

## APSAC Forensic Interview Clinics

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### History

Founded in 1987 to advance the best professional practice in the field of child abuse, the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC) is uniquely positioned to offer a comprehensive and state-of-the-art child forensic interview training. APSAC draws on its members, who represent the wide range of disciplines and professions involved in intervention in child abuse cases. The membership comprises both researchers and practitioners, including many nationally and internationally renowned experts in the area of child welfare. The topic of best practice in forensic interviews of children has been a priority of APSAC since its beginning, receiving attention at APSAC conferences and training institutes and in its publications. APSAC developed a series of task forces that generated best practice guidelines. These include medical evaluation of child maltreatment guidelines, assessment of psychological maltreatment guidelines, and three sets of guidelines related to interviewing children—"Psychosocial Evaluation of Suspected Sexual Abuse in Children, Second Edition" (1997), "Use of Anatomical Dolls in Child Abuse Assessments" (1995), and "Investigative Interviewing in Cases of Alleged Child Abuse" (2002). The latter is the most relevant to the APSAC Forensic Interview Clinics and represents a consensus of leading national authorities on investigative interviewing.

The APSAC Forensic Interview Clinic is one of the earliest 40-hour child interview training programs in the United States. The first such APSAC training was held in April 1997 at the University of Michigan. Clinics were initiated out of an appreciation that the 1- and even 2-day Institutes then provided by APSAC on forensic interviewing could cover only select topics and were not comprehensive. In addition, APSAC realized that effective child interview training needed to offer hands-on skills and not merely rely upon didactic training and exercises. Consequently, APSAC Clinics incorporated small-group "practica," giving each participant the opportunity to practice interviewing skills and receive constructive feedback from an expert facilitator. The Clinics have relied heavily on the experience and wisdom of one of the premier experts in the field of forensic interviewing, Kee MacFarlane, who pioneered such clinics in the State of California over a decade ago. The original Clinic curriculum was developed by Kee MacFarlane, Melissa McDermott-Steinmetz-Lane, and Kathleen Coulborn Faller.

Between 1997 and 2000, APSAC delivered seven Clinics. Some Clinics were freestanding, for example, the program at the University of Michigan and a Clinic for the Navy; others were structured around national conferences, for example, the National Symposium on Child Sexual Abuse and the APSAC Colloquium. APSAC also staffed Clinics in Dundee, Scotland.

There was then a hiatus in APSAC Clinics because of program priorities and resource scarcity. In the interim, other 20- to 40-hour forensic interview training programs developed and flourished. In 2002, the APSAC Forensic Interview Clinics were revived and updated in response to requests from the State of Kentucky and the State of Florida. Key leaders in this endeavor were Jon Conte, Parti Toth, and Melissa McDermott-Steinmetz-Lane. At that time,

APSAC contracted with Kentucky to produce a written curriculum and engaged a number of experts from around the country in this effort. Since then, APSAC has conducted five Clinics, and three more will take place in 2004. Some Clinics continue to be freestanding—professionals from throughout the country, as well from other countries, may register and attend. APSAC also works with individual states that request customization of the curriculum so it can be presented for specific groups of professionals. APSAC has developed a national list of presenters and critiquers, which it draws upon for the Clinics. These presenters take the existing curriculum topics and adapt them to the particular audience and the presenters' own delivery styles. Presenters also incorporate relevant material from their own practice and research experience. In addition, APSAC solicits feedback from participants and from faculty presenting at Clinics. The curriculum continues to be refined on the basis of all feedback.

### Training Model, Structure, and Focus

**Do you have a training model of what constitutes a competent or "good enough" interview? What are its components and its characteristics?**

**Do you teach a structured protocol, semi-structured protocol, or flexible guidelines?**

The APSAC Forensic Interview Clinic is unique in that it does not advocate, and is not meant to teach, a particular interview protocol or single approach. Because Clinic attendees come from a wide variety of backgrounds and locations, they often have distinct issues and requirements (legal and otherwise) related to their interview practice. The Clinic curriculum recognizes that there are many credible approaches to the forensic interview, and we attempt to present attendees with information about the various approaches and options, in hopes that they will be better equipped to make reasoned decisions about which techniques will work best for them. Feedback during Clinic practicum sessions represents a variety of perspectives and approaches, so that attendees get exposed to diverse points of view. At all times, Clinic instructors incorporate the latest empirical research and use a hands-on, skills-based training approach. APSAC practice guidelines, especially "Investigative Interviewing in Cases of Alleged Child Abuse," are also integrated throughout the Clinic.

**Is the questioning focused on child sexual abuse only? Do your guidelines routinely include questions about physical abuse, neglect, domestic violence, substance abuse, and felony animal abuse? Rationale?**

The APSAC Clinic curriculum encourages interviewers to use best practice whether the topic of concern with the child is sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, domestic violence, or some other situation. The reality, however, is that many state-of-the-art interviewing techniques concentrate on suspected sexual abuse. In sexual abuse, the greatest concern is about the reliability of children's statements because there is seldom any other direct evidence. These techniques, however, are also appropriate in many other situations involving

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suspected maltreatment, because accuracy and completeness of information are always desirable. Furthermore, interviewers are encouraged to approach their interviews with an open mind to the very real possibility that a child exposed to one type of maltreatment may be experiencing or witnessing *others as well*.

### Whom do you train? Teams? Individuals? Rationale?

#### Do you see your interview protocol or guidelines as prosecution-focused or protection-focused?

Clinic registration is offered to individuals, although instructors emphasize interdisciplinary collaboration. Because professionals from many backgrounds must interview children about abuse-related concerns, attendees include child interview specialists, professionals from law enforcement, child welfare and social services workers, prosecutors, therapists, and other professionals. The focus is on investigative (hence the word *forensic* in the title) interviews with children, and on techniques that maximize the retrieval of complete and reliable information from children while minimizing trauma during the interview process. Whether an attendee's job is focused on prosecution (such as police and prosecutors) or on protection (such as CPS), APSAC believes that professionals need to work together to accomplish both goals, and that forensically sound interviews serve both purposes equally well.

### Training Content

Questions presented about the approaches to child interview training in three previous *APSAC Advisor* articles (highlighting three programs: APRI's "Finding Words," that of the National Children's Advocacy Center, and that of Cincinnati's Childhood Trust) inquired about training content related to rapport-building, questions designed to introduce the topic of concern, developmental considerations, the use of interview aids, interviews with reticent children, diversity issues, and corroboration issues. As indicated previously, the APSAC Clinic curriculum does not advance one particular interview approach, although it certainly does cover critical considerations in all of these areas. The following description indicates the underlying principles of the Clinic and training topics.

#### Core elements of the APSAC Clinic are as follows:

1. *Presenters and Clinic critique givers have extensive experience, and many are leaders in the field of forensic interviewing.*

APSAC continues to recruit experts from its membership to assist in presenting and improving the Clinic curriculum. Presenters build their presentations around the key points included in the established curriculum to insure consistency, but the faculty is made up of a different mix from throughout the United States each time the Clinic is offered. Attendees have a unique opportunity to interact with top experts from many different professions and perspectives.

2. *Participants learn that the interview process is both art and science.*

They are exposed to a variety of views from both the literature and from practitioners on how to conduct forensic interviews. They learn that there is not a single right way of interviewing.

3. *The training is experiential.*

Practicum sessions often involve interviews with real children, either about their experience during a staged event that has some parallels with abuse (e.g., involving novel events with adults acting strange, adults committing bad acts, and adults seeking secrecy), or about a past salient event in their lives, or both. Practicum sessions always involve interviewing actors or graduate students who play the role of a suspected victim in an abuse case.

The actors utilize role plays developed by APSAC that represent a wide range of children and suspected maltreatment situations. Roles can be adapted to the characteristics of the interviewee. Constructive feedback on interview technique is provided by several experts in the field, and feedback is also given by peers. Interviews are usually videotaped so attendees can review them later.

4. *The training is didactic.*

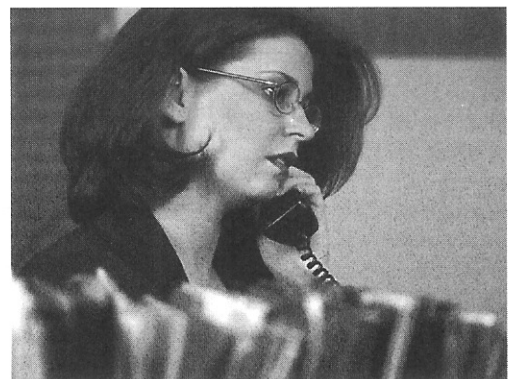
Didactic material presented during the Clinic represents the state of the art in forensic interviewing. This didactic component offers the participants information about techniques to use in their interviews—interview models, structure, and process. It includes information on research related to forensic interviewing. To the extent possible, the didactic component is empirically based. It makes use of the APSAC publication "Investigative Interviewing in Cases of Alleged Child Abuse" and refers to other APSAC practice guidelines. Central elements are information on questioning techniques as well as information on the use of media and interview aids during interviews. The didactic component includes sessions about the following specialized topics: cultural competence, linguistic issues, developmental issues, reluctant children, special needs children, and adolescents.

5. *Participants learn about the roles of other key professionals.*

Because the Clinic focuses on **investigative** interviews and **forensically sound** techniques, emphasis is given to the evidence needed by law enforcement and to legal issues in child abuse cases.

6. *Several student interviewers defend their interviews in testimony during a mock court experience.*

Participants interact with attorneys who actually litigate child abuse cases; both direct testimony and cross-examination about portions of select, videotaped practice interviews are demonstrated. Everyone observes the court process and participates in the discussion.



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Specific sessions included in the APSAC curriculum and some of the experts who have been, and will be, involved in developing and presenting the curriculum include the following (bolded names indicate Kentucky Clinic curriculum developers):

1. *Overview of Forensic Interview Issues & Models*—**Kathleen Coulborn Faller**, Kee Macfarlane, Julie Kenniston, Erna Olafson, Andrea Grosvald Hamilton, Nancy Berson, Mark Everson
2. *Lessons From the Research*—**Thomas D. Lyon**, Kathleen Faller, Andrea Grosvald Hamilton, Nancy Berson, Mark Everson, Dennison Reed, Miriam Wolf
3. *Child Interview Methods and Techniques: Documentation, Stages and Structure*—**Melissa McDermott-Lane**, Laura Merchant, Julie Kenniston, Deborah Davies, Katherine Eagleson, Kathleen Coulborn Faller, Nancy Berson, Mark Everson, Dennison Reed, Miriam Wolf
4. *Child Interview Methods and Techniques: Question Types and Question Design*—**Melissa McDermott-Lane**, Laura Merchant, Julie Kenniston, Nancy Berson, Mark Everson, Dennison Reed, Miriam Wolf
5. *Child Interview Methods and Techniques: Use of Media*—**Melissa McDermott-Lane**, Laura Merchant, Julie Kenniston, Nancy Berson, Mark Everson, Dennison Reed, Miriam Wolf
6. *Child Development Concepts*—**Karen Saywitz**, Susan Samuels, Anne Graffam Walker
7. *Linguistic Issues*—**Anne Graffam Walker**, Susan Samuels, Deborah Davies, Lisa Fontes
8. *Eliciting Details and Other Law Enforcement Concerns*—**Donna Pence**, Brad Russ, Ray Broderick, Rick Cage, George Ryan
9. *Interviewing Ethnically and Culturally Diverse Children*—**Lisa Fontes**, Toni Cardenas, Andrea Grosvald, Donna Pence, Julie Kenniston, Mary Ortega
10. *Interviewing Reluctant Children*—**Katherine Eagleson**, Ray Broderick, Deborah Davies, Kathleen Coulborn Faller, Andrea Grosvald, Kee MacFarlane
11. *Interviewing Children With Disabilities*—**Deborah Davies**, Andrea Grosvald, Julie Kenniston, Miriam Wolf
12. *Interviewing Adolescents*—**Katherine Eagleson**, Ray Broderick, Kee MacFarlane
13. *Legal Considerations and Effective Testimony*—**Anne Haynie**, Tom Lockridge, Steve Wilson, Harry Elias, Paul Stern, Nancy Lamb, Brian Holmgren, Patti Toth
14. *Interview Practicum*—**Melissa McDermott-Lane**, Kee MacFarlane
15. *Mock Court*—**Anne Haynie**, **Tom Lockridge**, **Steve Wilson**, Harry Elias, Paul Stern, Nancy Lamb, Brian Holmgren, Patti Toth, Frank Vandervort

APSAC is committed to continuing to improve the Clinic program. Information about upcoming Clinics can be found at [www.apsac.org](http://www.apsac.org). States interested in exploring the possibility of working with APSAC to present Clinics need to contact Tricia Williams at (405) 271-8202 or [tricia-williams@ouhsc.edu](mailto:tricia-williams@ouhsc.edu).

### About the Authors

Kathleen Coulborn Faller, PhD, ACSW, DCSW, is Professor of Social Work, Director of the Family Assessment Clinic, Principal Investigator on the Interdisciplinary Child Welfare Training Program, Principal Investigator on the Public Child Welfare Supervisor Training Program; Principal Investigator on the Program on Recruitment and Retention of Child Welfare Employees, and Principal Investigator on the Hasbro Early Assessment Project. All of these are programs at University of Michigan. She is author of seven books and approximately sixty articles.

Patricia Toth, JD currently works as a program manager in charge of child abuse training with the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission. She provides training nationally and started her career in 1980 as a prosecutor in Washington State, served eight years as Director of APRI's National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse, and worked as a federal prosecutor in the Child Exploitation Section of the U.S. Department of Justice.

