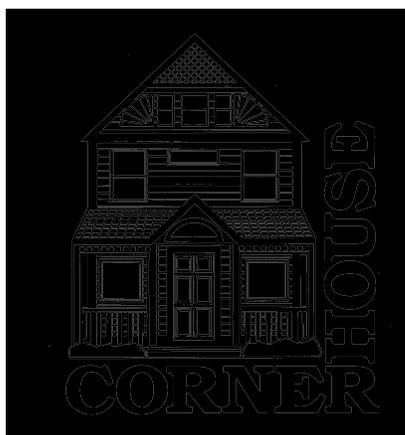


Around the Corner

A Quarterly Newsletter from CornerHouse

Volume 1 Number 1, 2002



Evaluation and Training Center

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Keeping In Touch:

CornerHouse has undergone a number of changes in the last several years. Staff, board and multidisciplinary team members have moved on from CornerHouse. New faces have replaced theirs, and new collaborations have been formed. In addition, our techniques in interviewing children have seen modifications, as new research and proven interview methods become available. We are aware that our supporters are interested in what we are doing, and we have resumed our quarterly newsletter regarding the services CornerHouse provides.

One of the most exciting endeavors CornerHouse has initiated in the last several years is our collaboration with the American Prosecutors Research Institute's (APRI) National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse called **Half a Nation by 2010**. The goal of **Half a Nation by 2010** is to establish a high quality, five-day forensic interviewing course based upon the CornerHouse forensic interview protocol in 25 states by the year 2010. Law enforcement and child abuse professionals, prosecutors and other multidisciplinary team members will be involved in each state to develop a customized, state of the art Train-the-Trainer course, meeting the distinct needs of their jurisdictions.

By the end of 2002, five states – Minnesota, South Carolina, Mississippi, Indiana and New Jersey – will have already completed the process. Georgia and Missouri will be trained in 2003, and West Virginia and Maryland have been selected as the eighth and ninth states to be trained in 2004. We are well on our way to a collaborative, systemic response to child abuse that elicits statements from children in a way that is developmentally appropriate, non-leading and non-suggestive, and ensures the rights of the accused.

We continue to face daily challenges in providing the best services to children who have experienced or witnessed violence, and we are grateful for the support and assistance provided to CornerHouse and the children we see on a daily basis. CornerHouse itself has provided services to almost seven thousand children since its inception, and through those we have trained, thousands more have been heard. Thank you all for your work to protect children in our communities.

Amy Russell
Program Director

Forensic Services

Changes in the CornerHouse Interview Protocol

By Judith F. Weigman, MS, LICSW

CornerHouse Child Interview Specialist/Trainer

When CornerHouse first began to interview children in June of 1989, a specific protocol had been developed for this purpose. This protocol was, and continues to be, based on the research and practice of numerous professionals in the field, as well as the experience of CornerHouse forensic interviewers. The first five-day training program was conducted at CornerHouse in 1990; the purpose, to teach pertinent information to multidisciplinary child abuse teams in Minnesota and across the country. As we interview more children and train more professionals in this field, we are constantly reviewing new information and research, in order to incorporate the most up-to-date material that we can utilize and share with others.

In 1997, a summary of changes in the CornerHouse protocol was compiled for professionals who had received training and were involved in investigating, prosecuting or conducting forensic interviews of alleged victims of sexual abuse or witnesses to violent crimes. Since that time, more changes to the CornerHouse protocol have been made. The following are the most significant changes made during these past years:

Telling child about team members observing: Along with information about being videotaped, interviewers routinely inform children that certain people [team members] are watching as the interview takes place. This may include stating that the detective, social worker and another person [assistant county attorney] are watching, and may call down with a question near the end of the interview.

Changes -- continued on page 2

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Changes – continued from page 1

Not writing names on the anatomical diagrams: Anatomical diagrams are an integral part of the CornerHouse process, especially with young children. Previously, CornerHouse interviewers would write the child's name on the drawing relating to the same gender as the child, and state something such as, "I'll put your name on the boy picture, because you said you are a boy." In some cases, the child was asked to name a person or family member that he knew who was of the opposite gender. This name was then written on the corresponding diagram.

Although this practice did not become a legal or court issue for CornerHouse interviewers, it was decided to discontinue this practice to prevent possible confusion for children or possible legal challenges. If desired, interviewers may now write the child's name on the easel paper, above the anatomical diagram.

Asking about sexually explicit materials, including videos, magazines, photographs, Internet, etc.: Prior to the Closure Stage, a CornerHouse interviewer may ask whether the child has been exposed to sexually explicit materials via various media. It is expected that a child is likely to withhold this information unless specifically asked. An interviewer might ask, "Did someone (Uncle Joe) ever show you pictures or movies that had people with no clothes on?" or "Did someone (Uncle Joe) ever take pictures of you or [child's sibling]?" If child says 'yes,' we ask the child to provide details, using words such as, "Tell me about that;" or "tell me how that happened;" etc. Since this may be especially embarrassing or shameful to a child, reassurance is strongly recommended in these cases. Comments from the interviewer such as, "If that happened, it wouldn't be your fault;" or something along those lines might be helpful.

Asking if someone told child what to say: Sometime during the interview, it is helpful to ask the child if someone [mother, dad, or someone else] told the child what to talk about. Suggested examples might be, "Did you talk to someone about coming here today?" "What did (person) say about that?" "Did someone tell you what to talk about today?" "Did your mom/dad tell you what to say during our talk?" "Is there something that you are not supposed to talk about today?" If a child indicates something concerning we check for more details.

Drawing child's face and assessing language and other skills: CornerHouse interviewers generally draw the faces of children being interviewed up to around the age of eight or nine. Depending on various circumstances, these older children may be given a choice to have their faces drawn or whether to just begin the interview with naming their family members.

We suggest that interviewers use the time while drawing the child's face, to engage the child in questions that would elicit possible narrative responses. Some helpful hints may be garnered from the child's parent(s) during the brief, parent/interviewer meeting prior to the interview. One might ask the child about friends and playmates or pets; or about games or songs they like to play or sing; or other possible interests which could provide possible clues as to the child's verbal abilities and thought processes. It is important to keep in mind that a young child may need prompts, multiple choice, or even yes/no questions in this regard, since a free recall question requires reconstructive memory, which is not fully developed in young children. An example might be, "Do you like to swim, or ----?" "Tell me about that." Asking the child to name various facial and body parts is better accomplished during the anatomy identification stage.

Asking child if anything was omitted: Near the end of the interview, we routinely ask children over five, if there is anything 'that I forgot to ask,' or if there 'is something that you [child] think is important for me [the interviewer] to know.' This gives the child an opportunity to provide information that may have been missed earlier.

Asking if child has questions: Along this same line, the child is told that she has answered lots of questions, and then is asked if she has any questions for the interviewer. It is highly recommended that the interviewer be prepared to respond to the child's questions, which could prove unexpected or embarrassing. Example, "Has someone ever touched your private spot?" Obviously, the interviewer will not provide a personal response to that question. It is likely that the child is exhibiting the *stigmatization dynamic*, and wants to know if she is the only one that this has happened to. The interviewer's response might be, "It sounds like you want to know if this has happened to other kids/people, and not just to you. I want you to know that I talk to lots of kids about *things like this*, [keep it non-specific]; and I can understand that you would ask that."

Modifying the protocol: In order to accommodate the variety of issues that may be present in a particular interview, this qualifying statement was added to more fully explain the flexibility of the CornerHouse Forensic Interview Process, which is referred to as "RATAC:" "Since this is a semi-structured process, one or more of these stages may be modified or eliminated, allowing for the

Look for Lori Holmes' article on **anatomical diagrams** in the November edition of Update (volume 15, number 5) or go to APRI's website: www.ndaa-apri.org and click on Update located under newsletters.

Changes -- continued on page 3

Calendar

November:

- 8 Case Review 8:30 am
- 13 Medical Tour for Pediatric Residents 1:15-2:15 pm
- 15 Board Meeting 7:30-9 am
- 28-29 CornerHouse Closed for Holiday

December:

- 20 Board Meeting 7:30-9 am
- 13 Case Review 8:30 am
- 13 CornerHouse closed at noon
- 25 CornerHouse Closed for Holiday

January:

- 1 CornerHouse Closed for Holiday
- 8 Medical Tour for Pediatric Residents 1:15-2:15 pm
- 10 Case Review 8:30 am
- 17 Board Meeting 7:30-9 am
- 22 Interagency Team Meeting 11:30 am-1 pm

Changes – continued from page 2

developmental considerations and/or spontaneity of each child.” Just a reminder, it is critically important for each interviewer to understand and be able to speak to the reason(s) why a particular interview was modified.

While RATAAC has proven to be useful, it was apparent that adjustments to this process needed to be clarified, in order to accommodate the disclosures of some children. For example, a child might be in active disclosure and ready to tell of his experiences, so during the rapport building stage, while drawing the child’s face or while the child is naming family members, the child may spontaneously blurt out that “Uncle Joe touched my private part.” Experienced interviewers would “go with the child” and elicit more details of the child’s experience, which is part of the Abuse Scenario Stage, and not feel trapped to following all of the stages of the protocol.

Since the above-mentioned child has not yet identified or provided names for body parts, it is important for this to take place without interrupting the child’s disclosure process. The interviewer has several options at this point. One option might be to introduce the anatomical drawings and have the child identify the private areas to which the child is referring. This would ensure that the interviewer and child are referring to the same “private part” that the child stated had been touched. Another option might be to introduce the anatomical dolls and have the child identify and name those private areas that he mentioned in his disclosure. Then ask the child to demonstrate what he experienced.

Obviously, since the child was in full disclosure during the rapport stage, touch inquiry is unnecessary. Asking about the kinds of touch the child likes or doesn’t like is likely to stop the natural flow of the interview, which may seem to be well underway. The stages of this interview would be identified as: Rapport Building; interrupted by Abuse Scenario; back briefly to Anatomy Identification; continuation of Abuse Scenario, if necessary; and then to Closure. Touch Inquiry was completely eliminated because it was not needed.

Another example of an appropriate time to vary from the protocol is after Rapport Building, when an older child is asked if she knows why she came to CornerHouse. At this point, a child who is comfortable telling why she was brought to CornerHouse might begin to provide details of the abuse experience, thus eliminating Anatomy and Touch Inquiry stages.

Since the field of forensic interviewing continues to change and grow, you can be assured that CornerHouse will continue to search for the most up-to-date research and information that will enhance the quality of our forensic interviews as well our training program. This information will in turn be shared with others, who are also dedicated to working together to help the children and families in their communities.

Recognition:

CornerHouse wishes to recognize and express our sincere appreciation to all those who aid in the CornerHouse mission.

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Training

CornerHouse is coming to a city near you! CornerHouse will be training onsite in New York, New Jersey and Missouri in 2002.

CornerHouse Wish List:

- 1) Sponsor a month's worth of snack food for the children.
- 2) Contribute to our medical exam distraction/stress relief materials.
- 3) Add to our library of diverse books and magazines for children of all ages.
- 4) Provide games and arts and crafts materials for children while they wait to be interviewed.

Due to the nature of the work done at CornerHouse, some donations unfortunately cannot be accepted. CornerHouse staff is happy to work with you as you select items for donation. If you have any questions please contact Barb Hiltz or Jessica Heuer at (612) 813-8300.

Child Sexual Abuse Forensic Interview Training for forensic interviewers and multidisciplinary teams (will receive priority registration) of law enforcement, social service and legal professionals. This course teaches an interview process to conduct credible, reliable, non-traumatic forensic interviews of children and vulnerable adults who allege sexual abuse. Openings are still available in the following sessions in 2003:

February 24-28

March 24-28

April 21-25

May 5-9

Five Days: Monday-Friday

Tuition: \$895

Onsite Child Sexual Abuse Forensic Interview Training is an intensive three-day training course. The course is designed for multidisciplinary teams of law enforcement, social service and legal professionals and teaches an interview process to conduct credible, reliable, non-traumatic forensic interviews of children and vulnerable adults who allege sexual abuse. This course, as compared to the five-day forensic interview course, is for teams of professionals who may have a hardship with traveling from their community to CornerHouse to obtain training and for those communities needing several professionals (up to 30 participants) trained. A CornerHouse trainer will travel to the host site community and utilize methods consisting of lecture and discussion; review of CornerHouse videotaped interviews, and skill-building exercises.

Advanced Child Sexual Abuse Forensic Interview Training for professionals who have completed the CornerHouse Forensic Interview Training, First Witness training or the Finding Words course. Participants must have completed a minimum of 25 interviews utilizing the CornerHouse interview process. This course: teaches advanced forensic interviewing issues and research on memory and suggestibility; provides a mock trial demonstration of cross examination regarding an interview; and provides students with the opportunity to learn and utilize a tool to critique their own interviews. Openings are still available in the following sessions in 2003:

May 19-22

September 22-25

Four Days: Monday-Thursday

Tuition:\$770

Child Sexual Abuse Training for Mandated Reporters is a one day seminar designed for teachers, counselors, nurses, advocates, child care providers and other professionals who have responsibility for mandated reporting of suspected child maltreatment. It is also designed for patrol officers who may be the first responders to reports of child sexual abuse. A CornerHouse trainer teaches a process to talk with children or vulnerable adults who they suspect may be victims of maltreatment. Call us about bringing this seminar to your organization or group for inservice training.

New in 2002! Diversity Training: As the cultural and ethnic makeup of Hennepin County changes, so too do the children and families CornerHouse serves. This year CornerHouse was fortunate to receive a grant from the Otto Bremer Foundation to provide training and direction as we attempt to grow along with the new face of our community. Local multidisciplinary team members are invited to attend. There is no fee but pre-registration is required. Sessions remaining in 2002:

Date: November 18

Time: 12:30-4:30

Orientation for interagency team members in Hennepin County is a three-hour session that includes: a tour of CornerHouse, the interview protocol, videotaped interview, and a team meeting demonstration. There is no fee but pre-registration is required. Sessions in 2003:

January 28

April 29

June 3

September 30

For more information or to register, contact Sandy Forseth at (612) 813-8310.

Any comments, suggestions or questions? Is your email address changing? We would love to hear from you! Please email the Forensic Services Administrative Assistant at amanda.harrington@childrenshc.org. Also please pass this newsletter on to anyone you think would be interested. Our website is currently under construction, look for us soon at www.cornerhousemn.org!