

**CHILD ABUSE VICTIMS WITH DISABILITIES:
A CURRICULUM FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT FIRST RESPONDERS AND
CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES FRONTLINE WORKERS**

INTRODUCTION TO THE CURRICULUM

The California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES) is the administering agency for the federal Children's Justice Act (CJA) grant funds. The CJA is a federal program charged with identifying the need for systemic changes in the area of investigating child abuse. The federal funds provide grants to states to improve the investigation, prosecution, and judicial handling of cases of child abuse and neglect. Since 1993, CJA funds have supported numerous programs throughout California and propelled much needed change in the system's response to child abuse. The overall goal of the CJA is to reduce systemic trauma to children who are victims of child abuse, sexual abuse and exploitation, and preserve the rights of all parties involved in the investigation of such cases.

The CJA Task Force is a requirement for California's eligibility to receive the federal funds. This CJA Task Force is comprised of professionals throughout California who have knowledge and expertise in the areas of criminal justice and child abuse, including investigation of child physical abuse, child neglect, child sexual abuse and exploitation, and child maltreatment-related fatalities. The CJA Task Force is responsible for making policy, program, and training recommendations to the State regarding improvements and reform to the way suspected child abuse cases are handled.

The California CJA Task Force recognizes the needs of child abuse victims with disabilities are different in substantial ways from those of child abuse victims who do not have disabilities; therefore, the CJA Task Force recommended funding for projects to address these needs. The CJA Task Force is aware of the importance of training first responders, child protective services workers, and others who are called upon to serve the needs of child abuse victims with disabilities. The first response of law enforcement officers and child protective services workers is critical to the child abuse case, as well as to the child victim and his/her family. To address this issue, the CJA Task Force recommended the development of a first responder's curriculum to improve and standardize available training.

The Child Abuse and Neglect Disability Outreach (CAN DO) Program at Arc Riverside was selected to develop a one-day training curriculum for first responders to cases of abuse of children with disabilities. The goal of the curriculum is to provide the first responders with information, skills, and an effective protocol for responding to abuse situations involving children with disabilities.

In its development of the curriculum, the CAN DO Program conducted a national search for similar curricula and none were located. Related curricula were identified and used as background material. Some projects have developed videos and curricula on similar topics such as the Peace Officer Standards and Training's (POST) curriculum on law enforcement response to individuals with mental illness and developmental disabilities. However, none exist specifically for children with all disabilities, and focus exclusively on law enforcement first responders and child protective services frontline workers.

Some of the issues addressed in this curriculum include: (1) Myths and stereotypes interfering with effective response; (2) Basic information about disabilities and how these lead to different life experiences and create cultural and knowledge-based differences; (3) Barriers to communication

occurring as a function of the disability and strategies to overcome them; (4) Development of a first response protocol for child abuse victims with disabilities that can be incorporated into existing first response protocols; (5) Access to information about disabilities and effectively interviewing children with disabilities; and (6) Information on deciding when to respond and when other resources may be necessary.

Children have many varied disabilities. Accordingly, the CAN DO Program team decided to provide a comprehensive overview of various disabilities and focus the curriculum on those disabilities most likely to require special skills or information on the part of the first responder (e.g., disabilities that affect intellectual function, speech and language, physical function, and mental health). Children with disabilities often require specialized services to meet educational and medical needs. The laws, service systems, and resources that exist to meet these needs are also described within this curriculum.

It is widely acknowledged that children with disabilities are abused at rates far higher than children without disabilities. However, the service and response systems have not provided for their needs. The first response is considered critical for many reasons: it can ensure the safety and well-being of the child victim; it can leave a positive or negative lasting impression on the victim and the family; and the information gathered and evidence collected contributes to the successful prosecution of the criminal case.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

Introduction to the Curriculum

Table of Contents

Module 1: Introduction

- A. Learning Objectives
- B. PowerPoint Slides

Module 2: Commonly Held Beliefs about Children with Disabilities Who Are Victims of Abuse

- A. Learning Objectives
- B. PowerPoint Slides
- C. Commonly Held Beliefs

Module 3: Overview of Disabilities

- A. Learning Objectives
- B. PowerPoint Slides
- C. Roles of Individuals in the Life of Children with Disabilities
- D. Americans with Disabilities Act
- E. California Definition of “Developmental Disability”
- F. Mental Retardation
- G. Learning Disabilities
- H. Communication Disabilities
- I. Autism Spectrum Disorders
- J. Epilepsy
- K. Tourette’s Syndrome
- L. Cerebral Palsy
- M. Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- N. Mental Illness
- O. Transcription of “Victims with Disabilities: The Forensic Interview,” clip with Dina Garcia

Module 4: The Legal System and Disabilities

- A. Learning Objectives
- B. PowerPoint Slides
- C. Legal Quiz
- D. Legal Update 2005

Module 5: Officer/Worker Safety Issues

- A. Learning Objectives
- B. PowerPoint Slides
- C. Article on Death of Children’s Services Worker
- D. Sources of Danger in Child Abuse Calls

Module 6: Conducting the Preliminary Investigation

- A. Learning Objectives
- B. PowerPoint Slides
- C. Information Sources Related to Educational and Regional Center Documentation
- D. Criteria for Spontaneous Statements

- E. Ten Tips for Law Enforcement First Response to a Child Abuse Call for Children with Disabilities
- F. Working with Interpreters
- G. Quick Reference Guide for Briefing Interpreters

Module 7: Interviewing Children with Disabilities

- A. Learning Objectives
- B. PowerPoint Slides
- C. Messages Learned by Children with Disabilities
- D. Characteristics of Disability that May Affect the Interview
- E. Some Key Questions and Issues for Interviewers
- F. Examples of Question Styles
- G. Considerations When Interviewing Children with Disabilities
- H. Thirteen Tips for Forensic Interviewers

Module 8: The Benefits of a Multidisciplinary Response and

- A. Learning Objectives
- B. PowerPoint Slides
- C. Multidisciplinary Team – Agency List

Conclusion

Supplemental Materials

- A. Child Development
- B. Child Abuse Accommodation Syndrome
- C. List of Regional Centers
- D. Handouts from CALCASA
 - 1. Suggestions for Improving Cultural Accessibility
 - 2. Suggestions for Improving Physical Accessibility
 - 3. Key Terms and Definitions Of Disability
- E. Additional Resources from Los Angeles City Department of Disability

Reference Materials

- A. Print
- B. Videos
- C. Websites
- D. Power Point Slides