



THE ADVISOR

AMERICAN PROFESSIONAL SOCIETY ON THE ABUSE OF CHILDREN

NEWS

APSAC SENDS TIME MAGAZINE STRONG MESSAGE; APSAC MEMBERS URGED TO PARTICIPATE IN BOARD COMMITTEES; NOMINATIONS SOUGHT FOR 1991 ELECTION, AWARDS; STATE CHAPTERS ON THE MOVE; CONGRATULATIONS AND THANKS

—by Theresa Reid

APSAC Responds to Time

Time magazine ran an article on March 4 entitled, "Why Children Lie in Court," which many APSAC members and Board found poorly researched and harmful both to child witnesses and to the professionals who advocate for them. The APSAC Board voted on March 23 to send the following letter in response:

"We strongly object to Time magazine's March 4 publication of the improperly researched and misleadingly titled article, 'Why Children Lie in Court,' by Jerome Cramer. By misrepresenting a significant body of scientific evidence, the article may seriously harm children who most need the help of caring adults such as the readers of Time.

Contrary to Mr. Cramer's statements, the respected scientific research literature reveals that children rarely lie about traumatic events. In the research by Drs. Karen Saywitz and Gail Goodman, cited by Mr. Cramer to show that children do lie in court, none of the 72 five- and seven-year-old children given medical exams made false reports of genital touch when asked to describe the exam or demonstrate it with dolls. Across all forms of questioning—including direct and even leading questioning about genital touch—the risk that children would not report genital touch that *did* occur was

64%, whereas the risk of their falsely reporting genital touch was only 1%. Suggesting that children regularly falsely claim to have been sexually touched is a clear distortion of this research.

Further, Mr. Cramer cites a study "conducted by the American Academy of Child Psychiatry" which "found that in custody disputes involving charges of sex abuse, as many as 36% of the allegations were later proved to be untrue." That study was not only not conducted by AACP, it is notorious in the field for its low sample size and poor methods: only 11 children were interviewed, and their allegations were found to be "true" or "untrue" solely on the strength of the author's opinion.

There are legitimate controversies about the best way to respond to allegations of child sexual abuse. But biased and inflammatory articles such as Mr. Cramer's are not constructive. Indeed, by distorting the research and using a patently misleading title to encourage adults to discount the generally reliable testimony of children—who are often the only witnesses to the crimes perpetrated against them—Mr. Cramer's article does active harm.

The overwhelming facts are that hundreds of thousands of American children are physically and sexually abused every year; that the vast majority of perpetrators of this abuse go unapprehended; that the social costs of child abuse are staggering; that it is the responsibility of every American adult to help stop this national tragedy.

We call upon Time magazine to meet its responsibility to the American public in the future by providing fair, accurate, and balanced coverage of the complex issue of child sexual abuse.

Sincerely,
The American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children"

In addition to being signed by APSAC, the letter was signed by individual Board members attending the meeting. It was also

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SPECIAL ISSUE

PROMISING PROGRAMS AND APPROACHES IN CHILD MALTREATMENT

—by Susan Kelley

Only in the past decade have the prevalence and impact of child maltreatment been empirically validated. As a result, professionals all over the country have established specialized treatment programs for victims, their families, and offenders. The purpose of this special issue of *The Advisor* is to bring together in one source overviews of the most effective programs and approaches for the prevention and treatment of child maltreatment.

But how do we know that what we are doing really makes a difference for child victims, adult survivors, and abusers? When *The Advisor's* Executive Editor, John E.B. Myers, our Managing Editor, Theresa Reid, and I began to work on this special issue we planned to entitle it, "Programs that Work." But we soon realized that the title was overly optimistic. Although the prevalence and impact of child maltreatment have been empirically validated, the effectiveness of our treatment approaches has not been systematically tested. As we assessed the lack of empirical evidence, the title for this special issue became more humble, evolving from "Programs that Work" to "Programs We Think Might Work," to "Programs We Hope Work," to, finally, "Promising Programs and Approaches!"

We are fortunate to have several leading experts share their insights about the programs and approaches that, according to the evidence available—including experienced clinical judgment—appear to be most promising. We hope that this issue of *The Advisor* will provide further direction for treatment and prevention programs. We also hope that it will stimulate clinicians and researchers to conduct the much-needed studies to empirically validate the effectiveness of our interventions.

Please let us know your thoughts on this special issue, and in fact on every issue of *The Advisor*. If you have an idea for an article you or a colleague would like to submit for publication, please contact the appropriate Associate Editor, the Executive Editor, Managing Editor, or myself. Articles undergo a peer review process to determine which are most suitable for publication in *The Advisor*. Publishing *The Advisor* four times a year is a major effort for the editors and many APSAC members. If you are looking for a way to become more involved in APSAC, consider contributing to *The Advisor*!

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