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Ending Child Abuse

Introducing a Collection of New Perspectives and Practical Techniques

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INTRODUCTION

Ending Child Abuse: Introducing a Collection of New Perspectives and Practical Techniques

Victor I. Vieth
Bette L. Bottoms
Alison R. Perona

SUMMARY. The editors provide an overview of the obstacles that prevent us from ending child abuse in the United States and briefly summarize the various articles in this volume that address these obstacles from multiple points of view. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> ©2006 by The HaworthPress, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

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KEYWORDS. Mandated reporting, model curricula, forensic interviewing, prevention, child abuse

There is, in the United States today, a culture permitting child abuse to thrive. As a result,

- Victims do not feel empowered to report their abuses.
- Mandated reporters often fail to report abuse, no matter how clear the evidence.
- Allegations that are reported are often screened out with little or no investigation.
- When investigations are conducted, many of the front line responders are inadequately trained and/or inexperienced in handling maltreatment cases, and abuse is therefore not well documented or successfully prosecuted.
- When child abuse is eventually documented, the victims are typically older and have needlessly endured years of abuse.
- Child abuse prevention efforts are woefully under-funded and are not present in any meaningful sense in most communities in our country.

In the lead article to this volume, Victor I. Vieth proposes to end this culture by implementing model curricula in every undergraduate and graduate institution in our nation. These curricula will reduce on-the-job training needed by the law enforcement officers, social workers, doctors, nurses, veterinarians, psychologists, clergy, prosecutors, and others who will enter mandated reporting or child protection professions. He also proposes ongoing instruction for child protection professionals that will include forensic interview training for everyone who must speak to children about abuse. Finally, he calls for massive education of America's child protection professionals in the art and science of developing and funding prevention programs at the community level.

These and other proposals are not pie in the sky, but are in fact unfolding at some level across the country. As a case in point, Montclair State University in New Jersey has revamped both its undergraduate and graduate curriculum in the hope of better preparing professionals who advocate for children. The reforms at Montclair State University are detailed in an article by Robert D. McCormick.

Alison R. Perona, Bette L. Bottoms, and Erin Sorenson argue that forensic interviews should be informed by sound research. They provide im-

portant, practical recommendations for interviewing children, and they support each recommendation with research and experience. They also review the best practices for conducting a legally defensible forensic interview utilizing a structured protocol, and offer practical advice for professionals seeking to access the social science literature related to children's eyewitness abilities.

To assist communities in developing effective prevention programs, Sharon G. Portwood examines our current knowledge about stopping abuse before it begins. She discusses the strengths and limitations of child empowerment and parent education models for prevention, and she advocates for broader social and system-level reforms.

Although investigators and prosecutors have made great strides in the past 20 years in improving their response to allegations of child abuse, concepts such as vertical prosecution are not yet in place in every jurisdiction. This concept is just as important in responding to allegations of physically abused and murdered children as it those victimized sexually. In his article, David M. Williams outlines the vertical prosecution in such cases, and details a model for its operation.

This volume concludes with an essay from David L. Chadwick, who considers these proposals in their historical context and offers some additional thoughts for building on these proposals and speeding toward the end of child maltreatment.

Thus, our volume is a timely and important collection of papers from an impressive array of social scientists and legal scholars. All contributions are grounded in scholarly work but written for a broad audience, and all place primary emphasis on practical implications. As such, this collection should be of interest to a wide readership, from practitioners, researchers, and students, to mental health, social service, medical, and legal professionals concerned with child abuse and children's welfare.

We wish to thank the many people who made this endeavor possible, including the authors of each contribution, who worked diligently to help us produce this high quality collection, and Bob Geffner and his staff who provided support ranging from encouragement to copy editing. We now invite you to a much needed forum for information exchange among a distinguished group of scholars and professionals. We hope that you, and eventually children nationally, will benefit from it.