

New method could facilitate child interrogations

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In a new study, a new method using computer assistance was tested where simplified images of emotions and people were used. Credit: Uppsala University

In many different contexts, adults may want to know more about children's experiences, such as in healthcare, the social services or the legal system. It is therefore important that there are good and reliable interview methods. In a new study, researchers tested a new method with computer assistance where simplified images of emotions and people

were used.

Conducting interviews with [young children](#) is challenging, especially if it is important that what they say matches what has happened. It is extra difficult to [interview](#) children who are silent and nervous at the beginning of an interview.

In the study now published, 60 children aged 4-5 years were interviewed, either with a method similar to the one the police use in child interrogations or with a method where the computer is used as an aid, called In My Shoes.

The children were of course not interrogated, but rather the researchers used the most important evidence-based components used in today's child interrogations, such as telling the child that he/she can say "I don't know" if he/she does not know the answer, asking the child open questions and avoiding leading questions entirely, as well as creating a supportive atmosphere where the child has the right to end the interview at any time.

With In My Shoes, the adult and the child sit at the computer together and the child is encouraged to tell about his or her feelings and experiences and has help from simplified images of emotions, people and situations. It is a structured interview with various modules and the child can choose to point to the screen as an answer. The child also has more control over the pace and the demand for eye contact decreases, which can be of comfort to many children.

The researchers wanted to find out if the children began communicating more depending on whether they were interviewed with one method or the other and depending on whether they were shy. They therefore observed how the children behaved at the beginning of the interview, during the part that is based on establishing contact with the child and

telling what rules there are. Then, they observed how the children behaved at the beginning of the part called the substantial phase, where the child is encouraged to tell about his or her experiences.

"It turned out that shy children who were interviewed with In My Shoes began to talk more, they answered faster and needed less encouragement to talk. The shy children who were interviewed with the police method did not begin communicating more. For children who were not shy, the interview method made no difference," says Karin Fängström, licensed psychologist and doctoral candidate at the Department of Public Health and Caring Sciences at Uppsala University.

She points out that it is important to remember that the study was done on a small group of children and that more studies have to be done to be able to confirm the results.

"Our earlier studies indicate that In My Shoes help children to provide equally reliable information as when they are interviewed with the [method](#) that is similar to child interrogations. We can now also say that In My Shoes seems to suit shy [children](#) who seem nervous and worried especially well," says Karin Fängström.

More information: Karin Fängström et al. The computer-assisted interview In My Shoes can benefit shy preschool children's communication, *PLOS ONE* (2017). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0182978](#)

Provided by Uppsala University

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