

An evidence-based approach to promoting honesty in child witnesses

Looking at interview strategies that promote honesty in child witnesses.

Key details

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Police region	South East
Collaboration and partnership	South Coast Doctoral Training Partnership and funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)
Level of research	PhD
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Research context

When interviewing vulnerable witnesses such as children, investigative interviewers in England and Wales are advised to follow the [Achieving Best Evidence \(ABE\) in Criminal Proceedings guidelines \(Ministry of Justice, 2022\)](#). These guidelines recommend that practitioners engage in truth-lies discussions (TLDs) with child witnesses at the end of the rapport phase of an interview. Such discussions aim to make children aware of the importance of telling the truth, therefore encouraging them to provide an honest and truthful statement.

However, there is no standardised procedure involving the employment of TLDs in practice. To date, little is known about whether and how these discussions are employed in the field.

This study will explore police officers' perceptions and experiences of promoting honesty in child witnesses through interviewing strategies such as TLDs. Police officers trained in ABE guidelines and who regularly interview child witnesses will be invited to complete an online survey. Multiple choice and open-ended questions will explore:

1. practitioners' experiences of promoting honesty during interviews with children
2. potential obstacles encountered
3. recommendations for alternative honesty-promoting strategies

The results will be discussed in terms of ideas for future research to inform evidence-based policing to facilitate honest and accurate accounts from child witnesses.

Research methodology

Phase 1 – an online survey is available on Qualtrics. The survey contains a combination of open-ended/text-box questions and multiple-choice/scale questions. All answers will be anonymous and confidential. The survey requires about 20 minutes for completion. Around 50 police officers trained in ABE guidance and who regularly interview child witnesses are needed for this phase.

Phase 2 – an optional individual online follow-up interview conducted via Zoom. The interview questions will explore police officers' experiences in more depth, with a focus on personal perceptions and opinions. Around eight participants are needed for this phase.