

FAQ 21: Who should interview children – what difference does it make?

What's the issue?

The asymmetry in power between adults and children can create distortions when adults interview children. Children may become anxious, try too hard to please, their privacy may be easily invaded, and so forth. The risk is that the researcher will obtain misleading information containing social desirability biases.

Common practice

One strategy is to assign the child interviewee an “expert role” – for example, let them know that they are the expert on their own media use, and explain that you would like to understand better what the child already knows.

Another strategy is to pay careful attention to the dynamics of the situation, including such practicalities as **r** set the tone and **p**ace of the interaction.

child.

them but explain what is coming next.

ot formally.

e the child's awareness of the power relations in an interview.

s language, glossary, and expressions.

A researcher's experience

Even though one researcher can be sufficient in research with adolescents, two researchers may occasionally be needed with younger children. In a normal usability lab situation, the researcher takes both the roles of observer and facilitator. Zaman (2005) explains that, because of the need to make younger children feel comfortable during the usability tests, speaking through an intercom system (from the observing room) is too impersonal for children who are sitting alone in the living room (the testing room). In this special case, to prevent children from feeling left to their own devices, a second researcher, who sits next to them and guides t

References and further resources

Zaman, B. (2005). *Evaluating games with children*. Paper presented at the Proceedings of Interact 2005 Workshop on Child computer Interaction: Methodological Research, Rome, Italy.