

## Techniques for Building Rapport with Children

In addition to the core conditions and guiding principles for developing a helping relationship, there are specific techniques the CAA can use to build rapport. A positive rapport is the foundation for assuring that the information you collect is reliable, accurate, and comprehensive. The following list provides some examples of ways to build rapport:

- Approach each individual involved with an open mind.
- Begin every interview by finding one positive statement you can make about your client.
- Starting your interview out by identifying strengths and what has "gone right" can help reduce feelings of defensiveness. It's easier to honestly state problems when you are not concerned that you will be characterized by your negative statements only.
- Find out what is important to the child and help the child frame your work together as a way to obtain the things they value. For example, if the child would like to return home, explain that being honest during your interview together you can best help him/her with making that possible.
- Use mirroring. Take note of words used by the child and try to incorporate them into your conversations.
- Express empathy for the child's thoughts and feelings. For example, acknowledge a frustrating situation and how that angered the client.
- Be mindful of your expressions and tone. When a child tells you something shocking, be aware that your reaction will impact their trust, comfort level, and ability to disclose future information to you. Do your best to respond with neutral words and body language.
- Listen to the child's explanation of the situation without correcting or arguing. If there is a discrepancy, ask a clarifying question. In order to avoid a direct confrontation and sustain rapport, you may need to circle back around to the topic later.
- Ask questions rather than issuing threats or commands.
- Clarify expectations and purposes. Clearly explain the helping process and your role in working together toward solutions. Be honest about the limitations of what you are able to do and be careful to not make promises you cannot follow through on.
- Explain that your conversations together are not confidential; your interview will be utilized in the legal process and information they share with you will be shared with others. If children are not aware of this, they may feel betrayed if they find out that you shared parts of your conversation with others. This loss of trust will impact future communications and may not be restored in the time you have together.
- Help the child retain a sense of control; for example, involve them in scheduling appointments and ask how they would like to be addressed.
- Acknowledge difficult feelings and encourage open and honest discussion of feelings.
- Be consistent, persistent, and follow through.

- Promote participatory decision-making for meeting needs and solving problems.
- Understand that it is difficult for children to discuss problems that occur in their family. Criticism of their family can feel like they are betraying their loved ones, especially when they have been told that not keeping family secrets makes them "bad". Be patient with your client and allow them to share their story at their own pace. Rushing an interview to make sure that you cover all the bases can weaken or even destroy your rapport, and therefore yield unreliable information.
- Accept that children cope with abuse and neglect in different ways. You are there to learn about the client and their needs, not correct maladaptive coping mechanisms. If the child does not look you in the eye, taps their foot, disassembles and reassembles a pen, draws a picture, etc while you perform your interview, this does not mean that they are not working with you. Allow the child to utilize these coping mechanisms, so long as they are not hurting themselves, without embarrassment or admonition.
- Conduct all interviews in a private space where children can feel safe.

Taken from: <http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/usermanuals/cps/cpsc.cfm>