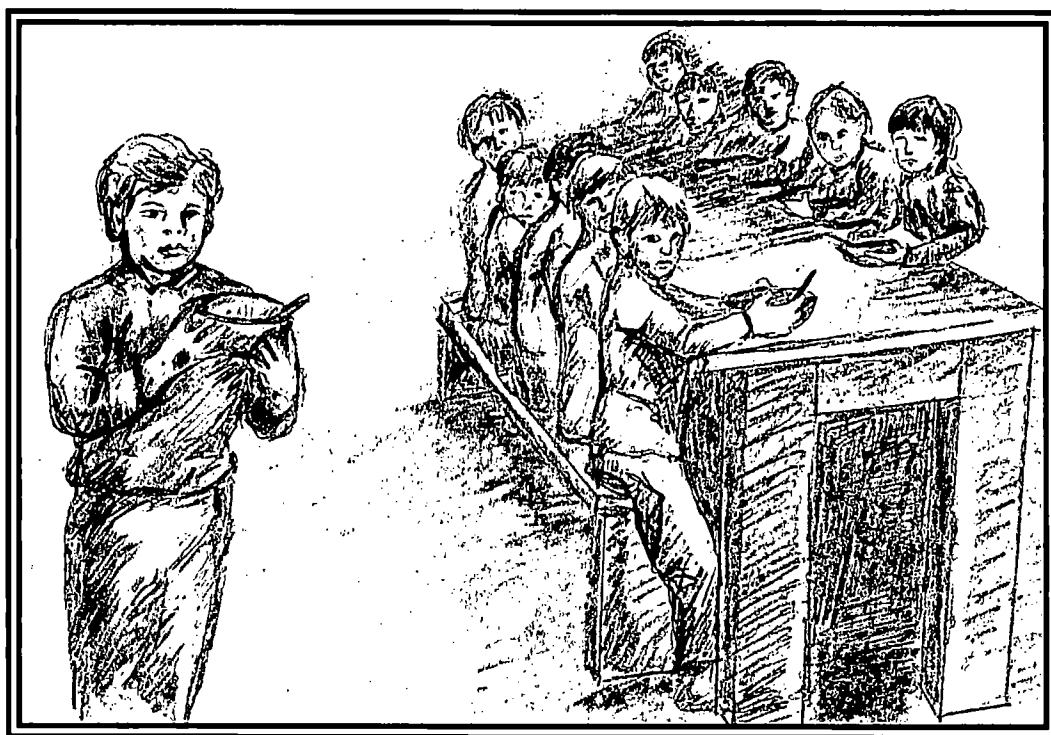




CHILD PROTECTION LEADER

June, 1994

Should We Return to Orphanages?



A growing number of child welfare professionals and policy makers are calling for a return to orphanages as means of out-of-home care for children who cannot safely remain in their own homes. Their supporters view orphanages as a better alternative to the current child welfare system and an answer to the issue of "foster care drift".

Historical data suggest that although orphanages were a widespread American institution for over a century, there is good reason why, over the last 60 to 70 years they have mainly been replaced with other methods of child care. There were nearly 600 orphanages in this country by 1890, and over 1,200 by 1923. But even by the 1860's, the majority of children in orphanages had at least one living parent and by the turn of the century orphanages often temporarily cared for children with two living parents who

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simply could not afford to provide for their children. The orphanage care these children received in lieu of remaining with their families was criticized as cold, authoritarian, regimented, and offering limited affection from caretakers and little opportunity to learn adult independent living skills. Much of this criticism was warranted.

From about 1920 to 1950, the child welfare system gradually replaced orphanages with foster care for children in other families' homes. At the same time, direct financial support for poor children was enhanced, helping to enable impoverished parents to care for their own children. Today, most institutional care is aimed at providing needed specialized services for children with severe emotional or psychological problems or extensive physical disability needs. Furthermore, many group care facilities have adapted to provide an environment that is more "home-like" and less "institutional" in nature (for example, through cottage arrangements on a campus or dispersed group home settings in communities).

What we know about children, families, and institutional care does not suggest that we ought to endorse the widespread use of orphanages for substitute care. By far the greater number of child welfare and mental health professionals believe that a family setting is superior to orphanages in meeting children's emotional, psychological and physical needs. Children need a nurturing environment which supports their healthy growth and development, and if their own families cannot provide such a home, a foster family is typically the best temporary, and an adoptive home the best permanent, substitute.

Infants in particular, the fastest growing segment of the current substitute care population, are best cared for in a home or home-like setting not in an institution. A group home may be the preferred alternative only if it can offer permanence and meet a special need such as a transition to independent living for older youth who otherwise may drift from one foster setting to another with little chance for adoption.

When out-of-home care is necessary to ensure that children are safe, they should continue to be placed in the least restrictive, most family-like setting possible, and within their own community, whenever possible. Increased efforts to find and support competent foster parents (including relatives) in a community setting are needed, as are efforts to recruit foster families of color and to ensure that agency requirements for foster parenting do not unintentionally present barriers to those who wish to serve as foster parents. In the long run, providing the supports that will help families stay together and working to improve the availability and continuity of quality foster care will serve children and their families better than a wholesale return to orphanages for substitute care.

The current system of providing for neglected or abused children recognizes the guiding principle that most parents want to be good parents and care for their own children but not all parents have the necessary skills and resources to do so effectively. Our efforts to support families in their most important role should therefore remain directed primarily at helping to provide resources, fortify family structure, and strengthen parenting skills.

References and research information from: Hacsí, Tim. "Are Orphanages the Answer?" Chicago Tribune, March, 1994; Rouyer, Jennifer S. "Families, Not Orphanages" Washington Post, March 25, 1994.

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American Humane Association, Children's Division, is a membership organization. For information on membership, contact Christine Race at 1-800-227-4645.



CHILD PROTECTION LEADER

December, 1994

Cultural Competence in Child Protective Services



Human behavior is tremendously complex and rich with diversity. People think differently and make different choices based upon their cultural traditions and expectations. To effectively serve families and children in today's diverse American communities, child protective services agencies must recognize the important role which culture plays in the lives of all human beings and must strive for cultural competence.

A culturally competent agency is one that emphasizes the strengths inherent in all cultures, respects cultural differences, and effectively incorporates cultural knowledge into service provision. The goal of equal and nondiscriminatory services is included in cultural competence, but true cultural competence goes further to ensure that service provision is responsive to the cultural needs of

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clients. Cultural competence also involves working in partnership with natural, informal support and helping networks within communities, such as neighborhood centers; religious institutions; day care programs; cultural arts, music and after school programs; and extended family networks.

A commitment to cultural competence is most likely to pervade agency practice if it begins with a formal statement at the highest administrative level. In addition to providing services that respect cultural considerations, administrators can help to ensure culturally competent practice by promoting staff diversity and providing worker training that teaches respect for cultural considerations and imparts cultural knowledge. The assessment and treatment modalities that are taught and utilized by the agency should define what is "normal" in the context of the client's culture. Workers can also be helped to develop cross-cultural communication skills, and the agency should provide bilingual services when appropriate. Periodically, agency administrators should formally assess the progress of the agency as a whole in reaching its goals to provide culturally competent services, delivered by a diverse and culturally aware work force.

At the individual worker level, workers need to be aided to acknowledge cultural differences and to develop awareness of how they affect social work practice. Acceptance of these differences in life outlook, communications, and the definition of family can be critical in generating a successful working partnership. When workers understand the role of culture in their own lives and how day to day behaviors are shaped by cultural norms and values, they can begin to appreciate the complexity of cross-cultural interaction and its influence on the helping process.

In the final analysis, a culturally competent child welfare agency is one which: (1) values diversity through acceptance and respect for cultural difference, (2) has the capacity for self-assessment of cultural competence, (3) is attentive to the dynamics of cultural interaction, (4) has an institutionalized base of cultural knowledge and resources, and (5) has adapted its service resources to meet the needs of children and families from all racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Information adapted from: Cross, Terry L.; Barzon, Barbara J.; Dennis, Karl W.; and Isaacs, Mareasa, R. (1989). Towards a Culturally Competent System of Care: A Monograph on Effective Services for Minority Children Who Are Severely Emotionally Disturbed, Washington, DC: CASSP Technical Assistance Center, Georgetown University Child Development Center.

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CHILD PROTECTION LEADER

September, 1994

The Link Between Child Abuse and Domestic Violence

A growing body of research points to a definite link between adult domestic violence and child abuse. These connections are pervasive. Forty-five to seventy percent of battered women in shelters report that their batterers have also committed some form of child abuse. Even using the more conservative figure, child abuse is 15 times more likely to occur in households where adult domestic violence is also present. Women who have been beaten by their spouses are, in turn, reportedly twice as likely as other women to abuse a child. It is also estimated that 3.3 million to 10 million children witness domestic violence each year. Many child witnesses of domestic violence experience increased problems themselves.



These connections make it important for those working in the field of child abuse and neglect to understand the connection between spousal abuse and child abuse, and to respond with treatment and protective resources that recognize the link. Cooperation between professionals working with battered women and abused or neglected children is essential. In practice, formal connections between the two fields are not often in place. They are sorely needed, however,

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beginning with the initial intake contact with the abused child or battered woman, and continuing through assessment of the precipitating incident and family interaction, treatment planning, intervention strategies, and evaluation of client progress.

A variety of family dynamics are at work in homes where spouse abuse leads to child abuse or neglect. Sometimes a child is the unintended victim when he or she attempts to intervene in an attack on a parent. In other instances, a child is accidentally struck by a blow directed at the mother. However, many children are deliberate targets in violent households. The severity of wife beating is also predictive of the severity of child abuse, and the manner in which children are abused bears a strong resemblance to the type of maltreatment experienced by their mothers.

More difficult for many to understand is the battered woman who abuses or neglects her children. According to those who work with battered women, several explanations are possible. In an effort to forestall further violence, some battered women devote all their attention to their abusers, or they withdraw from the family — even the children — in an effort to protect themselves. Both responses may result in child neglect. The tremendous stress associated with living in a violent situation may also prompt physical abuse of children by those women at risk for such behaviors. Some physical or emotional abuse of children also results from battered women who are so fearful of their spouse's reaction to childhood behavior that they overdiscipline in an attempt to protect the children from what they perceive to be the greater danger from the batterer.

Even in households in which children are not themselves physically abused or neglected, they can be victimized by witnessing spousal abuse. Because children do not fully understand the dynamics of domestic violence, they may come to view power and control, aggression and violence as the only means of getting one's needs met. Children may also imitate the violent adult behavior they observe by victimizing younger siblings, peers, and animals. Other children may adopt the victim role, becoming passive and withdrawn in their interactions with other people. Child witnesses of domestic violence may also display an inability to control and express emotion, or to delay gratification.

Only recently have helping professionals begun to coordinate interventions in child abuse and domestic violence. Further work is needed to develop joint screening mechanisms to identify families in which both types of abuse play a role in family dynamics. Assessments must also consider whether a parent has the capacity to care for her children outside of a violent situation. Intervention strategies must recognize the need for safety for victims of both spousal abuse and child abuse through services such as legal advocacy and shelter resources. When both women and children are victims, treatment modalities must not reinforce the idea that the battered spouse is somehow to blame for the violence within the family, e.g., by labelling her a poor parent and mandating attendance at parenting classes. Individual or unisex group counseling may be the more effective treatment modality and may be less risky than joint family counseling when the spouse is also a victim. Most importantly, professionals working in both fields must not lose sight of their ultimate goal — ending violence within families.

References and research information from: Schechter & Edleson (1994), In the Best Interest of Women and Children; McKay, M. M. "The Link between Domestic Violence and Child Abuse: Assessment and Treatment Considerations", Child Welfare, Volume LXXIII, No. 1 (1994) pp.29-39; Cummings, N. & Mooney, A., "Child Protective Workers and Battered Women's Advocates: A Strategy for Family Violence Intervention", Response, Vol. 11, No. 2 (1988) pp.4-9; Atuire, A. "Child Witnesses of Domestic Violence", Colorado Domestic Violence Coalition Newsletter, Summer, 1992.

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CHILDREN'S DIVISION

AMERICAN
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The American Humane Association, through its Children's Division, has advocated for improved services to at-risk children and vulnerable families for over a century. Today, it is a nationwide association of child welfare professionals, public and private social service agencies, medical and mental health professionals, as well as educators, researchers, judicial and law enforcement professionals, and child advocates. The goal of American Humane is to ensure that there are effective and responsive services available in every community for families at risk of abuse and neglect.

As the operating agency for the *National Resource Center on Child Abuse and Neglect*, American Humane brings together the best and the brightest in the field of child protection.

Key services of the Association include:

- centralized access to up-to-date information about the causes, effects, and intervention strategies for child maltreatment. This information is readily accessible through our toll free number 1-800-227-5242.
- advocating for national standards, improved child welfare policies, and federal and state legislation to help build effective programs to serve at-risk families, allocate needed resources, and measure the results of child protection work.
- publication of resource materials, surveys, and research findings, as well as the quarterly, ***Protecting Children***, for professionals, child welfare administrators, legislators and policy makers, and the general public.
- efforts to increase community awareness and responsiveness to the problem of child abuse and neglect by developing special community recognition programs, guidelines for reporting, etc.

Specific services offered by American Humane include:

INFORMATION SERVICES: As the National Resource Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, American Humane provides information access on child abuse and neglect through its toll-free number — **1-800-227-5242**. In addition, American Humane provides information dissemination services, to all public and private agencies involved in child welfare and child protection, as well as the media and the general public.

PROGRAM EVALUATION/CONSULTATION SERVICES: American Humane offers consultation around issues such as policy development, staff development, workload allocation, and the development of accountability systems. The Association provides evaluative services to programs that serve children and families. Such evaluations include agency-wide reviews of current laws, policies and procedures, decision-making practices, service provision, staffing levels and caseload analyses, staff qualifications and practice competencies. In addition, evaluations include interviews with other community services that collaborate with social services.

TRAINING AND EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES: The Association provides training to child welfare professionals and evaluation of staff development activities. Specialized training can be developed to meet the unique needs of a state or county agency. In addition, the Association has developed three specialized curricula:

- Comprehensive, Competency-Based Core Curriculum
- Child Sexual Abuse Curriculum for Social Workers
- Mastering the Art of Child Welfare Supervision

American Humane is the leading source of information concerning child abuse and neglect. Its unique expertise in the areas of evaluation, consultation, training, research and publication is not duplicated by other agencies. The Association works closely with other national child welfare organizations in order to maintain a coordinated and collaborative approach to the problem of child maltreatment.

AMERICAN HUMANE ASSOCIATION
63 Inverness Drive East
Englewood, Colorado 80112
(303) 792-9900
Fax (303) 792-5333
1-800-227-5242 (National Resource Center)

**About the
National
Resource Center
on Child Abuse
and Neglect
(NRCCAN)**

The National Resource Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (**NRCCAN**) is operated by the American Humane Association.

Working in partnership with NCCAN's other Resource Center, the National Resource Center on Child Sexual Abuse (NRCCSA) in Huntsville, Alabama and NCCAN's National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information in Washington, D.C. — NRCCAN provides a wide variety of resources and services to improve the capacities of public and private agencies to respond effectively to the problem of child abuse and neglect.

NRCCAN works in collaboration with three subcontracting organizations, recognized as national leaders in the field of child abuse and neglect — the American Public Welfare Association; the National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse; and the C. Henry Kempe National Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect.

Costs and Fees

There are no set fees for NRCCAN services and many are free of charge.

Workshops and training events are provided at considerably discounted fees to child protective services agencies. It is the policy of the Center to tailor training and consultation efforts to the needs of the requesting agency.

Information services are offered at no charge to public and private agencies involved with child protection.

For further information on Resource Center activities and services, please contact the Center at:

National Resource Center on Child Abuse and Neglect
63 Inverness Drive East
Englewood, Colorado
80112-5117
303-792-9900
FAX#: 303-792-5333

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**NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER
ON CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT**
of the **National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect**

Operating Agency:

**AMERICAN
HUMANE
ASSOCIATION**

NRCCAN's Goals NRCCAN Services and Activities Information Dissemination	• To provide information, training and technical assistance to professionals working in the field of child abuse and neglect; • To deliver technical assistance and consultation services to public and private agencies that address new and existing needs; • To identify and organize important resources on child abuse and neglect and to disseminate information to a wide variety of professional disciplines; • To provide training to child welfare professionals; • To coordinate NRCCAN activities and services with the National Resource Center on Child Sexual Abuse and the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information. The following services and activities are provided by the National Resource Center on Child Abuse and Neglect. NRCCAN's Information Specialists respond to requests for information on child abuse and neglect through our toll free number — 1-800-227-5242. Requests are received from child welfare agencies, public policy	makers, researchers, advocacy organizations, the media and the public. In addition, NRCCAN makes referrals to appropriate agencies or organizations nationally, such as the National Clearinghouse or the National Resource Center on Child Sexual Abuse. Calls are accepted between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Mountain Time, Monday through Friday. Other information dissemination activities include a teleconference series addressing critical issues and a special section in American Humane's quarterly, <i>Protecting Children</i>, called <i>Resource Notes</i>. The monitoring and analyzing of requests for information and assistance and other dialogue with practitioners enables NRCCAN to identify emerging issues and developmental needs in the field of child protection. These trends are communicated to NCCAN for consideration in NCCAN's planning efforts. Discussion and development of these trends is achieved through focused meetings on practices and criteria around specific child welfare decisions; special issues meetings and the synthesis of other resources This information is then made available Knowledge Building	through publications and other resource materials, including Research Reviews and Syntheses; Technical Briefs in Key Areas; as well as Conference Proceedings. NRCCAN conducts special events and provides training opportunities at major conferences, including American Humane's Annual Meeting . NRCCAN also sponsors in-depth training for child protection professionals using a faculty of experts and national leaders in the field. Courses provide current knowledge and skills building for child welfare practitioners. NRCCAN provides technical assistance and consultation to both public and private agencies. Services are flexible and can be delivered in person and on-site. Areas of emphasis include Workload Analysis and Resource Management; and Clinical Consultation and Clinical Referral. NRCCAN participates in work to identify best practice models and disseminates this information to the field. Information on model programs is available from NRCCAN or the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information. Training Technical Assistance Best Practices
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RESOURCE NOTES

This new column in *Protecting Children* will highlight current projects of the National Resource Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, and its partners, the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information in Washington, D.C., and the National Resource Center on Child Sexual Abuse, in Huntsville, Alabama.

National Resource Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (NRCCAN)

The National Resource Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (NRCCAN), funded by the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (Washington D.C.) and operated by the American Humane Association of Englewood, Colorado, provides a wide variety of resources to improve the capability of public and private agencies to respond effectively to the problem of child abuse and neglect.

NRCCAN's goals are the organization and dissemination of recognized and new resources in the field for a diverse audience; the delivery of technical assistance and consultation to meet new and existing needs of those working in the child welfare field; training and education for child welfare professionals; the identification of, and response to, emerging issues in the field; and the coordination of Center activities with the National Resource Center on Child Sexual Abuse and the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information.

NRCCAN's information and referral services are provided by its staff of information specialists. The toll-free number, 1-800-227-5242, is an access point for researchers, practitioners, legislators, media and the general public to inquire about child abuse and neglect information. The line is available Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Mountain time.

NRCCAN sponsors in-depth training for child welfare professionals using a faculty of experts and national leaders in the field. Courses provide current knowledge and skills building for child welfare practitioners.

NRCCAN provides technical assistance and consultation to public and private agencies. Services are flexible and can be deliv-

ered on-site. Areas of emphasis include Workload Analysis and Resource Management, and Clinical Consultation and Referral.

NRCCAN also participates in work to identify best practice models and disseminates this information to the field.

It is the policy of NRCCAN to tailor consultation and training efforts to the needs of the requesting agency. Many services are available at no charge.

Publications forthcoming from the Resource Center include research reviews and syntheses, technical briefs in key areas, a visual diagnosis of child maltreatment, and this column in the quarterly, *Protecting Children*, entitled *Resource Notes*.

NRCCAN recently completed its *Workload Analysis and Resource Management (WARM)* workshop in Denver at American Humane's National Training Center, March 16-20, 1992.

The focus of the workshop is to provide managers, administrators and those who support them with a firm foundation for harnessing an agency's best work. The *WARM* technology provides ongoing analysis and decision support for workload allocation and financial planning with a comprehensive approach to costs. The training is helpful to administrators in order to better manage workloads and to justify the needed level of expenditures.

Divided into two sections, the workshop first focuses on child protective services workloads and caseloads, unit costing and resource decision support system concepts. The second section provides participants with hands-on experience in conducting aspects of workload and costing studies.

The Computer Lab component of the workshop allows participants to experiment with resource-related data bases.

The workshop drew 16 participants from Arizona, California, Colorado, Minnesota, Nevada, North Carolina, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Texas and Washington. Initial review of the workshop's evaluation forms shows that participants were eager and ready to learn more about this subject and all felt that the workshop was essential to their work as administrators or managers.

For further information on the Resource Center's activities and services, please contact the National Resource Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (NRCCAN), 63 Inverness Drive East, Englewood, CO 80112-5117 or call 303-792-9900 or FAX 303-792-5333. The toll free information line is 1-800-227-5242. ■

National Resource Center on Child Sexual Abuse (NRCCSA)

The National Resource Center on Child Sexual Abuse was created to improve skills and advance knowledge in the field of child sexual abuse by providing services to all professionals working with sexually abused children and their families. Funded primarily by the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, the National Resource Center is operated by the National Children's Advocacy Center.

Services include information development and dissemination, training, technical →

assistance, think tanks, a newsletter and technical briefs.

The Information Service, staffed by information specialists who answer questions and provide written information and referrals, can be reached toll-free at 1-800-KIDS-006.

Bibliographies, information papers, the updated National Directory of Child Sexual Abuse Treatment Programs and other materials are available. Information services and bibliographies are free, but there is a charge for some other documents.

Information packets are individually tailored to meet the needs of requesting clients.

Training programs are also tailored to clients' needs and budgets. Training is available on all aspects of the multidisciplinary team approach to child sexual abuse and may be arranged by calling Shari Long at 205-534-6868.

NRCCSA sponsors advanced training in cooperation with the National Children's Advocacy Center and the University of Alabama in Huntsville. This is an in-depth, three-course program designed to enhance the multidisciplinary team approach by teaching skills necessary for professionals from the various disciplines to understand each other's responsibilities and perspectives.

Think tank sessions sponsored by the National Resource Center provide a dynamic forum for addressing important emerging issues. Each think tank results in a published report, available for purchase.

Think tank topics include "A Judicial Response to Child Sexual Abuse," "Enhancing Child Sexual Abuse Services to Minority Cultures," and "Investigation of Ritualistic Abuse Allegations." "Responding to Sexual Abuse of Children with Disabilities: Prevention, Investigation and Treatment" will be published later this year. A bi-monthly newsletter is designed to bring new advances and information to the field as quickly as possible. *NRCCSA News* is distributed free of charge to 15,000 child sexual abuse professionals and their associates.

The National Resource Center is providing special emphasis on the cultural and

ethnic needs of sexually abused children and their families, and is developing programs that encourage minorities to enter the field.

Also in the developmental process are mechanisms for getting useful information on best practices and significant research findings to line workers.

The National Resource Center on Child Sexual Abuse is located at 107 Lincoln Street, Huntsville, Alabama 35801, telephone 205-534-6868 or FAX 205-534-6883. The Information Service may be reached at 1-800-KIDS-006 (1-800-543-7006). ■

The National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information

The Department of Health and Human Services has awarded a new contract for the operation of the Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information to Caliber Associates of Fairfax, Virginia.

The Clearinghouse is now in its 17th year of operation. It was initially established by the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1974 to help meet the responsibility of disseminating up-to-date and relevant information on child maltreatment.

Among the publications distributed by the Clearinghouse are overview papers, bibliographies, directories, training materials and research reviews. In addition, the bibliographic data base "File 64" on DIALOG Information Services, Inc. is available to the public and Clearinghouse staff conduct searches on specific topical areas upon request.

The Clearinghouse has recently established a toll-free access line — 1-800-FYI-3366 — to call for assistance in locating materials or to request a search. Callers from the greater Washington, D.C. metro area will continue to use the regular number — 703-385-7565.

In order to serve constituent communities in the field of child abuse, the Clearing-

house has developed the following specific strategies:

Networking The Clearinghouse has entered into formal and informal agreements with several organizations in a variety of disciplines in order to assist in its overall effort to help abusive families.

Prioritizing A targeted collection of materials is being produced with the assistance of the networking partners to ensure that the most critical information needed by the field is acquired and made readily available.

The Clearinghouse is developing materials on several high priority topics including state statutes and court opinions; substance abuse; the response of the criminal justice system to abuse and neglect; the prevention of revictimization; the consequences of child abuse and neglect; cultural competency; a multidisciplinary/interagency response; the relationship between child abuse and neglect and family violence. The Clearinghouse will prepare materials on several of these topics this fiscal year.

In acquiring, managing and disseminating information to agencies and other service providers, the Clearinghouse provides critical and relevant information that is useful to professionals involved in all aspects of child abuse and neglect.

Contact the Clearinghouse at P.O. Box 1182, Washington, DC 20013 or call 1-800-FYI-3366 (In Washington, DC area, call 703-385-7565.)

In addition, the **People of Color Leadership Institute**, along with the Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information, is interested in obtaining information about child abuse prevention and treatment programs and agencies which serve predominantly clients of color. If you know of any such programs, please send program information about the good work happening in the drive toward cultural competence. Information may be sent to Terri Ryder, People of Color Leadership Institute, 714 G Street, S.E., Washington, D.C. 20003 or call 202-544-3144 or 1-800-444-6216 or FAX 202-547-3601. ■

FACT SHEET

AMERICAN
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Children's Division

WHAT SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT REPORTING CHILD ABUSE ? AHA Fact Sheet #5

Taking the First Step

Deciding whether or not to report suspected child abuse can be a difficult and confusing process, yet it is the important first step toward protecting a child who might be in danger. Professionals who work with children are required by law to report suspected neglect or abuse. About 20 states require that every citizen who suspects a child is being abused or neglected must report. However, regardless of whether or not you are among those who are mandated to report, accurate reporting of the suspected maltreatment of any child is a moral obligation. "Reasonable suspicion" based on objective evidence is all that's needed to report. That evidence might be your first-hand observation or statements made by a parent or a child.

Unfamiliarity with state reporting laws and ignorance of the dynamics of abuse and neglect are two of the most frequent reasons given for non-reporting. Frustration with lack of response, by child welfare professionals, to a complaint and "an unwillingness to get involved" are other reasons given for failure to report. Other reasons include not wanting to "make things worse for the child", an unwillingness to provide the time consuming court testimony that might be necessary or a reluctance to risk angering the family. All of these reasons are understandable yet any one of them could lead to the death of a child that might otherwise have been prevented if the person with the information had only reported it.

What Happens After I Make the Decision to Report Suspected Child Abuse and/or Neglect?

Several events might take place before and after the initial complaint is filed. First of all, depending on where you live, you might report suspected abuse and/or neglect to your local child protective agency. These agencies are sometimes called Social Services, Human Rehabilitative Services, Human Welfare or Children and Family Services. If you feel that a child is in an emergency situation, you should call local law enforcement immediately.

The person responding to your call may ask you several questions about what you are reporting. This is done to ensure that enough information is available for the investigative team to be able to make decisions concerning whether or not abuse and/or neglect has occurred. You might be asked to give names of the family and child, your reasons for suspecting abuse, the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of other witnesses, your relationship to the alleged victim, any other previous suspicious injury to the child, or for your name, address and phone number. Anonymous reports can be made in every state, however, child welfare agencies generally try to discourage anonymity for many reasons. Not knowing the identity of the reporter denies the child welfare worker the opportunity to get more information during the investigative process or to call the reporter as a crucial evidentiary witness if the case goes to trial.

Unfortunately, over the last several years many child welfare agencies have been severely underfunded and understaffed and sometimes the investigation of abuse and neglect complaints will be prioritized according to the immediate risk to the child. Be patient. You may have to call more than once.

Who Investigates Complaints of Child Abuse and Neglect?

The state or county agency that provides protective services has the legal authority granted it by law or charter which gives them an obligation to provide services when needed and which grants them the right "to explore, study and evaluate" the facts. Child welfare workers then base their decision on whether or not to remove a child from the family on two issues:

1. What is the immediate danger or risk to child?
2. What is the motivation, capacity and intent of the alleged perpetrator?

-Continued-

During the investigative process, the child welfare worker may call on a variety of supportive assistance from individuals and organizations in the community. It then becomes the responsibility of the child welfare worker to organize or provide any needed services for the child and the family.

What Happens to the Child and Family?

With the enactment of Public Law 96-272, it is legally mandated that child welfare workers make all "reasonable efforts" to reunite the family whenever possible. If, after a thorough investigation, it is determined that the child is in need of substitute care, then the child is placed in temporary foster care until the immediate danger has passed and services can be provided for the child and family. Sometimes criminal child abuse charges have to be filed depending on the nature and the severity of the abuse/neglect. There is a range of legal penalties for child maltreatment that varies from ordering the perpetrator into therapy to incarceration.

Will I Be Able to Find Out What Happens to the Child?

Persons who have reported suspected child maltreatment should be allowed to know whether or not their suspicions were founded and what steps the investigation agency took to protect the child. However, there is a great deal of confusion over whether or not information from child welfare cases should be shared. Legally, there is no impediment to providing general feedback to the child abuse/neglect reporter. Some states have even gone so far as to implement laws that require the child welfare agencies to report back to the reporters. Many times child welfare agencies, overburdened with high caseloads and too many time demands, will not report back the results of their investigations. Other agencies will wrongly say that they can not release the results of their investigations because the information is confidential. If the agency does not voluntarily provide such information to you then you will have to request it. Mandated reporters of child abuse, because they have an ongoing legal obligation to report, need to know the circumstances of an investigation so that they can keep track of any conditions that might further endanger the child. Professionals who work with child victims may have to know information in order to treat the victims in their care. The most difficult confidentiality issue to resolve concerns the reporting individuals need to know vs. the family's right to privacy. So, the distinction is usually made to provide less specific information to individuals outside the child welfare professional community. This means that if the reporter is a family friend, neighbor or relative, then the information won't be provided in detail. The child welfare agency may give feedback that indicates that the reporter was right in making a referral and that the agency will be working with the family.

What Happens If I Report and the Case Is Unsubstantiated ?

All states have laws that protect the reporter of suspected abuse or neglect from legal liability as long as the report was made "in good faith" and not maliciously. Only a small percentage of reports are deliberately false. Another percentage of cases may be classified as "unsubstantiated". This means that there might not have been sufficient information regarding the allegation or the identity of the family, or that the state law contained narrow criteria for substantiating a case. A case may not be substantiated because services were provided to the child but no court action was taken, or because there was a lack of resources to assist the child or family. Criteria for substantiation vary from state to state because there is no uniform national system for case reporting.

If you are unsure of what the legal and societal definitions of abuse/neglect are in your community, contact your local child welfare agency for information. In addition, the American Humane Association operates the federally designated National Resource Center on Child Abuse and Neglect which can offer you more information on what you can do, and what we are doing to assure that children's interests and well-being are fully, effectively and humanely guaranteed. Call 1-800-227-4645, or write The American Humane Association, 63 Inverness Drive East, Englewood, Colorado 80112-5117. Knowing how, when, and what to report about child abuse and neglect may make a life or death difference for a child.

FOR INFORMATION ABOUT MEMBERSHIP IN THE CHILDREN'S DIVISION OF THE AMERICAN HUMANE ASSOCIATION, PLEASE CONTACT US AT 303-792-9900 or 1-800-227-4645.

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