

## Book Review

***The Handbook on Questioning Children: A Linguistic Perspective, 3rd ed.***, by Anne Graffam Walker, co-edited by Julie Kenniston and Sally Small Inada. Washington, D. C.: American Bar Association, 2013. 157 pp. (ISBN: 978-1-62722-203-7). \$30.00 paperback.

After 14 years, the seminal book on questioning children by Anne Graffam Walker has been modernized with co-author Julie Kenniston. Although much of the original information remains the same, this edition contains current research citations, additional topics, and beautiful graphics, all of which enhance the reader's experience.

When it was first published in the mid-1990s, the *Handbook* was groundbreaking. It was the most comprehensive reference guide yet for professionals in the justice system on how to gather accurate information from children for the court process. Walker, a forensic linguist who specialized in courtroom communication, posited that children processed information differently than adults. She noted children sometimes gave inconsistent or confusing answers not because they were incompetent but because questioners structured their questions poorly. Walker offered readers a how-to guide on questioning children in a linguistically appropriate and legally sound way.

The latest edition of the *Handbook* is divided into seven chapters and 11 appendices. Readers will appreciate the authors' practical advice and clear prose as well as the variety of subjects covered. Although the *Handbook* has only minor changes to the body of the text, the new appendices and up-to-date references will ensure readers use current research as the basis for their interview practices.

Thomas Lyon, PhD, JD, authored the Foreword, in which he emphasizes laboratory and field research has confirmed Walker's recommendations for questioning children. Walker's preface is unchanged from the previous edition, but co-author Kenniston adds a touching additional preface describing how she became involved in this edition and a note of appreciation for Walker's influence on her and the field of interviewing.

As with previous editions of the book, the third edition begins with an introduction, which lays out basic facts about children's linguistic development. This chapter contains vital information for someone who is unfamiliar with children's language and cognitive skills at each stage of development.

From the beginning, Walker wants “to point the way to the kind of questioning that will build on children’s strengths in telling us what we need to know” (p. 2).

The second chapter provides a foundation for the rest of the book. Eighteen principles of interviewing children are established. Walker grounds the reader in the mindset that each child functions differently as a result of their own personal growth pattern, family, culture, and experiences. She also discusses assumptions adults make about children’s communication (i.e., children and adults do not speak the same language, children’s responses to your questions are not necessarily answers to your questions, and the ability to recite a list is not the same as the ability to understand its contents). The information in this chapter enlightens the reader to the child’s perspective during the interview process and, hopefully, enables the reader to understand something the authors put forth from the beginning of the book: We do not question children—we question one child at a time.

The largest section of the book addresses problems in how interviewers structure their questions, such as issues with prepositions, pronouns, sentence structure, legal words, and word meanings. Readers will gain valuable, concrete tips on how to phrase questions in a way that children understand what is being asked.

One of the most problematic issues for investigators and court personnel is determining why there are inconsistencies in children’s testimony. The *Handbook* offers concise explanations for these inconsistencies. Readers will see some of the reasons children are inconsistent pertain to children’s perspective and functioning (i.e., they misapply words or have incomplete acquisition of a linguistic rule), whereas other inconsistencies may be the result of adults’ errors (i.e., repeated questioning, adult assumptions, and failure to ask follow-up questions). After reading the various reasons for inconsistencies, readers will hopefully have a better understanding of and ability to decrease inconsistent statements.

The newest additions to the *Handbook* are in the appendices section. This edition added seven topics and an updated narrative on children’s competency. The appendices take up almost 40 pages of the book, and every page is worth reading. Walker’s previously written appendices (checklist, suggestions, and review of sentence-building principles) remain intact as they are as relevant as ever. Kenniston developed all of the new appendices, which address a variety of specific topics: using narrative event practices; interviewing persons with disabilities; color; adolescents; and minimizing miscommunication. Lyon co-authored with Kenniston the appendices pertaining to children’s competency and giving children instructions to testify in court.

Missing from this edition are the author and subject index sections that concluded the previous edition of the *Handbook*. Those indices were helpful—particularly for the new child interview practitioner—and it is unfortunate they weren’t included in this edition.

Obtaining accurate information from children is critical in investigations and the court process. Too often children are asked complex and developmentally inappropriate questions which may yield inaccurate information. Walker and Kenniston offer the reader a practical and interesting book to assist them with gathering information from children. Attorneys, judges, and interviewers would all benefit from, and enjoy, reading this latest edition of *The Handbook on Questioning Children*.

*Andi Grosvald Hamilton*  
*American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children*  
Child Forensic Interview Clinic Trainer