

## From Forensic Interviewer to Expert Witness

# First Things First



- Keep a CV  
(curriculum vitae)
- Keep a Training Log
- Keep a Testifying Log

## Megan Peterson

Outreach Specialist

VidaNyx

17330 W Center Road # 110

Omaha, NE 68130

(405) 317-1022

Updated: May 2022

### Education

The University of Oklahoma, Bachelor of Social Work, 2004

### Employment History

VidaNyx

Outreach Specialist

May 2022--Present

Dallas Children's Advocacy Center

Forensic Interviewer

December 2015-May 2022

Tarrant County Child Protective Services

Child Abuse Investigator

Specialized T.I.P. (Teamed Investigations Project), Unit 33

November 2008-December 2015

Alliance for Children

Forensic Interviewer

November 2007-November 2008

Tarrant County Child Protective Services

Child Abuse Investigator

Specialized T.I.P. (Teamed Investigations Project), Unit 33

April 2006-October 2007

Oklahoma County Department of Human Services

Child Welfare Specialist

Generic Unit, 55 G

July 2004-February 2006

### Professional Organizations

Member of the Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas Statewide Peer Review Team (2007-2008, 2015-present)

Former Member of the Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas Professional Society of Forensic Interviewers (2007-2008, 2015-2017)

Former Member of the Tarrant County Sexual Abuse Advisory Council (2008-2013)

Former Member of the Tarrant County Child Abduction Response Team (2008-2015)

Alliance for Children Team Excellence Award Winner 2011

### Experience & Continuing Education

Conducted approximately 2,475 Forensic Interviews of Children

Completed approximately 1280 hours of Cumulative Training

- Approximately 510 hours dedicated to Forensic Interviewing Training
- Approximately 770 hours dedicated to Child Abuse Training

Conducted approximately 1,400 Child Abuse Investigations

Training on Child Abuse and Interviewing Children including:

- Oklahoma Department of Human Services, Child Welfare Core Training (August 23, 2004-September 24, 2004)
- Oklahoma Department of Human Services, Substance Abuse (November 3-November 4, 2004)
- Oklahoma Department of Human Services, Effects of Abuse and Neglect (December 7-December 9, 2004)
- Oklahoma Department of Human Services, Specialized Child Protective Services (February 8-February 9, 2005)
- Oklahoma Department of Human Services, Cultural Diversity (February 16-February 17, 2005)
- Oklahoma Department of Human Services, Preparation for Court (May 5-May 6, 2005)
- Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, Child Protective Services Training Academy (May 1-July 21, 2006)
- Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, Meth Basics and Worker Safety (June 15, 2006)
- Tarrant County Forensic Interviewing Training (July 26-July 27, 2006)
- Dallas Crimes Against Children Conference (August 21-August 24, 2006)
- Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, Advanced Risk Assessment (September 20, 2006)
- Tarrant County Peer Review Session (September 21, 2006)
- Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, Child Development: Birth to Age Five (October 10, 2006)
- The Shaken Baby Alliance, Advanced Techniques in Joint Child Abuse Investigations (November 30-December 1, 2006)

# COURT/TESTIFYING

TRIAL DATE	VICTIM & AGE AT FI	DEFENDANT	PD	TYPE OF TESTIMONY	DA	DEFENSE	VERDICT
5/10/17	Victim; 9 yo	Defendant	Dallas	Expert and Fact	DA	Defense	Guilty-Agg Sx 10 yrs TDC
6/07/17	Victim; 5 yo	Defendant	Dallas	Expert and Fact	DA	Defense	Brady concerns after closing, to avoid mistrial Plead 10 yrs
6/12-6/14/17	Victim; 13 yo	Defendant	Balch Springs	Outery and Expert	DA	Defense	Guilty-Indecency 5 yrs TDC
10/19/17	Victim; 14 yo	Defendant	Grand Prairie	Expert and Fact	DA	Defense	Guilty-2 counts Agg Sx
10/20/17	Victim; 6 yo	Defendant	Lancaster	TBC-Outery	DA	Defense	Guilty-Agg Sx 10 yrs TDC Guilty-Indecency
11/01/17	Victim; 8 yo	Defendant	Dallas	Outery	DA	Defense	Guilty-Agg Sx
3/06/18	Victim; 15 yo	Defendant	Sachse	Outery and Expert	DA	Defense	Not Guilty (AP was going to plea but jury back before accepted)
8/08/18	Victim; 15 yo	Defendant	Rockwell Sheriff	Outery and Expert	DA	Defense	Guilty-4 counts Stab 179 yrs
9/11/18	Victim; 16 yo	Defendant	Irving	Outery and Expert	DA	Defense	Guilty-Continuous Sx 65 yrs TDC

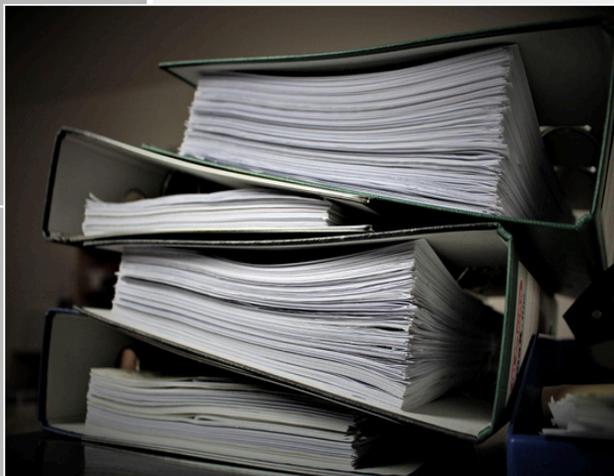
## Training Log

*DCAC; Crimes Conference Webinar: Trend Alert: Traffickers Expanding to Different Platforms to Sell Children Online	8/23/21	1.25	Yes
*DCAC; Crimes Conference Webinar: Corroborating Evidence: Critical in Child Abuse Cases	9/21/21	1.25	Yes
*DCAC; Crimes Conference Webinar: Gangs and Pimping: Easy Prey, Easy Money	9/28/21	1.25	Yes
*DCAC; Crimes Conference Webinar: Male Childhood Victims Turned Advocates	9/29/21	1.25	Yes
DCAC, Selective Mutism Webinar	11/04/21	1	No
DCAC, Juvenile 101 (Dallas Co Juvy DA) Webinar	11/05/21	1.5	No
NCJTC; Webinar: Introduction to Neurobiology of Addiction	1/18/22	1.5	No
NCJTC; Webinar: Neurobiology of Addiction-Beyond the Basics	1/18/22	1.5	No
*NCAC Webinar: Research on the Use of Human Figure Drawings in FIs	3/15/22	1	No
*Region 2 Peer Review	3/25/22	5	Yes
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>1288.20</b>	
Hours Specific to Child Abuse (no FI hours)		<b>774.50</b>	
<b>*Hours Training Specific to Conducting Forensic Interviews of Children</b>		<b>513.70</b>	

# Court and Trial Prep Binder

## Category Suggestions:

- Preparation
- Protocol
- Disclosure
- Grooming
- Compliant Victim
- Recantation
- Tools
- Suggestibility
- Miscellaneous



# Court and Trial Prep Binder

Build your own research article library.  
A few I like:



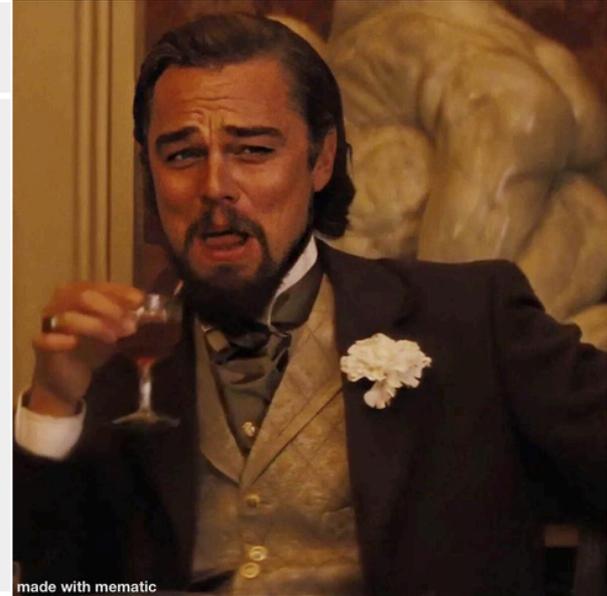
- How Children Tell: The Process of Disclosure in Child Sexual Abuse (Sorensen and Snow)  
Exploing Sex Offender Grooming (Jim Tanner and Stephen Brake)
- OJJDP's 2015 White Paper–Child Forensic Interviewing: Best Practices
- September 2020 APSAC Advisor–Forensic Interviewing Critical Updates for Professionals
-

# Flash Cards

For succinct answers to the basics:

- What is a Forensic Interview?
- What is a Forensic Interviewer?
- Which FI Protocol do you Use? Explain each step.
- Explain the Process of Disclosure
- Factors that Influence an Outcry?
- What are Sensory Details?
- What are Periphery Details?
- Episodic vs Script Memory
- What is Grooming?

I MAKE FLASH CARDS



AND I KNOW THINGS

What is a Forensic Interview?

A developmentally sensitive, legally sound and structured conversation with a child, intended to elicit detailed information about a possible event the child may have experienced and/or witnessed.

What is a Forensic Interviewer?

A trained, neutral and objective professional who has a conversation with a child, at the request of law enforcement (and/or CPS) to discuss allegation of abuse and/or neglect.

Various FI Protocols?

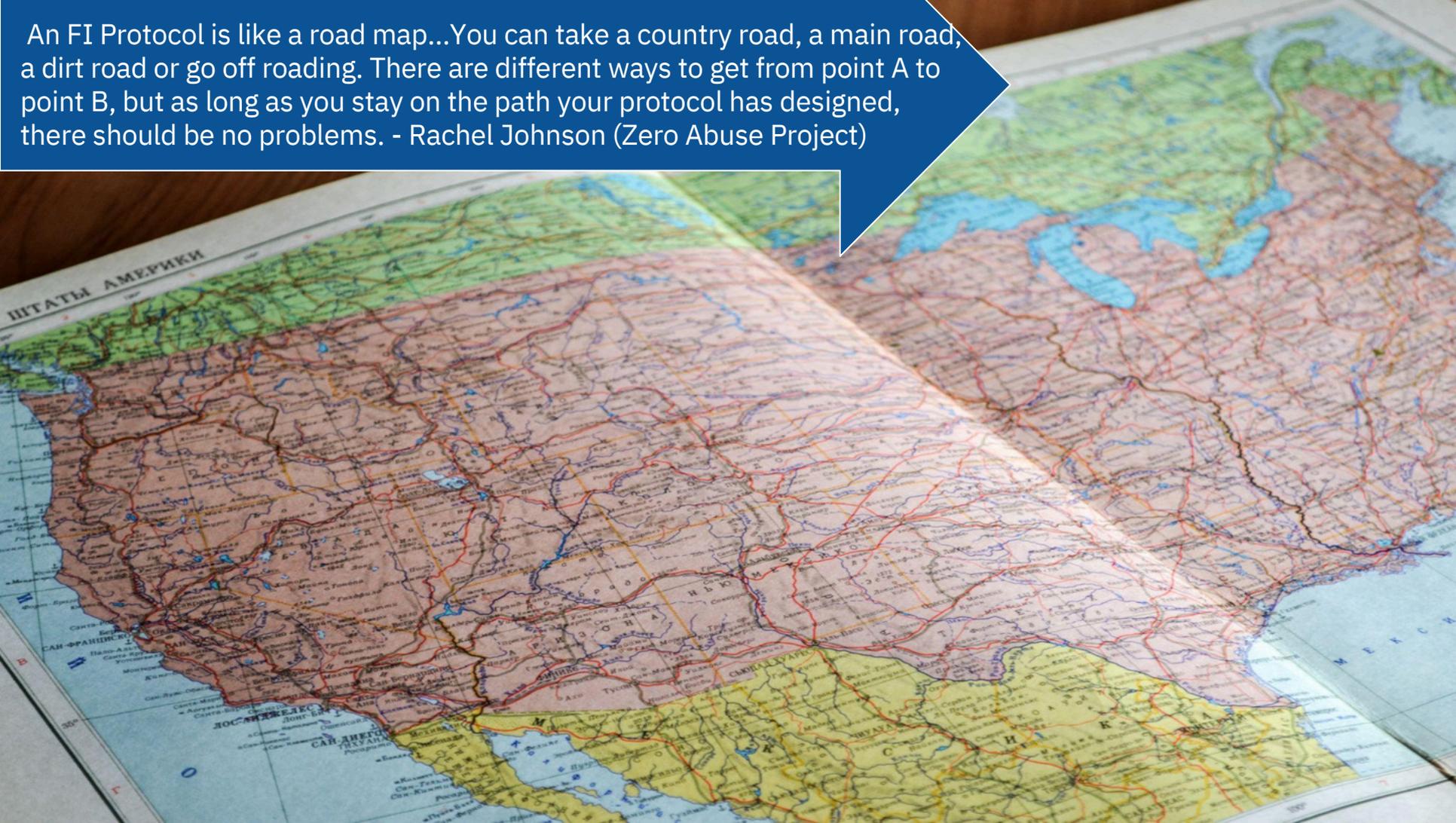
There are numerous FI protocols that are utilized across the nation, but they share common characteristics and each is based on the same body of research.

Commonalities in FI Protocols?

All FI Protocols that are recognized by The National Children's Alliance include the following phases:

- Rapport building (Rules, T vs. L, Event Narrative Practice)
- Substantive phase (TOC, Detail Gathering, Alternate Hypothesis)
- Closure Phase (Non-abusive Conversation, Questions for FI)

An FI Protocol is like a road map...You can take a country road, a main road, a dirt road or go off roading. There are different ways to get from point A to point B, but as long as you stay on the path your protocol has designed, there should be no problems. - Rachel Johnson (Zero Abuse Project)



Process of Disclosure?

Stages:

1. Denial
2. Disclosure
  - A. Tentative
  - B. Active
3. Recant
4. Reaffirm

Types of Disclosure?

- 1 Accidental
- . Purposeful
- 2
- .

*\*The closer a child is in both physical and emotional proximity, to the Alleged Offender, longer delays can be expected*

Active Disclosure?

When a child has decided to tell a significant amount of information. Even in active disclosure, a child might not tell all of the information.

Tentative Disclosure?

Characteristics include:

- Forgetting = “I forgot”
- Minimizing = “It happened a long time ago.”
- Empowerment = “He tried \_\_\_\_ but I hit him and ran away.”
- Dissociation = “When he touches me, I go to the pink forest.”
- Discounting = “I was only kidding.”

Factors influence outcry?

- Relationship to the Alleged Offender
- Developmental factors (the child may not understand the behavior is inappropriate)
- Level of support from a non-offending caregiver
- Reaction to disclosure
- Contact with the Alleged Offender
- Fear of negative consequences

Periphery Details?

The explanation of what was occurring before, during and after an event. The 'WH' answers to questions. Sometimes these details are not the significant aspect or emotionally impactful element of the memory.

Sensory Details?

A personal indication that they've experienced an event. What they feel, see, hear, smell, taste. (\*\*Scuba Diving Example)

Advantages of Using Tools?

- Gives the child another means of communication
- Some children (especially young children) may be better at showing vs telling
- May limit direct questions
- May show that the touch was not sexual in nature

Episodic Memory?

A person's unique memory of a specific event.

*\*Past verb tense = "He kissed, They came, She touched, I sat, etc."*

*Favorite restaurant example*

Script Memory?

An average of events over time. Typically does not have the same level of detail like in episodic, but may be better recalled (accessed).

*\*Present verb tense = "always, usually, sometimes, never"*

Suggestibility?

The degree to which one's memory and/or recounting of an event is influenced by suggested information or misinformation. Research in this area can only approximate real life situations (not duplicate it). *\*\*Children ages 10-12+ have very few differences from adults in terms of suggestibility.*

What is Grooming?

The patterned and intentional behavior to increase opportunities for sexual assault, by gaining the trust of the child. **Purpose is 3 fold:**

- 1 Overcome resistance
- 2 Maintain access
- 3 Minimize disclosure (to include the desire to disclose)

Environment Grooming?

The behavior focused on manipulating the perceptions of individuals in the child's life.

Purpose = 1. To have Access

2. To Allure (drawing child into a relationship)

3. To Alibi (reducing probability of being reported and if reported, reducing probability of child being believed)

The Who Environmental Grooming?

● Parents

● Family Members

● School

● Peers/friends

● Social organizations

● Significant others

Victim Grooming

4 step process:

1 Bond=Treat child like an adult, keep secrets, lure with interests, love, drugs/alcohol, etc.

2 Reliance=Become the center of child's support system and isolate the child from others

3 Reduce resistances=Slowly/step by step; justify, rationalize, normalize

4 Trap=Prevent disclosure with rewards, threats, guilt and to maintain access for as long as possible

Why a Child Might Recant?

● Pressure from family/Non-offending caregiver

● Financial strain

● Length of process

● Contact with Suspect

● Fear

● Guilt

● Shame

● Make it go away

● Wanted abuse to stop not investigation/arrest

COURT PREP HAD ME LOCKED UP LIKE



HAVE YOU SEEN MY FLASHCARDS?

## Re-Watching the Forensic Interview



- Transcribe your interview
- Note when you've checked off steps of your protocol
- Tally mark when the child
  - Corrects you
  - Utilizes "I don't know"
  - Utilizes "I don't understand"
- Note where/when you could have asked a better question—Discuss this with the DA

Guardify | Child Advocacy Center

Demo Account | For Child Advocacy Centers  
Ashley Stokrp

Dashboard  
Interviews  
Health Records  
Guardify Live  
Messages  
Center Files  
Users & Groups  
Summary Report

Guardify Community  
Take the Pledge  
Upcoming Events  
Blog

FI Test, CST Mock 09/01/2022 1  
Interviewee Interview Date Linked Items

BACK LIVE SHARE LINK EDIT

Video & Audio

Interviewee: FI Test, CST Mock Interviewer: Peterson, Megan LE Case ID: 22-23456

DETAILS

00:01:28 Correct Me Rule  
00:02:46 Event Narrative P...  
00:06:03 Truth/Lie  
00:11:51 Meeting AP Megan Peterson  
00:21:55 Offense Location Megan Peterson

Add Tag... 0 / 25

History

ALL SHARES DOWNLOADS

ALL ACTIONS

- 05/28/2024 10:58:50 AM Accessed Interview Megan Peterson
- 05/28/2024 10:45:46 AM Viewed Interview File File Name: Child Drawing.jpeg Megan Peterson
- 05/28/2024 10:45:46 AM Viewed Interview File File Name: Child Drawing.jpeg Megan Peterson
- 05/28/2024 10:41:58 AM Viewed Interview Transcript Megan Peterson
- 05/28/2024 10:41:41 AM Viewed Interview Video



## Common Defense Questions



Frequently  
asked  
Questions

*Q: Isn't (protocol) the gold standard?*

A: There is not one standardized, national protocol; State statutes and case law dictates aspects of FI practice, which demonstrates that no one method can always be best practice. FIs often receive training in multiple models and use a blended approach

*Q: You work in an Advocacy Center, you advocate for children, correct?*

A: My center advocates for safety, justice and healing for children and families. And the advocacy that happens at (CAC name) happens in different ways by different professions.

## Common Defense Questions



*Q: Do children lie?*

A: Yes.

*Q: Have you ever testified on behalf of the defendant?*

A: I've never been subpoenaed by the defense, in order to do so.

*Q: You have no definite knowledge the child has been abused?*

A: No

## Common Defense Questions

*Q: Forensic interviewing is not a tested/scientific process/What is the scientific theory behind an FI?*

A: Every child is different so it is hard to test this process in a controlled environment. The results would not be the same every time. FI is not a hard science. It's a soft science—which means there has been research to show the importance of asking open-ended questions because children can narrate or because some children need more direct questioning.

*Q: What is a sufficient number of sensory details? Is that all the child said in the way of sensory?*

A: There is no correct number of sensory details provided. It is not my job to determine the impact the sensory details have on an investigation. My job is to gather the information and not to make decisions with the information gathered.



## Common Defense Questions

*Q: When the defense is saying a child is “inconsistent” because they gave different people different information regarding the abuse.*

A: There is a difference between being “inconsistent” and a “contradiction.”

Inconsistency=Giving more or different information

Contradiction=Negating what was said the 1st time

**Explanations for a child’s “inconsistent statements”:**

- A child’s memory may fade over time
- The question(s) focuses on a different aspect of the event
- The child is tired and doesn’t want to give all the details
- The child is consistent but the adult misunderstands
- The child doesn’t understand the question
- The child didn’t hear the question



WHEN  
WILL IT  
END?



THE  
END

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