

Child Victims with Disabilities

Interviewing Children Labeled "Non-verbal"



Overview and Strategies



- There is no universal understanding of what the term "non-verbal" means
- Non-verbal sometimes means that a child uses signs or gestures, they may use a few words, utilize a communication device, or they do not speak at all
- In general, non-verbal does not necessarily mean non-interviewable
- Children should always be given the opportunity to be interviewed

If a child is identified as being "non-verbal," ask the following questions of a trusted caregiver or source:

1. Does the child speak at all?
2. Does the child understand what is being said to them?
3. How does the child get their needs met?
4. Does the child use any communication devices?
5. Does the child use any signs or gestures to communicate?
6. Does the child write to communicate?
7. Does the child draw to communicate?
8. Is there anything else you think I should know about communicating with the child?

If possible, gather information from more than one source about how the child communicates:

- Parents
- Non-offending caregivers
- School personnel
 - > Teachers
 - > One-to-one aides
 - > Speech therapists
 - > Occupational therapists
 - > Physical therapists

🌀 If the Child Uses a Communication Device:

- Find out as much information about the device as you can:
 - > What features does it have?
 - > How long has the child been using the device?
 - > How comfortable is the child with using the device independently?
 - > Does the child use the device at home, school, both, or somewhere else?
 - > Is the device fully charged?
 - > How long does the battery typically last?
- In some cases, caregivers have tried to suggest to MDT members that the child does not prefer to use their device in an effort to prevent the child from being interviewed. Always be sure to check with the child about their desire to use their device when speaking to you.

🌀 Strategies to Consider

DO

- Spend extra time establishing rapport and becoming familiar with how the child uses the device
- Consider a multisession interview approach and/or taking breaks
- Use questions that are simple and concrete
- Give ample time between questions

DON'T

- Don't use complex or stacked questions
- Don't assume that a child who uses a device has an intellectual disability
- Don't assume that a child who uses a device does not understand what is being said to them
- Don't assume that a child will want to use their device just because they have one

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