Interviewing a child

Prior to interviewing a child, where possible, discuss the child’s development with people who know the child, to ascertain the child’s level of development, how best to interact with them and what they call certain body parts, where applicable. Commence the interview with a non-threatening topic to engage the child, and to further assess their developmental and verbal ability prior to introducing the reason for the interview.

When interviewing a child:

- ensure that, if requested by the child, the child has an appropriate support person of their choice present during the interview
- introduce the persons attending the interview and tell the child who they work for, what their role is and explain the purpose of the interview
- ensure, where possible, that the interview with the child does not occur in the presence of the person who is alleged to have harmed them, or a person who is likely to inform the person who is alleged to have harmed them, of the matters discussed in the interview – the child needs an environment where they feel safe and able to speak
- take into account the special needs of a young child that may impact on their ability to communicate, including:
  - their understanding of time
  - the limitations in their attention span
  - variations between chronological age and developmental maturity
  - any disability the child may have
- ensure that the questions asked of a child:
  - are simple and age appropriate
  - contain only one thought
  - are open-ended and not leading.

If the child does not make a disclosure, the interviewer may ask them direct questions about the concerns received. At the end of the interview, the interviewer should:

- thank the child for the interview
- explain what will happen next and talk about the possibility of further interviews
- talk to the child about protective behaviours and who they can talk to if they are worried about anything
- ensure the child is supported and feels safe, and knows how to contact the interviewer if they want to talk further.

Legal representatives

Children are entitled to have a legal representative present during the interview, and it is the responsibility of the authorised officer to inform children about their rights and make all reasonable attempts to accommodate requests for a legal representative by a child, but this must not compromise the child’s immediate safety.