Coding Forensic Child Interviews

For research purposes, coders review portions of the transcripts concerned with substantive issues and categorize each interviewer utterance. Most utterances are of one of the following types:

1. Invitations (using questions, statements or imperatives) for an open-ended response from the child. Such utterances do not delimit the child's focus, except in the most general way (for example: And then what happened?)
2. Facilitators, which are utterances like o.k., restatements of the child's previous utterance, and nonsuggestive words of encouragement that are designed to prompt continuation of the child's narrative.
3. Directive utterances, which focus the child's attention on presumed details or aspects of the event that the child had previously mentioned, typically in the form of a wh- question (e.g., What color was that shirt?).
4. Option-posing utterances, which focus the child's attention on details or aspects of the account that the child had not previously mentioned by asking the child to choose among options explicitly or implicitly provided by the interviewer (e.g., Did he touch you inside or outside?).
5. Suggestive utterances, stated in such a way that the interviewer strongly communicates what response is expected (e.g., That hurt, didn't it?) or assumes details that have not been revealed by the child (e.g., Did it hurt when he touched you?, when the child had mentioned no touching).

The three types of focused utterances (directive, option-posing, suggestive) thus lie along a continuum of risk, varying with respect to the degree of suggestive influence they exert on children's responses while tapping the child's reconstructive and recognition memory. As we show below, option-posing and suggestive utterances are especially risky because of their tendency to elicit inaccurate information. Raters also count the number of new details conveyed by the child. By definition, details involve the identification and description of individuals, objects, events, or actions relevant to the alleged incident. As indicated below, there are systematic associations between the types of prompts used by investigators and the quality and quantity of information reported by children.

Handbook Of Eyewitness Psychology 2 Volume Set (pp. 430-431). Taylor and Francis.