



# Forensic Interviewing of Older Adults

DECEMBER 8, 2017

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE  
**ElderJustice**  
INITIATIVE



**OVCTTAC**  
OFFICE FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME Training and Technical Assistance Center



# TECHNICAL OVERVIEW

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- Today's session will be recorded and made available on the training website.
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# ELDER JUSTICE INITIATIVE

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The **mission** is to support and coordinate the Department of Justice's enforcement and programmatic efforts to combat elder abuse, neglect, and financial fraud and scams that target older adults.

The Initiative does so by—

- Promoting justice for older adults.
- Helping older victims and their families.
- Enhancing state and local efforts through training and resources.
- Supporting research to improve elder abuse policy and practice.



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## ELDER JUSTICE INITIATIVE (EJI)

REPORT ABUSE OR FIND HELP

New on ElderJustice.gov

EJI launches the MDT  
Toolkit and Guide for  
elder abuse case review  
MDTs



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**Elder abuse is a complex issue that intersects with many disciplines.**

Elder abuse can happen to anyone. It affects people of every ethnic background, gender, and financial status.

## PRESENTER

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**Sheri Gibson, Ph.D.**

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# FORENSIC INTERVIEWING OF OLDER ADULTS

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December 8, 2017

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# Historically

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- Social services response
- Criminalization of elder abuse
  - ▣ Elder Abuse Prevention & Prosecution Act of 2017

# Defining Forensic Interviewing

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□ A forensic interview of a child is a developmentally sensitive and legally sound method of gathering factual information regarding allegations of abuse or exposure to violence. This interview is conducted by a competently trained, neutral professional utilizing research and practice-informed techniques as part of a larger investigative process (OJJDP, 2015).

# Evidence-based Child Protocols

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- NCAC Child Forensic Interview Structure
- Child First (Finding Words) Training
- CornerHouse *Forensic Interview* Protocol™
- The NICHD Protocol

# Forensic Interviewing Research

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## With Older Adults

- About 10 articles

## With Children

- 35 years of sound research (e.g., Saywitz et al., 2017)

# Training Child Forensic Interviewers

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- Not equating children and older adults
- Apply child forensic interviewing principles
  - ▣ Rapport building
  - ▣ Open-ended questions
- Teach child forensic interviewers about elder abuse and interviewing older adults

# Multidisciplinary Teams

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- Forensic interviews are best conducted within the context of an MDT

<b>Persons who Report the Abuse</b>	<b>Law Enforcement Personnel</b>	<b>Emergency Medical Personnel</b>
Family, neighbors, and friends	Adult protective services	Prosecuting and defending attorneys
Judges	Mental health professionals	Medical providers, facility staff, financial institutions

# What is Abuse?

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- Nonaccidental (knowing or reckless) infliction of bodily injury, serious bodily injury, or death.
- Types:
  - ▣ Physical Abuse
  - ▣ Sexual Abuse
  - ▣ Emotional Abuse
  - ▣ Neglect
  - ▣ Financial Exploitation
  - ▣ Self-Neglect

# Three Common Causes for Mental Health Symptoms

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- Dementia – chronic cognitive problems, variety of causes
- Delirium – acute confusion caused by physiological problem
- Depression – mood disturbance, symptoms may be different in older adults

# Normal Aging

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- Cognitive and mental disorders are not part of normal aging
- Physiological changes affect all systems, including metabolism
- Metabolism affects how the person handles medications, environmental stressors, etc.
- Very common medications can create problems as well as polypharmacy

# Common Dementia Symptoms

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- ❑ Memory loss
- ❑ Confusion
- ❑ Disorientation (advanced)
- ❑ Language problems
- ❑ Inability to recognize familiar objects
- ❑ Changes in personality or behavior
- ❑ Disturbance in executive functioning

# The Interview: Assessing for Dementia

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## □ Dementia

- ▣ Depending on the “stage” of dementia, the person will likely be able to understand and give a basic explanation of why you are there
- ▣ In early to middle “stages”
  - Vague speech – when asked why you are there, person might say “there must be a problem”
  - Repeated phrases
  - Lose track during conversation; use story-telling
  - May not be troubled by mistakes or will lack awareness of incorrect answers
  - May make excuses for why he or she cannot perform a task or answer a question
  - May present as excessively friendly or hostile

# Communication Strategies

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- TALK tactics
  - ▣ Take it slow
  - ▣ Ask simple questions
  - ▣ Limit reality checks
  - ▣ Keep eye contact



# Communication Strategies

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- Approach from the front
- Introduce yourself
- Speak slowly
- Use simple, familiar language
- Ask one question/give one direction at a time
- Be mindful of body language
- Minimize distractions

# Delirium

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- Is a physiological consequence of:
  - ▣ Medical conditions, substance intake, withdrawal from medication, toxicity from medication
- Rapid onset – hours to days
- Symptoms can include confusion, hallucinations, agitation
- Will seem bewildered, “Where am I?”

# Assessment Through Interviewing

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*ALWAYS tell the person who you are and why you are there*

## □ Delirium

- ▣ Person will not be able to make sense of your presence
- ▣ Person will not be able to repeat what you told them
- ▣ Person will appear bewildered, “Where am I, what are you doing here?”
- ▣ Person will be difficult to console
- ▣ His/her conversation will likely contain suspiciousness; seem panicky, emotional, or pressured
- ▣ Person will be difficult to “connect” with during the interview
- ▣ Person will tend to misinterpret what he or she sees and hears (e.g., thread on the couch is a snake)

# Conversational Clues to Status

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## □ Delirium

- ▣ “Where are we right now?”
- ▣ “What day/time/date is it?”
- ▣ Can they engage in meaningful dialogue?
- ▣ Do they appear aware of their surroundings and able to focus?

# Depression

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- Is classified within a broad range of mood disorders
  - disruption in mood is most salient characteristic
- Fewer older adults than younger adults suffer from diagnosable depression

# Depression

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- Less likely to report depressed mood
- More likely to report:
  - ▣ Lack of purpose
  - ▣ Worthlessness
  - ▣ Sleep disturbance
- Attribute symptoms to physical aches and pains or aging process
- Greater suicide risk

# Depression Assessment

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## □ Depression

- ▣ Person should be able to repeat what you have said without any difficulty
- ▣ Speech will sound flat, person will appear uninterested, detached
- ▣ Listen for indicators of hopelessness, helplessness
- ▣ Typical responses include “I don’t know” or “I don’t care”
- ▣ Resignation

# Interviewing Strategies

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□ PLAY VIDEO

# Group Discussion

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- What interviewing strategies did you observe?
- What functional limitations did you notice that may require accommodations?
- What characteristics did you observe in Ms. Prim?
  - ▣ Cognition
  - ▣ Speech
  - ▣ Mood/affect
  - ▣ Eye contact
  - ▣ Rapport
  - ▣ Her story



# Helpful Interview Strategies

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- Determine the best time of day to conduct the interview (sun downing)
- Establish the victim's daily routine without asking about the crime
- Construct each subsequent question building on what the victim has already told you
- Use the victim's exact words or phrases

# Strategies (cont.)

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To enhance communication:

- Ask victim how he or she would prefer to communicate with you
- Ask how he or she prefers to be addressed (first or last name, Dr., Reverend?)
- Read written materials to the individual
- Use an interpreter as needed
- Use visual aids, charts, or diagrams
- Ask short questions
- Limit environmental distractions

# Strategies (cont.)

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- Ask the older victim if he or she can draw or show the object or what happened
- Ask open-ended questions first, then use process of elimination questions
- Ask more specific questions rather than broad questions

# Strategies (cont.)

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- Listen patiently and redirect as needed if the older victim digresses
- Use memory cues such as “What were you doing before this happened?”
- Do not discount the alleged abuse because the victim has made statements that seem untrue or may be the result of delusions

# Possible Barriers To Disclosure

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Communication/Comprehension Skills	Number of Prior Abuse Discussions
Language	Shame
Embarrassment	Guilt/Culpability – Self-Blame
Threats (emotional/physical)	Fear
Secrecy	Loyalty
Family Privacy	Protection
Cultural Issues (Gender, race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status)	Competency (Emotional status, developmental disabilities, cognitive functioning)

# Mobility Issues

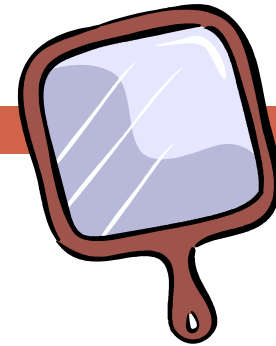
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- ❑ Conduct interview in the best location for the older adult
- ❑ Consider future needs for transportation and accessibility at police station and court
- ❑ Assist with arranging for assistive devices
- ❑ Collaborate with health care providers



# Self-Reflections

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- Importance of self-care
- Prior experiences
- Similarities/differences in child vs. older adult forensic interviewing
- Beliefs about autonomy and protection shaped by society and personal experiences
- Myths or beliefs about aging
- Infantilizing language

# Thank You

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## □ Resources:

### ▣ Alzheimer's Association

■ [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org)

### ▣ National Center on Elder Abuse (NCEA)

■ [www.ncea.aoa.gov](http://www.ncea.aoa.gov)

### ▣ National Committee to Prevent Elder Abuse (NCPEA)

■ [www.preventelderabuse.org](http://www.preventelderabuse.org)

### ▣ Center of Excellence on Elder Abuse and Neglect

■ [www.centeronelderabuse.org](http://www.centeronelderabuse.org)

### ▣ National Council on Aging

■ [www.ncoa.org](http://www.ncoa.org)

# Resources (cont.)

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- Gerontological Society of America [GSA] (2011). Communicating with older adults: An evidence-based review of what really works. Retrieved August 19, 2016, [http://aging.arizona.edu/sites/aging/files/activity\\_1\\_reading\\_1.pdf](http://aging.arizona.edu/sites/aging/files/activity_1_reading_1.pdf)
- De Vries, K. (2013). Communicating with older people with dementia. *Nursing Older People*, 25(4), 30-37.
- Mosqueda, L. (2013). *Geriatric Pocket Doc: A Resource for Non-Physicians*. Irvine, CA: University of California Irvine.

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- Saywitz, K. J., Lyon, T. D., & Goodman, G. S. (2017). When Interviewing Children: A Review and Update.

Q & A



[www.elderjustice.gov](http://www.elderjustice.gov)

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# QUESTIONS & SUGGESTIONS

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