

Interviewers' gestures mislead child-witnesses

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Children can easily be led to remember incorrect information through misleading gestures from adults, according to researchers from the University of Hertfordshire. These findings are being presented this week at the British Psychological Society Annual Conference.

Recounting a video

[Psychologists](#) from the University played children a video and then asked them to recount what they had seen.

The children were then questioned about what they remembered. After showing children a film of a woman wearing a hat, the researcher asked them "What was the lady wearing?" while performing an action similar

to putting on a hat. When the questions were accompanied by gestures that mimicked the correct answer, children got the answer correct.

But when the researcher asked the same question and pretended to put on a pair of glasses, ninety-three per cent of children ignored what they'd seen in the video and insisted the woman had been wearing glasses instead.

Incorporating gestures

University of Hertfordshire psychologist Dr Liz Kirk said: "We wanted to explore the differences in gesture [misinformation](#) by comparing younger and older children and how they incorporated this non-verbal information into their account of what they saw.

"All the children were highly susceptible to gesture and spoke about extra information fraudulently planted by the [interviewer](#). But what most surprised us was the fact that the children even incorporated the adult's misleading gestures into their stories of what they'd seen on the video.

"This study demonstrates the extent to which the [gestures](#) were included into the children's accounts of what they saw.

Serious implications

"This has serious implications for forensic interview of child witnesses, particularly where they may have witnessed a traumatic event which they may have to confront again during questioning. Interviewers need to think very carefully not just about what they say, but how they say it."

Provided by University of Hertfordshire

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