

Minnesota Mandates Recording of Child Abuse Interviews

In 1995 the Minnesota Legislature passed two significant bills regarding audio and video tapes of child abuse interviews. Here are excerpts of those bills, together with a few suggestions on videotaping based on our experience at CornerHouse.

Minnesota's *Reporting of Maltreatment to Minors Act*, Statute 626.556, subd. 10, was amended to include the following language regarding the documentation of child abuse interviews:

- (j) . . . "The following interviewing methods and procedures must be used whenever possible when collecting information:
- (1) audio recordings of all interviews with witnesses and collateral sources;
 - &
 - (2) in cases of alleged sexual abuse, audio-video recordings of each interview with the alleged victim and child witnesses."

Minnesota's *Data Practices Act* was amended to ensure greater protection of interviews of alleged child abuse victims that are documented through the use of videotape:

Section 2 [13.391] [Videotapes of Child Abuse Victims.]

- (a) . . . "an individual subject of data may not obtain a copy of a videotape in which a child victim or alleged victim is alleging, explaining, denying or describing an act of physical or sexual abuse without a court order under section 13.03, subdivision 6, or 611A.90."

A big advantage of videotaping is that it conveys both nonverbal as well as verbal communications, it displays the use of drawings, anatomical dolls and other visual

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Wait Time for Appointments Continues at Low Level

Over the past two years, CornerHouse staff and team members have worked to reduce wait time (the time between when a referent calls to schedule an interview at CornerHouse and when the interview occurs) to 3-5 days. In 1995 the average monthly wait time was just under 2 days. However, there were occasional spikes in wait time when a large number of referrals occurred within a short period. We continue to work with team members to find ways to keep wait times uniformly low. As always, referring team members can help keep wait times low by doing what they can to minimize cancellations and no-shows.

1996 Training Schedule

CornerHouse offers several training courses:

- 5-day Child Sexual Abuse Forensic Interview Training,
- 4-day Advanced Forensic Interview Training,
- Customized On-Site Training in Forensic Interviewing, &
- 1-day course for mandated reporters on talking with a child about sexual abuse.

To receive a brochure with course descriptions and scheduled training dates,

Interagency Child Abuse Evaluation Center

CORNERHOUSE STAFF

Administration

Joci Tilsen,
Executive Director
Dottie Bellinger,
Communications Director
Kristi Thomson,
Administrative Coordinator
Shawn McKinney,
Administrative Assistant
Carolyn Smith,
Secretary-Receptionist

Interview, Team Services and Training Program

Mary Annette Venier, Program Director
Judy Weigman,
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Lori Holmes, Training & Interview Specialist
Debbie Martinetti,
Interview/Training Specialist
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Interview/Training Specialist
Diane Sharper, Cultural Support Program Coordinator
Mary Hunt,
Program Assistant

Physicians

Gary Fifield, M.D.
Marjorie Hogan, M.D.
Julie Kummer, M.D.
Jud Reaney, M.D.
Linda Thompson, M.D.

please contact Carolyn Smith, Secretary -Receptionist. For additional information or to discuss on-site training, please contact Dottie Bellinger, Communications Director.

CornerHouse Staff Changes

We welcome Carolyn Smith as our new Secretary-Receptionist! Carolyn comes to CornerHouse with experience in human services, having worked at the Reuben-Lindh Learning Center for the past few years. Also, congratulations to Shawn McKinney, who formerly held Carolyn's position! Shawn has been promoted to Administrative Assistant.

You may have noticed that many CornerHouse staff members have new or altered titles. These reflect a staff reorganization implemented this fall to increase our efficiency, to better describe the functions being performed by staff, and to integrate the training program into the rest of CornerHouse. Two staff members were promoted to supervisory positions as part of the reorganization: Kristi Thomson became the Administrative Coordinator and Mary Annette Venier became the Program Director. Congratulations to both!

Minnesota Mandates Recording

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media suitable for children, and, if used in court, helps judges and juries attend more closely. One of the difficulties in videotaping is that it requires more elaborate equipment. There are some interviewers that actually take a video camera with them and perch it on their shoulder to record an interview. However, most people are not that comfortable with video equipment! Portable video equipment can also distract the child's (and the interviewer's) attention.

Rather than carrying video equipment around, numerous counties in Minnesota have set up dedicated space for videotaping interviews with children. Groups considering this should be aware that no one set of audio-

video equipment will work best in every setting. For example, the sound characteristics of the interview space will largely determine microphone placement and equipment. Additional sound-shielding insulation to eliminate outside noise may be required as well. Another example is the range of the camera's viewing area. CornerHouse was originally built so that interviews are videotaped through a one-way mirror on one wall of the interview room. Because the scope of the camera is limited to the viewing area behind the one-way mirror, active children sometimes move out of the range of the camera. Our remodeled facility will utilize a remote-controlled camera mounted on the wall of each interview room. To help evaluate specific needs, we have found it valuable to consult with professional audio-video equipment specialists.

Lastly, it is imperative that key members of the child abuse team-- law enforcement, child protection, and the county attorney's office-- be consulted BEFORE beginning the recording practice. The team should determine policy regarding audio and videotaping together. After an initial period of recording interviews, the team can evaluate how well the recording policy is meeting each member's needs, and make adjustments as indicated.

[This article is based on a presentation made by CornerHouse staff member Lori Holmes at the Sixth Annual TEAM Conference; Minneapolis, MN; January, 1996]

Editor's Note: We will be printing a brief article on current trends and practice in each issue of Program Update. We welcome your input; if you would like us to address a particular issue, please let us know!



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