

# Assessing Progress in Reducing Child Labor in Cocoa Growing Areas of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
Bureau of International Labor Affairs

Techniques for Interviewing  
Young Children



Erika Keaveney  
Ingrid Rojas-Arellano  
Enumerator Training  
Kumasi, Ashanti Region, Ghana

**NORC**  
at the UNIVERSITY of CHICAGO

# Challenges in Interviewing Young Children

# Challenges in Interviewing Young Children

## Reality-monitoring error

Four to six year-old children are often unable to distinguish between real and imaginary events.

As a result, they are highly prone to **confabulation**, where errors in memory lead to unintentionally fabricated or distorted stories.



# Challenges in Interviewing Young Children

## Source-monitoring error

Many younger children fail to distinguish between memories of internal/lived experiences and events stored in memory from external sources (e.g., hearing about or observing someone else doing farming versus actually doing farming themselves).



# Challenges in Interviewing Young Children

## *Limited vocabulary*

Vocabulary is directly related to age and schooling. Survey questions that include technical language or jargon will not be understood by children even though they may understand the underlying concepts.



# Challenges in Interviewing Young Children

## ***Lack of understanding of measurement units***

Time intervals like minutes, hours, days, months, and years are mathematical concepts that are taught in school and reinforced over many years.

The same applies for things like weight and distance.



# Challenges in Interviewing Young Children

## ***Suggestibility***

Younger children tend to want to please adults and easily respond to even subtle cues as to what type of answer they think you are looking for.

***This includes any answer at all, in cases where they do not understand the question!***

# Cognitive Interviewing Defined

The **Cognitive Interview** is a questioning technique used to enhance retrieval of information from memory.

The role of the interviewer is to facilitate the process of retrieving information from the child's memory through establishing **rapport, personalizing** the interview (speaking at the child's level), helping the child **reinstate context**, obtaining information via **free recall**, and **probing** through non-leading questions.



Cognitive interviewing techniques should be employed for any survey questions that include specific activities and reference periods which respondents don't understand. The goal of the cognitive interview is to credibly establish:

- Whether the child has **ever** engaged in a given activity; and
- If so, when s/he **most recently** engaged in the activity.

# Establishing Rapport

- “What games do you like to play?”
- “What are the names of your playmates? Siblings?”
- “What do you like to eat?”



## ***Developmental assessment***

- “Can you touch your head? Point to your nose? Knees? Shoulders?” *[Ask child to do quickly, as a game]*
- “Can you count to 10? Can you count backwards from 10?”
- “Can you name 3 types of work done by people in this community?”
- “Do you go to religious services? [If yes] on what day?”
- “On what day of the week were you born? What day of the week comes before that?”

## *Developmental assessment*

- “Can you name the days of the week, starting with Sunday? Can you name the days of the week backwards?”
- “What days of the week do you usually attend school?”
- “Can you name the months of the year, starting with January? Can you name the months of the year backwards, starting with December?”
- “How many hours are in a day? How many minutes are in an hour?”
- “Is it light or dark outside at 11:00 PM? 1:00 PM? 6:00 AM? 7:00 PM?”

## ***The difference between truth and a lie***

Ask child to explain the difference between truth and a lie. Check understanding by providing concrete examples such as:

- “If I said that house was blue, would that be true or untrue?”
- “If I said your name was X, would that be true or untrue?”
- Explain to the child that you want to talk only about the true things.

## ***The difference between guessing and knowing***

Ask child to explain the difference between guessing and knowing. Check understanding by providing concrete examples such as:

- “What did you do after school yesterday?” *[knowing]*
- “What will your teacher do after school tomorrow?”  
*[guessing]*
- Explain to child that the focus will be on things that they remember or know. If they don’t know something, they should not guess but instead say “I don’t know.”

## ***Asking the same questions twice***

Explain that you may ask the same question in a different way or more than once because you sometimes forget that you asked already. S/he should not change the answer when this happens, but just tell you what they remember as best as they can. Try the following exercise as practice:

- “What did you eat for your last meal?”
- “Did you eat X for your last meal?”
- If child contradicts earlier response, discuss inconsistency and reinforce rules on truth/lie and not needing to change answer if asked the same thing twice.

# Practice Exercise

- “Think back to the last time you visited a friend (or relative)’s house. I want you to tell me everything that you did during the visit.”
- “Start with when you first arrived at the house and tell me everything you can remember.”
- *[Once child stops giving account]* “Can you tell me anything else about that visit? For example, what was the weather like? Who all was there?”



- For a given question, begin by asking the child if s/he has ever heard of the activity:
  - “Can you tell me what a business is?”
  - “What is work in agriculture?”
- Ask the child to tell you everything s/he knows about that activity (free recall).
- Where appropriate, correct or supplement his/her understanding to ensure the correct definition is used.

- If understanding is in question, continue a conversation on the topic and make sure that s/he is able to correctly explain the activity back to you before proceeding.
- Where appropriate, verify understanding from multiple angles/lines of questioning.
- Once definition has been established, ask the child if s/he has ever directly or personally engaged in that activity.
- Use the child's own language/vocabulary as much as possible when asking.

# Establishing Understanding

## *Times of day*



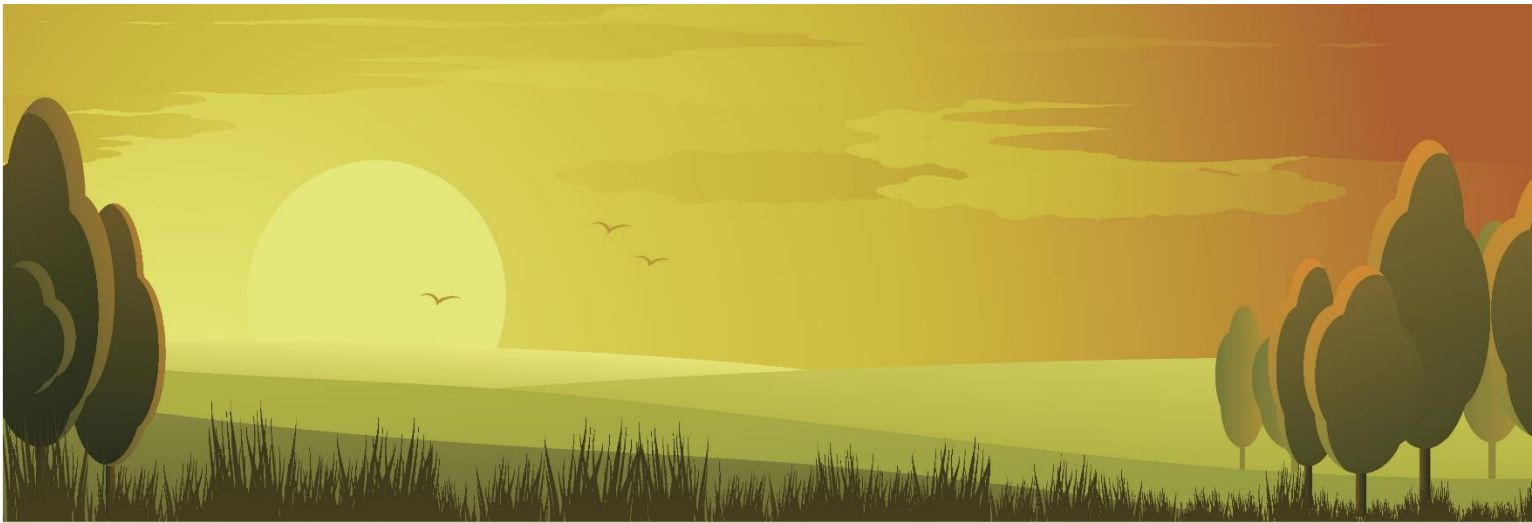
# Establishing Understanding

## *Times of day*



# Establishing Understanding

## *Times of day*



## *Times of day*



# Establishing Understanding

## Equipment



## *Reference period worksheet*

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7



## Reference period worksheet

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>	<i>Saturday</i>	<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>

# Establishing Understanding

## Reference period worksheet

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>	<i>Saturday</i>	<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>
				<i>Football game</i>	<i>Market day</i>	<i>Yesterday</i>

# Establishing Understanding

## Reference period worksheet

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>	<i>Saturday</i>	<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>
<i>Brother missed school so walked alone</i>	<i>Mosque</i>	<i>Auntie visited and gave banana</i>		<i>Football game</i>	<i>Market day</i>	<i>Yesterday</i>

- Ask child to create a mental picture of the event by thinking about all environmental and personal circumstances of the event.
  - “Tell me what it was like when you were on the farm.”
  - “What was the weather like?”
  - “Who was there?”
  - “What did you do?”

- Tell the child to share everything that s/he remembers, big or small.
- Do not interrupt—be sure to take notes to support you in questioning later on.
- If child stops giving the account, stay silent for a while to see if s/he has more to say.
- If s/he remains silent, be sure to ask “is there anything else?” before moving on.

- Explain that you are going to now ask about some details of the event.
- Remind the child that s/he should share whatever comes to mind without guessing or inventing anything.
- Use open-ended questions as much as possible so that child can provide free account versus single answers (e.g., “what did you use to break the cocoa pod” versus “did you use a knife or sharp tool to break the cocoa pod?”).
- Only use close-ended questions when you have exhausted other approaches to eliciting the information.
- Use this opportunity to clear up any inconsistencies you noted in earlier reports.

- Did this happen yesterday or a different day?
- How old were you?
- What class were you in?
- Was school in session or was it during a school break?
- Were you wearing the same shoes/clothes as now or did you wear something different?
- Did this happen before or after the past weekend or church/mosque visit?

**G10. Over the past 7 days, have you carried any load for more than 3 km as part of your work in agriculture?**

### ***Establish understanding***

- “What do people mean when they say something is heavy?”

### ***Free recall***

- “Tell me about any time that you carried a heavy load while doing farm work.”
- “What else can you tell me about that time?” [*Pause*]



**G10. Over the past 7 days, have you carried any load for more than 3 km as part of your work in agriculture?**

## *Open Questioning*

- “What was it that you were carrying?”
- “How big was it? How heavy was it?”
- “Where did you carry it to? Where did you carry it from?”
- “How far is that?”
- “How long did it take you?”

**G10. Over the past 7 days, have you carried any load for more than 3 km as part of your work in agriculture?**

### ***Closed Questioning***

- “Was it farther than from here to the market?”
- “Did you carry it before or after church day?”
- “Did you carry before or after your started P2?”

## DO...

- Adapt to the child's speech and language—speak to him/her on his/her level
- Use simple words, tenses, and sentences
- Ask child to explain words or expressions that you do not understand
- Move from general to specific questions
- Be patient—do not hurry the child or show annoyance
- Do not react negatively, express disapproval, or laugh at the child
- Recognize when child's concentration breaks and pause the interview
- Locate events within activities that are familiar to the child using reference periods worksheet
- Praise child for his/her effort (e.g., “you are doing a good job”)
- End on a friendly note. Ask the child what s/he plans to do for the rest of the day to maintain the conversational tone.

## DON'T...

- Ask yes/no questions if they can be avoided – children will try to guess what you want to hear and answer accordingly. If yes/no questions are necessary, phrase the question as an option (e.g., “did you or didn’t you...?” rather than “did you...?”).
- Interrupt the child. Deal with inconsistencies later on.
- Ask more than one question at a time.
- Ask loaded questions or questions with multiple parts.

**DO NOT** assume that “any answer” is better than no answer! If you can’t elicit the needed information, mark the survey “don’t know” and seek help from the guardian toward the end of the interview.

Questions?

