FORENSIC INTERVIEWS FOR VULNERABLE ADULTS

CORE STANDARD

Forensic interviews are utilized to obtain information from a vulnerable adult about abuse allegations that will support accurate and fair decision making by a multidisciplinary team (MDT). The MDT is comprised of representatives from the criminal justice system, county adult, or older adult protection services, and service delivery systems.

Forensic interviews adhere to research-based guidelines that create an interview environment that enhances free recall, minimizes interviewer influence, and gathers information needed by all the MDT members in order to avoid duplication of the interview process. They are conducted by trained forensic interviewers in a manner that is developmentally and culturally sensitive, unbiased, fact-finding, and legally sound.

DEFINITIONS

Multidisciplinary team (MDT). A team formed to coordinate an abuse investigation and provide services to the victim and their non-offending caregivers. Prosecution, law enforcement, county service agencies (e.g., Adult Protective Services (APS), Area Agency on Aging (AAA), Older Adult Protective Services (OAPS), Departments of Mental Health, Developmental Programs (MHDP) and/or the Office of Long Term Living), medical professionals, mental health specialists, victim service providers (VSPs) and other stakeholders may all serve as part of a MDT.

Vulnerable adult. An individual aged 18 or over whose ability to protect themselves from violence, abuse or neglect is significantly impaired through physical or mental disability or illness, through old age or otherwise. This includes, but is not limited to, adults with cognitive and/or physical disabilities and elderly individuals with diminished cognitive and/or physical capacities (e.g., communication and sensory disabilities, intellectual and developmental disabilities, such as dementia, autism, traumatic brain injury, or severe mental illness that compromises their ability to relate to the interview experience).

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

1. Any VOCA recipients conducting forensic interviews of vulnerable adults shall develop a comprehensive, written protocol between all parties that includes, at a minimum, the following:
   a. Assessment and referral criteria.
   b. Medical examination process.
   c. The scheduling process for the forensic interview.
d. The methodology to be used to conduct the forensic interview.

e. The training of the person conducting the forensic interview. At a minimum, the training should be:
   i. A National Children’s Alliance (NCA) approved forensic interview training; or
   ii. National Children’s Advocacy Center (NCAC) forensic interview training; and
   iii. Additional specialized training or experience in interviewing vulnerable adults and their specific needs; and
   iv. Training and education regarding the assessment of mental health and substance abuse disorders.

f. Accommodations for the forensic interview (e.g., the physical location for the interview, the environment for the interview, interview length, adapting the environment to address sensory issues, allowing for a support person to accompany the vulnerable adult, physical adaptations, forms of communication, language preference, interpreters, etc.).

This written protocol may be modeled after NCA-accepted protocols for forensic interviews of children, but must be a separate protocol for vulnerable adults only. VOCA recipients shall be required to provide this written protocol and any other supporting documentation to PCCD to be eligible to conduct forensic interviews of vulnerable adults.

2. VOCA recipients should ensure that any victim or family advocate who is also trained to conduct forensic interviews does not perform both duties or roles (i.e., conduct both the forensic interviews and offer advocacy services) with the same vulnerable adult and/or their family. VOCA recipients are encouraged to collaborate with other VSPs to avoid this situation.

STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE

- MDT member trainings that provide a general overview of the forensic interview process in order to gain a better understanding and education of that process are encouraged;
however, forensic interviewing of alleged victims in the context of a MDT response is considered specialized and thus requires additional specialized training prior to conducting forensic interviews.

- VOCA recipients that offer forensic interviews should provide initial and ongoing opportunities for professionals who conduct forensic interviews to receive specialized training. It is vitally important that forensic interviewers remain current on developments in the fields relevant to their delivery of services to victims and continue to develop their expertise.

- Forensic interviews for vulnerable adults may be conducted utilizing methodology from the National Children’s Advocacy Center (NCAC), New York State Justice Center for Protection of People with Special Needs, End Violence Against Women International, and the Illinois Family Violence Coordinating Council.

RESOURCES

- National Children’s Advocacy Center: http://www.nationalcac.org/
- National Children’s Alliance: www.nationalchildrensalliance.org
- Network of Victim Assistance (NOVA): http://www.novabucks.org/