

Handout #1: Baseline Narrative Assessment (modeled after Sternberg, Lamb et al., 1997)

Definitions of the Baseline Assessment:

Neutral Narrative: A neutral narrative about a recent positive or neutral experience can be elicited in the first session as a means of developing rapport and teaching a child how to respond to questions (with as much detail as possible). A neutral narrative can also be elicited before you begin writing the trauma narrative as a means of showing/reminding a child what kind of detail you want in the trauma narrative.

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Baseline Trauma Narrative

An open-ended question or statement about the traumatic experience that the clinician asks in the first or early session as a follow-up to the neutral narrative. The baseline trauma narrative should be elicited in the same manner as a neutral narrative: *Now, just like you told me about your birthday party/school trip, tell me in as much detail as you can about the time your uncle touched you. Start from the beginning and tell me where you were, what you were thinking, what you were feeling and what your body was feeling.*

Purpose of the baseline assessment:

1. Baseline neutral narrative helps with rapport building, may provide info about child's interests, allows the child to practice providing a spontaneous narrative and helps the therapist assess the child's developmental abilities in terms of sharing details and expressing feelings and thoughts about a positive or neutral event.
2. Baseline trauma narrative allows the therapist to contrast child's ability to share neutral narrative with their ability to share information about the trauma. Assess how comfortable the child is providing information about the trauma. If a child is open about the trauma and answers the question with minimal anxiety, you know you might be able to move through the gradual exposure at a quicker pace.
3. Assess language and narrative development. How much detail does a child give with open-ended questions and reflective statements (see participant handout)? This assessment helps the therapist to set appropriate developmental expectations for the child's trauma narrative.

Note: The **Baseline Trauma Narrative** is different from the **Trauma Narrative**, which is developed in sessions 5-8, the middle phase of treatment. Specific chapters of contained incidents surrounding the trauma (i.e., telling, the medical exam, the first time it happened) are written in detail.