Hello. My name is Martha Arterberry, and I am a faculty member at Colby College. My Element is titled Children’s Eyewitness Testimony and Event Memory.

I probably don’t have to convince you of the importance of children’s eyewitness testimony. Unfortunately, a lot of children end up being involved in crimes, whether they are direct victims or bystanders. And so there are times when they need to report on what happened.

Even memory more generally enriches all of our lives. We spend a lot of time reporting on what happened yesterday, a month ago, or many years ago. In this Element, I consider a number of factors that influence children’s ability to report on events and look at it from a developmental perspective.

I like to organize these ideas in this diagram. Here you see four general factors that might influence children’s eyewitness testimony. The upper right, blue factors, pertain to memory, not surprising. Events themselves have features that make them more or less memorable, and I illustrate these in the lower left in green. Eyewitness testimony – the witnessing and reporting on events – takes place in a social and cultural context. In red, on the lower right, you see the larger cultural context and the factors that may influence children’s reporting on events. And finally, we all differ, and these individual differences [upper right in orange] may affect the extent to which a child is able or willing to report on what happened.

So this Element explores a number of factors from these different domains to try to understand children’s eyewitness testimony, children’s event memory, and how development in these different domains impact that.

After considering children’s eyewitness testimony, I consider adults’ perceptions of children’s reliability and honesty. Potential jurors are faced with trying to evaluate children’s testimony of events, particularly in a criminal context.

Finally, I consider and demonstrate how this basic research has been put into practice by practitioners who interact with children, who have unfortunately have been victims of crimes and need to provide the best and most reliable report.

So I hope you enjoy reading this Element, and I look forward to your questions or comments that you can send to me via email: martha.arterberry@colby.edu. Thank you.