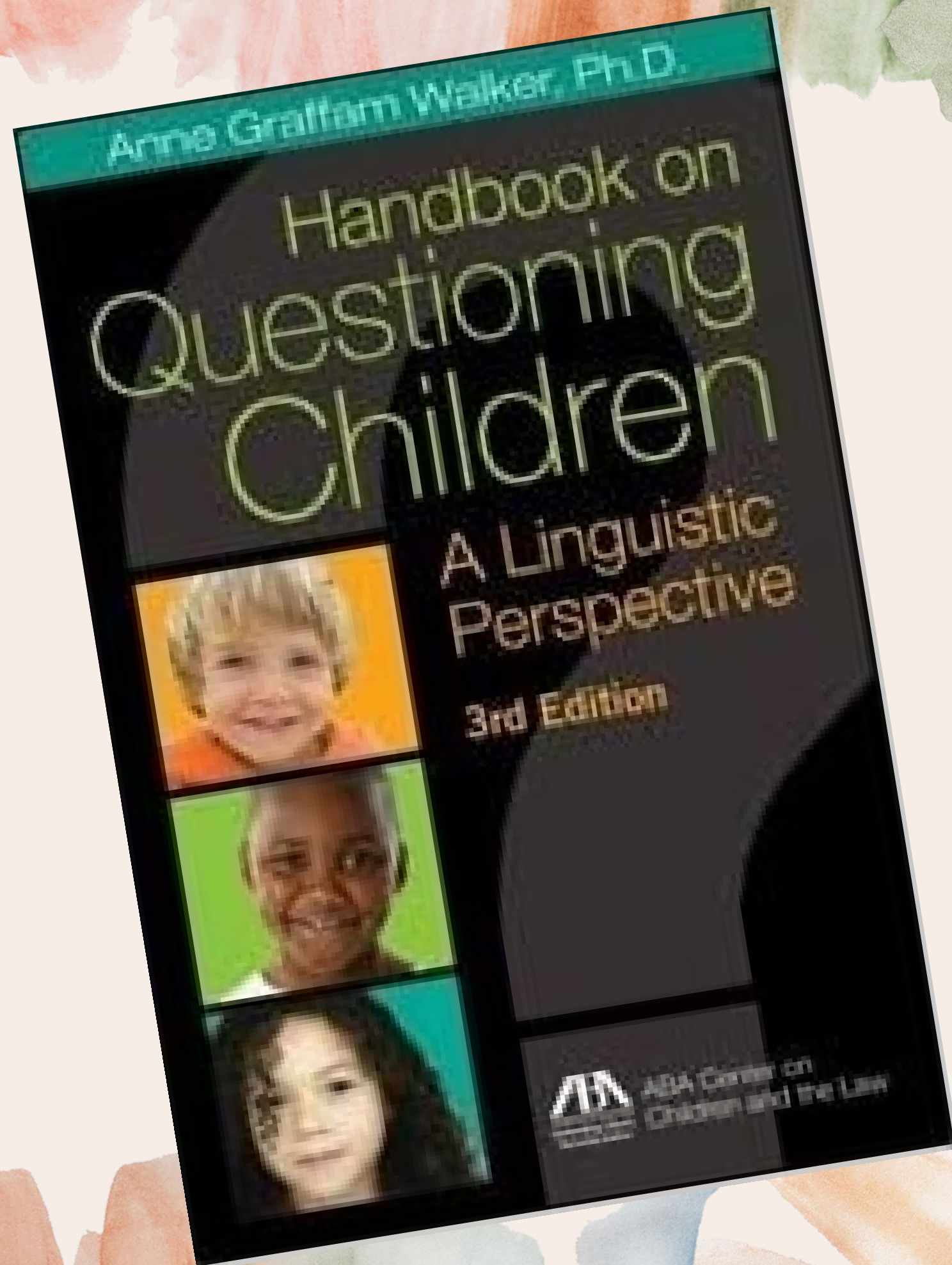


# Some Sources of Miscommunication with Children

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# Recommended Reading



What makes talking to children different from talking to adults?



Children and adults do not  
speak the same language



Language acquisition is gradual  
and inconsistent across childhood  
and adolescence

Language is shaped by experience  
and environment  
Vocabulary, syntax, conversational patterns...

Big vocabulary  $\neq$  adult-like  
capabilities

We don't question  
children.

We question one  
child at a time.



# Children tend to:

Provide non-elaborated responses to yes/no or forced-choice questions

Not tell us when they don't understand or when something is ambiguous


Struggle with questions containing ANY negatives (no, not, ---n't)



# Stay Curious!

- Things that seem to make no sense often do eventually
- Fewer life experiences = harder to explain, define and put in context new experiences
- Different vocabulary, application of words





I didn't even know  
she ate a chocolate  
pudding

Lead on, oh Kinky  
Turtle!

He did it with a  
circle in a square



# Blame yourself for all misunderstandings!

- *Fall on your sword!*
- It's not important for the child to understand why your confusion was justified
- We never want children to feel blamed/wrong
- Help reduce the power differential

I'm confused about \_\_\_\_\_. Tell me more about it.

More productive than asking children to define words!

I don't think I know about \_\_\_\_\_. Tell me everything about it.

I'm trying to picture \_\_\_\_\_ in my mind. Tell me everything about it.



Let's practice!

Pretty soon, it's gonna be time for the limp dicks.

What do we ask to understand what the child is talking about?



What do we do when a child says something inconsistent with earlier statements or outside information?





Gently confront apparent  
inconsistencies, with  
curiosity and not  
accusation

I'm confused. I think I heard you say X, and I also heard you say Y. Help me understand.

I'm trying to understand this part of what you told me: I remember you saying X, but I also remember you saying Y.

I'm not sure if I understand. I heard you might have told your teacher some other things that we haven't talked about, yet.



# Some Specific Sources of Miscommunication

- Under-Inclusivity
- Indexical / Relative Terms
- Grain-Size Ambiguities
- Passive / Active Voice
- Anaphora / Ellipsis
- Pseudotemporal Invitations
- Sequence Term Ambiguities





Children are  
**UNDER-INCLUSIVE**  
with category terms





Children have narrower  
definitions for:

**TOUCH**

Did Sam ever touch you a different time?

No, just that time



Tell me about a different time you felt [weird / uncomfortable / child's words] with Sam

Mostly just all the times when Sam made me lick his private part



Tell me other things that happened at Sam's

Well, Sam always rubbed / washed /  
tickled me on my pee-pee





Children have narrower  
definitions for:

**CLOTHES**

Where were your clothes when Pat started touching your wee-wee?

Oh, I didn't have on my clothes

Tell me more about not having on your clothes then

We were at the pool, so I only had my swim suit





Children have narrower  
definitions for:

SOMETHING / ANYTHING  
ELSE LIKE THAT

Did something like that ever happen on a different day?

No.

Tell me about other things that have happened when you got in trouble with [suspect]

That was the only time she hit me with her silver belt, but sometimes she hits me with the charger cord, or she uses the vacuum cord when she wants to choke me.





# Let's practice!

Child has described one incident during which stepdad strangled mom after he read a text on mom's phone. Child described feeling "so scared," seeing mom cry, and thinking mom might die.

What else could we ask to screen for other incidents of violence in the home?

Children do not share  
our adult  
understandings of  
relative terms



Was it big or small?

Was it hard or soft?

Was that a long time ago or a short time ago?



Was she old or young?

To little kids, older = bigger/taller



# Grain Size Ambiguity

Differing concepts of the scope or size of a question

Where did you wake up this morning?

- The left side of my bed
- Home
- Kent, Washington
- The United States
- Earth




Where did she touch you?

- My body
- Between my legs
- In the middle of the foldy part of my private
  
- The living room
- Pop-Pop's house
- Oregon

None are wrong!  
Dig deeper!







I want to learn  
even more  
about that.

Tell me  
everything  
about that.

Tell me more.



Tell me  
everything you  
could see at that  
moment.



Resist the urge to jump  
to a multiple-choice  
question

Who else was there?

Nobody.

What do we mean by *there*?

- On the bed?
- In the room?
- In the home?



Tell me everyone who was in the room  
when \_\_\_\_\_ happened.

Tell me everyone who was home when  
\_\_\_\_\_ happened.

Where was [Mom, Dad, etc.] when  
\_\_\_\_\_ happened?



# Passive vs Active Voice



Children often deny contact that's worded as them being the actor

Questions worded as the child being the actor can imply judgment or blame

Keep the focus on the suspect's actions, when a child is describing being made to do something



Did your mouth ever touch his penis?

No!!  
*(He put his penis in my mouth)*



Was there ever a time  
when your hand touched  
her private?

No, I would never do that.  
*(She rubbed my hand on her private)*

Children can confuse the subject and object if the object appears first in the sentence

Were you ever  
hit by him?

**No!**

(I didn't hit him – he hit me!)



# Anaphora:

using a substitute for a word used earlier



# Anaphora:

using a substitute for a word used earlier

I like Stella. She is nice.

(pronoun)



# Anaphora:

using a substitute for a word used earlier

Bryce ate pasta. So did  
Angel.



# Anaphora:


using a substitute for a word used earlier

So, your mom was at work. What about your dad?



# Anaphora:

using a substitute for a word used earlier



So, your mom was at work. *Where was your dad?*

# Anaphora:


using a substitute for a word used earlier

~~You said it started  
raining. Was that while  
he was hurting you?~~



# Anaphora:

using a substitute for a word used earlier

A black cat with bright yellow eyes is looking upwards and to the right. The background features abstract watercolor washes in shades of green and orange. A speech bubble is positioned to the right of the cat, containing a question.

What was happening  
when it first started  
raining?

# Ellipsis:

omitting part of the sentence



# Ellipsis:

omitting part of the sentence

You said your mom hit  
you. Did your dad [hit  
you]?



# Ellipsis:

omitting part of the sentence

Where were your  
clothes?

They stayed  
on.

And his?



# Ellipsis:

omitting part of the sentence

Where were your  
clothes?

They stayed  
on.

And where were  
Paul's clothes?



# Ellipsis:

omitting part of the sentence

What did you see when Shay  
came in the room?

And hear?

Just her,  
looking mad.



# Ellipsis:

omitting part of the sentence

What did you see when Shay  
came in the room?

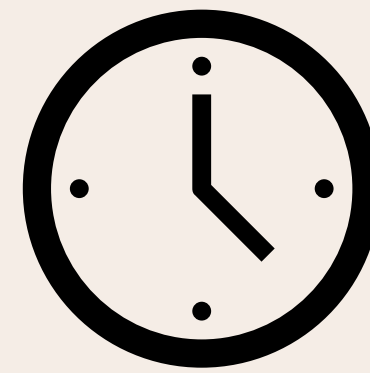
And what did you hear  
when Shay came in the  
room?

Just her,  
looking mad.





# Pseudotemporal Invitations



Tell me about a  
time when...

Many children hear this as 'What time was it when...'



# Pseudotemporal Invitations

Tell me about the  
last time you got  
whooped.

Tell me more about  
the time at Nana's.

...first time, last time,  
worst time, time it  
was different...

Tell me about a  
different time Mom  
and Dad fought.



# Pseudotemporal Invitations

What happened the last  
time/ a different time /  
etc

# Temporal Priming

Children are especially likely to think you're asking 'what time was it when...' if you've already asked them a 'when' question previously



# Sequence Term Ambiguities

BEFORE & AFTER



# Sequence Term Ambiguities

ever before/after vs  
immediately before/after



# Sequence Term Ambiguities

Did you tell your mom after?

No.  
[She wasn't there]



# Sequence Term Ambiguities

Had you ever seen him before?

Yeah.

[When he walked in 30 seconds earlier]



# Sequence Term Ambiguities

- Stay organized
- When exploring 'ever' before/after, signal to the child  
*...even on a different day?*



THANK YOU!!

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