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■TECHNOLOGY

Getting Connected: Child Abuse Resources on the Internet

—by Randell Alexander, Krista Holtzmann, and Beverly Saboe

Editor's Note: This is the first of a series of items to be published about on-line resources for professionals in the field of child abuse and neglect.

Cruising the information superhighway? Still waiting to see if it turns out to be a fad? This article will tell you how to gain access to some of the information about child maltreatment already available to users of the Internet. You do not have to be proficient with computers to learn about some of the interesting sites on child abuse you can access with fairly simple equipment and a little patience. Your investment in time now can pay big dividends later. Inevitably, communications and education will increasingly involve the Internet and the World Wide Web.

What is the Internet? The World Wide Web?

The Internet is the term for the vast interconnection of computers worldwide that are linked through many different types of data transmission lines, from satellites and fiber optics to simple telephone lines. Through the Internet, you can e-mail colleagues in the next office or across the world, electronically transfer entire book manuscripts, and search the card catalog in the Library of Congress. One of the most versatile and exciting applications in the Internet is the Web. Through the Web, users can use "hypertext" to access information. Hypertext consists of text in which some of the terms are highlighted. When selected, these highlighted terms, or links, will automatically link or transfer information related to that term. A user will not only have access to text through these links, but in many cases also have access to multimedia-formatted information such as pictures, sound, and brief videos. Hypertext allows all of the child abuse resources on the Internet to be connected, as explained next.

How do I access the Internet and the Web?

Virtually any personal computer (PC) can tap into this communication network with the proper software and hook-ups. However, the type of physical connection between the computer to the outside and the software on your PC makes a significant difference in exactly what can be accessed. (For a full discussion of how to choose modems and software, ask your local bookseller for the best books on the topic.) Briefly, you need a personal computer, a modem or a direct connection to the Internet, and communications software. If you do not have a direct connection to the Internet, which is available at many universities and some businesses, you can use a modem, which uses telephone lines to send and receive signals. The Internet may be accessed more quickly and efficiently depending upon your computer's memory capacity and processing speed as well as the speed of your modem. If your computer transmits sound and video, you will be able to take full advantage of the Internet and the Web. Cable TV and other options might be developed in the near future that will provide better connections than phone lines, allowing even more users to benefit from all of the features of the Web.

Your computer and modem will need software to enable your system to dial out and make the Internet connection. Most computers that come with modems also have pre-installed software for an Internet subscription service such as America Online, CompuServe, or Prodigy. Newer services include Apple's eWorld, the Microsoft Network, and AT&T's Interchange. Subscription services generally provide instructions that are easy to follow. Software for "browsing" the Web, such as Netscape™, is also desirable, allowing a user to view graphic information as well as text. Browser software can also be provided by subscription services.

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How do I find specific sites on the Internet?

Each site on the Net (or Web) has its own electronic address, known as a Uniform Resource Locator (URL)—an often complex, and somewhat intimidating, collection of letters and symbols (e.g., http://). Most systems save you the trouble of typing the address each time by allowing you to save addresses as "bookmarks."

But what if you don't know a site's URL? Does the Web provide directory assistance? Yes—there are many different ways to search the Internet—most of them easy. One of the most obvious is to search by key word, saving a URL as a bookmark when you've found a particularly interesting site. Through the Web you can virtually travel to other countries. You can also sample data sets about many different subjects, and save files or print the information contained in the sites. For example, by typing "NASA" into a search function, you could quickly find a picture of the earth as seen from the moon, which could be printed on your own printer. Similarly, child abuse information is proliferating on the Internet.

> *The bimonthly newsletter of the CPTA is available, as are other sources of information such as Child Abuse: A Guide for Mandatory Reporters.*

Child abuse and neglect information sites on the Internet

Any description of sites on the Internet begins to be outdated as soon as it is written. In some dynamic sites, information is added frequently enough that the format and content continually evolve.

Several key offerings in child abuse and their addresses are described below. This list is by no means all-inclusive, nor is it an endorsement of the sites listed. It is just a small sampling of the resources the authors have found available on the Internet.

Child abuse on the Virtual Hospital™

URL: http://vh.radiology.uiowa.edu/Providers/ChildAbuse/CAHomepg.html

The Virtual Hospital was developed through a National Library of Medicine grant to the Radiology Department of the University of Iowa. Individual medical departments, multimedia textbooks, and connections to other sites are available for patients, healthcare providers, and others. This extremely busy site on the Web has about 250,000 contacts per week.

Within the Virtual Hospital is a child abuse home page that provides reference and interactive materials designed to increase awareness and understanding of child abuse and neglect (the URL address noted above). This site was developed in part with the cooperation of the Iowa Child Protective Training Academy (CPTA), a multiuniversity collaboration that provides extensive training for child protective service investigators. The bimonthly newsletter of the CPTA is available, as are other sources of information such as *Child Abuse: A Guide for Mandatory Reporters*. This publication, from the Iowa Department of Human Services, provides detailed information for mandatory reporters of child abuse in the state of Iowa about the Iowa Child Abuse Reporting Law, Iowa Code Section 232.67 through Section 232.68. Information about Iowa's Dependent Adult Abuse Reporting Law, Iowa Code Section 235B is also included.

Coordinated by Randell Alexander MD, PhD, this site may eventually connect to all significant child abuse efforts on the Internet worldwide. Currently the entire text of the most recent report from the U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect, *A Nation's Shame: Fatal Child Abuse and Neglect in the United States*, is available on the Web only at this home page. Information about the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (NCCAN) and material from the National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse (NCPCA) can also be obtained. Soon you will be able to hyperlink to NCPCA's own home page through the Virtual Hospital Child Abuse home page. Other national organizations are preparing to locate information or their basic

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Web operations at this URL. With linkages in development to other sites (discussed later in this article), keeping this URL as a bookmark should allow easy access to all important child abuse and neglect information on the Internet.

The American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC) has its most extensive presence on the Web as part of the Virtual Hospital Child Abuse home page. This location includes an introduction to the organization as well as information about APSAC publications, task forces, state chapters, legislative relations, and other APSAC activities.

This section will be regularly updated. For example, extensive information about child death review teams should be available soon. Brochures about upcoming APSAC Colloquiums can be reviewed, and the registration forms can be printed on your own computer to be filled out and sent in.

Child Maltreatment home page

**URL: http://oz.ach.uams.edu/fmt/ cmhome.htm
or through the Virtual Hospital Child Abuse home page**

APSAC's new journal is highlighted at this Web site, located at the University of Arkansas. Mark Chaffin, PhD, is both Editor-in-Chief of the journal and administrator of this site. Features include an explanation of *Child Maltreatment*'s mission and format, listings of the *Child Maltreatment* Editorial Board, instructions for authors, and other related information.

CANnet

CANnet is a service of the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect and is operated by the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information. To utilize CANnet one must first obtain a password, free of charge, from the NCCAN system administrator at telephone number (800)FYI-3366 or e-mail nccanch@clark.net. This electronic bulletin board system gives professionals working in the fields of child maltreatment and child welfare easy access to information from the Clearinghouse and NCCAN, on-line forums for professionals, information on upcoming conferences and trainings, and lists of related electronic networks.

In a future issue of the *APSAC Advisor*, more sites will be discussed, and updates will be provided on the sites listed here. Professional bulletin boards on child abuse issues will be specifically highlighted. Because this field is rapidly expanding and important resources can easily be overlooked, we would appreciate any comments or suggestions about your favorite places on the Internet.

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The APSAC Homepage is also available through the Child Abuse Prevention Network, Cornell University, at http://child.cornell.edu

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■ New Membership Installment Plan

APSAC introduces a new installment plan to make membership more accessible to professionals at every income level. Prices to follow. For more information contact APSAC at 312-554-0166.

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(Does not include the journal, *Child Maltreatment*.)			