



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Developmental Review

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/dr



The use of ground rules in investigative interviews with children: A synthesis and call for research



Sonja P. Brubacher^{a,*,1}, Debra Ann Poole^a, Jason J. Dickinson^b

^a Department of Psychology, Central Michigan University, Sloan Hall, Mount Pleasant, MI, 48859, USA

^b Department of Psychology, Montclair State University, Montclair, NJ 07006, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 5 July 2014

Revised 2 October 2014

Available online 22 January 2015

Keywords:

Investigative interviewing

Children

Ground rules

Interview instructions

Metacognition

ABSTRACT

Guidelines for conducting investigative interviews with children often include instructions that explain the conversational rules of the interview. Despite the widespread and international use of such instructions (also referred to as “ground rules”), the body of research characterizing children’s understanding of these rules and documenting the impact of instruction on memory reports is relatively small. We review the use of ground rules in investigative interviews, the developmental differences that likely underlie children’s ability to make sense of these rules, and research pertaining to the effects of the ground rules commonly included in interview guidelines on the reports of 3- to 13-year-old children. We then present a study space analysis concerning the five ground rules reviewed: (a) a statement about interviewer naïveté regarding the target events, (b) instructions to tell the interviewer when a mistake has been made, (c) cautions that some questions may be repeated, and instructions to say (d) “I don’t understand” and (e) “I don’t know.” The results demonstrate obvious gaps in this body of literature, with only the “I don’t know” ground rule having received significant attention. In addition to exploring how individual rules impact interview performance, we encourage more process-oriented studies that relate developmental differences in ground rules benefits to the cognitive processes that underlie rule understanding and implementation. Optimally, this research should identify the most suitable

¹ Sonja P. Brubacher is now at the Centre for Investigative Interviewing, Deakin University, Australia.

* Corresponding author. School of Psychology, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Hwy, Vic 3125, Australia. Fax: 61-3-9244 6858. E-mail address: s.brubacher@deakin.edu.au (S.P. Brubacher).

format and placement of instruction in interviews and broaden to more often include field studies of child witnesses.

© 2015 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Introduction

Guidelines for conducting investigative interviews with children often include instructions (i.e., ground rules) that convey the communicative expectations of the interview. These can include directives to say “I don’t know” when prompted information cannot be recalled, to ask for clarification when misunderstandings arise, and to tell the interviewer when a mistake has been made. The purpose of discussing ground rules is to make children aware that they are the experts on the events in question and to set the stage for a unique style of conversation that is likely to be unfamiliar to young witnesses (Lamb & Brown, 2006; Poole & Lamb, 1998).

In daily life, children’s conversations often involve informed and familiar adults who are testing children’s memories of shared experiences or emerging knowledge (e.g. “Where did we go this morning?” or “What kind of animal is this?” Nelson & Fivush, 2000). Even when adults lack knowledge of target events (“What did you do at school today?”), they nonetheless tend to direct conversations with prompts that provide much of the structure and content for children’s stories (Kelly & Bailey, 2013; Principe, DiPuppo, & Gammel, 2013). Children therefore know that adults usually expect answers to questions and want them to learn the new information embedded in conversations. It is not surprising, then, that children often answer questions regardless of their level of certainty or understanding (Hughes & Grieve, 1980; Pratt, 1990; see Warren & McGough, 1996 for a review) and comply with adults’ suggestions (Ceci, Kulkofsky, Klemfuss, Sweeney, & Bruck, 2007; Principe et al., 2013).

Supporters of ground rules fear that the power dynamic in investigative interviews, wherein children likely view interviewers as authority figures, will amplify unwanted speculation and acquiescence to suggestion. Indeed, research has shown that children are more likely to accept suggestions from interviewers they believe to be knowledgeable rather than naïve (Waterman, Blades, & Spencer, 2004; Welch-Ross, 1999) and from adults rather than peers (Toglia, Ross, Ceci, & Hembrooke, 1992). Consequently, it seems prudent for interviewers to explain that “I don’t know” is an acceptable answer, that children can correct interviewers’ mistakes, and that children should report only memories of experienced events when potentially-confusing situations arise during the course of an interview (e.g., that a repeated question does not mean the child’s previous answer was inadequate).

The prediction that children would benefit from ground rules emerged from analyses of the question forms investigative interviewers delivered most frequently, along with the accuracy of children’s responses to these forms in analog studies, rather than in-depth understanding of the cognitive skills needed to comprehend and implement the rules. Our primary position in this paper is that this very understanding is needed to advance the use of ground rules so interviewers explain instructions to children in the most optimal ways. Although we acknowledge that motivational and emotional factors (e.g., being fatigued, under stress, or reluctant) may prevent children from benefitting from interview instructions (see Saywitz, 1995, for a discussion), in this review we focus on the cognitive factors that underlie the ability to understand and benefit from the rules. After reviewing how ground rules are currently integrated into investigative interviews, we describe basic research on the emergence of cognitive skills that likely underlie ground rules benefits and analog studies that documented the impact of ground rules on testimonial quality. Following discussion of these research traditions, we present a two-part study space analysis that identifies gaps in the literature and directions for future research.

The use of ground rules in investigative interviews

Although guidelines unanimously advise interviewers to avoid complex vocabulary and to rely on open (i.e., free-recall) questions, even well-executed interviews contain numerous specific (i.e., wh-) and option posing (multiple choice and yes-no) questions (e.g., Orbach, Hershkowitz, Lamb, Esplin, & Horowitz, 2000; see Lamb, Orbach, Hershkowitz, Esplin, & Horowitz, 2007, for a review). The high

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/353461>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/353461>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)