13. Study Overview

An informed parent is a comfortable parent! Some parents are concerned about what exactly their child will be exposed to. Provide the parent a general overview of the kinds of topics examined in our lab, as well as some details about the specific study the child will be participating in. Throughout the study, parents (and children old enough to understand) should know what’s going on at all times. Tell them what you’re doing, and what you need them to do. Be explicit in your directions, and when applicable, explain why.

The steps:

1. Briefly explain the topics examined in our lab:
   a. “Our research focuses on understanding how children form categories of animals, everyday objects, and people, and how they use this information to make sense of the world around them.

2. Use the study brochure to provide specific details about the study you will be conducting:
   a. “This particular study focuses on (this part of the script will be dependent on what study you are running).”
   b. Discuss with the supervisor of the study how to appropriately prepare the parent and the child for what you are going to do—your explanation should include a basic description of the procedure and showing the parent stimuli where applicable.

3. Explain what the initial setup is and provide details about the study format:
   a. “First I’ll be showing her some pictures on the computer screen and then I’m going to ask her to make some guesses about the pictures.”
   b. “First I’m going to read him a short story and then I’m going to ask him some questions about the story. The whole thing should take about 10 minutes.”

4. Tell parent his/her role (or lack thereof)
   a. If you need the parent to make sure he/she doesn’t speak or give any cues, explain why (e.g. “because your child usually tries to check in with you for clues about what’s going on, but we’re interested in what your child thinks on her own...”)
   b. Be specific in your directions: “We ask that you face the wall so that you won’t see the screen. Your child will probably be checking in with you a lot, and we don’t want them to pick up any cues from you; we’re interested to find out what they think on their own. We’d be happy to show you the videos they were watching at the end of the study.”
   c. “Please try not to give your child any verbal cues or point; we’re controlling the language/cues we use during the study.”

5. Situate the child
   a. Make sure that the parent/child will be comfortable with the setup:
      i. Make adjustments if necessary (e.g. put child on parent’s lap, find a different place or position for the child to sit).
   b. Note that you should not pick up a child, or have a child sit on your lap.
   c. For preschool and older, use an age-appropriate voice to entice the child to his/her chair or spot. “I have a special seat for you right over here!”

Example script:

“Before we get started, I’m going to ask you to sign a consent form. This form explains that your child’s participation in this study is completely voluntary, so you or your child can stop at any time. We do use a video camera to record the sessions, but the recordings are for research purposes only, and are completely confidential. Your child’s name will not be connected with their results. You can include their first name, initials, or even leave this blank—however, we will need an accurate birthdate, as our studies are age-dependent.

The second page we have included is a demographics form. Here we ask for some basic demographic information. We ask these questions so we can make sure that we include families from all different backgrounds in our research. If there are particular questions you feel uncomfortable answering, please feel free to just leave them blank.

Our research focuses on understanding how children form categories of animals, everyday objects, and people, and how they use this information to make sense of the world around them. In particular, the study we will be doing today aims to examine... 

First I’m going to read a short story and then I’m going to ask some questions about the story. The whole thing should take about 10 minutes. The only thing we ask is that you don’t provide any cues or feedback for the duration of the study. We are interested in what your child thinks on their own—there are no right or wrong answers.

I will give you some time to read through all of these forms, and please feel free to ask me any questions! We are so excited to have you here today!”