1.27>
- Poole, D. A., & Lindsay, D. S. (2002). Reducing child witnesses' false reports of misinformation from parents. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 81(2), 117–140. <https://doi.org/10.1006/jecp.2001.2648>
- Poole, D. A., & Wolfe, M. A. (2009). Child development: Normative sexual and nonsexual behaviors that may be confused with symptoms of sexual abuse. In K. Kuehne & M. Connell (Eds.), *The evaluation of child sexual abuse allegations: A comprehensive guide to assessment and testimony* (pp. 101–128). Wiley.
- Principe, G. F., DiPuppo, J., & Gammel, J. (2013). Effects of mothers' receipt of misinformation and conversation style on children's event reports. *Cognitive Development*, 28(3), 260–271. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cogdev.2013.01.012>
- Principe, G. F., Greenhoot, A. F., & Ceci, S. J. (2013). Young children's eyewitness memory. In D. S. Lindsay & T. Perfect (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of applied memory*. SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446294703.n35>
- Principe, G. F., Kirkpatrick, H., & Langley, S. (2022). A focus on accuracy in misinformed mothers puts young children at risk for false memories. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 214, Article 105274. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2021.105274>
- Principe, G. F., Ornstein, P. A., Baker-Ward, L., & Gordon, B. N. (2000). The effects of intervening experiences on children's memory for a physical examination. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 14(1), 59–80. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1099-0720\(200001\)14:1<59::AID-ACP637>3.0.CO;2-4](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1099-0720(200001)14:1<59::AID-ACP637>3.0.CO;2-4)
- Principe, G. F., & Smith, E. (2007). The tooth, the whole tooth, and nothing but the tooth: How belief in the Tooth Fairy can engender false memories.

- Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 21, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.1402>
- Principe, G. F., Trumbull, J., Gardner, G., Van Horn, E., & Dean, A. M. (2017). The role of maternal elaborative structure and control in children's memory and suggestibility for a past event. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 163, 15–31. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2017.06.001>
- Rayner, K., & Pollatsek, A. (1989). *The psychology of reading*. Prentice Hall.
- Reese, E., & Brown, N. (2000). Reminiscing and recounting in the preschool years. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 14(1), 1–17. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1099-0720\(200001\)14:1<1::AID-ACP625>3.0.CO;2-G](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1099-0720(200001)14:1<1::AID-ACP625>3.0.CO;2-G)
- Rivard, J. R., & Schreiber Compo, N. (2017). Self-reported current practices in child forensic interviewing: Training, tools, and pre-interview preparation. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 35(3), 253–268. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bsl.2290>
- Saywitz, K. J., Lyon, T. D., & Goodman, G. S. (2011). Interviewing children. In J. E. B. Myers (Ed.), *The APSAC handbook on child maltreatment* (3rd ed., pp. 337–360). Sage Publications.
- Schaaf, J. M., Bederian-Gardner, D., & Goodman, G. S. (2015). Gating out misinformation: Can young children follow instructions to ignore false information? *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 33(4), 390–406. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bsl.2195>
- Schooler, J. W. (2001). Discovering memories in the light of meta-awareness. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 4(2), 105–136. https://doi.org/10.1300/J146v04n02_06
- Schreiber, N., Bellah, L. D., Martinez, Y., McLaurin, K. A., Strok, R., Garven, S., & Wood, J. M. (2006). Suggestive interviewing in the McMartin Preschool and Kelly Michaels Daycare abuse cases: A case study. *Social Influence*, 1(1), 16–47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15534510500361739>
- Stolzenberg, S. N., & Lyon, T. D. (2014). How attorneys question children about the dynamics of sexual abuse and disclosure in criminal trials. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 20(1), 19–30. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035000>
- Summit, R. C. (1983). The child sexual abuse accommodation syndrome. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 7(2), 177–193. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0145-2134\(83\)90070-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/0145-2134(83)90070-4)
- Taylor, M., Esbensen, B. M., & Bennett, R. T. (1994). Children's understanding of knowledge acquisition: The tendency for children to report that they have always known what they have just learned. *Child Development*, 65(6), 1581–1604. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1131282>
- Teoh, Y. S., & Lamb, M. (2013). Interviewer demeanor in forensic interviews of children. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 19(2), 145–159. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1068316X.2011.614610>
- Tversky, A., & Kahneman, D. (1974). Judgment under uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases. *Science*, 185(4157), 1124–1131. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.185.4157.1124>
- Valentino, K., Cummings, E. M., Borkowski, J., Hibbel, L. C., Lefever, J., & Lawson, M. (2019). Efficacy of a reminiscing and emotion training intervention on maltreating families with preschool-aged children. *Developmental Psychology*, 55(11), 2365–2378. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000792>
- Wang, Q. (2021). Cultural pathways and outcomes of autobiographical memory development. *Child Development Perspectives*, 15(3), 196–202. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12423>
- Warren, A. R., & Marsil, D. F. (2002). Why children's suggestibility remains a serious concern. *Law and Contemporary Problems: Children as Victims and Witnesses in the Criminal Trial Process*, 65(1), 127–147. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1192368>
- Warren, A. R., & Woodall, C. E. (1999). The reliability of hearsay testimony: How well do interviewers recall their interviews with children? *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 5(2), 355–371. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1076-8971.5.2.355>
- Warren, K. L., & Peterson, C. (2014). Exploring parent-child discussions of crime and their influence on children's memory. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 32(6), 686–701. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bsl.2144>
- Wellman, H. M. (2018). Theory of mind across the lifespan? *Zeitschrift für Psychologie*, 226(2), 136–138. <https://doi.org/10.1027/2151-2604/a000330>
- Wimmer, H., Hogrefe, G.-J., & Perner, J. (1988). Children's understanding of informational access as source of knowledge. *Child Development*, 59(2), 386–396. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1130318>
- Wood, J. M., & Wright, L. (1995). Evaluation of children's sexual behaviors and incorporation of base rates in judgments of sexual abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 19(10), 1263–1273. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0145-2134\(95\)00090-U](https://doi.org/10.1016/0145-2134(95)00090-U)
- Wright, D. B., London, K., & Waechter, M. (2010). Social anxiety moderates memory conformity in adolescents. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 24(7), 1034–1045. <https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.1604>
- Zapf, P. A., Kukucka, J., Kassir, S. M., & Dror, I. E. (2018). Cognitive bias in forensic mental health assessment: Evaluator beliefs about its nature and scope. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 24(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1037/law0000153>

Received January 25, 2022

Revision received July 18, 2022

Accepted July 20, 2022 ■