

# Interviewing Children in an AFC Role

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## Meeting your client where your client is at.

The steps of an interview.

1. Review the file:
  - a. Know the terms of the existing orders.
  - b. Know what is being asked for of the Court.
  - c. Know if your client has any disabilities or other special needs.
  - d. Talk with the parties to get information beyond what is in orders or pleadings.
2. Set the stage:
  - a. Choose where you will meet with your client.
  - b. Block out appropriate time for meeting your client.
3. Engage your client.
  - a. Greeting your client is important, it is the first impression that they will form of you and first impressions matter.
  - b. Give your client the ground rules in a way that she/he can understand.
    1. Asking your client if he/she knows why they are meeting with you, and if he/she knows who you are is a good way to lead into introducing yourself and setting up the rest of the interview.
      - a. This also helps you to know right away what they were told before your meeting and clear up any incorrect information.
    2. You work for them (only on their side).
    3. Confidentiality (only between the two of you).
    4. Importance of being honest (because you are going to trust them, and you want them to trust you).
    5. Letting them know that they don't have to share with you, it is at their comfort level.
  - c. Get to know your client.
    1. Find a way to let them feel safe to talk.
      - a. Talking "small talk" about things that are easy and lighter such as interests they have, school, foods they like, TV or video games, what they do when they play outside, friends they have or even something concrete in your interview space.
  - d. Work in questions that are more on topic.
    1. Routines.

2. Who are the people that are in her/his life and what roles do they play?
  3. Asking more directed questions aimed at topics you will need to have a position on in court.
  - e. Give your client time to ask you questions
4. Wrap up your interview
    - a. Let your client know they can contact you in the future.
    - b. Reinforce that all of your conversations are confidential.
    - c. Do not make promises about outcomes.

Tips:

1. This is the most important part of your representation of your clients.
2. Listen to your client. Be present and engaged. It takes focus and effort to properly meet with a child.
3. Remember that they are a person. Every child is different and you will need to adjust to them.
4. You have to be ok with having clients that may not want to talk about certain things.
5. Remember that they are a child.
  - a. They are not great at reporting factual information.
  - b. Time frames can be warped.
  - c. Using context clues can be helpful such as before/after, better/worse, who else was present when something happen, weather, relation to holiday or birthday, or other touchstones that kids are more likely to relate to.
  - d. Direct eye contact, sitting across from a desk and other formal interview strategies can be intimidating and cause them to shut down. Being on level with your client can provide them comfort.
  - e. They are often used to adults having more information or believing adults can know what they are thinking. Be aware that they may assume you know things that you do not know.
  - f. Be conscious of appearances. If you meet with a child and tell them everything is private and then you go into directly talking privately with a parent be aware that the child may think you are sharing what they told you.

<b><u>Preschool (3-6)</u></b>	<b><u>Schoolage (7-10)</u></b>	<b><u>Adolescents (11-18)</u></b>
interpret language extremely literally		
have difficulty with abstractions	still have difficulty with abstractions	
use words for concepts (time, distance, kinship, size) without actually understanding their meaning	have varying understanding of these concepts	understand time mostly as here and now
have difficulty with pronouns	can make errors with pronouns	
have difficulty with complex questions with more than one subject/verb	have difficulty with complex questions with more than one subject/verb	likely to lose track of question if complex
have difficulty with compound questions	have difficulty with compound questions	have difficulty with compound questions
have difficulty with negation in questions	have difficulty with negation in questions	have difficulty with negation in questions
tend to supply an answer/response even if they don't have knowledge to do so (Yes)	don't know if they don't understand a question	not likely to admit they don't understand question
don't organize info as adults do with regard to time, place, sequence	don't organize info as adults do with regard to time, place, sequence	don't organize info as adults do with regard to time, place, sequence  may or may not have adult narrative skills
still acquiring language and will use words without knowing their meaning		
generally believe adults tell truth, know what they know, and would not trick them	generally believe adults tell truth, know what they know, and would not trick them	a large number of adolescents stay at schoolage level especially the population that is under-educated/parented or developmentally delayed

Preschool (3-6)	Schoolage (7-10)	Adolescents (11-18)
uses simple sentences (subject/verb/object-and one idea)	uses simple sentences (subject/verb/object-and one idea)	uses simple sentences (subject/verb/object-and one idea)
<i>(Did Grandma drive you home? Rather than: Directing our attention to Saturday, did your grandma pick you up in a car and take you somewhere?)</i>		
avoid abstract ideas (Tell me about your living room. Rather than: Describe the area near the kitchen.)	avoid abstract ideas	
use names rather than pronouns (again and again) (What did Jeff say about the dog? Rather than: What did he say about it?)	use names rather than pronouns (again and again)	
one idea per sentence/question (What are the names of the people who sleep at your house? Rather than: Are the people living with you the same as before?)	one idea per sentence/question	
avoid negative in sentences (Did you see the dog? Rather than: Didn't you see the dog?)	avoid negative in sentences	avoid negative in sentences
use concrete examples and allow for demonstration (Show me what Mommy did with the stick.)	use concrete examples and allow for demonstration	
avoid queries requiring time, distance, age, kinship, and sequencing because what you get will not be reliable- test ability to use before relying on		
ask follow up questions (Where did you live? The brown house. The brown house with an upstairs and downstairs? No, the other brown house with the broken window. —make sure that you and the child have the same meanings for words/ideas)	ask follow up questions	ask follow up questions
check meanings of words used by children (Skip is my Dad's cousin. What is a cousin? The one who gets to sleep in the same bed with my little sister.)	check meanings of words used by children	check meanings of words used by children
Words to avoid: believe, story, any legal jargon	→ depict, demonstrate, etc.	