



Engaging children

Interviewing children – Tip Sheet for ICLs

Explain your role and contract with children clearly

Like adults, children make informed decisions and choices. Discuss confidentiality and limits: If children know how what they share will be used, they can more easily raise concerns and decide what they feel comfortable to share. This promotes long-term trust of helping professionals. Avoid using legal jargon; use simple clear language that children can easily understand.

Create a child-friendly, calm environment

Consider having items like toys and fidgets in your office that appeal to a range of ages and can be picked up and held, furnishings and pictures on the wall that may appeal to children of different ages, and markers and paper for drawing (essential!). Children can be extra sensitive to body language; try not to sit behind a desk, which can feel distant and intimidating.

Build rapport

Start by discussing neutral topics or interests. This gives children a chance to relax and feel like you are genuinely interested in them as a person.

Ask open-ended, non-leading questions

Children are psychologically vulnerable and may be more motivated to please the interviewer than speak their mind. More so than adults, children infer what you want them to say (rightly or wrongly), so it is important to elicit their perspective in a way that feels natural to them, rather than in a way that conforms to adult expectations (e.g., “tell me what you like/don’t like about spending time with dad” versus “do you like spending time with your dad?”).



For more info, visit lscpsych.com.au, email admin@lscpsych.com.au, or call (02) 8205 7877

Want to learn more?

Join clinical psychologist Dr Robyn Goodwin on the morning of Thursday 14 May 2026 for a half-day workshop on **Engaging Children – Practical tips for Children’s Lawyers**.

Workshop Focus Areas Include:

- How to build rapport and trust with children.
- Developmentally appropriate communication across different ages and stages.
- Responding to reluctance, distress, trauma, or complex family dynamics.
- Working alongside clinicians and experts: making use of professional reports and observations.
- Navigating disclosures, safety concerns, and signs of coaching or influence.
- Basic tips for understanding and meeting the needs of neurodiverse children (e.g., with diagnoses of ADHD or ASD).

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