

Book Review

Investigation and Prosecution of Child Abuse Cases (3rd Edition). By the American Prosecutors Research Institute's National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. 2004.

If we lived in a perfect world there would be no need for a volume entitled *Investigation and Prosecution of Child Abuse Cases*. Every child would be cherished and nurtured by loving parents and never come to harm. But as a recent Madison Avenue advertising campaign reminds us, the world we live in is not any where near perfect. In 2002, the most recent year for which there are statistics, an estimated 896,000 children were victims of child abuse or neglect. That makes this book not only necessary, but indispensable. In the 10 years since the American Prosecutors Research Institute's National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse (NCPA) published the first edition of this book, *Investigation and Prosecution of Child Abuse Cases* has become a staple in prosecutors' offices across the country. The third edition continues that strong tradition.

For nearly 20 years, NCPA has provided training and technical assistance in the area of child abuse investigation and prosecution. The staff at NCPA receives approximately 3,500 questions a year from prosecutors and police requesting assistance and advice on child abuse cases. As a result, the center is in a unique position to identify and respond to developments in this area.

The major theme of the third edition is that child abuse is different from other crimes and consequently, successful prosecution requires a different working model. "[T]he optimal response to child abuse involves a coordinated multi-disciplinary approach to share information and establish agency responsibilities" (xxix). The benefits of this shared investigative approach are many: a reduction in the number of interviews the victim must undergo and the number of people involved in a case, more efficient use of resources, more awareness of the roles of other agencies, and less interagency conflict.

The introduction offers a basic roadmap for the establishment of a coordinated system, covering the roles of the major players: prosecutors, child protective services, health care and mental health workers, victim advocates, guardians *ad litem*, the courts, and various others, such as schools and funding agencies. It then offers a

model for changing to a multidisciplinary approach, recognizing that institutional change is often a slow process. Importantly, it points out avoidable landmines along the way, such as strategies for ensuring team flexibility and involving the prosecutor early in the case. NCPCA recommends an initial evaluation of current practices in each jurisdiction, as well as yearly reviews of the team's effectiveness to continually improve its performance.

The volume guides the reader through every step of the process of proving abuse and bringing an offender to justice, from an overview of victims and victimization in the first chapter, to the trial of abuse cases, finishing with a chapter on special courtroom tactics helpful in these highly sensitive matters. A special section on child pornography and the Internet offers extremely valuable—but not necessarily intuitive—advice for attacking this all-too-common phenomenon.

Each chapter demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of child abuse and its dynamics. While much of the victimization chapter will not be news to child abuse researchers and workers, the impact on legal prosecutions may be. For instance, NCPCA recognizes the special risks of abuse to disabled children—something that has not been widely appreciated or appropriately responded to within the child protective services system—but then argues that disabled children can, with appropriate accommodation, provide adequate testimony to support a conviction.

Each chapter contains tables and figures, providing information such as which states protect the identity of child victims or the advantages and disadvantages of videotaping interviews. Many of the chapters contain lists of additional resources—books and legal or medical journal articles—that may prove useful. In addition, there are several indices—a case index and a detailed and comprehensive index to the contents. Perhaps most useful for nonlawyers are the many tables outlining the different approaches various states take to certain topics, together with citations to the appropriate section of that state's code. For instance, in Chapter 3 alone, Table III.1 provides a state-by-state breakdown of statutes protecting the identity of child victims, Table III.2 lists statutes extending the statute of limitations for offenses against children, Table III.3 catalogues statutes that impose liability for the failure to protect, Table III.4 gives felony murder statutes, Table III.5 describes murder by torture statutes, Table III.6 inventories specialized child homicide statutes, while Table III.7 lists statutes governing victim impact statements.

Even though the material in the book is extensive, it is supplemented by a CD-ROM packed with yet more useful material. There is a 38-page bibliography of articles from law reviews and medical journals, dealing with a wide range of subjects from interviewing child witnesses to Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy. The CD also contains forms for letters and pleadings, in Word format, which may be saved and altered to suit the facts of a particular investigation or prosecution. It also gives numerous examples of questions for victims and expert witnesses such

as doctors and social workers—a thought-provoking primer for those considering a role as an expert in child abuse cases. There are even examples of opening and closing arguments.

All of these features make this volume and the CD an essential resource. It would be particularly useful to rural prosecutors and police, many of whom cannot afford to attend training sessions and may lack locally available reference material and experts. At \$64.95, this kind of assistance is a bargain.

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