



Reflections on Emerging Issues

Forensic Use of Anatomical Dolls

The following is a partial summary of Hlvaka et. al 2010. For more information please read the entire article:

Hlvaka, H., Olinger, S. & Lashley J. (2010). The use of anatomical dolls as a demonstration aid in child sexual abuse interviews: A study of forensic interviewers' perceptions. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 19(5), p. 519-553.

Effective use of anatomical dolls as a demonstration aid requires training, expressly in regards to when it is appropriate to introduce dolls and how to provide individuals with specific instructions about their use. While there are guidelines regarding doll use, there is no single correct way to use the dolls in a forensic interview. State statutes, protocol recommendations, local practice, and the specifics of a case may dictate modifications to the use of anatomical dolls (APSAC, 1995, 2002).

Forensic interviewers should not consider using dolls unless a child or individual has made a verbal disclosure of abuse during the interview (Boat & Everson, 1996; Thierry et al., 2005). To effectively use an anatomical doll, the individual must be able to identify that the doll represents their own body; this cognitive skill is referred to as representational capacity (Myers, Saywitz, & Goodman, 1996). Children or individuals should be provided with doll instructions that avoid such words as pretend, imagine, or make believe (APSAC, 1995; Boat & Everson, 1988a; Freeman & Estrada-Mullaney, 1998) to clarify the individual's representational capacity. Once an individual has made a verbal statement or has exhausted verbal recall (Faller, 2007; Faller, 2005), the dolls can then be used as demonstration aids for the purpose of clarification, consistency, distancing, or communication (Anderson et al., 2010).

Dolls are used to clarify information that was previously verbally disclosed (APSAC, 1990, 2002; Holmes, 2000; CornerHouse 2007; Faller, 2005; Myers et al., 1996; Poole & Lamb, 1998). Dolls may be used to help clarify an individual's vocabulary and terminology regarding body parts, positions, and physical or sexual acts. Anatomical dolls can be utilized to help establish internal consistency in an individual's report: a verbal report followed by demonstration may assist in bolstering the strength of the individual's statement. and thereby bolster their credibility.

Individuals who try to communicate their experience by demonstrating on their own bodies can use anatomical dolls as an alternative to demonstrate what happened; this is referred to as distancing. Anatomical dolls may also be helpful when an individual cannot or will not fully verbalize their experience (APSAC, 1995; CornerHouse, 2003; DeLoache, 1995; Faller, 2005; Koocher et al., 1995; Meyers et al., 1996). An inability to thoroughly verbalize details of their experience may be due to language issues or emotional barriers. Regardless of the reason, anatomical dolls may allow the individual to communicate in a way that feels more comfortable (CornerHouse, 1990, 2003; Faller, 2005; Holmes, 2000; Meyers et al., 1996).

Hlvaka et al (2010) notes that the four distinct functions of clarification, consistency, distancing, and communication are commonly practiced, but remain largely unexamined. They are considered valuable to sexual abuse forensic investigations: Faller (2007) specifically notes the value of anatomical dolls for clarifying and internally corroborating information to augment person's verbal disclosures. When utilizing anatomical dolls, the interviewer should consider the purpose or reason for use, as well as any modifications required by the specifics of the case and the unique needs of the individual.

Throughout the forensic interview, individuals must be given as much opportunity as possible to provide narrative details about their experience. Thus, when anatomical dolls are used, interviewers must continuously invite individuals to provide verbal narrative details about what they are demonstrating. In addition, interviewers should monitor the individual's use of anatomical dolls and ensure that they are put away when the individual is done using them as a demonstration aid.

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