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DEVELOPMENTAL FACTORS WHEN WORKING WITH MIDDLE CHILDHOOD CHILDREN IN THE FIELD OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

3.1   INTRODUCTION

In the course of development, children change physically, emotionally and cognitively as they progress through different stages. From the researcher's point of view, child development is a progression through generally accepted milestones. In order to determine a child's ability to supply information about events which they have witnessed or experienced, it is necessary to know what the developmental milestones are, and to understand the general characteristics of each age period.

This chapter will provide an overview of the following areas of development of the child: physical, cognitive, memory, language, socio-emotional, moral and sexual. Emphasis will also be placed on memory, repression and dissociation. Due to the fact that many children are referred for forensic assessment due to sexual reactive behaviour, the researcher will also address normal and abnormal sexual behaviour.

3.2   PHASES OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Development refers to the change over time in body and in behaviour due to both biology and experience (Craig & Baucum, 2002:4). It is further described by (Schoeman, 2006:74) as the pattern of change that human beings undergo during their lifetime; beginning at conception and continuing through the life cycle until the person's death. For the purpose of organisation and understanding, development is frequently described in terms of phases (Berk, 2003:5; Smith, Dockrell & Tomlinson, 1998:202). The development of children is divided in four phases namely: the toddler phase (birth to 2 years), early childhood (2 to 6 years), middle childhood (6 to 11/12 years) and adolescence (12 to 18 years) (Berk, 2003:5; Cole

& Cole, 2001:468; Louw, Van Ede & Ferns, 1998:321). Each of these phases is described in terms of physical, cognitive, socio-emotional and moral development (Newman & Newman, 2003:254).

In order to work with children, all professionals should have a comprehensive working knowledge and clear understanding of the phases and issues of the child's development in a number of areas. This research will focus on the allegedly sexually abused child in the middle childhood and therefore it is imperative that middle childhood should be defined.

3.3   THE MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

The period from approximately 6 to 12 years of life is generally known as middle childhood (Louw *et al.,* 1998:321; Cole & Cole, 2001:468; Newman & Newman, 2003:254) and the onset thereof is recognised in cultures around the world.

The period between 6/7 and 11 years is referred to by Berger (2003:299) as the "school years" where children are mastering new concepts, new vocabulary and new skills. According to Piaget (Shaffer, 1996:266), the ages 6 to 7 is "precisely the time when children are decentring from perceptual illusions while in the process of acquiring the cognitive operations that will enable them, among other things, to classify animals, people, objects and events, and to understand the relations between upper and lower case letters".

In South Africa, school attendance is compulsory and according to Section 3(1) of the South African Schools Act, 1996 (Act No. 84 of 1996), a learner must attend school from the first day of the year in which he/she reaches the age of 7 years until the last school day of the year in which he/she reaches the age of 15 years, or the Grade 9, whichever occurs first. However, according to the South African Schools Act, 1996 (Act No. 84 of 1996) parents may enrol their child if the child turns 6 before June of the school year. The primary school system accommodates the middle childhood child in three phases, namely the foundation phase (Grades 1 – 3: age 6 to 9/10); intermediate phase (Grades 4 – 6: age 9/10

to 12); senior phase (Grade 7: age 12/13) (The South African Schools Act, 1996). This study focuses on children in the middle childhood, involving children who may be in Grade 1 to Grade 7.

The researcher experienced that when a child enters Grade 1, new expectations arise regarding the child's behaviour (Berger, 2003:299) as they spend less time under the parents' supervision. More emphasis is placed on responsibilities and tasks away from home, e.g. attending formal school, homework and participating in extra-mural activities. In South Africa many children stay at after school facilities and use public transport to travel to and from their homes. Often both parents work and therefore many children are left with older siblings who must take care of them. From the researcher's working experience with victims of sexual abuse, it became evident that these children spend less time under direct supervision from parents, which may result in the child falling at risk for possible sexual abuse.

3.4 PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF MOTOR SKILLS

As children move out of the home to be introduced to the outer world on their own, they need more motor skills. Genetic contribution to size can be seen in the height and rate of growth typical of different populations and families (Louw *et al.,* 1998:321).

3.4.1 General physical development

Like all aspects of development, children's growth depends on the interaction of environmental (Craig & Baucum, 2002:318) and genetic factors (Berger, 2003:309). Inherited differences may influence children's ability in sports activities and many other physical activities (Berger, 2003:309) and it may occur that a child will not necessarily perform on the same level as children who inherited advanced

motor skills from their parents. Environmental factors that moderate growth potential are nutrition and health (Cole & Cole, 2001:472).

Size and strength increase significantly in the years from age 6 to 12, but slower than during early childhood (Newman & Newman, 2003:255). Outstanding characteristics of the physical development during middle childhood are, according to Louw *et al.* (1998:323), the rapid growth of the arms and legs in comparison with the body, and a slower growth rate in comparison with the earlier pre-school period. The average annual growth in the middle childhood is approximately 6 cm in height and 2 kg in weight (Cole & Cole, 2001:473), and height increased from approximately 120 cm at age 6 to 150 cm at age 12. Weight increased from 20 kg to 40 kg in this same period (Newman & Newman, 2003:255; Louw *et al.,* 1998:323).

The most common problem during this stage is children who are overweight or obese, affecting them physically and emotionally (Berger, 2003:302). The researcher found that many victims of sexual abuse are overweight due to overeating (Craig & Baucum, 2002:321). In practice the researcher experienced that girls of 11 years look more mature and older for their age in comparison with boys of the same age. For this reason interviewers must be careful during formal interviews not to have higher expectations from girls, but to keep to guidelines for the specific age group.

As discussed, children in the middle childhood have to cope with a body that is getting bigger, taller and stronger and the growth thereof may look out of proportion. Other physical changes according to Louw *et al.* (1998:323) include the following:

- Milk teeth are replaced by permanent teeth.
- The circulatory system develops at a slower rate.
- The brain reaches 90% of its adult size (Craig & Baucum, 2002:318).
- The respiratory system functions more economically.

Table 3.1:   Physical development during middle childhood

AGE	DEVELOPMENT
7 to 8 years old	• Steady increase in height and weight. • Steady increase in strength for both boys and girls. • Increased use of all body parts. • Refinement of gross motor skills. • Improvement in fine motor skills. • Increasing variability in motor skills performance.
9 to 10 years old	• Beginning of growth spurt for girls. • Increase in strength for girls accompanied by loss of flexibility. • Awareness and development of all body parts and systems. • Ability to combine motor skills more fluidly. • Balance improvement.
11 years old	• Girls generally taller and heavier than boys. • Beginning of growth spurt for boys. • Accurate judgements in intercepting moving objects. • Continued combination of more fluid motor skills. • Continued improvement of fine motor skills • Continued increasing variability in motor skill performance.

Adapted from Craig and Baucum (2002:320); Berger (2003:303); Newman and Newman (2003:254) and Woolfolk (2001:90).

From experience with child victims of sexual abuse, the researcher found that children in the middle childhood, who are sexually abused, may think that their bodies are damaged (Finkelhor & Brown, 1985:530; Wieland, 1997:15). They may also blame the sexual abuse for physical changes or delayed growth. The researcher found that a female victim would for example blame the sexual abuse if

her breasts are developing quicker than her friend's, or if she has not started with her menstrual period at the same time as her peers did. The forensic interviewer needs to be sensitive regarding these aspects, as it is vital to be reminded that the child sitting in front of the professional is challenged with a lot of physical changes, which are not necessarily experienced in the same way as non-victims. If questions regarding physical development arise during the interview, the interviewer needs to normalise it in a neutral way.

3.4.2   Motor skills

Children of school age become better at performing controlled, purposeful movements (Woolfolk, 2001:90) and their newly acquired physical abilities are reflected in their interest in sports and other adventurous stunts.

3.4.2.1   *Gross motor skills*

It is highlighted by Cole and Cole (2001:499) that compared to girls, boys are superior in many motor skills during middle childhood. Muscles become stronger and therefore the average 10-year-old boy would throw a ball twice as far as the average 6-year-old boy (Berger, 2003:301) and can run faster and exercise longer. Although girls make similar progress in throwing and catching, at each age their throwing distance is on average shorter than that of boys (Craig & Baucum, 2002:319; Newman & Newman, 2003:254).

During interviews with children in the middle childhood, the researcher has experienced that children like to run, jump, skip, cycle, skate, swim, kick a ball, do ballet and participate in a variety of other sports (Cole & Cole, 2001:498). Talking about these activities is a good contact point to facilitate discussion and assessing their ability to communicate. It is the researcher's experience that due to increased exposure to television, Playstation and television games, modern children are less mobile and consequently their motor skills are limited.

During interviews boys tend to get bored easily when faced with tasks where they have to sit still. It is observed that they would move their bodies more than girls during interviews. They also tend to ask for physical activities during the interviewing process. Girls, however, tend more to be able to sit still and talk about feelings and happenings at school.

It is thus imperative for the forensic interviewer to be prepared to adapt their interviewing process to accommodate children's different needs. Boys may need more breaks and may need to move around during the interview. Girls, on the other hand, tend to be more responsive than boys (Louw *et al.,* 1998:323).

3.4.2.2   *Fine motor skills*

Most of the fine motor skills required for writing develop between the ages of 6 and 7 (Craig & Baucum, 2002:319; Cole & Cole, 2001:499) and therefore it can be expected from the child to make pictures during interviewing, write his/her name and names of family members, with assistance with spelling where necessary. Between the ages of 6 and 7 some quite normal children cannot draw a diamond or make many letter shapes until they are 8 years old (Craig & Baucum, 2002:319) and it is therefore important for interviewer not to make an assessment that a child is developmentally behind based only on his/her fine motor skills. Some children naturally write more neatly than others (Berger, 2003:309) and left-handed children, for whom writing a right-handed language such as English runs against the natural direction of their body, and poorly co-ordinated children, may also be left out of group activities due to the fact that their work is not neat. It is the opinion of the researcher that during a forensic interview with the child, the professional should never comment on handwriting that is not neat, or on any inability that the child is displaying, but should rather comment on the child's willingness to try. If a child does not want to make a drawing or write something, he/she must never be forced, as there will be a valid reason why the child does not want to draw. By forcing a child to make a picture, his/her level of anxiety may increase, which will inhibit the facilitation of information about the alleged offence.

3.5   COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Although the child in middle childhood is capable of operational thinking, such thinking is still concrete and not abstract (Sutherland, 1992:16).   Piaget and Vygotsky (Newman & Newman, 2003:69) developed two main theories on cognitive development respectively; however, the focus of these two theories differs.   Piaget's theory (Meyer & Van Ede, 1998:77) focuses on individuals in interaction with their environment.   Vygotsky (Newman & Newman, 2003:73; Smith *et al.,*1998:36) proposed that development could only be understood within a social framework where thinking develops through the learning process.

Table 3.2:   Concepts from the theories of Piaget and Vygotsky

PIAGET	VYGOTSKY
• Active learning: The child's own search for understanding, motivated by the child's inborn curiosity.	• Guided participation: The adults or other mentors aid in guiding the next step of learning, motivated by the learner's need for social interaction.
• Egocentrism: The pre-schooler's tendency to perceive everything from his/her own perspective and to be limited by that viewpoint.	• Apprenticeship in thinking: The pre-schooler's tendency to look to others for insight and guidance, particularly in the cognitive area.
• Structure: The mental assumptions and modalities the child creates to help him/her organise his/her understanding of the world. Structures are torn down and rebuilt when disequilibrium makes new structures necessary.	• Scaffold: The building blocks for learning put in place by a teacher or a culture. Learners use scaffolds, and then discard them when they are no longer needed.
• Symbolic thought: The ability to think using symbols, including language. The ability emerges spontaneously at about age 2 and continues throughout the child's life.	• Proximal development: The next step in cognition, the ideas and skills a child can grasp with assistance, but not alone. It is influenced not only by the child's own abilities and interests, but also by the social context.

(Berger, 2003:251.)

The researcher concludes that both theories emphasise that learning is not passive, but is affected by the learner. Although both theories share concepts and terminology, they differ in the emphasis which is put on the learner, other individuals and the social environment.

Some authors identified limitations to Piaget's theory (Kuehnle, 1996:50; Sutherland, 1992:64), due to arguments that all developmental changes occur from a small number of reorganisations of the cognitive system as a whole. However, the researcher is of the opinion that it offers a useful framework (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2006) for understanding children's vulnerability to sexual exploitation and therefore it will be discussed.

3.5.1 Piaget's cognitive-developmental theory

The cognitive-developmental theory according to Piaget (Woolfolk, 2001:28) motivates that children move through four stages of development, namely: sensorimotor, pre-operational, concrete operational, and formal operational. During these phases the exploratory behaviours of infants transform into the abstract, logical intelligence of adolescence and adulthood (Berk, 2003:219).

Table 3.3:   Piaget's cognitive-developmental theory

Sensorimotor (birth – 2 years)	• Formulation of complex sentences. • Increased motor schemes which allow infants to organise and exercise some control over their environment.
Pre-operational (2 – 7 years)	• Develop tools for representing schemes symbolically through language, imitation, imagery, symbolic play and symbolic drawing. • Knowledge is still very much tied to own perceptions.
Concrete operational (7 – 11/12 years)	• Appreciate the logical necessity of certain causal relationships. • Can manipulate categories, classifications systems and hierarchies in groups.

	• More successful at solving problems that are clearly tied to physical reality than at generating hypotheses.
Formal operational (11/12 years and older)	• Level of thinking permits a person to conceptualise about many simultaneously interacting variables. • Creation of a system of laws or rules that can be used for problem-solving.

Adapted from Newman and Newman (2003:71) and Daven and Van Staden (2004:51).

This study focuses on the middle childhood and the researcher will therefore discuss the concrete operational stage.

3.5.2   The concrete operational stage

The concrete operational stage, which spans the years from ages 6 to 12, is viewed as a major turning point in cognitive development. Reasoning in this stage is far more logical, flexible and organised than cognition during the pre-school years (Newman & Newman, 2003:71). The thoughts of the child in the concrete operational stage are (Craig & Baucum, 2002:324):

:

• flexible;

• reversible;

• not limited to the here and now;

• multidimensional;

• less egocentric;

• marked by the use of logical inferences; and

• marked by the search for cause-and-effect relationships.

3.5.2.1 Tasks achieved during the concrete operational stage

According to Piaget (Shaffer, 1996:264; Woolfolk, 2001:29; Matlin, 2002:8; Berk, 2003:241; Cole & Cole, 2001:477; Van Dyk, 2005:151; Louw, Van Ede & Louw, 1998:329) the following tasks are achieved during this stage:

- **Conservation**

  The most famous versions of Piaget's conservation task (Berk, 2003:241) involve presenting children with two identical glass beakers containing the same amounts of liquid to see if they understand conservation of quantity. The experimenter begins by pouring the contents of one of the beakers into a third beaker which is taller and narrower. Pre-school children would say that the taller beaker has more liquid than the other beakers. At the age of 8 years, children seem to fully understand that the new beaker is both taller and narrower, but that a change in one dimension of the beaker is offset by a change in the other (Woolfolk, 2001:32). The child co-ordinates several aspects of the task rather than centring on only one. The older child engages in decentration, recognising that a change in one aspect of the water (its height) is compensated for by a change in another aspect its width (Smith *et al.,* 1998:63). This explanation also illustrates reversibility – the capacity to imagine the water being returned to the original container as proof of conservation (Cole & Cole, 2001:477). This implicates that the child in the middle childhood would, for example, be able to notice that the perpetrator's penis was not the same after he/she started stroking it. The researcher experienced that this also is the reason why a child would also be able to draw a picture of the happenings, illustrating what happened and also depict emotions experienced at that stage.

- **Seriation**

  Seriation is the ability to arrange objects systematically in a series from small to large or from large to small (Meyer & Van Ede, 1998:80). The child will thus be able to say that the alleged perpetrator (for instance another child) was bigger, taller than him/her, indicating that it was an older child. The child

would also be able to argue that the alleged perpetrator is shorter and thinner than his/her father and therefore be scared of his/her father.

- **Spational reasoning**

  Children of school age children have a more accurate understanding of space than pre-schoolers (Louw *et al.,*1998:330). The child in the concrete operational stage has a more accurate understanding of distance, direction and cognitive maps than the child in the pre-operational stage (Berk, 2003:242). The child would, for example, indicate that the grandfather, who allegedly abused her, is the one who stays far; indicating it is not the person staying in the same town (Cole & Cole, 2001:477). The child would also be able to tell that the perpetrator was close to him/her when the abuse happened. School-aged children's more advanced understanding of space can also be seen in their ability to give directions. Between the ages of 7 and 8 years, children start to perform mental rotations (Cole & Cole, 2001:477). As a result, they can identify left and right for positions they do not occupy (Berk, 2003:241). From the age of 8 to 10 years, children can give clear, well-organised directions for how to get from one place to another (Van Dyk, 2005:151). Six-year-olds give more organised directions after they walk the route themselves or are specially prompted; otherwise, they focus on the end point without describing exactly how to get there. It is thus within the middle childhood child's ability to direct the police or interviewer to the venue of the abuse, if the area is known to the child, or to give an indication of close to which prominent marker the alleged sexual abuse happened.

- **Cognitive maps**

  Children's drawings of familiar large-scale spaces, such as their neighbourhood or school, also change from early to middle childhood. These cognitive maps require considerable perspective-talking skill, since the entire space cannot be seen at once (Matlin, 2002:8). In the early school grades, children's maps become more organised. They draw landmarks along an organised route of travel, such as the path they walk from home to school – an accomplishment which resembles improvement in their ability to give direction (Meyer & Van Ede, 1998:83). It can therefore be expected from a

child to make a drawing of the house or neighbourhood where the alleged sexual abuse took place.

- **Decentration**

  The child in the concrete operational stage can ignore misleading appearances and focus on more than one aspect of a situation when seeking answers to a problem (Louw *et al.,* 1998:71). This means that the interviewer could ask for more detail when interviewing the child in this age group than he/she would expect from a younger child. The child would be able not only to give detail regarding the sexual behaviour that took place, but also give information regarding the context in which it took place, as well as the reactions of the alleged perpetrator and of the child self (Woolfolk, 2001:32).

- **Declining egocentrism**

  Children can now communicate more effectively about objects they cannot see (Berger, 2003:334) and is in the process mastering the ability to see things from someone else's point of view. The researcher experienced during forensic interviewing that children would often tell that when the alleged perpetrator called them, they knew "it" is going to happen again. They also sometimes mention that the perpetrator would close the curtains so that nobody could see from the outside, illustrating their thoughts are not that egocentric anymore.

- **Decreasing animism**

  Children in the middle childhood are more aware of the biological bases for life and do not attribute lifelike qualities to inanimate objects as pre-schoolers do (Shaffer, 1996:264). They would, for example, know that Father Christmas, the tooth fairy and the Easter bunny are not real, but still play along for the fun. The interviewer would, for example, not use techniques like: "Tell the bunny what makes you sad"

It is thus imperative that interviewers are aware of the above-mentioned concepts as they may lead to ineffective interviewing techniques and wrong deductions, should they not be accommodated.

3.5.2.2 Limitations of concrete operational thought

Children in the middle childhood can reason logically only about concrete information that they can perceive directly (Cole & Cole, 2001:478) like objects, situations, or events that are real or imaginable. Their mental operations work poorly with abstract ideas (Berk, 2003:241) and 7- to 11-year-old children cannot yet apply this relational logic to abstract signifiers such as the X, Y and Z which are used in algebra (Shaffer, 1996:26). In South Africa algebraic concepts are introduced in the Grade 7 curriculum (children aged 12/13). Even though children in this age group have the ability to perform the mental actions such as reversibility and are less egocentric, which enable them to understand the perceptions of others, they still have great difficulty answering abstract and hypothetical questions (Müller, 2002:43).

The researcher has experienced that due to the more advanced cognitive development in the middle childhood, it is easier to interview these children and to get more accurate and detailed information as they tend to be more talkative, have learnt to adjust to new situations (new teachers and classmates every year), and learnt how to get along with adults as they spend most of their day under the supervision of adults outside their homes.

In table 3.4 the relationship between Piaget's stages of cognitive development and the child's interpretation of sexual abuse is highlighted.

Table 3.4:   The relationship between Piaget's stages of cognitive development and the child's interpretation of sexual abuse

AGE RANGE	THE CHILD VICTIM'S INTERPRETATION OF THE SEXUAL ABUSE
18 months to 8 years	• Child does not understand "intention" and would not necessarily identify the perpetrator as "bad". • Child can easily be manipulated through curiosity or fear. • Child will believe that the perpetrator has supernatural powers if told so by perpetrator.

8 years to 12 years	• Child understands sexual behaviour is wrong and may think he/she is bad because he/she is engaged in "bad" behaviour. • The child can be manipulated into worrying about the consequences to the perpetrator without having insight into consequences for him-/herself.
12 years to 15 years	• Child may now begin to understand the concept of exploitation and think about the consequences of the sexual abuse to him-/herself. • Child may be capable of independently initiating a false allegation for reasons of attention, revenge, or to escape an emotionally/physically abusive family.

Adapted from Kuehnle (1996:51).

The researcher is of the opinion that children in the middle childhood is not only vulnerable to fall prey of sexual offenders, but the possibility of not telling because they feel it is their fault, or want to protect the offender could cause many children to be left in an abusive situation. It is the opinion of the researcher that when sexual abuse victims are interviewed, it is imperative to understand how they would interpret sexual abuse when it happened to them. From experience it was evident that children do not see victimisation in the same way as adults do. They tend to think the sexual abuse is their fault or blame themselves for not stopping it or telling someone sooner.

3.6   MEMORY

Cognition, known as "mental activity" describes the acquisition, storage, transformation and use of knowledge (Meyer, 1998:10; Matlin, 2002:2). It includes a wide range of mental processes such as perception, memory, imagery, language, problem-solving, reasoning and decision-making. In this study attention will be given to memory and how it works.

3.6.1 Information-processing system

The information-processing system (Berger, 2003:328) is explained in terms of the sensory register, the working memory and the long-term memory. The sensory register stores incoming stimulus information for a split second after it is received, to allow it to be processed (Lyon & Saywitch, 2006:850). Information comes in through our position and via our five senses namely sight, sound, smell, taste and touch. Based on the individual's beliefs, expectations and feelings and on past experiences, the individual begins to have a present experience of the event (Müller, 2002:56). The individual then starts to process the experience. The most important factor influencing it, is rehearsal (thinking, talking or writing about it). Most sensations that come into the sensory register are lost or discarded, but meaningful information is transferred to the working memory (short-term memory).

It is in the working memory that a person's current, conscious mental activity occurs (Botha, Van Ede, Louw, Louw & Ferns, 1998:241). The working memory includes: what is going on at the moment; a person's understanding of reading a text at the specific moment; any previous knowledge recalled that is related to it; (Jordaan & Jordaan, 1998:498); and also perhaps distracting thoughts, e.g. weekend plans, or the interesting person next to you. In the absence of rehearsal, information in the short-term memory remains for about 15 to 30 seconds (Craig & Baucum, 2002:258). Some thoughts are discarded, while a few are transferred to long-term memory (Berger, 2003:328).

The long-term memory stores information for minutes, hours, days, months or years (Matlin, 2002:457). This capacity of how much information can be stored, is limitless.

Memory thus involves the acquisition (or encoding), storing and retrieving of the stored information (Lyon & Saywitz, 2006:850; Müller, 2002:56; Kuehnle, 1996:78).

It is the experience of the researcher that investigation of allegations of sexual abuse is complicated where the eyewitness or victim is a child. Not only does the

dominant partner in the crime not often admit guilt, but due to among other factors such as the cognition of the child witness, he/she is regarded as unreliable. The researcher has experienced that it is very important for a professional to have a good understanding of children's working memory and therefore it will be discussed.

3.6.2   Encoding or acquisition

Encoding is the process of how a person would lay down a memory trace into his/her recorded consciousness. Therefore, simply using open-ended questions to ask children to recall an event again and again does not necessarily have a detrimental effect on memory (Lyon & Saywitz, 2006:850) and may even help children consolidate memory over short delays.

During the acquisition of information, the child must perceive and attend to the event (Kuehnle, 1996:78). Perception is a process that uses previous knowledge to gather and interpret the stimuli that the senses register (Jordaan & Jordaan, 1998:285; Matlin, 2002:2). A trace of an experience becomes registered in memory (Müller, 2002:57; Woolfolk, 2001:244). There is selectivity as to what gets encoded in the storage system at the initial stage, since in most cases attention is given to certain aspects of an event, while other aspects are ignored.

3.6.2.1   *Factors which influence children's acquisition of information*

The researcher became aware of the gap between what adults want and what children think is important in sexual abuse situations. Children are trained what to do when someone violates their boundaries, but in most cases they are still not able to assert themselves. They are furthermore not prepared for what would be expected from them in a forensic interview, i.e. explicit detail and elaboration on context detail. It is the experience of the researcher that children in the middle childhood are more likely to encode some central actions during the abuse event. They also encode information which makes the biggest impact on them and not

necessarily what the interviewer thinks is important. They are less likely to encode details about the location or person(s) involved, despite the fact that these details are usually necessary for the successful prosecution of a case.

Factors which influence the information that enters the child's memory system are: knowledge, interest value of stimuli, duration and repetition of the original event, stress level, the distinctiveness of the experience and the traumatic nature of the happenings at the time when encoding takes place (Ceci & Bruck, 1995:41-42; Ney, 1995:103; Bruck, Ceci & Principe, 2006:805).

- **Prior knowledge**

    Prior knowledge influences how an individual monitors the world, interprets events, and selectively attends to certain types of stimuli while excluding other types (Bruck *et al.,* 2006:807). A child's prior knowledge regarding the experience in which he/she is interacting or observing appears to influence how events are interpreted, coded and put in memory (Keuhnle, 1996:79). This child's understanding of the sexually abusive events which he/she has experienced may have an important impact on what enters into memory storage and how it is organised (Jordaan & Jordaan, 1998:285). The researcher experienced that children who had to report an incident which only happened once, a long time after the event, were not as clear about details as those who reported several incidents about sexual abuse.

- **Interest value of stimuli**

    Details about persons, actions, or objects in which a child is interested are more likely to be encoded than less salient stimuli. The more a child knows about something, the more likely he/she is to be interested in it, and therefore better motivated to remember it (Greenhoot, Ornstein, Gordon & Baker-Ward, 2000:363). Children are aware of societal taboos regarding sexuality, and therefore sexually abusive behaviour may cause the child to be embarrassed. Although the behaviour may be well remembered, the child may not report it (Ceci & Bruck, 1995:42). A marked improvement in memory occurs between the ages of 7 and 11 years (Berger, 2003:329; Craig & Baucum, 2002:259). Despite this, the researcher experienced that school-

going children are more likely to remember information about activities and objects than details concerning people or locations. This may have a detrimental impact on the details regarding the alleged offence which is facilitated as children may not be able to give accurate information on the crime as requested by the legal system.

- **Duration and repetition of the original event**

  Memories of children who are abused repeatedly will be stronger than those of children who experience just one incident (Ceci & Bruck, 1995:42). It is the opinion of Kuehnle (1996:78) that if one event is not repeated within a specific time period, the memory of that event could be deleted. When a child is an active participant in an event, greater attention may be directed to the details of the event than when the child is simply an observer (Kuehnle, 1996:82). After multiple occurrences of an event, details which are generally experienced in the same way during each occurrence, are strengthened in memory (Bruck *et al.,* 2006:806) and consequently, with repeated experience, children's reports become increasingly general or script-like, focussing on what usually happened (Ney, 1995:104). The more frequently events are experienced, the longer the time delay between the event and the interview and the greater the similarity between events, the more difficult it is for children to keep track of which details were included in a particular occurrence (Bruck *et al.,* 2006:807). It may thus result in children being confused about details when asked about specific happenings during a specific incident. It is the experience of the researcher that many children only disclose months and even years after the victimisation, which have an impact on the details they may reveal. In the South African criminal courts it is expected of a child to give detailed information, irrespective of how long ago the abuse occurred (Venter, 2006). It is also expected of the child to distinguish between the different incidents, resulting in children contradicting themselves and subsequently the perpetrator may walk free.

- **Stress level**

  Stress experienced during an event may strengthen a child's ability to focus and facilitate the encoding of information (Fivush, 1998:715). However, it

was found that high levels of stress may slow down memory (Merrit, Ornstein & Spicker, 1994:20). Stress alone may not impair memory processes, but stress that results from intimidation may lead to either impairment in encoding or problems in recalling or reporting memories (Ceci & Bruck, 1995:42). Confrontational stress has a negative effect on school-age children's reports of their memories (Müller, 2002:56). It is the opinion of the researcher that the amount of stress experienced by the child is not necessarily determined by the number of times the event occurred, but by the child's personality, resilience, support and faith in life, the nature of the offence and relationship with the perpetrator. The researcher is also of the opinion that the child must not be interviewed in the presence of the perpetrator and the interviewer should make sure that the child feels safe in the interview environment. If the child needs to be taken back to the crime scene, precautions must be taken in order to prevent further traumatisation.

- **Distinctiveness of the experience**

    A factor which may have an effect on the ability to remember the trauma is the distinctiveness or uniqueness of the event against the background of the particular child's past experiences (Bruck *et al.,* 2006:805). However, studies by Howe, Courage and Peterson (1995:131) showed that previously distinctive experiences may lose their uniqueness and their memorability with additional experience. It is thus important for interviewers to always take note of the fact that the child could have gained experiences after the alleged abuse took place, which are now enmeshed or incorporated with his/her memory of what happened. In order to address these issues, as part of the proposed protocol, the interviewer should ask the child after the interview if there is any of the information that he/she is not sure about, and if he/she heard any of it from someone else.

- **Traumatic nature**

    Just like ordinary memories, traumatic memories also become less accessible as time passes by. According to Bruck *et al.* (2006:204) children's trauma memories are not repressed or hidden from consciousness, "rather the core of the events tends to be well remembered over time… and it seems

that traumatic memories are not of a unique nature, nor do they require special principles to explain their operation". It is the opinion of the researcher that the interviewer plays an instrumental role in helping the child to access these traumatic memories. This can be achieved by creating a calm and child-friendly atmosphere; the interviewer self must be open, respectful and have good rapport with children; and no pressure should be put on children to disclose.

3.6.3 Storage

Three memory-storage strategies, namely rehearsal, memory organisation and elaboration will be discussed.

3.6.3.1 *Rehearsal*

Rehearsal is the process of repeating to oneself the material that one is trying to memorise, such as a word list, a song, or a telephone number. Studies show that children that rehearse tend to recall more than children who do not (Cole & Cole, 2001:485; Woolfolk, 2001:247).

3.6.3.2 *Memory organisation*

Memory organisation is a memory strategy in which children mentally group the materials to be remembered in meaningful clusters of closely associated items so that they have to remember only one part of a cluster to gain access to the rest (Ney, 1995:104; Starks & Samuel, 2002a:24). In the middle childhood years children are more likely to link words according to categories such as animals, foods or geometric figures (Cole & Cole, 2001:485). The consequence of these changes is an enhanced ability to store and retrieve information deliberately and systematically.

3.6.3.3 Elaboration

Elaboration is a process in which children identify or make up connections between two or more things which they have to remember (Cole & Cole, 2001:485).

3.6.4 Retrieval

Whenever the individual may need it or when something else may trigger it, information can be retrieved. Retrieval is thus how we activate our memory of the experience when triggered or required (Berger, 2003:328; Craig & Baucum, 2002:258). Factors such as speed and accuracy of pronunciation help to explain why older children can recall a greater number of words (Matlin, 2002:457).

The final phase of the memory process involves retrieval of the stored information. Yet, not everything can be retrieved at all times. Many factors, both social and cognitive, influence the child's ability to gain access to previously acquired information (Müller, 2002:58). According to Greenhoot *et al.* (2000:363) a child's language skills and understanding of an interviewer's questions may influence his/her ability to recall and to describe events.

In the context of interviews with child sexual abuse victims, Starks and Samuel (2002:24) identified three types of memory techniques to be used by professionals:

- Recall memory which requires thought and then a long descriptive answer, e.g.: "Tell me everything about the naughty things?", "Tell me more about what happened when he came into the bathroom", or "And then what happened…and…?"
- Recognition memory, which requires a person "pick one" or "confirm/deny" the answer, e.g.: "Were your clothes on or off?" or "Did he say anything about telling?" The researcher is of the opinion that interviewers should use this technique with caution as it could be regarded as leading (Carstens,

2006). Should the interviewer utilise these techniques, he/she should clarify the child's answer in order to determine whether the child is giving information which he/she really experienced, e.g.: "You said your clothes were off. How do you know that?" It is the opinion of the researcher that recognitions should never be used to facilitate a disclosure or determine the identity of the perpetrator.

- Memory/questions interrelation always attempt to "pair" recognition memory questions with a recall memory question, e.g.: "Tell me everything about how your clothes got off" and "Tell me everything he said about telling" (Starks & Samuel, 2002a:24).

According to Bruck *et al.* (2006:801) "if a child's indicting statements are made in the absence of any previous suggestive interviewing and in the absence of any motivation on the part of the child or adults to make incriminating statements, then the risk that the statement is inaccurate is quite low". A study by Loftus (2006) found that misinformation posed to eyewitnesses resulted in people claiming that they saw the misinformation details in the original event. In another study of children between the ages of 3 and 8 years (Poole & Lindsay, 2001:27) it was found that children are vulnerable to misinformation from especially parents. This is applicable when parents and interviewers use leading and suggestive questions, resulting in contamination of information. The researcher is of the opinion that it is thus important that interviewers must not use leading questions or suggest to the child what has happened, as it has serious consequences not only for the accused person, but also for his relationship with the child, his family and other relevant parties.

3.6.5 Suppression

Suppression means that an individual has consciously elected not to dwell on information, because it is too unpleasant, embarrassing or threatening (Ceci & Bruck, 1995:194). After a while such an individual will lose contact with the memory as a result of not thinking about it. However, this memory can resurface if a hint or reminder is given. The term "denial" is used by Whitfield (1995:89) to

describe the avoidance of an individual's awareness of the reality of traumatic experiences. The researcher uses play-related communication techniques where certain cues are used to bring suppressed memory to the foreground.

3.6.6   Repression

In contrast with suppression, repression is an automatic and unconscious process. A repressed memory is not easily elicited by a cue or hint (Ceci & Bruck, 1995:196) and often repressed primarily when there have been multiple traumatic experiences. Repression is defined by Whitfield (1995:90) as "an automatic psychological defence against unbearable emotional pain wherein we forget a painful experience and store it in our unconscious mind". The researcher is of the opinion that interviewers who only manage to access one memory of sexual abuse from a child, but evidence show multiple occurrences, must keep in mind that the child may have repressed the memory of the others.

After experiencing trauma, memory blocks are common and they tend to occur most frequently in the rehearsal and in retrieval. The person is thus somehow inhibited or prohibited from completely processing and expressing their experience (Whitfield, 1995:92). In the management of child sexual abuse cases, professionals who interview child witnesses are concerned with the retrieval of details related to the events which the children have experienced. Children also recall less information as the delay between the event to be remembered and the interview increases (Lamb *et al.,* 2000:1586).

3.6.7   Dissociation

Dissociation refers to a disconnection between one form of memory and another. According to Whitfield (1995:93) the degree of dissociation may be mild, moderate or extreme. Various types of information in memory (feelings, thoughts, and actions) may not be integrated and as a result the individual may express out-of-body feelings, self-induced trance states and inappropriate emotions (Ceci &

Bruck, 1995:196; Walters, 2001:4). In other words, the memory of a thought is split from the memory of its emotional content, resulting in robot-like enactments of events. It is claimed that dissociation results most commonly from trauma, and particularly trauma related to sexual abuse.

In a study of adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse, McNally, Ristuccia and Perlman (2005) reported that those who were molested by their caretakers are especially likely to dissociate their memories of abuse. Another study conducted by Goodman, Ghetti, Quas, Edelstein, Alexander, Redlich, Cordon and Jones (2003:114) with 175 individuals with documented child sexual abuse histories, 81% reported the documented abuse, concluding that the forgetting of child sexual abuse may not be a common experience. The researcher has not observed dissociation as a common phenomenon and in all her years of dealing with child sexual abuse could only identify one child out of approximately 500 who positively dissociated herself from the sexual abuse.

3.6.8   Suggestibility

According to several studies conducted over the years (Clarke-Stewart, Malloy & Allhusen, 2004:1043) generalisations were formed regarding children's suggestibility. It is stated that younger children, children from low-socio economic families, children with lower levels of intelligence, girls, children with inferior memory abilities, children with less inhibitory control and children who received less parental support are more vulnerable to suggestion (Alexander, Goodman, Schaaf, Edelstein, Quas & Shaver, 2002:282; McFarlane, Powell & Dudgeon, 2002:227). However, it was found that vulnerability to suggestion is also highly common in middle childhood and not restricted only to the abovementioned groups (Bruck & Ceci, 2004:231).

The misconceptions among professionals that it is very difficult to implant memories and that false reports occur only when multiple suggestions are repeated over time, were challenged when research showed that children can incorporate suggestions about significant events after a single suggestive

interview (Bruck & Ceci, 2004:231). It is stated by Bruck *et al.* (2006:809) that a child may incorporate a suggestion because he/she forgets the original event or is confused as to whether he/she saw the original event or the suggestion.

In research by Bruck and Melnyk (2004:956) the researchers reviewed and synthesised the results of 69 studies examining the relationship between children's suggestibility and demographic factors, psycho-social factors and cognitive factors. The highest correlations with suggestibility were obtained for measures of self-concepts, maternal attachment style and parent-child relationships. This imply that children with a poor self-concept, poor supportive relationships with fathers or mothers, and with mothers who were insecurely attached in their romantic relationships were at risk for being suggestible when asked misleading questions (Bruck & Melnyk, 2004:988). It is the opinion of the researcher that it must be a golden rule for a forensic interviewer to guard against any leading questions, irrespective whether the above-mentioned factors are present.

Two studies were conducted in the United States of America and in Brazil respectively involving 193 children (Saltzstein, Dias & Millery, 2004:1082) where children heard hypothetical dilemmas about whether to keep a promise or tell the truth. An adult interviewer suggested the alternative to the child's initial choice. It was found that younger children (5 to 8 years) were more suggestible than older children (10 to 12 years). They also found in the study in the United States of America that suggestibility was greater when the interviewer was an adult than when the interviewer was a teenager.

The researcher is of the opinion that interviewers should adapt their use of language when working with smaller children and also continuously be aware that children may not resist suggestions and leading questions. One of the rules in the proposed interview protocol is that no suggestions or leading questions should be posed the child.

It was found by Loftus (2006) that after studying numerous research studies, it could be concluded that people who were given misinformation about events and also about an event that never occurred, definitely sometimes report to remember

seeing or experiencing things that were merely suggested to them. These studies were conducted with adults, but the researcher is of the opinion that it is also applicable to children. It is thus imperative that the forensic interviewer does not suggest any behaviour or context information to the child, and more so not suggest any names of perpetrators.

3.6.9   Parental factors influencing children's memory recall

It was found by Bruck *et al.* (2006:798) that when adults are asked to recall conversations, most adults recall the core content and not the exact words used, nor the sequence of interactions between speakers. This implies that the interviewer cannot rely on the feedback from the parent to assess whether leading questions were used when talking to the child after the initial disclosure. This could lead to false allegations or implanting misinformation. In a study by Alexander *et al.* (2002:263) memory and suggestibility were examined in 51 children between the ages of 3 and 7 years old. The children received an immunisation (as part of their standard medical care) and later answered questions about the event. Their parents were also subjected to questionnaires evaluating parental avoidance (discomfort with close relationships) and parental anxiety levels (fear of abandonment and rejection in the context of close relationships). The following potential sources of individual difference in the relation between children's stress and memory were found (Alexander *et al.,* 2002:282):

- As children's age increased, so did memory accuracy and resistance to suggestion. Older children were more accurate than younger children.
- Parental avoidance was associated with more stress in children. More avoidant parents may have been less supportive during the event and their children were less trusting of others, thus experiencing more arousal in stressful situations, involving adults impacting on memory retrieval later on. It means that parents who were less avoidant may have prepared their children better for the event. By knowing what to expect these children had

basic trust in adults and may have been better able to regulate their emotions during the event.

- Children of parents who had a high score on anxiety tended to give more information on response to free recall prompts and resisted leading questions. It thus suggests that children of anxious parents appeared to talk more, but still gave less accurate and more inaccurate information.

The researchers (Alexander *et al.,* 2002:282) argued that parents who scored low in both avoidance and anxiety were more secure; explaining why children of more secure parents had greater general cognitive abilities and may have performed better during memory interviews. They also emphasised that children who have a low score on avoidance may be more likely to talk to children about the experience, providing a narrative structure for children's memories, as well as opportunities for rehearsal, which are known to enhance memory.

Another study by Clarke-Stewart *et al.* (2004:1037) with 70 children aged 5 years old found that children with supportive and psychological healthy parents were better able to resist the interviewer's suggestive questions and persuasive attempts.

The above-mentioned findings were confirmed in practice by the researcher. It was found that children whose parents were secure (also implicating coping skills, support to the child and behaving in the presence of the child) tended to feel more secure and could access their memory of the abuse to give an understandable version of the alleged abuse.

It is the opinion of the researcher that it is important that forensic interviewers be aware that if a child cannot recall all the detail, it could be due to above-mentioned factors and the development level of the child (Kuehnle, 1996:78), and does not necessary implicate that the child is lying.

3.6.10 Personality characteristics as influence on memory recall

Individual differences among children in such areas as language, temperament, memory and intelligence can influence the reporting of information during an interview (Müller, 2002:56).

Because of children's increasing appearance in courtrooms as sole witnesses, there is a growing interest in whether children can give a reliable testimony of an observed or experienced event. A study was conducted by Roebers and Schneider (2001:9) where a sample of 217 children in the age groups 6, 8 and 10 years were included in the study. The researchers showed a video where a child was a victim of a robbery whereafter interviews with the children were conducted. An intelligence test was also conducted. The children were subjected to three interviews about the happenings in the video – an interview on the same day and then three weeks and four weeks after watching the video. The following findings were concluded by Roebers and Schneider (2001:18):

- Extremely shy children under the age of 8 years talked significantly less in unfamiliar situations and would give only a very brief description of the event, because they felt uncomfortable in the presence of a stranger.
- Extremely shy 10-year-olds reported more information from the film in their free narratives than did their peers who were not shy. It thus appears that older children cope better with pressure in the interview situation and have better verbal skills than younger children.
- In all three age groups children with a higher intelligence tended to give a more accurate report of events than did their peers with a lower intelligence.

The researcher found in practice that although shy children appear to have less to tell, they are attentive in situations and sometimes reveal more detail than extrovert children. However, due to language abilities in young children, shy children reveal less than they can really remember. Partial disclosure (Sorenson & Snow, 1991:15) also tends to be common. It is important for interviewers to make a greater effort to familiarise the child with the interviewer before the questioning starts. Therefore the researcher prefers to utilise play-related

communication techniques (see paragraph 4.6.6) where, to a certain extent, the playing field is levelled. Children are interviewed with material which they are familiar with, e.g. drawings, play dough and paint. The researcher is also of the opinion that when working with children with a lower intelligence, the interviewer should adapt to a slower process, simplify instructions and repeat questions if the child takes long to respond, as children are often too shy to tell that they do not understand the instruction or question.

3.7 ASKING A CHILD TO DRAW

Adults go to work everyday, use cell phones, the Internet and adult conversation to express themselves and make sense of our world. Many children use among other things, drawings as their way of expressing and communicate what they feel towards the world.

In the beginning young children scribble and around the age of 3 their drawings are marked with lines (Cole & Cole, 2001:364) and between the ages of 6 and 11 to 12 years of age, children increasingly draw how they actually see an object. At the same time their drawings begin to represent the perspective from which the object is seen (DeLoache, Pierroutsakos & Uttal, 2003:115). Eventually children begin to combine representations of people and things to make scenes depicting a variety of experiences (Cole & Cole, 2001:364).

A study by Bruck *et al.,* 2000:170) was conducted where pre-school children (ages 3 to 6 years) participated in a magic show. Later the children were given true and false reminders about the show. Half of the children were asked to draw the true and false reminders. The other half of the children were only asked questions about the reminders. It was found that children who drew pictures had better recall of true reminders, but also recalled more false reminders than the other group. Both groups reported that the false reminders actually happened (Bruck *et al.,* 2000:194). The researcher is of the opinion that an important factor challenging in the result as given above is that children in this age group were found by Saltzstein *et al.* (2004:1082) to be more suggestible than other children.

It can therefore be assumed that drawings must be conducted with care with children under the age of 6 years. However, for older children it is different and it is stated by (DeLoache *et al.,* 2003:115) that "full pictorial competence involves both perceptual abilities and conceptual knowledge" and children in the middle childhood with the concrete operational cognitive abilities (Berk, 2003:242) are able to make representations of happenings. Drawings may be used as a tool to clarify all or some of the child's verbal disclosure.

To ask a child to draw a picture about a specific event in combination with non-leading verbal prompts can enhance the verbal reports of children over the age of 4 years (Salmon, 2001:270). A study by Bruck, *et al.* (2000:170) found that when drawings are accompanied by misleading questions, it is associated with very high error rates in children's subsequent reports. It is thus imperative for forensic interviewers not to use any misleading or suggestive interviewing techniques.

The following advantages of the use of drawings during forensic interviews are highlighted by Hiltz and Bauer (2003):

- Establishing comfort and reducing intensity – Drawings may be used initially to build rapport and throughout the interview to establish comfort for the child. During the first interview with a child, the interviewer requests the child to make a picture about anything which will then be put on the wall, next to other children's pictures.

- Clarification – Drawings may be used to clarify all or some of a child's verbal disclosure, which may promote understanding between the child and the interviewer.

- Enhancing recall of detail – There is evidence that children who have the opportunity to draw in conjunction with verbalising their experiences, report significantly more information.

- Prodding memory – Drawings may help to facilitate disclosure of sexual abuse by helping a child to move closer to the abusive event. Drawing one aspect of a particular event may remind a child about other aspects of the same event.

- Documentation and evidence – Drawings made by the child during the investigation may be submitted as evidence during the trial. The researcher once testified in a criminal case where the picture made by the child during the assessment was submitted as evidence to prove that over time she stayed consistent regarding the allegations.

- Context-specific drawings – The child may be asked to draw the genitals of the alleged perpetrator if she mentioned that she saw them, draw the place where the abuse happened, as well as anything that the interviewer wishes to clarify. The researcher found it very useful to ask children to draw the place where the abuse happened, as the researcher experienced that more context detail comes out. The researcher also experienced that those children who make up the allegation struggle to draw the alleged abuse accurately, leave out detail and cannot manage to draw the alleged perpetrator in close relationship to him/her. Children also tend to draw an unhappy face on the figure representing themselves. The researcher found with children who admitted that they were lying about the allegation, that when they drew the picture about the sexual abuse, they drew a happy face on the figure representing themselves.

During ten years of practice in the forensic field, the researcher has grown to rely a lot on the child's portrait of the alleged offence committed. Although young children under 6 years may experience difficulties to draw explicit accounts (DeLoache *et al.,* 2003:115), it was found that they are able to at least draw the context in which it occurred. It is found by the researcher that when asked to draw the sexual abuse, children are very reluctant as if they try to avoid the visual stimuli of a horrible nightmare. After a child has completed a picture, it is imperative for an interviewer to, in a non-leading way, clarify what the child has made and if necessary ask for elaborative drawings. No interpretations should be allowed as this may be regarded as leading. Neutral encouragement is necessary.

3.8   LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Language consists of a system of symbols (Jordaan & Jordaan, 1998: 360) which people use to make sense of things in ways that make sense to others. Children develop language skills in "layers" (Starks & Samuel, 2002a:18). Fully developed language concepts do not emerge until the child reaches his/her teens. In order for a person to understand another person's verbal messages and make intelligible verbal messages, at least three related skills (Jordaan & Jordaan, 1998: 360) must be learnt, namely:

- to link speech sounds with their meanings;

- to link words with the things, ideas and events which they symbolise; and

- to master the rules according to which words are combined to communicate intelligibly in a particular language.

In order to communicate and participate with family, friends and especially participate in school activities, a child must have the ability to communicate in a manner which is understood by the listeners (Louw, 2005:19). Language abilities continue to improve during middle childhood (Berger, 2003:352) as children successfully learn code-switching (when a person switch from one language register to another, e.g. from formal language to slang) and the ability to change from one form of speech to another (e.g. language with adults would differ from the slang, drama and gestures used with peers).

The researcher is of opinion that the forensic interviewer should be aware of the form of speech children use with their peers and accommodate that during their interviews in order to establish rapport. The researcher learnt through practice to use a few of these slang words when building a rapport, e.g. "I heard it is not cool to wear those pink bangles." From experience the researcher has found that most of the children in the middle childhood have the ability to make a sensible conversation. Even those who appeared to have learning difficulties can express themselves and follow instructions. Depending on the child's cognitive ability, the researcher has experienced difficulties to understand mentally retarded children who have a chronological age in the range 7 to 12 years. An understanding of

language development of children is imperative for conducting successful interviews with children.

The three theories that are currently dominating explanations of language acquisition are according to Cole and Cole (2001:332):

- The learning theories, claiming that words and patterns of words are learnt through imitation and through classical and operant conditioning.
- Nativist theories claim that children are born with a language acquisition device that is automatically activated by the environment when the child has matured sufficiently.
- Interactionist theories emphasise the cognitive preconditions for language acquisition and the role of the social environment in providing a language acquisition support system.

The researcher is of the opinion that factors like gender, social class and intelligence may have an influence on language development. Language development in girls tends to develop faster than boys (Louw *et al.,* 1998:189) due to more rapid physiological maturation and environmental factors like greater stimulation between mother and daughter (Newman & Newman, 2003:188). Children from lower socio-economical classes may show poorer language development due to less talking time with parents and a lack of a "pure" form of the mother tongue (Louw *et al.,* 1998:189).

A factor that needs to be treated with caution is the one where it is presumed that early talkers have a high IQ score (Louw *et al.,* 1998:189). However, it is commonly believed that a child who talks at a very early age is exceptionally intelligent. It is important that the forensic interviewer adapts his/her protocol according to the language development of the child. The researcher has experienced that very often children from lower socio-economical classes have a better language development regarding day to day happenings and are "streetwise". This may be due to more exposure to adult conversations, lack of supervision during social gatherings and exposure to situations where bigger families stay together, resulting in more conversation time.

3.8.1 Semantics

Semantics refer to the meaning of a word or a piece of writing (*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*: 2003:1294). If a child uses a particular word, it does not necessarily mean the child attached the same meaning to it as the adult (Louw, 2005:19; Müller, 2002:84). Starks and Samuel (2002a:18) are of the opinion that most miscommunication between adults and children occur when adults assume that a child has mastered a particular skill, when in fact the child has not. The researcher found through her experience with children in the middle childhood that they have a tendency to interpret words literally (Starks & Samuel, 2002a:18) or use words of which they do not know the meaning. An 8-year-old child overheard his brother saying that he has made his girlfriend pregnant and then saw him giving the girlfriend a chocolate. The 8-year-old boy also then told his friend at school that he has made his girlfriend pregnant (because he gave her a chocolate) without knowing what it means. It also happens that when a child does not understand a word (Müller, 2002:84), he/she may give that word the meaning of a similar word. If a child uses a symbol, concept or word it does not mean the child comprehends it, e.g. days of the week or numbers (Amacher, 2000). Studies conducted by Saywitz (1990:346) and Müller and Tait (1997:600) indicated that children under the age of 11 made mistakes regarding the following concepts:

- The word "jury" was frequently mistaken for "jewellery".
- A "case" was something books were carried in.
- A "court" was a place where basketball was played.
- A "judge" was described by children as a person who keeps score in a rugby match.

A 7-year-old child told the researcher that he is scared he will get "oats" after the abuse, meaning "Aids". The researcher is of the opinion that although the meaning some children attach to words are humoristic, it is important not to laugh at the child, pull a face or reprimand the child. The researcher is also of the opinion that the interviewer should only give the correct word to the child after the

meaning for the word has been clarified, otherwise this could lead to misinformation.

It is thus imperative for interviewers to clarify whether the child understands the instruction or question, and to clarify words that may be misinterpreted or confused by the child for some other word which is familiar to the child.

3.8.1.1 Developmental issues to consider regarding semantics

The following developmental issues with regard to semantics should be considered when forensic interviews with children in the middle childhood are conducted:

- **Words describing touch**

  Children may believe that only a hand can touch, and even if they did not see what touched their private parts, they will assume it was a hand (Poole & Lamb, 1998:161-177). Children in the middle childhood do not necessarily understand concepts like "in" in the context of whether the penis or finger was placed in the private part or bottom (Müller, 2002:84). Elaborating questions must be used to clarify uncertainties by asking the child to demonstrate on dolls what exactly happened, or ask the child to illustrate by means of drawings. The researcher experienced that many children will make a mistake when telling with what their private parts were hurt – often they would say with a knife, a belt and even a piece of hot coal, as they believe it is only a knife, belt or coal that can hurt you. This, however, causes problems in the court case as the defence's lawyer uses this inconsistency to discredit the child's testimony (Venter, 2006).

- **Words describing sexual acts**

  Children find it difficult to verbalise the sexual acts which happened to them due to two reasons (Louw, 2005:22): firstly because they do not understand or have the ability to interpret the sexual act accurately and secondly because they do not have the necessary vocabulary to describe the sexual

abuse. The researcher experienced that children would also describe the happenings in terms of the parts of the body during the abuse according the normal function they know for the body part, e.g. a child would say: "His willy became large and then he wee-weed all over me." During exploration the child would even say the "wee-wee" was red or orange as they know that is the colour of urine. Many children are scared to say the "wee-wee" was white, as it does not make sense in their frame of reference and they are scared that they would be accused of lying. It is thus very important that forensic interviewers must not take what the child says literally, but put it in the context of the child's developmental level. Interviewers must clarify words which the child is using at all times. It is also very useful when a child answered to a "when" question, to follow it up with a clarifying question (Starks & Samuel, 2002a:20), e.g. "What makes you think it was winter?"

- "**Remember**"

  It is normal for an adult to ask a child: "Can you remember what happened?" It is stated by Poole and Lamb (1998:166) that a child may think that he/she must first have forgotten an event before he/she can remember it. The researcher would rather recommend that a question be asked like: "Tell me what happened." The child will in any case only tell what he/she remembered or what he/she wants to reveal.

- **Identification**

  It is important to explore names and nicknames and particular relationship terms (Müller, 2002:89). It is stated by Poole and Lamb (1998:89) that children under 10 years may use these terms without fully comprehending the meaning. The researcher is of opinion that interviewers should use interviewing techniques which would identify significant people before the disclosure of sexual abuse. The interviewer should then ask the child to identify all the places where the alleged abuse took place and explore from there whether the abuse happened more than once at specific places. The researcher found it also useful to ask the child to describe the house where they lived at the time of the abuse as he/she would describe it to his/her brother or parent. It is also useful if the child is asked to describe the

happenings of the day as if he/she would tell it to a brother, sister or peer. The researcher found that children have a different view on telling when they retell something to a sibling or peer.

- **Chronological order**

  According to Massengale (2001) the ability to think abstractly only develops at age 10 to 11 and therefore it is not until adolescence that children tend to be able to recall sequential information accurately (Lyon & Saywitz, 2006:852). The researcher experienced that children tend to give the core happenings and it is imperative to inform them that the interviewer was not present and do not know what happened. It is also important to request the child to tell everything from the beginning.

- **Definite and indefinite articles**

  Children under the age of 9 struggle to make a distinction between the indefinite article (a) and the definite article (the) (Poole & Lamb, 1998:166), e.g.: "I don't like *a* dog" and "I don't like *the* dog".

- **Shifters**

  A shifter is a word of which the meaning depends on the location of the speaker (Müller, 2002:89) and includes words like "this/that" and "come/go". It is the opinion of Poole and Lamb (1998:167) that young children struggle to master the contrasts. When they identify the perpetrator, type of abuse that happened and location of the abuse it is extremely important to be specific. The researcher experienced that children from 7 years and older do not have a problem with shifters.

- **Legal terminology**

  Legal terminology used in the legal system and forensic interviewing process may fall outside the normal language of adults and even more so of children (Brennan & Brennan, 1988:31). Phrases like: "You have to tell the absolute truth" and "You told the court" may be confusing for children. The researcher is of opinion that the interviewer should clarify at all times whether the child understands what is meant with "truth" and "lie".

- **Auditory discrimination**

  The ability to distinguish between words which sound the same but have different meanings is only developed by the age of 8 years (Louw, 2005:21). The researcher experienced that a 6-year-old asked: "Am I now *grey* because of the naughty things I have done with my brother?" In this case the child is aware that persons of the same sex engaging in sexual acts are referred to as "gay", but due to auditory discrimination referred to it as "grey". The interviewer should not assume that he/she understands what the child means, but rather clarify unfamiliar words used by the child.

3.8.2   Syntax

Syntax is according to the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (2003:1465) "the rules of grammar that are used for ordering and connecting words to form phrases or sentences".

It is the researcher's experience after five years of training professionals all over South Africa in the interviewing of children and observing them during practical sessions, that professionals really struggle to adapt the sentence construction of their questions to the level of a child. Questions used are close-ended and sentences tend to be long and complex. The professional does not have any guarantee that the child understood the questions and that the answer given is accurate. It is thus imperative that professionals follow an interview protocol when interviewing children.

3.8.2.1   Developmental issues to consider regarding semantics

The following rules posed by Poole and Lamb (1998:168) need to be considered:

- **Word order**

  It is recommended that passives be avoided completely. All questions should be phrased in the active voice, specifying the subject of the sentence

first, e.g.: "Who asked you to do that?" and not "By whom were you asked to do that?"

- **Use of the negative**

  Questions containing unnecessary negative terms will only contribute to the child's confusion (Starks & Samuel, 2002a:20; Amacher, 2000) and reduce his/her level of confidence when relating his/her story (Massengale, 2001).

- **Tag questions**

  A tag question is one that transforms a statement into a question by adding on a request for confirmation, e.g.: "You were trying to tell your mom, weren't you?" Although children copy adults and use tag questions, research shows (Poole & Lamb, 1998:171) that children up to 14 years old experience difficulties understanding tag questions.

- **Multiple questions**

  Multiple questions involve the use of several questions at once (Massengale, 2001) and may result in children making mistakes in responding to the questions (Hershkowitz, 2001:50). Thus type of question should be avoided during interviews with children in the middle childhood (Massengale, 2001). An example of a multiple question is: "Did anyone ever come to your house and asked you if something bad happened to you and if you told your mom about it?"

- **Use of pronouns**

  According to Poole and Lamb (1998:171) pronouns have meanings apart from the specific context in which they occur, and it is stated by Massengale (2001) that the mastery of pronouns does not occur until the ages 9 to 10 years. To avoid confusion it is recommended by Starks and Samuel (2002:18) to limit the use of pronouns. The sentence: "When he came home, did he talk to you?" will have no meaning unless the listener knows to whom "he" refers. The question can be rephrased as follows: "When your dad came home, did he talk to you?" The researcher is of the opinion that it is of utmost importance that the interviewer clarifies pronouns used by the child so

that it is clear to whom the "he" or "she" refers before starting to use that label. The interviewer should also use the same label which the child is using, e.g. the interviewer should not use "your *father*" if the child uses the label "my *dad*".

- **Type of questions**

  Children in the middle childhood are able to answer "who", "what", "where" and "when" questions (Schoeman, 2006:113), but may still have problems with "why" questions (Bull, 2003a:18).

3.8.3 Pragmatic and social competence

Pragmatics refers to the study of language in social context (Müller, 1999:93). Children must not only develop linguistic competence, but must also learn to adapt their language to the demands of the social situation. The forensic context is more demanding, and children with no reference of what is expected, use the same rules in the forensic interview as in their social conversation (Louw, 2005:26).

As children depend on adults for providing context when asking questions and they are used to it at school, it is imperative that interviewers also provide a clear context for the subject questioning by reframing (Massengale, 2001). Reframing assists children in successfully making the transition from one topic to another (Starks & Samuel, 2002a:21). The questioner also needs to signal when he/she is switching topics, or if he/she is going into more specific detail about something the child already said: e.g.: "You told me uncle Thabo called you into his room, and that it was after school when it was hot. I want us to talk more about that day when it happened." The researcher finds it useful to make a brief summary of what was said to check whether she got a clear understanding of what the child has told her before the new topic is introduced. However, it is important that the interviewer does not suggest new information to the child.

Children also fail to detect when a speaker's comment or statement is ambiguous and even when they do realise this, they will generally not tell the speaker that they are confused (Massengale, 2001). Many children will, even though they are

empowered to ask if they do not understand, still answer a question if they do not understand it. After the initial disclosure, the researcher does a role-play with the child on neutral topics like happenings of the previous Christmas, things that happened on a known television programme, etc. She would then ask the child questions which she knows the child does not know and then teach the child how he/she must resist questions of which he/she does not know the answer.

During forensic interviewing it is important that the interviewer and the child have the same understanding of words, concepts, symbols and expressions (Louw, 2005:26). From experience the researcher found that even when children have mastered the basics of simple sentences, certain concepts still give rise to problems in communication. Even when a child uses a difficult concept or word in conversation, it does not necessary mean that the child understands the word, or connects the same meaning to it as an adult. The researcher has experienced that the interviewer therefore needs to clarify any word, phrase, concept and label that may cause any misunderstanding. If a child says: "He hurt my leg", the interviewer would not clarify it, but since "leg" is a common word, say: "Show me where on your leg he hurt you." However, if the child says: "He hurt my poenoenoe", the interviewer firstly needs to clarify what a "poenoenoe" is and thereafter clarify where on the child's body his/her "poenoenoe" is. Interviewers must be developmentally sensitive when interviewing children.

When interviewing a child about alleged sexual abuse, it is imperative that the interviewer must determine when the abuse took place, as the alleged perpetrator must be linked to the crime and has the right to defend whether he has been there at the time or not (Carstens, 2006). Legal practitioners often assume that children should be capable of dating events with respect to personal time intervals, such as the child's age or the child's teacher at the time of the event (Venter, 2006). However, according to Lyon and Saywitz (2006:860) little research exists to support such assumptions, and they argue that children up to 12 years of age have difficulty in dating relatively recent events with respect to such landmarks. The researcher has experienced that if the interviewer would ask the child in the middle childhood about the date when the alleged abuse happened, some children may give any date just to answer the question. The researcher always aims to

determine in which school year it took place, whether it happened when it was hot or cold outside, during a holiday or school term, where the other people were at the time, as well as where the child or the perpetrator came from directly before the alleged abuse took place. This technique has many times assisted the researcher to determine by means of corroborating evidence of when the alleged abuse could have happened. Some children may give an accurate description, e.g. the night Shrek 2 was showing on SABC 2. It is important that the interviewer must clarify how the child can remember so clearly, as children in the middle childhood tend to draw their own conclusions (Massengale, 2001; Amacher, 2000).

It is important for presiding officers during the child's testimony to observe the child's emotional state while talking about the alleged abuse (Carstens, 2006). However, children with post-traumatic stress disorder display a restricted range of emotions and numbing of general responsiveness (James & Gilland, 2005:175). It is important to ask children to describe their emotional reactions during and following the abuse (Lyon & Saywitz, 2006:861) as it may be one of the components of evaluating the child's statement. It is, however, important that interviewers realise that those children who have been repeating the narrative about the abuse may appear neutral, but that it is not necessarily an indication of lying.

3.8.4 Content expected during the forensic interview

When a child has been a victim of sexual abuse, specific information is necessary in order to prosecute the offender. The skill to give explicit details about events are mostly progressively mastered over the middle childhood period and mastered during adolescence (Louw, 2005:24). If the forensic interviewer is not sensitive to these developmental issues, it may influence the credibility of the child's statement, resulting in false allegations.

3.8.4.1 Number of times the abuse occurred

The number of times that the alleged abuse happened is a very crucial part of the statement as this will determine the charge against the alleged perpetrator (Venter, 2006). It must not be assumed that if a child can count, he/she understands number concepts. Although children can count from one to ten and even make calculations, it does not mean that they can count happenings abstractly (Louw, 2005:24). When the child is interviewed and he/she testifies, this aspect often causes a problem, often resulting in perpetrators getting off the hook (Venter, 2006; Carstens, 2006). It is recommended by Starks and Samuel (2002:21) and Orbach *et al.* (2000:751) to explore by asking a child "if something happened one time or more than one time". The researcher found it useful to ask the child whether the abuse happened once or more than once and thereafter let the child name the different places where it happened, write the venue on different papers and ask the child to draw it. The researcher also determined that it is easier for children to start with either the last or the first happening.

3.8.4.2 Time and place of the abuse

According to Louw (2005:24) a child learns to tell time from a watch at the age of 7. At the age of 8 years they can name the days of the week and name the names of seasons accurately (Louw, 2005:24). At this stage they are able to argue, e.g.: "I had a winter school uniform on so it must have been during a school term in winter." However, children under 10 years still find it difficult to recall happenings in chronological order (Kuehnle, 1996:131). Research by Saywitz, Goodman, Nicholas and Moan (1991:682) proved that children's responses regarding dates and times are more accurate when alternative methods are used. Children under the age of 10 have a very limited cognitive ability to understand concepts of time and will not be able to provide accurate information regarding dates and times (Müller, 2002:86). It is the opinion of Massengale (2001) and Lyon and Saywitz (2006:852) that children do not fully comprehend concepts related to space, time and distance until their early teens. Temporal words like "yesterday", "today" and "tomorrow" also create difficulties (Starks & Samuel, 2002a:21). A study by

Harner as reported by Poole and Lamb (1998:164) found that at the age of 5, children are beginning to distinguish between "yesterday" and "tomorrow". The researcher experienced that children up to the age of 8 years may experience difficulties referring correctly to "tomorrow" and "yesterday". Concepts like whether something happened a long time ago or short time ago are also difficult for children younger than 8 years old (Amacher, 2000).

Depending on the facts of the individual case, the questions determining the following information may assist the interviewer to determine when the alleged abuse happened (Starks & Samuel, 2002a:20; Amacher, 2000; Morgan, 1995:45):

- Where the child stayed at the time.

- Which school the child attended and the name of the teacher.

- With whom the child was living at the time.

- If anything special happened around that time.

- Whether it was near a big day e.g. birthday or Christmas.

- What happened on a specific television programme.

The researcher experienced in practice not to ask the child on which day or at what time something happened, but rather whether the abuse happened during school or holiday, weekend or during the week, night or day, when it was hot or cold. The interviewer should also explore where other people were and what the child was doing before and after the abuse. During corroborating interviews with the parents or caregivers the time and date could be determined. It is the opinion of the researcher that children in the middle childhood can accurately describe where the abuse happened.

3.8.4.3   Length, age and weight

Most of the sexually abused children in the Vaalrand area of the Gauteng province in South Africa are abused by a person whom they know (South African Police, 2001). However, it does happen that children are sometimes asked to identify the

alleged perpetrator and give a description of his age, length and weight. Young children (Louw, 2005:25) only focus on one aspect at a time and will not be able to focus on the length and age of a person, and if asked about it will give an answer which is not reliable. Since this is a skill that develops over time, it is important for the forensic interviewer to remember that whatever the child in the middle childhood answers to these questions, must be clarified as children make their own interpretations. The researcher experienced through practice that if a child says that the alleged perpetrator is tall, the interviewer would ask clarifying questions, e.g.: "Tall like who?" or "How do you know he is old?" or "If you say he is fat, who else is as fat as he is?"

3.8.4.4   Intentions, perspective and feelings

During forensic interviews and court testimony children are often asked about deductions they made during the abuse, as well as about the intentions of others involved (Louw, 2005:25). Although pre-school children are able to interpret emotional expressions correctly, the skill to see the world from the perspective of others is only mastered at the ages of 6 to 7 years. (Botha *et al.,* 1998:36). Research conducted by Aldridge and Wood (1998:114) found that children younger than 8 years old respond poorly to questions about how the alleged perpetrator felt at the time of the abuse. Although abstract thinking generally starts between the ages of 8 and 12 years, the child is still developing this method of reasoning and is still not able to hypothetically infer a motive or reason (Massengale, 2001). The researcher found that later in middle childhood, at the age of 11 and older, children are better capable to answer questions about the perpetrator's intentions. The researcher also found through practice to explore the feelings during and after the event. A question about what the child was thinking when the abuse happened, or what he/she thinks is going to happen, often facilitate the verbalisation of the child's fears.

3.8.4.5 Logical arguments

Many forensic interviewers expect children to give answers to questions where the skill of hypothesising is expected. Pre-school children tend to make the wrong deductions of happenings (Louw, 2005:26). Most children in the early middle childhood phase (6 to 8 years) have acquired the basic cognitive and linguistic concepts necessary to sufficiently communicate an abusive event and can imitate adult speech patterns. It is therefore easy to forget that the child in the early middle childhood is still not fully cognitively, emotionally and linguistically developed (Massengale, 2001).

Children in the middle childhood also tend to make their own conclusions, which are not always logical and accurate (Berger, 2003:352). It often happens that a case is closed due to the statement of the child that does not make sense. The researcher found that even children in early middle childhood sometimes provide a narrative that does not make sense, especially when the alleged abuse happened over a longer period.

3.8.4.6 Understanding and responding to questions

It is imperative that children would signal to the interviewer when they do not understand a question, or do not know the answer, or cannot remember (Louw, 2005:26). However, it is found that children often do not alert the adult that they do not understand a question, and answer it irrespective of whether they know the answer (Craig & Baucum, 2002:3329). Furthermore it is found that younger children tend to answer only the part of the question which they think they understand (Louw, 2005:26). It is thus important that interviewers prepare children before commencement of the interview to indicate when they do not understand the questions and emphasise to them that they must not guess the answer. The researcher found it useful to practise this on neutral topics before abuse-focused interviewing starts.

3.9   SOCIO-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Although children in the middle childhood spend more time with their peers, their lives are still shaped by family structures and community values. The emotional development of school-age children depends on their understanding of the social world they interact in (Berger, 2003:356).

3.9.1   Emotional development

Just as it is natural for a human being to become hungry and thirsty, it is unavoidable to experience emotions. Children do not have the natural ability which many adults have to express their emotions verbally, but manage to act it out through play (Botha *et al.,* 1998:304; Oaklander, 1988:22).   Emotional development is closely related to social development and refers to young children's feelings about themselves and others and the environment in which they play and live (Schoeman, 2006:124).   When they are playing, they have the opportunity to experiment with coping behaviour in a non-threatening situation.

Research by Berger (2003:357) reports that children in the middle childhood mastered the following elements with regard to emotional development:

•   They understand the motivation and origin of various behaviours.
•   They can analyse the future impact of whatever actions a person might take.
•   They recognise personality traits and use them to predict a person's future reactions.

Because children are aware of their parents' coping and problem-solving skills, (Fouché, 2006:211), it results in them predicting what would happen if they should disclose the sexual abuse.   It is recommended by Lyon and Saywitch (2006:854) that interviewers must ask children to describe their emotional reactions during and following the abuse as this is imperative for the evaluation of the child's statement. Children in the middle childhood are more competent than children in

the early childhood years to express emotions due to their increasing language skills (Craig & Baucum, 2002:282).

The researcher is of opinion that the expression of emotions like sadness and joy can bring people together. Children need to be taught that expression of anger and disgust may increase the distance between people and that each person must take responsibility of his/her own expression of emotions.

Continuous healthy emotional development is especially important in the middle childhood as children are more confronted with peer groups and activities outside the safe supervised environment of the home. Between the ages of 6 and 12 years, children typically spend more than 40% of their waking hours in the company of peers – children of their own age and status (Cole & Cole, 2001:554). The opportunity to interact with peers without adult supervision affects children's behaviour in two important ways: firstly, the content of peer activity is usually different from when adults preside over the children's activities, as the interaction with adults usually includes some form of instruction or work (Newman & Newman, 2003:158.); secondly, the forms of social control in unsupervised peer activity are different (Cole & Cole, 2001:554). Adults will keep the peace and maintain social order, but when children are on their own in peer groups, they must establish authority and responsibility themselves. There is a change from helplessness to independence and self-sufficiency (Newman & Newman, 2003:303). Gender-role stereotyping influences the nature and quality of emotional expression (Louw *et al.,* 1998:345) as boys are often taught not to cry and not to show fear, and girls are often criticised if they become aggressive.

Children in the middle childhood also become capable to identifying emotional labels such as anger, fear and happiness; and of attributing inner feelings to them (Durkin, 1995:145). They are better able to control their emotions and to hide their feelings. They learn to read facial expressions and learn that emotional states can be changed psychologically. They also realise that people can experience different emotions simultaneously (Louw *et al.,* 1998:346).

Children from all cultures can express a variety of emotions (Van Dyk, 2005:151), which will be discussed next.

3.9.1.1   Love

The child learns about love from birth and this is shown by his attachment to his caregiver (Schoeman, 2006:126).   During the middle childhood children leave behind an egocentric point of view and develop sensitivity towards others as their expression of love gradually mature. (Louw *et al.,* 1998:348). It is the opinion of the researcher that by having their needs met, young children feel loved and although they cannot express their love towards the parents or caregivers, they give hugs and share sweets to express their feeling of affection.

3.9.1.2   Happiness and humour

Humour offers the possibility of taking the sting out of a situation and lightens the spirit and creates a more cheerful atmosphere (Schoeman & Van der Merwe, 1996:92; Craig & Baucum, 2002:375). The researcher is of the opinion that a wide variety of situations elicit happiness, including feelings of acceptance, the pleasures of accomplishment, the satisfaction of curiosity, or the development of new abilities. From experience the researcher found that children who are happy tend to use humour more. The researcher especially uses jokes with children in the middle childhood, as they appear to have the cognitive abilities to appreciate the punch line of a story.

3.9.1.3   Anger and aggression

It is the opinion of Oaklander (1988:22) that anger is the "… most feared, resisted, suppressed, and threatening emotion, because it is so often the most important and the deepest hidden block to one's sense of wholeness and well-being". As a child tries to satisfy his/her basic psychological needs through behaviour, he/she

will use angry behaviour to gain what he/she wants (Schoeman & Van der Merwe, 1996:172; Berger, 2003:278). Some children also learn from their environment that anger can also be buried and expressed through passive and sullen means, such as pouting or hateful stares (Louw *et al.,* 1998:348).

It is the experience of the researcher that outbursts such as kicking, shoving and hitting are common among young and older children. From experience the researcher learnt that children learn from parents and other role players in their lives that anger can be channelled in other ways, e.g. verbally express it through insults, arguing, or swearing.

3.9.1.4 *Fear*

During middle childhood there is a decline in fears related to body safety (such as sickness and injury) and in the fear of dogs, noises, darkness and storms. Most of the new fears that emerge at this time are related to school and family, in accordance with children's expanding social boundaries (Van Dyk, 2005:151). Children in the age group 6 to 8 years experience an increase in fear of imaginary and abstract things, monsters, darkness, lightning, burglars, physical injury, death and being alone at home (Craig & Baucum, 2002:282). Older children between the ages of 9 to 12 years are often afraid of tests and examinations at school, school performance, physical injury, thunder and lightning, death and the dark (Botha *et al.,* 1998:271). The researcher experienced that children with whom she works have great fears for burglars, that their parents will die in a robbery and even to be kidnapped, as there have been a few prominent cases of kidnapped children in South Africa. A rumour is also going around that a network of paedophiles are kidnapping children in order to have enough child prostitutes for the Soccer World Cup in South Africa in 2010. Whether this is true is unknown, but what is true is that children experience fear when hearing about these type of things.

3.9.1.5   Anxiety

The *New Dictionary of Social Work* (1995:4) defines anxiety as "complex emotional condition characterised by acute tension and physiological reactions, such as accelerated heartbeat and sweating".   It is the opinion of Schoeman and Van der Merwe (1996:74) that a fearful, anxious child will depict the sad, while an unafraid child will depict the pleasure in his/her life. The researcher experienced that children who are still anxious after an icebreaker in the interview room, are either scared, experience performance anxiety, or are coached by parents what to say and are scared that they will not say the right things.

3.9.1.6   Jealousy

It appears as if children are more able to withhold themselves from reacting on feelings of jealousy at school and during social gatherings with friends (Berger, 2003:356). However, in a household it is very common to find fights, blaming and hurtful behaviour towards older and younger siblings. This can be explained by the argument of Louw *et al. (*1998:348) that children develop sensitivity towards other people during middle childhood; they take other's needs and feelings into account and show a need to help other people. They thus become more altruistic. However, the researcher is of the opinion that this altruistic attitude is mostly only practised outside the home, as jealousy resulting in fighting with siblings is universally found among children of all ages.   Experience as a mother and professional, proved to the researcher that the existence of jealousy in the middle childhood is commonly found over racial and cultural boundaries. It appears that jealousy among siblings are more prominent than between friends and school pupils.

3.9.2   The emotional development of children from birth to adolescence

During children's lifespan, they have certain emotional developmental tasks which they need to address for optimal growth and functioning. This lifespan is divided

into eight stages by Erickson (Meyer & Van Ede, 1998:51-54). Each stage is characterised by a crisis, i.e. a situation in which the individual must orientate him-/herself according to two opposing poles. Each crisis is brought about by a specific way of interaction between the individual and the society (Cole & Cole, 2001:399). The solution to each crisis lies in a synthesis of the two poles. This results in a new life situation from which the two opposing poles of the next stage arise. The five stages relating to a child's emotional development are as follows:

3.9.2.1 Infancy – Age 0 to 1 year
Crisis: Basic trust versus mistrust (Develop: hope)

During this stage, which coincides with the first year of life, the child must develop a feeling of basic trust (Cole & Cole, 2001:399). At the same time, he/she must overcome a feeling of basic mistrust. The quality of a child's relationship with his/her mother is of prime importance in the development of trust (Meyer & Van Ede, 1998:51). If the infant's needs are met consistently and responsively by the parents, the infant will not only develop a secure attachment for the parents, but will also learn to trust his/her environment in general (Craig & Baucum, 2002:47). A healthy synthesis between basic trust and mistrust thus will equip children well in dealing courageously, but carefully with new situations. However, when badly handled, children become insecure and mistrustful believing that life is unpredictable.

It is the opinion of the researcher that within the interview situation, the establishment of an emotionally safe relationship in a non-threatening environment provides the child with an opportunity to once again experience trust and to handle any issues regarding mistrust and anxiety caused by the trauma which he/she has experienced.

3.9.2.2 Toddler – Age 1 to 3 years
Crisis: Autonomy versus shame and guilt (Develop: will-power)

During this stage a child has the task of developing a sense of autonomy (independence) and, at the same time, overcoming feelings of shame and doubt (Meyer & Van Ede, 1998:52). Physical maturation allows children to have greater autonomy and to follow their own will. They learn to walk, talk, master bowel and urinary control and do things for themselves (Schoeman, 2006:134), but greater autonomy and freedom bring the child into contact with rules. This in turn leads to the possibility of failure and consequently to shame and doubt about their own abilities (Cole & Cole, 2001:400). If the child is punished or labelled as messy, sloppy, inadequate or bad, he/she learns to feel shame and self-doubt (Craig & Baucum, 2002:47).

The researcher is of opinion that it is very important to give children opportunities to make choices during the interviewing process. This gives them the opportunity to experience a sense of control and independence, and also to gain awareness of the effect of their actions. When children make choices and experience the effect thereof, it makes it easier for them to take responsibility for their behaviour.

3.9.2.3 Early childhood – Age 3 to 6 years
Crisis: Initiative versus guilt (Develop: purpose)

This stage, which lasts from approximately ages 3 to 6 years, is characterised by the task of learning to show initiative, while at the same time overcoming a feeling of guilt (Meyer & Van Ede, 1998:52). Children's greater freedom of movement and autonomy enable them to act more independently than before so that they can now begin to explore their world with a new sense of purpose (Cole & Cole, 2001:401). If their explorations and activities are generally effective, they learn to deal with things and people in a constructive way and gain a sense of initiative (Craig & Baucum, 2002:47). However, if they are severely criticised or over-punished, they instead learn to feel guilty for many of their own actions.

By establishing boundaries in the interviewing situation and providing fun, creative mediums to work with, children are encouraged to take initiative and experience purpose. The therapist can help children to work within the set boundaries and experience guilt-free fun.

3.9.2.4 Middle childhood – Age 6 to12 years
Crisis: Industry versus inferiority (Develop: competence)

This stage, which lasts form the age of 6 until the beginning of puberty, more or less covers the primary school years. Children learn to make things, use tools and acquire the skills to be workers and potential providers (Meyer & Van Ede, 1998:53). Children aim at mastering certain skills required for adult life and society helps them by providing schooling. Children develop numerous skills and competencies in school, at home and in the outside world (Craig & Baucum, 2002:47) and comparison with peers is increasingly significant. A negative self-evaluation of being inferior to others is especially disruptive at this time.

The researcher is of the opinion that, within the interviewing setting, children can be exposed to activities which enhance their sense of self-worth and pride. It is important to provide age-appropriate mediums, which will challenge them to achieve mastery and success and to compete against themselves, and in the process strengthen their value of their own abilities.

Adolescents who have experienced trauma can have great difficulty in establishing a realistic and healthy identity and can be troubled by negative internalisations. Internalisations like: "I am damaged", "I am powerless", "I am bad/guilty/an object to be used", "I am responsible" and "I feel chaotic" are found in victims of sexual abuse. Wieland (1997:10) differentiates between internalisations resulting from:

- all abuse experiences where the abuse experiences consist of intrusions, self-related threats and acts of abuse and non-protection;
- sexual abuse by someone close where the abuse experiences of entanglement, juxtaposition and distorted family boundaries lead to the internalisations; and

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- extreme sexual abuse where the messages during the abuse experience were perceived by the child as that sexualised behaviour brings attention and sensual pleasure or negative experience, distorted messages and distortion of reality.

It is essential that all aspects of a child's emotional development need to be taken into consideration to provide the child with opportunities to handle his/her trauma and also to understand the way he/she experienced the abuse.

3.9.2.5   Adolescence – Age 12 to 18 years
Crisis: Identity versus role confusion (Develop: reliability)

The adolescent's identity crisis is the central problem of this stage. Adolescents have the task of acquiring a feeling of identity (Meyer & Van Ede, 1998:51). This feeling consists of three components which can be summarised by the following questions (Meyer & Van Ede, 1998:51):

- "Who am I?"
- "To which group(s) do I belong?"
- "What do I wish to achieve?"

Adolescents seek basic values and attitudes that cut across their various roles. If they fail to form a central identity or cannot resolve a major conflict between major roles, the result is called ego diffusion (Craig & Baucum, 2002:47). However, if the adolescent does not solve this conflict, he/she will sink into confusion and become unable to make decisions and choices, especially about vocation, sexual orientation and his/her role in life in general (Schoeman, 2006:137).

Within the interviewing process, the normal emotional development of children needs to be taken into account. Children who experience trauma often regress (Fouché & Yssel, 2006:242) and it is imperative that a forensic interviewer is aware of the normal progressive developmental milestones in order to assess whether the child reveals any regressive behaviour; not to misinterpret it as a

difficult child, or a child that is lying, but a child that regresses due to possible trauma experienced.

3.9.3   Self-concept

The most influential system for developing the self-concept is the peer group (Berger, 2003:357) and it is a crucial social skill during middle childhood to get along with peers. Children's increased time spent among peers is accompanied by a changing sense of self.

A study of 212 children by Salmivalli and Isaacs (2005:1116) showed that a negative self-perception was a risk factor for the development of all forms of peer adversities. A child cannot discriminate between things that are said to him/her and will believe everything that is said about and to him/her. Many of these messages are wrong and not the truth and result in the disturbed development of the child's self-esteem (Wieland, 1997:38).

By the age of 6 to 7 years, the child has formed at least four self-esteems, namely academic, social, physical competence and physical appearance (Berk, 2003:448). By the age of 10 the child's self-esteem becomes hierarchically organised and separate self-evaluations are integrated into one, overall self-image. By the age of 12 the child's self-esteem will continue to rise or fall (Schoeman, 2006:131).

The researcher experienced that children who have been sexually abused asked the questions: "Why me?", "What is wrong with me?", "What about me attracted the abuser?" The answer that they come up with is: "I was abused because of something in me." This results in them thinking less about themselves. Messages like "I am not good enough" and "There is something wrong with me" have been evaluated with children in practice. Forensic interviewers should therefore be sensitive to children with a low self-esteem.

3.9.4 Peer group and friends

Generally children see their parents as very important and parents are the primary contributors to their children's development. However, parents' influence, compared with the influence of peers, decreases as children enter middle childhood and adolescence (Salmivalli & Isaacs, 2005:1161). In the middle childhood acceptance in the peer group is very important and personal friendship is even more important (Durkin, 1995:140), and by the age of 10 years children often have one "best" friend. Boys tend to emphasise group identity and loyalty, while they jockey for position within the group. In contrast girls form smaller, more intimate networks and are more concerned about being excluded from the small circle (Berger, 2003:360). By the end of middle childhood, many girls have one best friend whom they depend on. It is imperative that interviewers are aware of these differences so that they do not make the wrong conclusions that there is something wrong with a girl due to the fact that she only has one friend.

Middle childhood children describe close friends as people who like the same activities, share common interests, enjoy each other's company and can count on each other for help (Newman & Newman, 2003:255). The researcher is of the opinion that it is very important for a child in the middle childhood to be able to participate in positive peer friendship and to function in an intellectually and socially stimulating environment. Children learn three lessons from interaction with peers:

- Children are not forced to accept one another's ideas in quite the same way as they are with adults. They argue, bargain and eventually compromise in order to maintain friendships (Newman & Newman, 2003:256; Van Dyk, 2005:151).
- Children learn to be sensitive to the social norms and pressures of their peer group. The peer group evolves norms for acceptance and rejection, and as the children become aware of these norms and conform to the peer group, adults lose some of their power to influence children's behaviour (Louw *et al.,* 1998:368). The need for approval becomes a powerful force towards

conformity and children learn to dress, talk and joke in ways that are acceptable to their peers (Newman & Newman, 2003:257).

- Closeness to a same-sex peer occurs. They share private jokes, develop secret codes, tell family secrets, set out on "dangerous" adventures and help each other in times of trouble. They also fight, threaten, break up and reunite.

With the increased emphasis on friendship and peer acceptance comes the risk of peer rejection and feelings of loneliness. The researcher is of the opinion that perpetrators abuse this developmental task by identifying children who do not have friends. Perpetrators use age-appropriate language and toys to gain these children's trust, become their friend and then sexually abuse them.

In a study conducted by Salmivalli and Isaacs (2005:1116) 212 children in the age group 11 to 13 years were interviewed to investigate links between peer adversities and children's perception of themselves. They found that a negative self-perception influenced the children's social experiences with peers and these experiences had effects on their later perceptions. It is thus important that children must have a positive self-concept in order to maintain good relationships with their peers.

The researcher experienced that child victims of sexual abuse often feel lonely and stigmatised, which impact on their relationships with peers. Children who are withdrawn, quiet, or have outbursts of aggression tend to be rejected by peers (Cole & Cole, 2001:573; Craig & Baucum, 2002:358) resulting in more isolation and withdrawal. Many victimised children reported to the researcher that they struggle to trust peers, expect betrayal every moment, or are jealous to share a friend. Therefore the researcher recommends that during forensic interviewing the professional needs to be sensitive regarding the child's fear of rejection and also be careful not to give the impression to the child that other children did something better or were more co-operative. Other children's experiences should rather be used to encourage the child, e.g. tell the child those other children his/her age also experienced rejection from peers or were also treated badly. By doing this, the child's feelings are normalised.

3.9.5 Acquisition of skills

The middle childhood child is according to Piaget in the concrete operational thought. The concrete operational thought refers to an outlook, a way of understanding and solving problems (Newman & Newman, 2003:264). Middle childhood is the phase in which children learn to read and write and during which they also become ready and willing to learn and assume their share of household tasks (Van Dyk, 2005:153). Children do not only need to learn to read and write, but they must also master numerical concepts, learn to participate in sport activities and group activities and engage in projects.

3.10 MORAL DEVELOPMENT

Moral development refers to the process by which children learn the principles that enable them to judge behaviour as "good" or "bad" and as "right" or "wrong" (Van Dyk, 2005:151). Moral development is according to Thomas (2000:476) "usually viewed as one aspect of socialisation, meaning the process by which children learn to conform to the expectations of the culture in which they grow up". Moral development describes children's ability to distinguish between what they perceive as what is right and what is wrong, good or bad, as well as changes in the way they make moral judgements (Schoeman, 2006:114). Children thus not only learn to conform, but also to internalise these standards and thereby accept the standards as correct and as representing their own personal values (Thomas, 2000:476; Woolfolk, 2001:78).

Moral learning occurs according to the principles of both operant and cognitive learning (Jordaan & Jordaan, 1998:490):

- Operant approach – A person learns socially acceptable moral behaviour through appropriate positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement and punishment.

- Cognitive moral learning – In addition to external control of moral behaviour though reinforcement, people also display inner control of moral behaviour based on the development of moral thought, concepts and insight.

Different theories of moral development exist (Louw *et al.,* 1998:372):

- Psychoanalytic theory – Moral development is sometimes referred to as the development of a conscience, or superego.
- Social learning theory – Moral behaviour is learnt like any other behaviour. The social situation, as the context wherein behaviour takes place, is of great significance in the moral development of children.
- Cognitive development perspective – Moral development is based on the individual's cognition or understanding of a situation.

Cognitive developmental theories of psychologists Piaget and Kohlberg are widely accepted (Cole & Cole, 2001:560; Jordaan & Jordaan, 1998: 491).

Piaget's theory (Louw *et al.,* 1998:374) maintains that the child's moral development takes place in a particular sequence and that there is an interaction between moral and cognitive development. Children younger than 5 years are pre-moral, meaning they do not understand rules and are unable to judge whether or not a rule has been broken (Van Dyk, 2005:151). Between the ages of 5 and 10, moral realism takes place and children develop an enormous respect for rules and believe that rules must be obeyed at all times (Cole & Cole, 2001:560).

According to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2006) the most influential attempt to build on to Piaget's approach, is Kohlberg's stages of moral development.

For the purpose of this study Kohlberg's stages of moral development (Kohlberg, 1971) will be discussed in depth.

3.10.1 Kohlberg's stages of moral development

A large number of American children from different age groups, were interviewed by Kohlberg (1963:19) where their responses on moral dilemmas were evaluated and categorised into three broad levels of moral reasoning, namely: pre-conventional level, conventional level and post-conventional level. According to Kohlberg's stages, the pre-conventional level (level 1) of moral development is characteristic of middle childhood in particular (Louw *et al.,* 1998:377), but it is important that all three levels are discussed.

3.10.1.1 Level 1: Pre-conventional level

This is a self-centred level as emphasis is placed on getting rewards and avoiding punishments (Berger, 2003:336). A person follows society's rules of right and wrong. These rules are followed in terms of the consequences (e.g. to avoid punishment, get rewards and exchange favours) and in view of the power of the authority who imposes the rules (Thomas, 2000:479). The researcher has experienced in her practice that many children in the middle childhood would rather obey rules imposed by their fathers than their mothers. This was because they are scared of the fathers and know what kind of punishment he will give if rules are not obeyed, while the mothers may not be that authoritative and tend not to be so strict in punishment methods.

The fact that children in the middle childhood will obey rules at school and during games if there is some kind of reward involved, links with this level. The researcher experienced that children in the middle childhood could be convinced to behave themselves by offering a reward for good behaviour, while the reward could not "convince" children in high school (older children) to behave.

This level is divided into the following three stages:

- Stage 0: Egocentric judgement – The child makes judgements of "good" on the basis of what he/she likes and wants or what helps him/her, and "bad" on

the basis of what he/she does not like or what hurts him/her. The child has no concept of rules or of obligation to obey or conform independent of his/her wishes (Kohlberg, 1971).

- • Stage 1: The punishment and obedience orientation – Whether an action is good or bad depends on whether it results in punishment or reward (Berger, 2003:336). If the individual is going to get punished for it, it is bad so he/she should not do it. If he/she will not get punished, he/she can do it, regardless of the human meaning or value of the act (Thomas, 2000:479). Avoidance of punishment and absolute respect for power are values in their own right, but not in terms of respect for an underlying moral order supported by punishment and authority (Kohlberg, 1963:19). According to Kohlberg children in the age group 6 to 9 years are in this phase of pre-conventional moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1971). The researcher is of opinion that this implies that if children are alone and they think that they will not be caught, they may do things which are against the societal values.

- • Stage 2: Naive instrumental orientation – In this phase of moral reasoning, which starts at approximately the age of 10 years, children think that moral action comprises of making fair deals and trades (Clarke-Stewart & Friedman, 1987:439). Proper action satisfies the individuals' needs and occasionally the needs of others (Thomas, 2000:479). Human relations are viewed in terms of the market place; getting a fair return for one's investment (Berger, 2003:336). Reciprocity of fairness involves "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours", but this does not happen out of gratitude, loyalty, or justice (Kohlberg, 1971). The researcher is of the opinion that in the context of forensic assessment, this may cause children to be tricked into making a false allegation initiated by a significant person in his/her life, due to rewards given. It also makes children vulnerable who are groomed and rewarded for participating and keeping the sexual abuse a secret. This then may also cause severe feelings of guilt later as the child internalised wrongly that he/she has given co-operation in order to gain something.

3.10.1.2 Level 2: Conventional level

At this level, emphasis is placed on social rules. A person conforms to the expectations of his/her family, group, or nation and actively supports and justifies the existing social order (Thomas, 2000:479; Kohlberg, 1971).

- Stage 3: "Good boy, nice girl" orientation (Berger, 2003:336). – Good behaviour is what pleases or helps others and is approved by them and therefore a person acts in ways that please or help others (Thomas, 2000:479). Approval is thus earned by being "nice" (Kohlberg, 1963:20).

- Stage 4: The "law and order" orientation (Berger, 2003:336). – The individual is oriented toward authority, fixed rules and the maintenance of the social order. The person is doing the right thing for its own sake (Kohlberg, 1963:19).

3.10.1.3 Level 3: Post-conventional, autonomous or principled level

A person tries to identify universal moral values which are valid, regardless of what authority or groups stand for (Kohlberg, 1971). The level has the two following stages:

- Stage 5: "Social contract" orientation (Berger, 2003:336). – The "right" action tends to be defined in terms of general individual rights and standards which have been critically examined and agreed upon by the whole society (Kohlberg, 1971). Aside from what is constitutionally and democratically agreed upon, right action is a matter of personal values and opinions.

- Stage 6: "Universal ethical principles" (Berger, 2003:336). – A person's moral judgements are based on universal principles of justice, on the equality of human rights and respect for the dignity of other human beings. "Right" is defined by the decision of conscience in accord with self-chosen ethical principles that appeal to logic, comprehensiveness, universality and

consistency (Kohlberg, 1971). These principles are abstract and ethical. At heart these are universal principles of justice, of the reciprocity and equality of the human rights and of respect for the dignity of human beings as individual persons (Thomas, 2000:479).

It was claimed by Kohlberg (Durkin, 1995:474) that moral development involves sequential, stage-by-stage progress, and that not everyone reaches the highest stages, but all individuals' progress in the same logical order. It would thus be possible that the forensic interviewer would be faced with a child whose moral development may be more advanced than that of the parent who is putting pressure on him/her to lie about the alleged abuse.

3.10.2 Impact of sexual abuse on a child's moral development

When working with victims of child sexual abuse it is important for professionals to understand the child victim's interpretation of sexual abuse.

Table 3.5: The relationship between Kohlberg's stages of moral development and the child's interpretation of sexual abuse

STAGE	CHILD'S INTERPRETATIONS OF SEXUAL ABUSE
Stage 1 (4 – 8 years)	• Child conforms without understanding it is wrong. • Child can be tricked that it is normal, special or fun. • Child may not disclose due to obedience to authority. • Child's vulnerability to do what he/she is told, influences him/her to lie that sexual abuse did or did not happen.
Stage 2 (8 – 10 years)	• Child may understand wrongfulness, but conforms to instructions to please or to avoid punishment. • If the relationship with perpetrator is the strongest relationship, child will most likely not disclose. • If the relationship with the non-offending parent is supportive, likelihood of disclosure is greater. • Child is vulnerable to do what he/she is told, including lying about the absence or presence of involvement in sexual abuse.

Stage 3 (10 – 12 years)	• Child understands wrongfulness and may disclose the abuse.
	• If supportive relationships exist apart from the perpetrator, and these relationships become more significant than the relationship with the perpetrator, the child may disclose.
	• Child whose emotional needs are not met by caregivers could make a false allegation in order to gain nurture from others.
Stage 4 (12 – 13 years)	• Child understands the wrongfulness and understands the consequences of disclosure to the perpetrator and others.
Stage 5 (early adolescence and older)	• Child understands the wrongfulness and may disclose to prevent the perpetrator to hurt others.
Stage 6 (middle adolescence and older	• Child assesses the exploitation and does what he/she thinks is right.

(Kuehnle, 1996:54-55).

The researcher is of the opinion that every professional that works with allegedly sexually abused children must know how children interpret sexual abuse. If a child who still stays in his/her family home and adores his/her father denies the abuse, it does not necessarily mean that it did not happen, or that he/she is coached or difficult – it is typical of a child in the middle childhood to react in that way. The interviewer would also be more supportive of an adolescent that comes to the office alone and disclose abuse. Typical of her moral reasoning the teenager can make a conscious decision due to her developmental stage. It is also important that the interviewers must be alert that adolescents can make up false allegations independently.

It is the opinion of the researcher that it is vital for interviewers to understand the moral development of children in the middle childhood as it has an impact on the understanding of the child's responses and reactions.

3.11   SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

According to Van Dyk (2005:152) children in Grade 4 and Grade 5 (aged 10/11) are often aware of their own sexual feelings and desires and often feel confused and conflicted about these feelings. Children in the middle childhood are curios about sex and often engage in various forms of simple sexual play (Van Dyk, 2005:152). The researcher has experienced that when working with victims of child sexual abuse, it is imperative to have a thorough understanding of normal sexual development.   The researcher experienced that children become increasingly inquisitive about body parts.

3.11.1 Normal and abnormal sexual behaviours in middle childhood children

Children are curious about sex and therefore sexual play in middle childhood is usually experimental and it has nothing to do with love or sexual urges (Van Dyk, 2005:152). Due to adults reacting with anger or disgust to the sexual exploration in which children engage, children's main source of information will usually be their peer group. This information is often incorrect or distorted, causing anxiety in children. Children involved in natural and expected sex play are of similar age, size and developmental status. They participate on a voluntarily basis and are children who have an ongoing, mutually enjoyable play and/or school friendship (Kubik & Hecker, 2005:43; Ney, 1995:57).   Natural and expected sexual exploration may result in embarrassment, but do not usually leave children with deep feelings of anger, shame, fear, or anxiety and if they are discovered and instructed to stop, the behaviour generally diminishes (Cavanah,1995: 4). The attitude of the children towards the sexual behaviour is generally light-hearted and spontaneous.

Children's natural and expected sexual behaviour, as well as their level of comfort with sexuality, will be affected by the amount of exposure they have had to adult sexuality, nudity and explicit television, videos and pictures, as well as their level of sexual interest (Kubik & Hecker, 2005:43; Ney, 1995:58).   While sexualised

behaviour and post-traumatic stress syndrome (James & Gilland, 2005:175) are the only two symptoms that occur more frequently in sexually abused children than in clinical comparison groups of non-abused children, less than half of sexually abused children manifest sexual behaviours of concern (Ney, 1995:51).

In a study of 1017 black and white adolescents, it was determined that exposure to sexual content in music, movies, television and magazines caused increasing risk of engaging in early sexual intercourse (Brown, L'Engle, Pardun, Guo, Kenneavy & Jackson, 2007:24). According to Kuehnle (1996:56) masturbation and exposure are the most common types of sexual behaviour among pre-school and primary school children.

A developmental continuum has been classified by Sgroi (1988:57-58) where children's normal and abnormal sexual behaviour were classified into three categories:

- Touching oneself.
- Looking at others.
- Touching others.

Table: 3.6: Sexual behaviour in children: normal versus sexual reactive behaviour

AGE 7 – 10 YEARS	NORMAL BEHAVIOUR	SEXUAL REACTIVE BEHAVIOUR
Touching oneself	• Masturbate in private.	• Excessive masturbation that interferes in play behaviour and daily activities.
Looking at others	• Engage in games involving sexual exposure (playing doctor). • Engage in competitions (who can urinate the furthest). • Engage in dares that have a sexual component (game-like atmosphere).	• Excessive attempts to observe other's nudity which violates other's privacy.

Touching others	• Touching within context of game or play. • Stroking genitals rather than penetration. • Absence of force or coercion. • Engagement due to peer pressure and not out of fear.	• Excessive sex play which interferes in other social activities. • Initiates sexual activities with adults. • Forces sexual involvement of peers or younger children with themselves.

Adapted from Sgroi (1988:2-8) and Kubik and Hecker (2005:43).

3.11.2 Impact of television on children's sexual interest

There are plenty of sexual content on television containing scenes of kissing and a modest frequency of implied or depicted intercourse. Children aged 2 to 11 years, who have access to television, spend an average of 21 hours and 49 minutes per week watching television, and teenagers aged 12 to 17 years old spend on average 17 hours and 16 minutes per week watching television (Comstock & Scharrer, 2006:823).

It is the experience of the researcher that children in the middle childhood often watch television during the afternoons and early evenings. In South Africa the soap operas (soaps) start at 16:30 in the afternoon, giving children access to scenes of kissing and implied sexual intercourse. The researcher has standard questions which she poses to children during interviews to assess their exposure to television. Questions relate to what happened in a specific soap, what kind of programmes they watch and what the rules are with regard to age restriction of programmes or movies. It is important to determine what happens if the child watched a movie during the weekend and his/her parents go to sleep. This is done to assess whether the child sometimes watches movies alone. In South Africa, pornographic movies are shown after midnight on the free channel e-TV. This type of movies may have a detrimental impact on children if they watch it. The interviewer should assess whether the child has watched these kinds of programmes.

The researcher concludes that due to the impact of media and advanced technology, the existence of explicit knowledge about sexual activities cannot be the only assessment guidelines to indicate that sexual abuse has occurred, but multiple hypotheses should be investigated.

3.12   SUMMARY

Due to the developmental changes children go through in the middle childhood, it is imperative that forensic interviewers be informed on what could be expected from the child's physical, cognitive, language, socio-emotional, sexual and moral development.

This study focuses on children in the middle childhood, therefore only the middle childhood period (from 6 to 12 years) was discussed.   Reference to other developmental phases was made, where applicable, in order to give a more holistic picture of child development.

A child that has been sexually abused during the middle childhood does not only have to cope with changes in his/her body, but also with cognitions like "I am damaged", which may alter the way the child looks at the him-/herself.

It is also found by the researcher that it is more difficult for boys to sit still during an interview and they want more physical activities than girls.   The fine motor skills are developing progressively and it could be expected from the child to draw pictures or write.

Piaget's concrete operational stage were discussed which span from ages 6 to 12 years.   Tasks achieved during this stage include conversation, seriation, spational reasoning, cognitive maps, decentration, declining egocentrism, and decrease in animism.   Limitations to the concrete operational stage are that children still have great difficulty answering abstract and hypothetical questions.   The middle childhood child understands that sexual behaviour is wrong and may think he/she is bad because he/she is engaged in "bad" behaviour, and could also be

manipulated into worrying about the consequences to the perpetrator without having insight into consequences for him-/herself.

The encoding, storage and retrieval of memory were discussed and it was determined that various factors have an influence on whether the child would be able to retrieve memories of an event. The working memory of a child is very important to understand, as the professional must be sensitive that during sexual abuse children will not necessarily encode what would later be expected from them during formal interviews.

To ask a child to draw a picture about a specific event in combination with non-leading verbal prompts can enhance the verbal reports of children over the age of 4 years.

The middle childhood is a phase where the child masters various language and communication skills. However, miscommunication may occur when adults ask leading and suggestive questions.

Important semantics should be kept in mind when working with a middle childhood child. The importance of clarifying was highlighted, especially with regard to how many times an incident occurred, as well as the time it happened. Children in the middle childhood find it difficult to retell happenings in chronological order and also struggle with syntax like word order, tag questions, multiple questions and pronouns.

The importance of framing an event by summarising facts and introducing a new topic would assist the child to optimally remember happenings. Children in the middle childhood find it difficult to specify the number of times, the time and the place the abuse happened.

Emotional development of children were investigated and it was determined that, according to Erickson, children in the middle childhood (aged 6 to 12 years) experience the crisis of industry versus inferiority and they develop competence.

It was noted that victims of child sexual abuse in the middle childhood may co-operate during the sexual abuse in order to avoid punishment or to please the adult. If the child has a close relationship with the perpetrator he/she would most likely not disclose. The older the children, the more likely they are to disclose, especially if they have a supportive relationship apart from the relationship with the perpetrator. It was noted that false allegations could me made to gain nurture from others.

A natural curiosity about sex exists in the middle childhood and if sexual play occurs, it is experimental and has nothing to do with love or sexual urges. A differentiation between normal and abnormal sexual behaviour was made.

It was also found that the media has an important impact on children's sexual interest.