



Department of Psychology Colloquium Series

After 20 years
of research on
children's
eyewitness
testimony, are
there any
challenges left?



Thursday, November 3rd, 2016

2:30 p.m.

Southam Hall 304



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Well publicized instances of wrongful convictions of child sexual abuse led researchers in the '80s and '90s to focus on how accurately children can recall experiences, and whether they can be persuaded to describe an event that never happened. Since then, an internationally-agreed consensus supported by scientific evidence clearly lays out that children can provide accurate accounts in response to 'open-ended questions' and can be misled and report false events in other circumstances. So why, then, are children's rights consistently violated by preventing them from using their own 'voice' to describe their personal experiences and respond to allegations that are false? The reasons are both practical (the training offered to investigative interviewers) and theoretical (children's limitations based on their neurological and social development). I will outline the major impediments (as I see them) to implementing the evidence-based international guidelines, and identify some specific issues that were not addressed by the international community. In particular, I will focus on children's ability to remember the origins of their knowledge (their own repeated experiences, multiple interviews, contamination from peers, etc.) and present some innovative techniques shown to be helpful in reducing errors and maximizing accurate recall. Participants can come to their own conclusions about the effectiveness of the Canadian justice system and, indeed, whether there are any challenges left.