

# Child Sex Rings: A Behavioral Analysis

For  
Criminal Justice  
Professionals  
Handling  
Cases of  
Child  
Sexual  
Exploitation



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# **Child Sex Rings: A Behavioral Analysis**

## **For Criminal Justice Professionals Handling Cases of Child Sexual Exploitation**

**December 1989**

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## **Dedication**

This book is dedicated to the victims of child sex rings and to the memory of two FBI agents who devoted their professional lives to helping sexually exploited children.

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Boston, Massachusetts

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## Author's Preface

Since 1981 I have been assigned to the Behavioral Science Unit at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia, and have specialized in studying all aspects of the sexual victimization of children. The FBI Behavioral Science Unit provides assistance to law-enforcement agencies and prosecutors in the United States and foreign countries. The Unit attempts to apply knowledge of the behavioral sciences for practical application to the criminal justice system. As a result of training and research conducted by the Unit and its successes in analyzing violent crime, many professionals contact the Behavioral Science Unit for assistance and guidance in dealing with violent crime, especially those cases considered different, unusual, or bizarre. This service is provided at no cost and is not limited to crimes under the investigative jurisdiction of the FBI.

In 1983 and 1984, when I first began to hear stories of bizarre cults and human sacrifice, the validity of the stories was believed to be high. I had been dealing with bizarre, deviant behavior for many years and had long since realized that almost anything is possible. Just when you think that you have heard it all, along comes another strange case. The idea that there are a few cunning, secretive individuals in positions of power somewhere in this country regularly killing a few people as part of some ritual or ceremony and getting away with it is certainly within the realm of possibility. But the number of alleged cases began to grow. We now have hundreds of victims alleging that thousands of offenders are murdering tens of thousands of people, and there is little or no corroborative evidence. I began to question some aspects of these allegations.

I have devoted more than seven years part-time, and nine years full-time, of my professional life in researching, training, and consulting in the area of child sexual abuse and exploitation. I have made the issues of child sexual abuse and exploitation a big part of my professional life's work. I have no reason to deny their existence or nature. In fact, I have done everything I can to make people more aware of the problem. I can accept no outside income and am paid the same salary by the FBI whether or not children are abused and exploited—and whether the number

is one or one million. As someone deeply concerned about and professionally committed to the issue, I do not lightly question the allegations of thousands of victims of child sexual abuse and exploitation.

There are many valid perspectives from which to assess and evaluate victim allegations of sexual abuse and exploitation. Parents may choose to believe simply because their children make the claims. The level of proof necessary may be minimal because the consequences of believing are within the family. One parent correctly told the author, "I believe what my child needs me to believe."

Therapists may choose to believe simply because their professional assessment is that their patient believes the victimization and describes it so vividly. The level of proof necessary may be no more than therapeutic evaluation because the consequences are between therapist and patient. No independent corroboration is required.

A social worker must have more real, tangible evidence of abuse in order to take protective action and initiate legal proceedings. The level of proof necessary must be higher because the consequences (denial of visitation, foster care) are greater.

The law-enforcement officer deals with the criminal justice system. The levels of proof necessary are probable cause and beyond a reasonable doubt because the consequences (search and seizure, arrest, incarceration) are so great. This book focuses only on the criminal justice system and the law-enforcement perspective. The level of proof for accepting allegations of criminal acts must be more than simply that the victim alleged it and it is possible. This in no way, however, denies the validity and importance of the parental, therapeutic, or social welfare perspectives of these allegations.

This book sets forth my behavioral analysis of child sex rings. All the information is set forth from a law-enforcement perspective in order to improve the investigation and prosecution of these cases. The book, however, is not meant to be a step-by-step manual on how to investigate these cases but, rather, a general guide for law-enforcement in applying the behavioral analysis set forth. The book will also be useful for social service professionals, therapists, mem-

bers of the legal system, researchers, and students examining the issues of child sexual abuse and exploitation.

After many years of evaluating and analyzing child sex ring cases, I have identified two major patterns or types of cases. It is difficult to label these two patterns or types. At first I referred to them as traditional and nontraditional child sex rings. The idea of referring to any kind of child sexual abuse and exploitation as "traditional," however, was distasteful to me. For a time they were called Type A and Type B child sex rings. For want of better labels, I now refer to these two types of cases as *historical child sex rings* and *multidimensional child sex rings*. These terms were first suggested to me by an unknown police officer attending a training conference in Hamilton, Ontario. After some thought and analysis, these terms were adopted because they give a descriptive name or label to each type of case without the emotion or implication of such terms as "traditional," "ritualistic," or "satanic" abuse.

In order to have a better understanding of the

problems of investigating and prosecuting child sex ring cases, I believe that it is necessary to have some knowledge of societal attitudes and historical perspectives on child sexual abuse and exploitation. I have also long realized the confusion created by calling different things by the same name or the same thing by different names. Therefore, chapters on an historical overview and the clarification of definitions have been included in this book.

The complete citations for any books, articles, and studies mentioned in the body of the text are set forth in the References at the end. In addition, because of the complexity of many of the issues discussed in the book, an Additional Readings section is also set forth, which contains books and articles that present additional information, opinions, and perspectives about child sex rings.

Kenneth V. Lanning  
Quantico, Virginia  
December 1989

# 1. Historical Overview

In order to attempt to deal with the problem of child sex rings, it is important to have an historical perspective of society's attitudes about child sexual abuse. Therefore, a brief synopsis of recent attitudes in the United States will be presented. For those desiring more detailed information about such societal attitudes, particularly in other cultures and in the more distant past, Florence Rush's book, *The Best Kept Secret: Sexual Abuse of Children*, is recommended (see References).

Society's attitude about child sexual abuse and exploitation can be summed up in one word: *denial*. Most people do not want to hear about child sexual victimization and would prefer to pretend that it just does not happen. Today, however, it is difficult to pretend that it does not happen. Stories and reports about child sexual victimization are a daily occurrence.

It is important for professionals dealing with child sexual abuse to recognize and learn to manage this denial of a serious problem. Professionals must overcome the denial and encourage society to deal with, report, and prevent child sexual abuse from happening again.

Some professionals, however, in their zeal to make American society aware of the sexual victimization of children, may exaggerate the problem. Presentations and literature with poorly documented claims about one in three children being sexually molested, the \$5 billion kiddie porn industry, child slavery rings, and 50,000 stranger-abducted children are not uncommon. The problem is bad enough; it is not necessary to exaggerate it. Professionals should cite reputable and scientific studies and note the sources of information. If they do not, when the exaggerations and distortions are discovered, their credibility and the credibility of the issue are lost.

## **"Stranger Danger"**

During any discussion of child sexual abuse during the 1950s and early 1960s, the primary focus would undoubtedly have been on "stranger danger"—the dirty old man in the wrinkled raincoat. If one could not deny the existence of child sexual abuse, one de-

scribed victimization in simplistic terms of good and evil. The "stranger danger" approach to preventing child sexual abuse is clear cut. We immediately know who and what the good guys and bad guys are.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the FBI distributed a poster that epitomized this attitude. It showed a man, with his hat pulled down, hiding behind a tree with a bag of candy in his hands. He was waiting for a sweet little girl walking home from school alone. At the top it read, "Boys and girls, color the page, memorize the rules." At the bottom it read, "For your protection, remember to turn down gifts from strangers, and refuse rides offered by strangers." The poster clearly contrasts the evil of the offender with the goodness of the child victim.

The myth of the child molester as the dirty old man in the wrinkled raincoat is now being reevaluated, based on what we now know about the kinds of people who victimize children. In fact, the child molester can look like anyone else and even be someone we know.

There is another myth that is still with us and is far less likely to be discussed. This is the myth of the victim as a completely innocent little girl walking down the street minding her own business. This myth may be more important to dispel than the myth of the offender, especially when talking about the sexual exploitation of children and child sex rings. Society seems to have a problem dealing with any sexual abuse case in which the offender is not completely "bad" or the victim is not completely "good." Society seems to find it difficult to deal with child victims who simply behave like human beings and respond to the attention and affection of offenders by voluntarily and repeatedly returning to the offender's home. We become confused when we see the victims in child pornography giggling or laughing. At professional conferences on child sexual abuse, child prostitution is almost never discussed. It is the form of sexual victimization of children most unlike the stereotype of the innocent girl victim. Child prostitutes, by definition, participate in and often initiate their victimization. Furthermore, child prostitutes and the participants in child sex rings are frequently boys. One therapist recently told the author that a researcher's data on child

molestation were misleading because many of the child victims in question were child prostitutes. This implies that child prostitutes are not "real" victims. In a survey by the *Los Angeles Times*, only 37 percent of those responding thought that child prostitution constituted child sexual abuse. Whether or not it is fair, when adults and children have sex, the child is *always* the victim.

### **Intrafamilial Child Sexual Abuse**

During the 1970s, primarily as a result of the women's movement, society began to learn more about the sexual victimization of children. We began to realize that most children are sexually molested by someone they know who is usually a relative—a father, stepfather, uncle, grandfather, or older brother. It quickly became apparent that warnings about not taking gifts from strangers were not good enough to prevent child sexual abuse. Consequently, we began to develop prevention programs based on more complex concepts, such as good touching and bad touching, the "yucky" feeling, and the child's right to say *no*. These are not the kinds of things you can easily and effectively communicate in forty-five minutes to hundreds of kids packed into an auditorium. These are very difficult issues, and they must be carefully developed and evaluated.

In the late 1970s child sexual abuse became almost synonymous with incest, and incest meant father-daughter sexual relations. Therefore, the focus of child sexual abuse intervention became father-daughter incest. Even today, the vast majority of training materials, articles, and books on this topic refer to child sexual abuse only in terms of intrafamilial father-daughter incest.

*Incest* is, in fact, sexual relations between individuals of any age too closely related to marry. It need not necessarily involve an adult and a child, and it goes beyond child sexual abuse. But more important, child sexual abuse goes beyond father-daughter incest. Intrafamilial incest between an adult and child may be the most common form of child sexual abuse, but it is not the only form.

The progress of the 1970s in recognizing that child sexual abuse was not simply a result of "stranger danger" was an important breakthrough in dealing with society's denial. The battle, however, is not over. The persistent voice of society luring us back to the more simple concept of "stranger danger" may never go away. It is the voice of denial.

### **Return to "Stranger Danger"**

In the early 1980s the issue of missing children rose to prominence and was focused primarily on the

stranger abduction of little children. Runaways, throwaways, noncustodial abductions, non-family abductions of teenagers—all major problems within the missing children's issue—were almost forgotten. People no longer wanted to hear about good touching and bad touching and the child's right to say *no*. They wanted to be told, in thirty minutes or less, how they could protect their children from abduction by strangers. We were back to the horrible but simple and clear-cut concept of "stranger danger."

In the emotional zeal over the problem of missing children, isolated horror stories and distorted numbers were sometimes used. The American public was led to believe that most of the missing children had been kidnapped by *pedophiles*—a new term for *child molesters*. The media played a big role in this hype and hysteria over missing children.

### **The Acquaintance Molester**

Only recently has society begun to deal openly with a critical piece in the puzzle of child sexual abuse—acquaintance molestation. This seems to be the most difficult aspect of the problem for us to face. People seem more willing to accept a father or stepfather as a child molester than a parish priest, a next-door neighbor, a police officer, a pediatrician, an FBI agent, or a scout leader. These kinds of molesters have always existed, but our society has not been willing to accept their existence.

Sadly, one of the main reasons that the criminal justice system and the public were forced to confront the problem of acquaintance molestation was the preponderance of lawsuits arising from the negligence of many institutions.

One of the unfortunate outcomes of society's preference for the "stranger danger" concept is what the author calls the "say no, yell, and tell" guilt. This is the result of prevention programs that tell potential child victims to avoid sexual abuse by saying no, yelling, and telling. This might work with the stranger hiding behind a tree. Adolescent boys seduced by a scout leader or parish priest often feel guilty and blame themselves because they did not do what they were supposed to do.

While American society has become increasingly aware of the problem of the acquaintance molester and related problems such as child pornography, the voice calling us back to "stranger danger" still persists.

### **Satanism: A New Form of "Stranger Danger"**

In today's version of "stranger danger," it is the satanic devil worshipers who are snatching the children.

Many who warned us in the early 1980s about pedophiles snatching 50,000 kids a year now contend they were wrong only about who was doing the kidnapping, not about the number abducted. This is again the desire for the simple and clear-cut explanation.

For those who know anything about criminology, the oldest theory of crime is demonology: The devil makes you do it. This makes it even easier to deal

with the child molester who is the "pillar of the community." It is not his fault, he is really a good guy, the devil made him do it. This explanation has tremendous appeal because, like "stranger danger," it presents the clear-cut, black-and-white struggle between good and evil as the explanation for child abduction, exploitation, and abuse.

## 2. Definitions

In Chapter 1, the author deliberately used a variety of terms without defining them in order to make a point. Many of these terms are thought to be basic and are regularly used by both professionals and non-professionals.

Between 1986 and 1988, the author had the honor and privilege of making presentations at the National Conference on Sexual Victimization of Children, the National Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect, the National Conference on Missing and Exploited Children, the National Conference on Child Sexual Exploitation, and the National Symposium on Child Sexual Abuse. All these conferences were very similar and many of the same issues were discussed. A number of the presenters were the same. Why then were they called by different names? What, if any, is the difference between sexual exploitation, abuse, and victimization of children? There is still confusion among professionals with regard to the terms *child molester* and *pedophile*. (For a complete discussion of the terms *child molester* and *pedophile*, see *Child Molesters: A Behavioral Analysis*, listed in References.)

Some say that child pornography pervades the country, and others say that it is not openly distributed anywhere in the United States. Some say there is a connection between missing children and child pornography, and others say there is not. Some people quote the FBI as stating that there are approximately 70 stranger-abducted children each year, while others claim that there are 50,000. This is not simply a matter of difference of opinion. This is actually the result of confusion over definitions.

In written and spoken communication, definitions are crucial to understanding. The problem is that when we use basic or common terms, we rarely define them. What is the difference between child molestation and child rape? Why does one group call itself Society's League Against Molesters (SLAM) and another group call itself Mothers Against the Rape of Children (MARC)? What does it mean to the average citizen to read in the paper that a child was the victim of *indecent assault*, or a child was *sodomized*, or an offender was convicted of *indecent liberties* with a child?

Terms such as *sexual assault of children and youth*

or *sexual assault of children and adolescents* imply that a youth or an adolescent is not a child. At what age does a child become a youth? If such a person is sexually victimized, is that considered youth molestation or sexual abuse of youths?

Although many recognize the importance of definitions, a major problem is the fact that most of these terms do not have universally accepted definitions. They have different meanings on different levels to different disciplines. For example, the dictionary definition of a *pedophile* is not the same as the psychiatric definition in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III-R)* (see References). In common usage in the federal government, *sexual exploitation of children* is what occurs outside the family, and *sexual abuse of children* is what occurs inside the family. The definition problem is most acute when professionals from different disciplines come together to work or communicate about child sexual abuse.

The important point, then, is not that these terms should have only one definition but that people using the terms should communicate their definitions, whatever they might be. Following are the author's attempts to define some terms used in this book. These are certainly not the only definitions for these terms. They may not even be the best definitions. They are simply the author's definitions.

### Sexual Victimization of Children

The term *sexual victimization of children* is a broad term that encompasses all the ways in which a child can be sexually victimized. Under this umbrella term are the following terms: *sexual abuse of children*, *sexual exploitation of children*, and *missing children*. The term *missing children* is partly outside this umbrella because a portion of the population of missing children has nothing to do with sexual victimization.

### Sexual Abuse of Children

The basic term *sexual abuse of children* comprises three elements: 1) a significantly older individual who engages in 2) sexual activity with 3) someone who is

legally a child. This seems to be a simple, basic definition, but each of the elements is complex and potentially confusing.

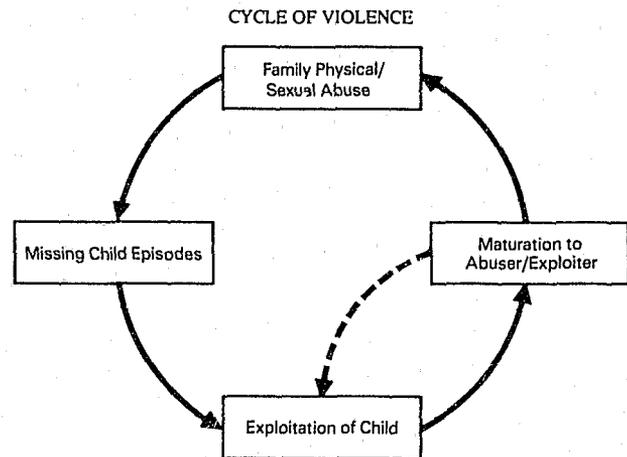
**Significantly Older Individual** How much older is "significantly older"? Clearly, in many cases, the dynamics of the case may be more important than simply the chronological age of the individuals. There are some working guidelines, however. Is it sexual abuse for a 14-year-old child to have sex with a 12-year-old child? The rule of thumb that psychiatrists and others use is that there must be an age difference of five years. There are, however, cases in which the age difference is less than five years and yet the sexual behavior seems to fit the power abuse dynamics of child sexual abuse. There are also cases in which the age difference is greater than five years, but the behavior does not seem to fit the dynamics. One of the most difficult cases to evaluate is that involving a younger and an older adolescent—for example, a 13-year-old girl and a 19-year-old boy. It is more than five years' difference, but is it child sexual abuse?

Another problem is the fact that the offender can be significantly older than the child victim but not be an adult. Offenders are frequently 13 to 16 years of age. The criminal justice system has a difficult time with these adolescent sex offenders. An even more difficult case involves an offender who is 6, 7, or 8 years old. The criminal justice system does not seem to have the slightest idea what to do with a child molester who is 7 years old.

The criminal investigator must understand the dynamics involved. As a general rule, the younger the sex offender, the greater the likelihood that the offender is also a victim. The author is not suggesting that the offenses of such children be ignored, but only that they also be viewed as a possible indicator of prior victimization. This victimization may involve psychological, physical, or sexual abuse.

A central theme of this training book is to emphasize the "big picture" approach to investigation. In short, a reported case of a 7-year-old child molester requires the investigation of more than just the reported crime. Almost everyone has heard of the "cycle of violence" (*see next column*). Many people, however, have the idea that the cycle of violence only means that child victims grow up and become adult offenders. It also can mean that the same individual is both a victim and offender at the same time. For example, say that a man sexually molests a 13-year-old boy. The 13-year-old boy goes home and molests his 7-year-old brother. The 7-year-old brother then molests the baby his mother is babysitting. The investigation of the last crime should lead back to the first crime.

The definition of *sexual abuse of children* states that the offender is a significantly older individual,



not a significantly older male. There are female child molesters. From his investigative experience, the author believes that between 5 percent and 15 percent of the sexual abuse of children is perpetrated by females. But this creates another set of problems.

When the victim of a female child molester is an adolescent boy, some consider the boy "lucky" or experiencing a "rite of passage." When the victim is a young child, it is difficult to prove that the alleged acts were sexual in nature. The author is aware of cases in which a woman has been caught with her mouth on the genitals of a young child and subsequently claimed that the act was part of some child-rearing or calming technique. If a male offender alleged this, he would be a laughingstock.

**Sexual Activity** What is a sexual act? Child sexual abuse can run the gamut of "normal" sexual acts from fondling to intercourse. It can also include deviant sexual acts involving sadomasochism, bondage, urination, and defecation.

Some acts can be sexual acts if you can prove the intent of the individual. Are kissing a child, hugging a child, or appearing naked in front of a child sexual acts? Are giving a child an enema, taking a rectal temperature, or cutting a child's hair sexual acts? Are a physical examination by a doctor, wrestling instructions by a coach, or photographing a child playing dead sexual acts? All these acts could be sexual acts if you could prove the intent was for sexual gratification. Some acts may not be crimes even if you could prove they were for sexual gratification. Photographing children in the playground, tape recording the belching of boys, or listening to children urinate in a public bathroom can be sexual acts for some individuals, but they are most likely not crimes.

Other acts involve societal and cultural judgments. Does allowing children to watch adults have sex or to gain access to pornography constitute child sexual abuse or child neglect? Should artists, photog-

raphers, and therapists have special privileges under child pornography statutes? Is it child abuse to ask a child to reenact sexual abuse the child has described? Is it a crime to photograph the reenactment? Is burning a child's genitals with a lit cigarette physical abuse, sexual abuse, or both?

**Legally a Child** What is a child? The answer to this basic and simple question can be confusing and complex. In our society, for purposes of being served alcohol you become an adult at 21; for purposes of voting you become an adult at 18; for purposes of driving a car you become an adult at 16; and for purposes of consenting to marriage you become an adult, in some states, at 14.

It is not clear in our society exactly when a child becomes an adult. The author recently found an article in the newspaper with the heading, "No longer children, but not yet fully formed adolescents, the 10- to 14-year-old group has come under increasing scrutiny." Is this article implying that 10-year-old persons are not children? There clearly can be a conflict between the law and society when it comes to defining a *child*. The main problem is with the 13- to 17-year-old age group. Those are the victims who most likely look like adults, act like adults, and have sex drives like adults—but who might be considered children under some laws and by society.

For example, federal law defines *child pornography* as sexually explicit visual depictions of minors. A minor is defined as someone who has not yet reached his or her eighteenth birthday. A photograph of a mature-looking 17-year-old girl is therefore legally child pornography. Such photographs are not, however, what most people think of when they think of child pornography. This again reflects the problem of definitions. Arguments about child pornography, such as whether it is openly sold or whether it is of interest only to pedophiles, may be primarily the result of confusion over the definition.

Many people using the term *sexual abuse of children* are referring to children 12 or younger. This results in a sympathy level for victims that is inversely proportional to their age and sexual development. There was a famous case in the early 1980s involving a judge who sentenced a convicted child molester to a minimal sentence because the judge felt the 5-year-old victim was sexually promiscuous. Society was out-

raged and demanded that the judge be removed from the bench. The sad reality is that most people were outraged for the wrong reason—because they thought it was impossible for a 5-year-old child to be sexually promiscuous. Although not typical, it is possible for such a child to be sexually promiscuous. Of course, this is the *result* of abuse, not the cause. It should make no difference, however, whether or not the 5-year-old child was sexually promiscuous. It in no way lessens the offender's crime or responsibility. If you change the case slightly and make the victim 9 years old, does that make a difference? Most people would probably say no. If you change it again and make the victim 12 years old, many people would still say it makes no difference, but they might want to see a picture of the victim. If you change it again and make the victim 13, 14, 15, or 16 years old, the response of society and even the law would vary greatly.

Laws vary from state to state when dealing with adolescent victims. Issues such as whether the victim consented or whether the offender was a caretaker are important legal considerations in such cases. It is confusing how the law determines consent when dealing with a 14-year-old boy seduced by a 55-year-old pedophile.

To determine who is a child, law-enforcement officers must turn to the law. The penal code will legally define who is a child. But law-enforcement officers must still deal with their own perceptions as well as those of the jury and society as a whole.

## Sexual Exploitation of Children

Sexual exploitation is an extension of child sexual abuse that goes beyond the dynamics of an offender, a victim, and an act. *Sexual exploitation of children*, as the author uses the term, includes the dynamics of 1) child pornography, 2) child prostitution, and 3) child sex rings.

It is not relevant to confine the term to sexual acts within or outside the family because sexual exploitation of children can clearly occur in both cases. An incestuous father can be a collector and distributor of child pornography. A father molesting his own child can also simultaneously sexually abuse other children and thus operate a child sex ring.

### 3. Child Sex Rings

In this book, the term *child sex ring* is defined as one or more offenders simultaneously involved sexually with several child victims. As a rule of thumb, a child is defined as someone who has not yet reached his or her eighteenth birthday. Legal definitions, however, of what constitutes a child may vary from situation to situation and case to case and must be considered in any criminal investigation.

Child sex rings need not have a commercial component. In one case in which a teacher was convicted of sexually molesting several of his students, the author used the term *child sex ring* during a pre-sentence hearing. The defense attorney objected, stating that there was no evidence that his client had operated a sex ring. By definition, however, that is exactly what the teacher had operated. Just because the children were not bought and sold does not mean that it was not a sex ring.

A child sex ring does not necessarily mean group sex. Although that has happened in some cases, it is more likely that the offender is sexually interacting with the children one at a time. In a child sex ring, the offender has sex with other children before terminating the sexual relationship with prior victims. The various child victims being molested during a certain period of time usually know each other but may or may not know that the offender is having sex with the other children. Some may believe they are the only ones having a "special" relationship with the offender. Other victims may actually witness the sexual activity of the offender with other children. Offenders may have favorite victims that they treat differently than the other victims.

Many of the nation's child sexual abuse experts have little or no experience dealing with child sex ring cases. All their experience is with one-on-one intrafamilial incest cases. The investigation of child sex rings requires specialized techniques. The author has become convinced that the intrafamilial model for dealing with child sexual abuse has only limited application when dealing with multi-offender/multi-victim child sexual exploitation cases.

In one case that the author was asked to evaluate, a military officer had sexually molested his daughter from shortly after birth to shortly before her seventh

birthday. He was convicted and sent to prison. After several years he was released and is now living with his wife and daughter. When the author describes this case during a presentation, most people operating only from the intrafamilial perspective of child sexual abuse react with disgust or outrage to the notion that the offender is back in the home with the victim. Although that is of some concern to the author, it is minor compared with the author's concern for other young female children in the community where the offender now lives. Having reviewed and analyzed the offender's collection of child pornography and erotica, the author knows a great deal about this man's sexual fantasies and desires. His daughter is now too old to be a preferred sexual partner. Those who focus on intrafamilial abuse rarely think of the danger to other children in the community because, in their minds, intrafamilial offenders molest only their own children.

#### Dynamics of Child Sex Rings

Child sex rings have many dynamics different from "typical" intrafamilial abuse cases.

**Multiple Victims** Interaction among the multiple victims is one major difference. In intrafamilial cases, the sexual activity is usually a secret that the victim has discussed with no one until disclosure takes place. In a child sex ring there are multiple victims whose interactions, *before* and *after* disclosure, must be examined and evaluated.

**Multiple Offenders** Interaction among multiple offenders is a second major difference. Offenders sometimes communicate with each other and trade information and material. Offender interaction is an important element in the investigation of these cases. The existence of multiple offenders can be an investigative difficulty, but it can also be an advantage. The more offenders involved, the greater the odds that there is a weak link who can be used to corroborate the alleged abuse.

**The Victim's Parents** The role of the child victim's parents is a third major difference between child sex rings and intrafamilial child sexual abuse. In intrafamilial cases there is usually an abusing and a non-

abusing parent. In such cases, a non-abusing mother may protect the child, pressure the child not to talk about the abuse, or persuade the child to recant the story so that the father does not go to jail. Dealing with these dynamics is important and can be difficult.

Since parents are usually not the abusers in child sex ring cases, their role is different. It is a potentially serious mistake, however, to underestimate the importance of their role. Their interaction with their victimized child can be crucial to the case. If the parents interrogate their children or conduct their own investigation, the results can be damaging to the proper investigation of the case. It is also possible that a child sexually exploited in a sex ring also was or is sexually, physically, or psychologically abused at home.

**Gender of the Victim** The gender of the victim is the fourth major difference between intrafamilial and sex ring cases. In a recent study, Dr. Gene Abel found that two thirds of all victims molested outside the

home were boys. Unlike intrafamilial sexual abuse, in which the most common reported victim is a young female, in child sex rings we are often dealing with the adolescent boy victim.

### **Types of Child Sex Rings**

After many years of evaluating and analyzing child sex ring cases, the author has identified two major patterns or types of child sex ring cases: *historical child sex rings* and *multidimensional child sex rings*. These terms were adopted because they give a descriptive and generic name to each type of case yet avoid such loaded labels as "traditional" or "ritualistic" or "satanic" child sexual abuse and exploitation. Historical child sex rings are described in Chapter 4; multidimensional child sex rings are described in Chapter 5. Investigative techniques particular to each type of child sex ring are described in Chapter 6.

## 4. Historical Child Sex Rings

The term *historical child sex ring* is now used to refer to what the author previously called a *child sex ring*. In her 1984 book *Child Pornography and Sex Rings*, Dr. Ann W. Burgess set forth the dynamics of such child sex rings. Dr. Burgess' research identified three types of child sex rings: solo, transition, and syndicated. In the solo ring, the offender keeps the activity and photographs completely secret. Each ring involves one offender and multiple victims. In the transition ring, offenders begin to share their experiences, pornography, or victims. Photographs and letters are traded and victims may be tested by other offenders and eventually traded for their sexual services. In the syndicated ring, a well-structured organization recruits children, produces pornography, delivers direct sexual services, and establishes an extensive network of customers.

Some have begun to refer to child sex rings as multi-offender/multi-victim cases. An historical child sex ring can involve a daycare center, a school, a scout troop, a Little League team, or neighborhood children. It can also involve marriage as a method of access to children, intrafamilial molestation of children, and the use of family children to attract other victims.

In contrast to the confusion and lack of corroboration characteristic of multidimensional child sex ring cases, there is much we know about historical child sex ring cases. The information is well-documented by law-enforcement investigation and is based on the author's involvement in hundreds of these cases. The investigation of these cases can be challenging and time consuming; once, however, a law-enforcement agency understands the dynamics and is willing to commit the manpower and resources, it can be easier in these cases to obtain convictions than in one-on-one intrafamilial cases.

### Characteristics of Historical Child Sex Rings

Historical child sex ring cases have the general characteristics described below.

**Male Offenders** As many as 95 percent or more of the offenders in these cases are males. Even in those

few cases in which there is a female offender, she will most likely have one or more male accomplices who are the ringleaders.

**Preferential Molesters** Most of the offenders in these cases are true pedophiles, or preferential child molesters. (For a complete description of the preferential child molester, see *Child Molesters: A Behavioral Analysis*, listed in References.) Most of the preferential molesters will be in the seduction pattern of behavior. The main characteristics of preferential child molesters are multiple victims, access to children, and collection of child pornography and/or child erotica.

**Male Victims** As many as 66 percent or more of the victims in these cases are male. Most of these males are boys between the ages of 10 and 16.

**Sexual Motivation** Although preferential child molesters frequently claim that sex is only a small part of their "love" for children, the fact is that when the sexual attraction is gone, the relationship is essentially over. Their primary reason for interacting with the children is to have sex. This is not to say, however, that sex is their only motivation. Some preferential child molesters care about children.

**Child Pornography and Child Erotica** Preferential child molesters almost always collect child pornography and/or child erotica. *Child pornography* can be defined as the sexually explicit visual depiction of a minor, including sexually explicit photographs, negatives, slides, magazines, movies, or videotapes. *Child erotica* (pedophile paraphernalia) can be defined as any material, relating to children, that serves a sexual purpose for a given individual. Some of the more common types of child erotica include toys, games, drawings, fantasy writings, diaries, souvenirs, sexual aids, manuals, letters, books about children, psychological books on pedophilia, and ordinary photographs of children.

The preferential child molester's motivations for collecting the material are that it fuels his sexual fantasies, validates his behavior, and is a souvenir of his relationship with the child. Many preferential child molesters do not possess commercial child pornography because it is difficult to obtain in the United States. The preferential child molester who is oper-

ating a child sex ring is very likely to have sexually explicit and nonsexually explicit visual depictions of the victims.

**Control Through Seduction** Child molesters control their victims in a variety of ways. In the historical child sex ring, they control them primarily through the seduction process, seducing their victims with attention, affection, kindness, and gifts until they have lowered the victims' inhibitions and gained their cooperation and "consent."

## Offender Strategies

**Control** Maintaining control is very important in the operation of a child sex ring. It takes a certain amount of skill and cunning to maintain a simultaneous sexual relationship with multiple partners. It is especially difficult if you have the added pressure of concealing illegal behavior. In order to operate a child sex ring, an offender has to know how to control and manipulate children.

As stated above, control is primarily maintained through attention, affection, and gifts—part of the seduction process. Preferential child molesters seduce children the same way that adults seduce one another. The major difference, however, is the disparity between the adult authority of the child molester and the vulnerability of the child victim. This is especially important if the child molester is a prestigious authority figure, such as a teacher, police officer, priest, scout leader, and so on.

**The Seduction Process** The seduction process begins when the preferential child molester sees a potential victim who fits his age and gender preferences. It may be a 6-year-old girl or a 14-year-old boy. Child molesters can and do have sex with children and sometimes adults who do not fit their preferences, however. A child molester may be experimenting or may be unable to find a child who fits his preference. Child molesters who prefer adolescent boys sometimes become involved with adolescent girls as a method of arousing or attracting the boys.

The offender's next step in the seduction process is to gather information about the potential victim. This may involve nothing more than a ten-minute spot evaluation of the child's demeanor, personality, dress, and financial status. Through practice, many child molesters have developed a real knack for spotting vulnerable victims. Other preferential child molesters may have access to school, medical, or court records. These records could be valuable in determining a child's interests or vulnerabilities. Almost any child can be seduced, but the most vulnerable children are those who come from broken homes or who are victims of emotional neglect.

The seduction process takes place over time. The offender who is operating a sex ring has many other victims. He is willing to put in the time it takes to seduce a child. It may take a few minutes or a few years. Some molesters may even start grooming a potential victim long before the child has reached his age preference.

In addition to seducing his child victims, sex ring operators sometimes "seduce" the victim's parents, gaining their trust and confidence so that they will allow him free access to their children. A favorite target victim is a boy living with a single mother. The offender will sometimes pretend romantic interest in the mother or express a desire to be a father figure for her child. He may even marry her or move in with her. The relationship with the mother can be used as a cover for his interest in children, and her child can be used as bait to lure or gain access to other children. Most parents, for example, would not be reluctant to allow their child to go on an overnight trip with the "father" of one of their child's friends. In this case, however, the man in question is not the child's father or even the stepfather. He is just a man who lives with the mother. Once a molester has put in the time and effort to seduce a child, he will be very reluctant to give up access to the child until he is finished with the child.

The true pedophile or preferential child molester often possesses an important talent in the seduction process: his ability to identify with children. He knows the "in" games, toys, television shows, and movies. He is skilled at recognizing and then temporarily filling the emotional and physical needs of children. This is why such offenders can be the Big Brother of the Year, the most popular teacher, or the best soccer coach. They are sometimes described as "pied pipers" who simply attract children. This is not to say that in some cases children will not sense that some adult is "weird" or has a "problem" before other adults recognize it.

The essence of the seduction process is the offender providing attention, affection, and gifts to the potential victim. Gifts and financial incentives are important, especially for kids from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, but attention and affection are the real key. How do you tell a child not to respond to attention and affection? All children crave it, but especially children who are not getting it at home. Moreover, because the offender is interested only in short-term gain, he may allow his victims to "break the rules"—play basketball or football in the house, drink alcohol, use drugs, or view pornography. The homes of many preferential child molesters are miniature amusement parks filled with games, toys, and athletic equipment appealing to children of his age preference.

The typical adolescent boy is easily sexually aroused, sexually curious, sexually inexperienced, and somewhat rebellious. All these traits combine to make the adolescent boy one of the easiest victims of seduction. An adolescent boy with emotional and sexual needs is no match for a 50-year-old man with an organized plan. Yet, adult offenders who seduce them and the society that judges them continue to claim that these victims "consented." The result is a victim who feels responsible for his abuse and embarrassed about his actions. Once a victim is seduced, each successive sexual incident becomes easier and quicker. Eventually, the child victim may even take the initiative in the seduction.

The next step in the seduction process is the lowering of inhibitions. It is easy to be judgmental toward victims when you look at only the end product of their seduction. At the beginning of the relationship, the child is looking for friendship, emotional support, a job, or just some fun. The lowering of sexual inhibitions is usually done so gradually and skillfully that the victim does not realize he or she is a victim until it is too late. It may begin with simple affection: a kiss on the cheek, a pat, a hug. It may progress to talking about sex, wrestling on the floor, hide-and-seek in the dark, working out with weights, strip poker, swimming nude in the pool. The introduction of photography or video cameras during this process is common. Innocent pictures progress to pictures of the "fun and games," which progress to nude or partially nude pictures, which then escalate into sexually explicit pictures.

Most preferential child molesters usually work toward a situation in which the child has to change clothing, or spend the night, or both. If the child molester achieves either of these two objectives, the success of the seduction is almost assured. The objectives of changing clothes can be accomplished by such ploys as squirting with the garden hose, turning up the heat in the house, exercising, taking a bath or shower, physical examination of the child, or swimming in a pool. Spending the night with the child is the best way for the sexual activity to progress.

Sexual activity can begin with conversation about sex. The sexual activity can progress to fondling while wrestling, playing hide-and-seek in the dark, drying the child with a towel, massaging an injury, playing a physical game, or cuddling in bed. Adult pornography is frequently left out for the children to "discover."

A collection of adult pornography is very effective in sexually arousing and lowering the inhibitions of adolescent boys. This is the primary reason why preferential child molesters collect adult pornography. Some of them may even attempt to use this collection as proof that they do not have a sexual pref-

erence for children. Alcohol and drugs are also used, especially with adolescent boys, to lower inhibitions. By the time the victims realize what is going on, they are in the middle of it and ashamed of their complicity. They did not "say no, yell, and tell."

**Operation of the Historical Child Sex Ring** The operation of a child sex ring is dynamic and ever changing. It is like a pipeline. At any given moment there are victims being recruited, victims being seduced, victims being molested, and victims being let go, or "dumped." For most preferential child molesters, it is easy to recruit, seduce, and molest the victims. It is difficult to let the victims go without their turning against you and disclosing the abuse.

The offenders control the victims once they are in the pipeline through a combination of bonding, competition, and peer pressure. Most children, especially adolescent children, want to be a part of some peer group. Any offender operating a sex ring has to find a way to bind the victims together. Some offenders use an existing structure, such as a scout troop, a sports team, or school club. Other offenders create their own group, such as a magic club, computer club, or religious cult. Some offenders just make up a name and establish their own rules and regulations. They may call themselves the "88 Club" or the "Winged Serpents." In recent years, several offenders have used satanism and the occult as a bonding and controlling mechanism.

Competition, sometimes focusing on sexual acts, is also an effective control technique. Victims may compete over who can do an act first or longest. A series of sexual acts may result in some special reward or recognition. The offender may use peer pressure to control his victims, and the boys will enforce the rules on each other. No victim wants to be the one to ruin it for anyone else, and each victim may think he or she is the offender's "favorite." All these techniques simply capitalize on the developmental needs of children.

Violence, threats of violence, and blackmail are most likely used by the offender when pushing a victim out or attempting to hold onto a still-desirable victim who wants to leave. Sexually explicit notes, audiotapes, videotapes, and photographs are effective insurance for a victim's silence. Victims worried about disclosure of illegal acts, such as substance abuse, joyriding, petty thefts, and vandalism, are also subject to blackmail. Many victims, however, are most concerned over disclosure of engaging in sex for money, bizarre sex acts, homosexual acts in which they were the active participant, and sex with other victims. In child sex rings, not only does the offender have sex with the child but, in some cases, the children have sex with each other. While children may admit that they were forced by the offender to per-

form certain acts with him, they find it hard to explain sexual experiences with other children. Therefore, they frequently deny such activity. One offender told the author that if you select your victims properly and seduce them properly, the secret takes care of itself.

When trying to push a victim out the end of the pipeline, the offender may pass the child to another pedophile who prefers older children. The victim now enters a new pipeline as a pre-seduced victim.

**Offender-Victim Bond** Because victims of historical sex rings have been carefully seduced and often do not realize they are victims, they repeatedly and voluntarily return to the offender.

Society and the criminal justice system have a difficult time understanding this. If a boy is molested by his neighbor, teacher, or priest, why does he allow it to continue? Most likely, he does not realize he is a victim. Some victims are willing to trade sex for attention and affection. The sex itself might even be enjoyable. The offender may be treating them better than anyone has ever treated them. They may not realize they are victims until the offender pushes them out. Then they realize all the attention, affection, and gifts were just part of the master plan to use and exploit them. This may be the final blow for a troubled child who has had a traumatic life.

Most of these victims never disclose their victimization. When an occasional victim does come forward and report, it is usually because he is angry at the offender for "dumping" him. He might be jealous that the offender found a younger boy. One 16-year-old victim tried to murder the man who had sexually exploited him but still denied he was sexually victimized. He pled guilty rather than use the abuse as a mitigating circumstance and publicly admit he had engaged in sexual activity with a man. He privately admitted his victimization to a prosecutor.

In another case, several boys took the stand and testified concerning the moral character of the accused molester. When the accused molester changed his plea to guilty, he admitted that the boys who testified for him were also victims. Many victims not only do not disclose, but they strongly deny it happened when confronted. Since most of the offenders are male, the stigma of homosexuality is a serious problem for male victims. Although being seduced by a male child molester does not necessarily make a boy a homosexual, the victims do not understand this. If a victim does disclose, he risks ridicule by his peers.

In interviewing victims of historical child sex rings, law-enforcement should—in their own minds—pretend that the victim is a subject or suspect, and expect the victim to deny or minimize his acts. Some boy victims will continue to deny their victimization no matter what the interviewer says or does. Some will make admissions but will minimize the quality

and the quantity of the acts. They may minimize their involvement by claiming to be drunk, drugged, or tied up, and maximize the offender's involvement by claiming he threatened them or had a weapon. Of course, some of these allegations may be true and should be investigated. They are, however, not typical of historical sex rings. Violence is most likely used to prevent disclosure. Violence during sex may also be used by sadistic preferential child molesters, but this is relatively rare in sex rings.

Because of the bond with the offender, victims frequently resent law-enforcement intervention and may even warn the offender. Even the occasional victim who comes forward and discloses may feel guilty and warn the offender. The offender may also continue to manipulate the victims after investigation and disclosure. The offender may appeal to the victim's sympathy. He may make a feeble attempt at suicide to make the victims feel guilty or disloyal. Some offenders may threaten the victims with physical harm or with disclosure of the blackmail material. Some offenders may bribe the victim and his family.

A particular aspect of the offender-victim bond is especially troubling for the criminal justice system. Some victims, when being pushed out, or while still in the pipeline, may assist the offender in obtaining new victims. They become the bait to lure other victims. Such recruiters or "graduate" victims can and should be considered subjects of investigation. Their offenses, however, should be viewed in the context of their victimization and the child sex ring.

Some victims in historical sex rings disclose incomplete and minimized information about the child sexual exploitation, which creates significant problems for the investigation and prosecution of such cases. For instance, when the investigator finally gets a victim to disclose the exploitation and abuse, the victim furnishes a version of his victimization that he swears is true. Subsequent investigation then uncovers child pornography or additional victims—directly conflicting with the first victim's story. The most common example of this is that the victim admits that the offender sucked his penis, but denies that he sucked the offender's penis. The execution of a search warrant then leads to the seizure of photographs of the victim sucking the offender's penis. Additional victims may also confirm this, but they vehemently deny that they did the same thing.

Investigators and prosecutors must understand and learn to deal with the incomplete and contradictory statements of victims of historical child sex rings. The dynamics of their victimization must be considered. They are embarrassed and ashamed of their behavior and rightfully believe that society will not understand their victimization. Investigators who have a stereotyped concept of child sexual abuse vic-

tims or who are accustomed to interviewing younger children molested within their family will have a difficult time interviewing adolescent boys molested in a sex ring. Many of these victims will be troubled, even delinquent boys from broken homes.

The author has a training slide on interviewing child sexual abuse and exploitation victims that reads, "Never imply guilt or show disgust for activity revealed." The same rule applies when interviewing adolescent boys or girls involved in a child sex ring. It is not the victim's fault even if the victim did not say no, did not resist, did not tell, or even enjoyed the activity.

**High-Risk Situations** There are certain high-risk situations that arise in investigating historical child sex rings. Unfortunately, certain youth organizations inadvertently provide the child molester with almost everything necessary to operate a child sex ring. A scouting organization, for example, fulfills the sex ring offender's needs for: 1) access to children of a specific age or gender, 2) a bonding mechanism to ensure the cooperation and secrecy of victims, and 3) opportunities to spend the night with a victim or have a victim change clothing. The bonding mechanism of the scouts is especially useful to the offender. Loyalty to the leader and the group, competition among boys, a system of rewards and recognition, and indoctrination through oaths and rituals can all be used to control, manipulate, and motivate victims. Leaders in such organizations, especially those who are not the parents of children involved, should be carefully screened and closely monitored.

Another high-risk situation involves high-status

authority figures. As stated above, child molesters sometimes use their adult authority to give them an edge in the seduction process. Adults with an added authority (teachers, camp counselors, coaches, religious leaders, law-enforcement officers, doctors, judges, and so on) present even greater problems in the investigation of cases of child sex rings. Such offenders are in a better position to seduce and manipulate victims and escape responsibility. They are usually believed when they deny any allegations. In such cases, the law-enforcement investigator must almost always find multiple victims or recover child pornography or erotica in order to get a conviction.

The most difficult case of all involves a subject who has an ideal occupation for a child molester: a therapist who specializes in treating troubled youth. This offender need only sit in his office while society pre-selects the most vulnerable victims and brings them to him. The victims are by definition "troubled" and unlikely to be believed if they do make an allegation. In addition, such therapists, especially if they are psychiatrist's or physician's assistants, can claim that certain acts of physical touching were a legitimate part of their examination or treatment. They may also claim to be doing research on child development or on child sexual abuse. Again, such a case could probably only be proved through the identification of multiple victims and the recovery of child pornography or erotica. Fortunately for American law-enforcement, but unfortunately for American children, such offenders almost always have multiple victims and collect child pornography and child erotica.

## 5. Multidimensional Child Sex Rings

Sometime in 1983 the author was first contacted by a law-enforcement agency for guidance in what was then thought to be an unusual case. The exact date of the contact is unknown because its significance was not recognized at the time. In the months and years that followed, the author received more and more inquiries about "these kinds of cases." The requests for assistance came (and continue to come) from all over the United States. Many of the aspects of these cases varied, but there were also some commonalities. Early on, however, one particularly difficult and potentially significant issue began to emerge.

These cases involved and continue to involve unsubstantiated allegations of bizarre activity that are difficult either to prove or disprove. Many of the unsubstantiated allegations, however, do not *seem* to be true or possible. These cases seem to call into question the credibility of victims of child sexual abuse and exploitation. These are the most frustrating and baffling cases the author has encountered in more than fifteen years of studying the criminal aspects of deviant sexual behavior. The author privately sought answers, but said nothing publicly about these cases until 1985.

In October 1984, the problems in investigating and prosecuting one of these cases in Jordan, Minnesota, became publicly known. In February 1985, at the FBI Academy, the FBI sponsored and the author coordinated the first national seminar held to study "these kinds of cases." Later in 1985, similar conferences sponsored by other organizations were held in Washington, D.C.; Sacramento, California; and Chicago, Illinois. These cases have also been discussed at recent national conferences dealing with the sexual victimization of children. Few answers have come from these conferences. The author continues to be consulted on these cases on a regular and increasing basis. Inquiries have been received from law-enforcement officers, prosecutors, therapists, victims, families of victims, and the media from all over the country. The author does not claim to understand completely all the dynamics of these cases. He continues to keep an open mind and to search for answers to the questions and solutions to the problems. This chapter is based on the author's analysis of more than

200 of "these kinds of cases." (See also Appendix A and Appendix B.)

### **Dynamics of Multidimensional Child Sex Rings**

What are "these kinds of cases"? They were and continue to be difficult to define. They all involve allegations of child sexual abuse, but with a combination of some atypical dynamics. Multidimensional child sex rings seem to have the following four dynamics in common: 1) multiple young victims, 2) multiple offenders, 3) fear as the controlling tactic, and 4) bizarre and/or ritualistic activity.

**Multiple Young Victims** In all the cases, the sexual abuse was alleged to have taken place or at least begun when the victims were between the ages of 2 and 6. In addition, the victims all described multiple children being abused. The numbers ranged from three or four to as many as several hundred victims.

**Multiple Offenders** In all the cases the victims reported numerous offenders. The numbers ranged from two or three all the way up to dozens of offenders. In one recent case, the victims alleged 400-500 offenders were involved. Interestingly, many of the offenders (perhaps as many as 40-50 percent) were reported to be females. The multiple offenders were often described as being part of a cult, occult, or satanic group.

**Fear as Controlling Tactic** Child molesters in general are able to maintain control and ensure the secrecy of their victims in a variety of ways. These include attention and affection, coercion, blackmail, embarrassment, threats, and violence. In all of the cases studied by the author, the victims described being frightened and reported threats against themselves, their families, their friends, and even their pets. They reported witnessing acts of violence perpetrated to reinforce this fear. It is the author's belief that this fear and the traumatic memory of the events may be the key to understanding many of these cases.

**Bizarre and/or Ritualistic Activity** This is the most difficult dynamic of multidimensional child sex rings to describe. *Bizarre* is a relative term. Is the use of urine or feces in sexual activity bizarre, or is it a well-

documented aspect of sexual deviancy? The ritualistic aspect is even more difficult to define. How do you distinguish acts performed in a precise manner to enhance or allow sexual arousal from those acts that fulfill spiritual needs or comply with "religious" ceremonies? Victims in these cases report ceremonies, chanting, robes and costumes, drugs, use of urine and feces, animal sacrifice, torture, abduction, mutilation, murder, and even cannibalism and vampirism.

**Custody or Visitation Dispute** An ever-increasing number of these cases involve a fifth dynamic—the allegations emanate from a custody or visitation dispute over the child victims. The four dynamics described above make these cases extremely difficult to handle. When complicated by this fifth dynamic, the cases can be overwhelming. This is especially true if the disclosing child victims have been taken into the "underground" by a parent during the custody or visitation dispute. Some of these parents or relatives may even provide authorities with diaries or tapes of their interviews with the children. An accurate evaluation and assessment of a young child held in isolation in this underground while being "debriefed" by a parent is almost impossible. However well-intentioned, these self-appointed investigators severely damage any chance to validate these cases objectively.

Multidimensional child sex rings typically emerge from one of three scenarios: adult survivors, daycare cases, and family/isolated neighborhood cases.

In *adult survivor* cases, adults of almost any age—nearly always women—are in therapy. They are frequently hypnotized as part of the therapy and are often diagnosed as suffering from Multiple Personality Disorder. Gradually, during the therapy, the adults reveal childhood victimization that includes multiple victims and offenders, fear as the controlling tactic, and bizarre or ritualistic activity. The multiple offenders are often described as members of a cult or satanic group. Civic leaders, police officers, or individuals wearing police uniforms are frequently described as present during the exploitation. The offenders may allegedly still be harassing or threatening the victims. This type of case is probably best typified by the book *Michelle Remembers* (see References). In several of these cases, women claim to have had babies that were turned over for human sacrifice. If and when the therapist comes to believe the patient, the police or FBI are sometimes contacted to conduct investigation. The therapists may fear for their safety because they now know the secret.

In *daycare* cases, children currently or formerly attending a daycare center gradually describe their victimization at the center and at other locations to which they were taken by the daycare staff. The cases

include multiple victims and offenders, fear, and bizarre or ritualistic activity, with a particularly high number of female offenders. Descriptions of strange games, killing of animals, photographing of activities, and wearing of costumes are common.

In *family/isolated neighborhood* cases, children describe their victimization within their family or extended family. The group is often defined by geographic boundary, such as a cul-de-sac, apartment building, or isolated rural setting. The stories are similar to those told of the daycare setting, but with more male offenders. The basic dynamics remain the same, but victims tend to be more than 6 years of age, and the scenario is more likely to include a custody or visitation dispute.

### Characteristics of Multidimensional Child Sex Rings

A problem in conducting training and research in the area of multidimensional child sex rings is the term used to define "these kinds of cases." Many refer to them as ritual, ritualistic, or ritualized abuse of children cases. Such words carry specialized meanings for many people and might imply that all these cases are connected to occult or satanic activity. Others refer to these cases as multi-offender/multi-victim cases. The problem with this term is that most multiple offender and victim cases do not involve the four dynamics discussed above.

For want of a better term, the author has decided to refer to "these kinds of cases" as *multidimensional child sex rings*. Following are the general characteristics of multidimensional child sex ring cases.

**Female Offenders** As many as 40-50 percent of the offenders in these cases are women. This is in marked contrast to historical child sex rings (see Chapter 4) in which almost all the offenders are men.

**Situational Molesters** The offenders appear to be sexually interacting with the child victims for reasons other than a true *sexual* preference for children. (See *Child Molesters: A Behavioral Analysis*, listed in References, for a description of the situational child molester.)

**Male and Female Victims** Both boys and girls appear to be targeted, but with an apparent preference for girls. The most significant characteristic of the victims, however, is their young age (generally 2-6 years old when the abuse began).

**Multidimensional Motivation** Sexual gratification appears to be only part of the motivation for the sexual activity. Many people today argue that the motivation is "spiritual"—possibly part of an occult ceremony. It is the author's opinion that the motivation may have more to do with anger and hostility carried

out against weak and vulnerable victims. Much of the ritualistic abuse of children may not be sexual in nature. Some of the activity may, in fact, be physical abuse directed at sexually significant body parts (penis, anus, nipples).

**Pornography and Paraphernalia** Although many of the victims of multidimensional child sex rings claim that pictures and videotapes of the activity were made, no such visual record has been found by law-enforcement. In recent years, American law-enforcement has seized large amounts of child pornography portraying children in a wide variety of sexual activity and perversions. None of it, however, portrays the kind of bizarre and/or ritualistic activity described by these victims. Perhaps these offenders use and store their pornography and paraphernalia in ways different from preferential child molesters (pedophiles). This is an area needing additional research and investigation.

**Control Through Fear** Control through fear may be the overriding characteristic of these cases. Control is maintained by frightening the children. A very young child might not be able to understand the significance of much of the sexual activity but certainly understands fear. The stories that the victims tell may be their perceived versions of severe traumatic memories. They may be victims of a severely traumatized childhood in which being sexually abused was just one of the many negative events affecting their lives.

### **What Is Ritualistic Abuse of Children?**

The author has been unable to define precisely *ritualistic abuse of children* and prefers not to use the term. It is confusing, misleading, and counterproductive. Certain observations, however, are important for investigative understanding.

Not all spiritually motivated ritualistic activity is satanic. Santeria, witchcraft, voodoo, and most religious cults are not satanism. In fact, most spiritually or religiously based abuse of children has nothing to do with satanism. Most child abuse that could be termed "*ritualistic*" by various definitions is more likely to be physical and psychological rather than sexual in nature. If a distinction needs to be made between satanic and non-satanic child abuse, the indicators for that distinction must be related to specific satanic symbols, artifacts, or doctrine rather than the mere presence of any ritualistic element.

Not all such ritualistic activity with a child is a crime. Almost all parents with religious beliefs indoctrinate their children into that belief system. Is circumcision for religious reasons child abuse? Does having a child kneel on a hard floor reciting the rosary constitute child abuse? Does having a child chant a satanic prayer or attend a black mass constitute child

abuse? Does a religious belief in corporal punishment constitute child abuse? Does group care of children in a commune or cult constitute child abuse? Does the fact that any acts in question were performed with parental permission affect the nature of the crime? Many ritualistic acts, whether satanic or not, are simply not crimes.

When a victim describes and investigation corroborates what sounds like ritualistic activity, several possibilities must be considered. The ritualistic activity may be part of the excessive religiosity of a mentally ill, psychotic offender. It may be a misunderstood part of sexual ritualism. The ritualistic activity may be incidental to any real abuse. The offender may be involved in ritualistic activity with a child and also may be abusing a child, but one may have little or nothing to do with the other.

The offender may be deliberately engaging in ritualistic activity with a child as part of child abuse and exploitation. The motivation, however, may be not to indoctrinate the child into a belief system, but to lower the inhibitions, control, manipulate, and/or confuse the child. In all the turmoil over this issue, it would be a very effective strategy for any child molester deliberately to introduce ritualistic elements into his crime in order to confuse the child and therefore the criminal justice system.

The ritualistic activity and the child abuse may be integral parts of some spiritual belief system. In that case, the greatest risk is to the children of the practitioners. But this is true of all cults, not just satanic cults. A high potential of abuse exists for any children raised in a group isolated from the mainstream of society, especially if the group has a charismatic leader whose orders are unquestioned and blindly obeyed by the members. Sex, money, and power are often the main motivations of the leaders of such cults.

### **Why Are Victims Alleging Things That Do Not Seem To Be True?**

Some of what the victims in these cases allege is physically impossible (victim cut up and put back together, offender took the building apart and then rebuilt it); some is possible but improbable (human sacrifice, cannibalism, vampirism); some is possible and probable (child pornography, clever manipulation of victims); and some is corroborated (medical evidence of vaginal or anal trauma, offender confessions).

The most significant crimes being alleged that do not *seem* to be true are the human sacrifice and cannibalism. In none of the multidimensional child sex ring cases of which the author is aware have bodies of the murder victims been found—in spite of major excavations where the abuse victims claim the bodies

were located. The explanations for this include: the offenders moved the bodies after the children left, the bodies were burned in portable high-temperature ovens, the bodies were put in double-decker graves under legitimately buried bodies, a mortician member of the cult disposed of the bodies in a crematorium, the offenders ate the bodies, the offenders used corpses and aborted fetuses, or the power of Satan caused the bodies to disappear.

Not only are no bodies found, but also, more important, there is no physical evidence that a murder took place. Many of those not in law-enforcement do not understand that, while it is possible to get rid of a body, it is much more difficult to get rid of the physical evidence that a murder took place, especially a human sacrifice involving sex, blood, and mutilation.

The victims of these human sacrifices and murders are alleged to be abducted missing children, runaway and throwaway children, derelicts, and the babies of breeder women. It is interesting to note that many of those espousing these theories are using the long-since-discredited numbers and rhetoric of the missing children hysteria in the early 1980s. Yet, a January 1989 *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, published by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the U.S. Department of Justice, reports that researchers now estimate that the number of children kidnapped *and murdered* by non-family members is between 52 and 58 a year and that adolescents 14-17 years old account for nearly *two thirds* of these victims.

We live in a very violent society, and yet we have "only" about 20,000 murders a year. Those who accept these stories of mass human sacrifice would have us believe that the satanists and other occult practitioners are murdering more than twice as many people every year in this country as all the other murderers combined.

Many of those who accept the stories of organized ritualistic abuse of children and human sacrifice will tell you that the best evidence they now have is the consistency of stories from all over America. It sounds like a powerful argument. It is interesting to note that, without having met each other, the hundreds of people who claim to have been abducted by aliens from outer space also tell stories and give descriptions of the aliens that are similar to each other. This is not to imply that allegations of child abuse are in the same category as allegations of abduction by aliens from outer space. It is intended only to illustrate that individuals who never met each other can sometimes describe similar events without necessarily having experienced them.

The large number of people telling the same story is, in fact, the biggest reason to doubt these stories.

It is simply too difficult for that many people to commit so many horrendous crimes as part of an organized conspiracy. Two or three people murder a couple of children in a few communities as part of a ritual, and nobody finds out? Possible. Thousands of people do the same thing to tens of thousands of victims over many years? Not likely. Hundreds of communities all over America are run by mayors, police departments, and community leaders who are practicing satanists and who regularly murder and eat people? Not likely. In addition, these community leaders and high-ranking officials also supposedly commit these complex crimes leaving no evidence, and at the same time function as leaders and managers while heavily involved in using illegal drugs.

In the beginning, the author was inclined to believe the allegations of the victims. But as the cases poured in and the months and years went by, the author became more concerned about the lack of physical evidence and corroboration for many of the more serious allegations. With increasing frequency, the author began to ask the question, "Why are victims alleging things that do not *seem* to be true?" Many possible answers were considered.

The first possible answer is obvious: clever offenders. The allegations may not seem to be true but they *are* true. The criminal justice system lacks the knowledge, skill, and motivation to get to the bottom of this crime conspiracy. The perpetrators of this crime conspiracy are clever, cunning individuals using sophisticated mind control and brainwashing techniques to control their victims. Law-enforcement does not know how to investigate these cases.

The author does not deny the possibility that some of these allegations of an organized conspiracy involving taking over daycare centers, abduction, cannibalism, and human sacrifice might be true. But if they are true, then it is one of the *greatest* crime conspiracies in history.

Many people do not understand how difficult it is to commit a conspiracy crime involving numerous co-conspirators. One clever and cunning individual has a good chance of getting away with a well-planned interpersonal crime. Bring one partner into the crime and the odds of getting away with it drop considerably. The more people involved in the crime, the harder it is to get away with it. Why? Human nature is the answer. People get angry and jealous. They come to resent the fact that another conspirator is getting "more" than they. They get in trouble and want to make a deal for themselves by informing on others.

If a group of individuals degenerate to the point of engaging in human sacrifice and cannibalism, that would most likely be the beginning of the end for such a group. The odds are that someone in the group

would have a problem with such acts and be unable to maintain the secret.

The appeal of the satanic conspiracy theory is two-fold. One, it is a simple explanation for a complex problem. Nothing is more simple than "the devil made them do it." If we do not understand something, we make it the work of some supernatural force. During the Middle Ages, serial killers were thought to be vampires and werewolves, and child sexual abuse was the work of demons taking the form of parents and priests.

Second, the conspiracy theory is a popular one. We find it difficult to believe that one bizarre individual could commit a crime we find so offensive. Conspiracy theories about the assassination of Abraham Lincoln continue to this day. On a recent television program commemorating the 100th anniversary of Jack the Ripper, almost 50 percent of the viewing audience who called the polling telephone numbers indicated that they thought the murders were committed as part of a conspiracy involving the British Royal Family. The five experts on the program, however, unanimously agreed the crimes were the work of one disorganized but lucky individual who was diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic. In many ways, the murders of Jack the Ripper are similar to those allegedly committed by satanists today.

Even if only part of an allegation is *not* true, what then is the answer to the question, "Why are victims alleging things that do not *seem* to be true?" After consulting with psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists, social workers, child sexual abuse experts, and law-enforcement investigators for more than five years, the author can find no single, simple answer. The answer to the question seems to be a complex set of dynamics that can be different in each case. In spite of the fact that some skeptics keep looking for it, there does not appear to be one answer to the question which fits every case. Each case is different, and each case may involve a different combination of answers.

The author has identified a series of other possible answers to this question. The author will not attempt to explain completely these alternative answers because he cannot. They are presented simply as areas for consideration and evaluation by child sexual abuse intervenors, for further elaboration by experts in these fields, and for research by objective social scientists. The first step, however, in finding the answer to this question is to admit the possibility that some of what the victims describe may not have happened. Some child advocates seem unwilling to do this.

The first possible answer to why victims are alleging things that do not *seem* to be true is *pathological distortion*. The allegations may be errors in pro-

cessing reality influenced by mental disorders such as hysterical neurosis, borderline or histrionic personality disorders, or psychosis. These distortions may be manifested in false reports of direct victimization (Munchausen Syndrome) or indirect victimization through their children (Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy) in order to get attention and sympathy. Mass hysteria may partially account for large numbers of victims describing the same symptoms or experiences.

The second possible answer is *traumatic memory*. Fear and severe trauma can cause victims to distort reality and confuse events. This is a well-documented fact in cases involving individuals taken hostage or in life-and-death situations. The distortions may be part of an elaborate defense mechanism of the mind called "splitting." The victims create a clear-cut good-and-evil manifestation of their complex victimization that is then psychologically more manageable.

Another defense mechanism may tell the victim that it could have been worse, and so his or her victimization was not so bad. They are not alone in their victimization—other children were also abused. Their father who abused them is no different from other prominent people in the community they claimed abused them. The described human sacrifice may be symbolic of the "death" of their childhood.

It may be that we should anticipate that very young children abused by *multiple* offenders with *fear* as the primary controlling tactic will distort and embellish their victimization. Perhaps a horror-filled yet inaccurate account of victimization is not only not a counterindication of abuse, but is in fact a corroborative indicator of extreme physical, psychological, and/or sexual abuse.

The third possible answer may be *normal childhood fears and fantasy*. Most young children are afraid of ghosts and monsters. Even as adults, many people feel uncomfortable, for example, about dangling their arms over the side of their beds. They still remember the "monster" under the bed from childhood. While young children may rarely invent stories about sexual activity, they might describe their victimization in terms of evil as they understand it. In church or at home, children may be told of satanic activity as the source of evil. Children do fantasize. Perhaps whatever causes a child to allege something impossible (such as being cut up and put back together) is similar to what causes a child to allege something possible but improbable (such as witnessing another child being chopped up and eaten).

*Misperception, confusion, and trickery* may be a fourth answer. Expecting young children to give accurate accounts of sexual activity for which they have little frame of reference is unreasonable. The Broadway play *M. Butterfly* is the true story of a man who

had a fifteen-year affair, including the "birth" of a baby, with a "woman" who turns out to have been a man all along. If a grown man does not know when he has had vaginal intercourse with a woman, how can we expect young children not to be confused? Furthermore, some offenders may deliberately introduce elements of satanism and the occult into the sexual exploitation simply to confuse the victims. Simple magic and other techniques may be used to trick the children. Drugs may also be deliberately used to confuse the victims and distort their perceptions.

Overzealous intervenors, causing *intervenor contagion*, may be a fifth answer. These intervenors can include parents, family members, doctors, therapists, social workers, law-enforcement, and prosecutors. Victims have been subtly as well as overtly rewarded and bribed by usually well meaning intervenors for furnishing additional details. In addition, some of what appears not to have happened may have originated as a result of intervenors making assumptions about or misinterpreting what the victims are saying. The intervenors then repeat, and possibly embellish, these assumptions and misinterpretations, and eventually the victims are "forced" to agree with or come to accept this "official" version of what happened.

Allegations of ritualistic or satanic abuse may also be spread through *urban legends*. In *The Vanishing Hitchhiker*, the first of his three books on the topic, Dr. Jan Harold Brunvand defines *urban legends* as "realistic stories concerning recent events (or alleged events) with an ironic or supernatural twist." Dr. Brunvand's books convincingly explain that just because individuals throughout the country who never met each other tell the same story does not mean that it is true. The mass media frequently participate in the dissemination of these stories. Training conferences for all the disciplines involved in child sexual abuse may also play a role in the spread of this contagion. At a recent child abuse conference attended by the author, an exhibitor was selling more than fifty different books dealing with satanism and the occult. By the end of the conference, he had sold nearly all the books. At another national child sexual abuse conference, the author witnessed more than 100 attendees copying down the widely disseminated 29 "Symptoms Characterizing Satanic Ritual Abuse" in preschool-aged children. Is a 4-year-old child's "preoccupation with urine and feces" an indication of satanic ritual abuse or part of normal development? Do intervenors uncover ritualistic abuse because they have learned how to identify it or because it has become a self-fulfilling prophesy?

Most multidimensional child sex ring cases probably involve a combination of the answers previously set forth, as well as other possible explanations un-

known to the author at this time. Obviously, each case of sexual exploitation must be individually evaluated on its own merits without any preconceived explanations. All the possibilities must be explored if for no other reason than the fact that the defense attorneys for any accused subjects will almost certainly do so.

Most people would agree that just because a victim tells you one detail that turns out to be true, this does not mean that every detail is true. But many people seem to believe that if you can disprove one part of a victim's story, then the entire story is false. One of the author's main concerns in these cases is that people are getting away with sexually abusing children because we cannot prove that they are satanic devil worshipers who murder and eat people.

The author has discovered that the subject of multidimensional child sex rings is a very emotional and polarizing issue. Everyone seems to demand that one choose a side. On one side of the issue are those who say that nothing really happened and it is all a big witch hunt led by overzealous fanatics and incompetent "experts." The other side says, in essence, that everything happened; children never lie about sexual abuse, and so it must be true.

The author believes that there is a middle ground—a continuum of possible activity. Some of what the victims allege may be true and accurate, some may be misperceived or distorted, and some may be "contaminated" or false. The author believes that the vast majority of victims alleging "ritualistic" abuse are in fact victims of some form of abuse. After a lengthy discussion about various alternative explanations and the continuum of possible activity, one mother told the author that for the first time since the victimization of her young son she felt a little better. She had thought her only choices were that either her son was a pathological liar or, on the other hand, she lived in a community controlled by satanists.

There is a middle ground. It is the job of the professional investigator to listen to all the victims and conduct appropriate investigation in an effort to find out what happened, considering all possibilities.

### **Do Children Lie about Sexual Abuse and Exploitation?**

The crucial central issue in the evaluation of a response to cases of multidimensional child sex rings is the statement "Children never lie about sexual abuse or exploitation. If they have details, it must have happened." This statement, oversimplified by many, is the basic premise upon which some believe the child sexual abuse and exploitation movement is based. It is almost never questioned or debated at training conferences. In fact, during the 1970s, there was a suc-

cessful crusade to eliminate laws requiring corroboration of child victim statements in child sexual abuse cases. The best way to convict child molesters is to have the child victims testify in court. If we believe them, the jury will believe them. Any challenge to this basic premise was viewed as a threat to the movement and a denial that the problem existed.

The author believes that children *rarely* lie about sexual abuse or exploitation, if a lie is defined as a deliberate malicious intent to deceive. The problem is the oversimplification of the statement. Just because a child is not lying does not necessarily mean the child is telling the truth. The author believes that in the vast majority of these cases, the victims do not lie. They are telling you what they have come to believe has happened to them. Furthermore, the assumption that children rarely lie about sexual abuse does not necessarily apply to everything a child says during a sexual abuse investigation. Stories of mutilation, murder, and cannibalism are not really about sexual abuse.

Children rarely lie about sexual abuse or exploitation, but they do fantasize, furnish false information, furnish misleading information, misperceive events, try to please adults, respond to leading questions, and respond to rewards. Children are not adults in little bodies and do go through developmental stages that must be evaluated and understood. In many ways, however, children are no better and no worse than other victims or witnesses of a crime. They should not be automatically believed, nor should they automatically be disbelieved.

The second part of the statement—if children can supply details, the crime must have happened—must also be carefully evaluated. The details in question in most of the cases of multidimensional child sex rings have little to do with sexual activity. Law-enforcement and social workers must do more than attempt to determine how a child could have known about sex acts. These cases involve determining how a child could have known about a wide variety of bizarre and ritualistic activity. Young children may know little about sex, but they may know a lot about monsters, torture, kidnapping, and murder.

Children may supply details of sexual acts using information from sources other than direct victimization. Such sources must be evaluated carefully by the investigator of multidimensional child sex rings.

**Personal Knowledge** The victim may have personal knowledge of the sexual acts, but not as a result of the alleged victimization. The knowledge could have come from viewing pornography or sex education material, witnessing sexual activity in the home, or witnessing the sexual abuse of others. It could also have come from having been sexually or physically abused, but by other than the alleged offenders.

**Other Children** Young children today are socially interacting more often and at a younger age than ever before. Many parents are unable to provide possibly simple explanations for their children's stories because they were not with the children when the events occurred. They do not even know what videotapes their children may have seen, what games they may have played, or what stories they may have been told or overheard, for example. Children are being placed in daycare centers for eight, ten, or twelve hours a day starting as young as six weeks of age. The children share experiences by playing house, school, or doctor. Bodily functions such as urination and defecation are a focus of attention for these young children. To a certain extent, each child shares the experiences of all the other children. The odds are fairly high that in any typical daycare center there might be some children who are victims of incest; victims of physical abuse; victims of psychological abuse; children of cult members (even satanists); children of sexually open parents; children of sexually indiscriminate parents; children of parents obsessed with victimization; children of parents obsessed with the evils of satanism; children without conscience; children with a teenage brother or pregnant mother; children with heavy metal music and literature in the home; children with bizarre toys, games, comics, and magazines; children with a VCR and slasher films in their home; children with access to dial-a-porn, party lines, or pornography; or children victimized by a daycare center staff member. The possible effects of the interaction of such children *prior* to the disclosure of the alleged abuse must be evaluated.

**Media** The amount of sexually explicit, occult, or violence-oriented material available to children in the modern world is overwhelming. This includes movies, videotapes, television, music, toys, and books. There are also documentaries on satanism, witchcraft, and the occult which are available on videotape.

The International Coalition Against Violent Entertainment estimates that 12 percent of the movies produced in the United States can be classified as satanic horror films. Cable television and the home VCR make all this material readily available even to young children. Religious broadcasters and almost all the television magazine programs have done shows on satanism and the occult. Heavy metal and black metal music, which often has a satanic theme, is readily available and popular. In addition to the much-debated fantasy role-playing games, there are numerous popular toys on the market with an occult-oriented, bizarre, or violent theme.

Books on satanism and the occult, both fiction and nonfiction, are readily available in most bookstores. Several recent books specifically discuss the issue of ritualistic abuse of children. Obviously, most

young children do not read this material, but their parents and relatives might and then discuss it in front of or with them.

**Suggestions and Leading Questions** This problem is particularly important in cases stemming from custody/visitation disputes. It is the author's opinion that most suggestive, leading questioning of children by intervenors is inadvertently done as part of a good-faith effort to learn the truth. Parents and relatives especially are in a position to subtly influence their young children to describe their victimization in a certain way. Children may also overhear their parents discussing the details of the case. Children often tell their parents what they believe their parents want or need to hear. In one case a father gave the police a tape recording to "prove" that his child's statements were spontaneous disclosures and not the result of leading, suggestive questions. The tape recording indicated just the opposite. Why then did the father voluntarily give it to the police? Probably because he truly believed that he was not influencing his child's statements—but he was.

The accuracy and reliability of the accounts of adult survivors who have been hypnotized during therapy is certainly open to question. One nationally known therapist personally told the author that the reason police cannot find out about satanic or ritualistic activity from child victims is that they do not

know how to ask leading questions. Types and styles of verbal interaction useful in therapy may create significant problems in a criminal investigation. The extremely sensitive emotional and religious aspects of these cases make problems with leading questions more likely than in other kinds of cases.

**Misperception and Confusion** In one case, a child's description of the apparently impossible act of walking through a wall turned out to be the very possible act of walking between the studs of an unfinished wall in a room under construction. In another case, pennies in the anus turned out to be copper-foil-covered suppositories. The children may describe what they believe happened. It is not a lie, but neither is it an accurate account of what happened.

**Education and Awareness Programs** Some well-intentioned awareness programs designed to prevent child sex abuse and exploitation may, in fact, be unrealistically increasing children's and parent's fears and concerns. Some of what children and their parents are telling intervenors may have been learned in or fueled by such programs. Religious programs, books, and pamphlets that emphasize the power and evil force of Satan may be adding to the problem. In fact, several of the daycare centers in which ritualistic abuse was alleged to have taken place were fundamentalist Christian centers.

## 6. Investigating Child Sex Rings

This chapter is intended to offer general guidelines on how to apply the previously discussed behavioral dynamics to the investigation and prosecution of cases of child sex rings.

Child sexual abuse cases can be difficult to prove in a court of law. Frequently there is only the word of one child against that of an adult. This is, however, rarely the case in a child sex ring. With multiple victims, no one victim should have to bear the total burden of proof.

### Corroboration of Evidence

Many factors combine to make it difficult and possibly traumatic for children to testify in court. In spite of some recent advances that make such testimony easier for the child victim or witness, a primary objective of every law-enforcement investigation of child sexual abuse and exploitation should be to prove the case without child victim testimony in court. This is more a philosophy than a rule. It may not always be possible, but it should be an investigative goal. It is possible more often than the investigator may think, however. Most children can testify in court if necessary.

Obviously, the best and easiest way to avoid child victim testimony in court is to build a case that is so strong that the offender pleads guilty. In the zeal to convince society that child sexual abuse and exploitation exist and children do not lie about it, seeking corroboration for alleged abuse has been interpreted by some as a sign of denial or disbelief. It is, however, the author's opinion that corroboration is "the name of the game." It is not the job of law-enforcement officers to believe a child or any other victims or witnesses. It is the job of law-enforcement to listen, assess and evaluate, and then attempt to corroborate. Attempts should be made to corroborate any and all aspects of a victim's statement.

Although there is frequently more corroborative evidence available than many investigators realize, corroboration can be difficult in one-on-one child abuse cases, especially when the offender is a situational child molester. In spite of the many investigative difficulties already discussed in this book, cor-

roboration in child sex ring cases is usually easier.

Law-enforcement officers must stop looking at child sexual abuse and exploitation through a keyhole—focusing on one act, by one offender, against one victim, on one day. Law-enforcement must "kick the door open" and take in the big picture—focusing on proactive techniques, offender typologies, patterns of behavior, multiple acts, multiple victims, and child pornography. This is absolutely essential in the investigation of child sex rings.

The "big picture" approach starts with four basic assumptions about child molesters:

1. Child molesters sometimes molest multiple victims.
2. Intrafamilial child molesters sometimes molest children outside their families.
3. Other sex offenders sometimes molest children.
4. Other criminals sometimes molest children.

The emphasis on the word *sometimes* should be noted. In law-enforcement, we tend to create neat categories of offenders. The only problem is that the offenders sometimes do not cooperate and stay within the definitions. A window peeper, an exhibitionist, or a rapist can also be a child molester. The research of the FBI Behavioral Science Unit and others clearly demonstrates this. "Regular" criminals can also be child molesters. The author has recently been involved in three cases in which a drug dealer and two organized crime hit men have been identified as child molesters. The first child molester put on the FBI "Ten Most Wanted" List was recently arrested burglarizing a service station. The simple concept that an intrafamilial child molester might molest children outside his family seems beyond the comprehension of some child abuse professionals. Identifying other victims can be one of the most effective ways of corroborating an allegation of sexual abuse by one victim.

The author has evaluated a number of child sex ring cases in which the offender operated for years after identification because no one took the "big picture" approach. It is almost impossible to convict a "pillar of the community" child molester based only on the testimony of one delinquent adolescent. A

child sex ring operator cannot be stopped unless law-enforcement is willing to evaluate the allegation, do background investigation, document patterns of behavior, review records, identify other acts and victims, and develop probable cause for a search warrant. This will often mean working with other local, state, and federal law-enforcement agencies. Many offenders cross jurisdictional boundaries and violate a variety of laws when committing their crimes.

## General Investigative Techniques

One advantage to the investigation of child sex rings is that the possibility of developing significant corroborative evidence is far greater than in one-on-one sexual abuse cases. Much of this evidence can be identified and located only if the investigator has a solid understanding of the nature and dynamics of child sex rings. The following general investigative techniques are offered as ways to corroborate allegations of child sexual abuse and avoid child victim testimony in court. If child victim testimony cannot be avoided, at least the victim will not bear the total burden of proof if these techniques are used. These techniques can, to varying degrees, be used in any child sexual abuse case. Here, however, they are set forth for use in the investigation of child sex rings.

**Document Indicators of Sexual Abuse** Because the behavioral and environmental indicators of child sexual abuse are set forth in many publications elsewhere, they will not be set forth here again. The documentation of the indicators of child sexual abuse and exploitation can be extremely valuable in corroborating child victim statements. The use of expert witnesses to introduce this evidence into a court of law is a complex legal issue which will not be discussed here in detail (see *When the Victim Is a Child*, listed in References). Experts may not be allowed to testify about the guilt and innocence of the accused, but may be able to testify about the nature of the offense and the victim's behavior. The most commonly acceptable use of such expert testimony is to rebut defense allegations that the prosecution has no evidence other than the testimony of a child victim. These and other possible uses of expert testimony should be discussed with the prosecutor of each case.

Mental health professionals, social workers, child protective service workers, as well as law-enforcement investigators can be the source of such expert testimony documenting the indicators of sexual abuse. It must be emphasized that these are only indicators and their significance must be evaluated in context by truly objective experts. Many behavioral indicators of child sexual abuse are actually indicators of trauma, stress, and anxiety that could be caused by other events in the child's life.

**Document Patterns of Behavior** Two patterns of behavior need documentation: victim patterns and offender patterns.

Experts such as Roland C. Summit, M.D.; Suzanne M. Sgroi, M.D.; Ann W. Burgess, R.N., D.N.Sc.; and others have documented and published information about child sexual abuse victim behavior patterns. This book has set forth victim patterns of behavior seen in child sex ring cases. The fact that a victim does not disclose the abuse for years or recants previous disclosures may be part of a pattern of behavior which in fact corroborates sexual abuse. Paul Derohannesian, Assistant District Attorney, Albany (New York) states, "The absence of proof of child sexual abuse can be proof of child sexual abuse." The secrecy, the sequence of disclosures, the recantation of statements, and the distortion of events can all be corroboration.

With regard to offender patterns of behavior, many have been set forth elsewhere in this book, and others are contained in *Child Molesters: A Behavioral Analysis*, listed in References. The law-enforcement investigator must understand that doing a background investigation on a suspected child molester means more than obtaining the date and place of birth and credit and criminal checks. School, juvenile, military, medical, employment, and bank records can be valuable sources of information about an offender. Knowing the kind of offender you are dealing with can go a long way toward learning where and what kind of corroborative evidence might be found. Knowing the kind of offender you are dealing with can be helpful in determining the existence and location of other victims and child pornography or erotica.

**Identify Adult Witnesses and Suspects** One benefit of a multi-offender case is that it increases the likelihood that there is a weak link in the group. The conspiracy model of building a case against one suspect and then using that suspect's testimony against others can be useful. Because of the need to protect potential child victims, the conspiracy model of investigation has limitations in child sexual abuse and exploitation cases. You cannot knowingly allow children to be molested as you build your case. Corroboration of a child victim's statement with adult witness testimony, however, is an important and valuable technique.

**Medical Evidence** The ability and willingness of medical doctors to corroborate child sexual abuse has improved greatly. The colposcope, toluidine blue dye, and other techniques have greatly improved the ability of doctors to medically corroborate child sexual abuse. When used with a camera, the colposcope can document the trauma without additional examinations of the child victim. Statements made to doctors

by the child victim as part of the medical examination may be admissible in court without the child testifying. Law-enforcement investigators, however, should be cautious of doctors who have been identified as child abuse crusaders or who always find—or never find—medical evidence of sexual abuse. Medical doctors should be objective scientists doing a professional examination. The exact cause of any anal or vaginal trauma needs to be carefully and scientifically evaluated. It should also be noted that many acts of child sexual abuse do not leave any physical injuries that can be identified by a medical examination. Thus, lack of medical corroboration does not necessarily mean that a child was not sexually abused.

**Other Victims** The simple understanding and recognition that a child molester might have other victims is one of the most important steps in corroborating an allegation of child sexual abuse. There is strength in numbers. If an investigation uncovers one or two victims, each will probably have to testify in court. If an investigation uncovers five, ten, or thirty victims, the odds are that none of them will testify because there will not be a trial. In one recent case, a Christian minister accused of sexually molesting boys announced at a press conference two days before his trial that the angel of the Lord had appeared to him and told him he would not be convicted at his trial. He technically was not convicted at his trial because before the trial he changed his plea to guilty. Why? Thirty victims were prepared to testify against him. With multiple victims, the only defense is to allege a flawed investigation.

Because of the volume of crime and limited resources, many law-enforcement agencies may be unable to continue an investigation to find thirty victims. If that is the case, they need to try to identify as many victims as possible. Other victims are sometimes identified through publicity about the case. Consistency of statements obtained from multiple victims, independently interviewed, can be powerful corroboration.

**Search Warrants** The major law-enforcement problem with the use of search warrants in child sexual abuse and exploitation cases is that they are not obtained soon enough. In many cases, investigators have probable cause for a search warrant but do not know it. Because of the possibility of the movement or destruction of evidence, search warrants should be obtained as soon as legally possible. Waiting too long and developing, in essence, too much probable cause may be a reason for criticism or even lawsuits against agencies on the basis that the delay allowed additional victims to be molested. Knowing what to search for is also important. The value and significance of child erotica (pedophile paraphernalia) is often not recognized by investigators. (See *Child Molesters: A Be-*

*havioral Analysis*, listed in References.)

**Physical Evidence** Physical evidence can be defined as any object that corroborates anything a child victim said, saw, tasted, smelled, drew, and so on. It could be bed sheets, articles of clothing, sexual aids, lubricants, and so on. It could also be an object or sign on the wall described by a victim. If the victim says the offender ejaculated on a door knob, that becomes physical evidence if found. Positive identification of a subject through DNA analysis of trace amounts of biological evidence left at a crime scene may result in a child victim not having to testify because the subject pleads guilty. If the victim says the offender kept condoms in the nightstand by his bed, they become physical evidence if found. The back page missing from a pornography magazine that the victim described is physical evidence. Satanic occult paraphernalia is evidence if it corroborates criminal activity.

**Child Pornography and Child Erotica** Child pornography, especially that produced by the offender, is one of the most valuable pieces of corroborative evidence of child sexual abuse that any investigator can have. Obviously, many child molesters do not possess or collect child pornography. Investigators, however, should always look for it. Preferential child molesters, especially those operating child sex rings, almost always collect child pornography or child erotica. If situational child molesters possess child pornography, they usually have pictures of their own victims. In addition to viewing any homemade videotapes seized from the offenders, investigators must also listen carefully to them. The voices and sounds may reveal valuable corroborative or intelligence information. If necessary, photographic enhancement can be used to help identify individuals, locations, and dates on newspapers and magazines otherwise unrecognizable in the child pornography. In one case, a subject was positively identified from his fingerprint, which was visible in a recovered child pornography photograph. The FBI, U.S. Customs, and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service all maintain obscenity and child pornography reference files that can be accessed by law-enforcement agencies.

Child erotica is not as significant as child pornography, but it can be of value. It can help prove intent. It can be a source of intelligence information—identifying other offenders or victims. It can also be used to deny bond if it indicates the offender is a risk to the community. Child erotica can be instrumental in influencing the offender to plead guilty, and it can also be used at the time of sentencing to demonstrate the full scope of the offender's activity. This is consistent with the "big picture" approach.

**Consensual Monitoring** Consensual monitoring is a valuable, but often underutilized, investigative tech-

nique. It includes the use of pretext phone calls and body recorders. Because of the legal issues involved and variations in state laws, use of this technique should always be discussed with department legal advisors and prosecutors.

Remember, children are *not* small-statured adults and must never be endangered by officials. The use of this technique with child victims presents ethical as well as legal considerations. Pretext phone calls may be more suitable than body recorders with child victims but are obviously not appropriate in all cases. They may not be suitable for use with very young victims. The use of this technique should usually be discussed with the parents of a victim who is a minor. The parent, however, may not be trusted to be discreet about the use of this technique or may even be a suspect or subject in the investigation. Although there is the potential for further emotional trauma, many victims afterwards describe an almost therapeutic sense of empowerment or return of control through the use of this technique.

Consensual monitoring with body recorders is probably best reserved for use with undercover investigators and adult informants. Under no circumstances should an investigative agency produce a videotape or audiotape of the actual molestation of a child victim as part of an investigative technique. The victim might be used to introduce the undercover investigator to the subject.

Inappropriate responses obtained through consensual monitoring can be almost as damaging as outright admissions. When told by a victim over the phone that the police or a therapist wants to discuss the sexual relationship, "Let's talk about it later tonight" is not an appropriate response by an offender.

**Videotaping or Audiotaping of Victims** Taping of victims was once thought to be an ideal solution to many of the problems involving child victim interviews and testimony. Many legislatures rushed to pass special laws allowing it. Aside from the Constitutional issues, there are advantages and disadvantages to videotaping or audiotaping child victim statements.

The advantages include the following:

1. The ability to reduce the number of interviews.
2. The visual impact of a videotaped statement.
3. The ability to deal with recanting or changing statements.
4. The potential to induce a confession when played for an offender who cares for the child victim.

The disadvantages include:

1. The artificial setting created when people "play" to the camera instead of concentrating on communicating.

2. Determining which interview to record and explaining variations between them.
3. Accounting for the tapes after the investigation. Copies are sometimes furnished with little control to defense attorneys and expert witnesses. Many are played at training conferences without concealing the identity of victims.
4. Since there is no single objective criterion on how to conduct such an interview, each tape is subject to interpretation and criticism by "experts."

It is the author's opinion that the disadvantages of taping outweigh the advantages. Many experienced child sexual abuse prosecutors are against the taping of child victim statements as a general rule, although special circumstances may alter this opinion on a case-by-case basis. Departments should be careful of written policies concerning taping. It is potentially embarrassing and damaging to have to admit in court that you usually tape such interviews, but you did not in this case. It is better to be able to say that you usually do not tape such interviews, but you did in a certain case because of some special circumstances.

**Subject Confessions** Getting a subject to confess obviously can be an effective way to corroborate child sexual abuse and avoid child victim testimony in court. Unfortunately, many investigators put minimal effort into subject interviews. They typically rush in too soon without developing background information and an interview strategy. The biggest problem, however, is the fact that many investigators cannot control or conceal their anger and outrage at the offender's behavior. They want to spend as little time as possible with him. In addition, many investigators find it difficult to discuss deviant sexual behavior calmly and nonjudgmentally.

The fact is that many of these offenders really want to discuss their behavior or at least their rationalization for it. If treated with professionalism, empathy, and understanding, many of these offenders will make significant admissions. If the offender is allowed to project some of the blame for his behavior on someone or something else, he is more likely to confess. A tougher approach can always be tried if the soft approach does not work.

Investigators should consider non-custodial, non-confrontational interviews of the subject at home or work. If you do not confront the subject with all your evidence, he may be more likely to minimize his acts rather than fully deny them. Interviews during the execution of a search warrant should also be considered. Investigators should not overlook admissions made by the offender to wives, girlfriends, neighbors, friends, and even the media.

Interview techniques and strategies could easily be the topic of an entire training publication. In this

limited space, however, no attempt will be made to present an in-depth discussion of subject interviews. Suffice it to say, the ability to be an effective interviewer is an important skill for any criminal investigator. In view of the stakes involved, child sexual abuse investigators must do everything reasonably possible to improve their skills in this area.

**Surveillance** Surveillance can be a time-consuming and expensive investigative technique. In child sex ring cases, it can also be highly effective. Time and expense can be reduced if the surveillance is not open-ended but is based on inside information about the subject's activity. One obvious problem, however, is what to do when the surveillance team comes to believe that a child is being victimized. How much reasonable suspicion or probable cause does an investigator on physical or electronic surveillance need in order to take action? If a suspected child molester simply goes into a residence with a child, does law-enforcement have the right to intervene? What if the offender is simply paying the newspaper boy or watching television with a neighborhood child? These are important legal and ethical issues to consider when using the surveillance technique. In spite of these potential problems, surveillance is a valuable technique in the investigation of child sex rings.

**Creative Prosecution** Another effective way to avoid child victim testimony is to prosecute the offender for violations that may not require such testimony. This is limited only by the imagination and skill of the prosecutor. One effective technique, when appropriate, is to file federal or local child pornography charges, which usually do not require victims to testify. A combination of federal, state, and local charges may convince the subject to plead guilty. Some offenders may plead guilty in order to do their time in the federal penitentiary. Since the sexual abuse of children in sex rings sometimes involves the commission of other crimes, charges involving violations of child labor laws, involuntary servitude, bad checks, drugs, or perjury can also be filed. Valuable information can also be introduced in court without child victim testimony if the prosecutor is familiar with the use of out-of-court statements and the exceptions to the hearsay rule.

### **Investigating Historical Child Sex Rings**

The general investigative techniques discussed in the previous section are applicable in varying degrees to the investigation of historical child sex rings. The "big picture" approach is the key to the successful investigation and prosecution of these cases. Multiple victims corroborated by child pornography, erotica, and other physical evidence make a powerful case likely to result in a guilty plea, no trial, and therefore no

child victim testimony. The following techniques apply *primarily* to the investigation of historical child sex rings. (See also Chapter 4.)

**Understand the Seduction Process** The seduction process was discussed in depth in Chapter 4. After understanding the seduction process, the investigator must be able to communicate this understanding to the victim. This is the difficult part. One investigator recently contacted the author and described what sounded like a classic historical sex ring involving a seduction preferential child molester. The investigator stated, however, that his first disclosing victim (a 12-year-old boy) described being gagged and tied up by the offender. While this is certainly possible, it is not typical of such offenders. When asked when and how the victim furnished this information, the investigator admitted that it was after he had asked the boy why he did not scream or fight when the offender abused him sexually.

By asking such questions in this way, the investigator is communicating to the boy that the investigator has no understanding of the subtle seduction of the boy. The investigator is back in the world of dirty old men in wrinkled raincoats jumping out from behind trees. Obviously, the investigator did not understand that the molester was probably the boy's best friend, who seduced him with attention and affection. The victim realized that the investigator would not understand what happened, and so the boy "adjusted" the story and tried to explain with an excuse that the investigator would accept and understand. The boy was suffering from the "say no, yell, and tell" guilt.

Most adolescent boy victims will deny their victimization even if the investigator does the investigation properly. Almost all articles and training presentations on the interviewing of sexually abused children mention nothing about the interview of adolescent boys or girls. The emphasis is usually on such things as developing rapport by getting on the floor and playing and using the child's own terminology. Interestingly, many of the same interview principles do in fact apply to the interview of adolescent victims. You must begin by developing a rapport with the victim; but this is far more difficult to do with a 13-year-old streetwise boy. You must learn the victim's terminology; while terms such as "head job" and "rim job" are vulgar, it is important to find out exactly what the victim means by them.

The interview of an adolescent boy victim of sexual exploitation is extremely difficult at best. The stigma of homosexuality and embarrassment over victimization greatly increase the likelihood that the victims will deny or misrepresent the sexual activity.

When attempting to identify potential victims of an historical sex ring, the author recommends trying

to start with victims who are about to or have just left the offender's "pipeline." The victim most likely to disclose would be one who has just left the ring and who has a sibling or close friend about to enter the ring. The desire to protect younger victims from what they have endured is the strongest motivation for overcoming their shame and embarrassment. The next best choice would be a victim who has just entered the "pipeline."

Before beginning the interview, the investigator must understand that the victim may have many positive feelings for the offender and may even resent law-enforcement intervention. Time must be spent attempting to develop a working relationship with the victim. The investigator must be able to discuss a wide variety of sexual activity, understanding the victim's terminology and without being judgmental. Not being judgmental may be much more difficult with a delinquent adolescent engaged in homosexual activity than with an innocent 8-year-old girl abused by her father. Investigators often nonverbally communicate their judgmental attitude unknowingly through gestures, facial expressions, and body language.

The investigator must communicate to the victim that he or she is not at fault even though the victim did not say no, did not fight, did not tell, or even enjoyed it. When the victim comes to believe that the investigator understands what he experienced, he or she is more likely to talk. The investigator must allow the victim to use scenarios to save face when disclosing the victimization. Adolescent boy victims are highly likely to deny certain types of sexual activity. The investigator must accept the fact that even if a victim discloses, the information is likely to be incomplete, minimizing his involvement and acts. If all else fails, the investigator can try the no-nonsense approach. No matter what the investigator does, most adolescent boy victims will deny they were victims. Therefore, it is important that as many potential victims as legally and ethically possible are interviewed.

The author has given many presentations describing the dynamics of historical sex rings and the seduction techniques of preferential child molesters (pedophiles). After many of these presentations, adult male members of the audience have approached the author in private and admitted they were victimized as boys. Most stated they had never before told anyone of their victimization but were now able to tell because they realized that the author understood the problem and that they were not the only ones so victimized. The key to getting adolescent boys to disclose their victimization is to communicate subtly to them your understanding of the seduction process. After the first few victims disclose, the others usually come forward more readily.

**Understand the Preferential Molester** Men sexually attracted to young adolescent boys are the most persistent and prolific child molesters known to the criminal justice system. Depending on how you define molestation, they can easily have hundreds if not thousands of victims in a lifetime. They usually begin their activity when they were teenagers themselves and continue throughout their lives as long as they are physically able.

They may be "pillars of the community" and are often described as "nice guys." They almost always have a means of access to children (marriage, neighborhood, occupation). Determining their means of access helps to identify potential victims. Investigation should always verify the credentials of those who attempt to justify their acts as part of some "professional" activity. It must be understood, however, that just because an offender is a doctor, priest, minister, or therapist, for example, does not mean he is not also a child molester.

Because the molestation of children is part of a long-term persistent pattern of behavior, preferential child molesters are like human evidence machines. During their lifetime, they leave behind a string of victims and a collection of child pornography and erotica. Therefore, the preferential child molester is easy to convict if investigators understand how to recognize him and how he operates—and if their departments give them the time and resources. It is obviously better to convict the preferential child molester based on his past behavior. If, however, all else fails, he can be convicted in the future based on his continuing molestation of children.

Most preferential child molesters spend their entire lives attempting to convince themselves and others that they are not perverts. They try to convince themselves that they love and nurture children. Because most of them have hidden their activities for so long, when identified and prosecuted, they try to convince themselves that they will somehow continue to escape responsibility. This is why they often proclaim their innocence right up to the time of their trial. If, however, the investigator and prosecutor have properly developed the case, preferential child molesters almost always change their plea to guilty. The last thing they want is to have the public hear the details of their sexual activity with children. After pleading guilty, they attempt to convince the sentencing authority that their lives have been ruined and that they are "sick" and need treatment.

**Proactive Approach** Many investigators have told the author that they investigate almost exclusively one-on-one intrafamilial child sexual abuse cases, not child sex rings. The author does not doubt that intrafamilial sexual abuse cases are the most common, but believes that there are more child sex ring cases than

many investigators realize. If a police department takes a reactive approach and waits for ring cases to be reported, they will probably wait a long time. As previously stated, most of these victims will deny their victimization when questioned, much less voluntarily come forward and report it.

Because this book is available to the general public, specific details of proactive investigative techniques will not be set forth. In general, however, proactive investigation involves the use of surveillance, mail covers, undercover correspondence, "sting" operations, and reverse "sting" operations. For example, when an offender who has been communicating with other offenders is arrested, investigators can assume his identity and continue the correspondence.

It is not necessary for each law-enforcement agency to "reinvent the wheel." Federal law-enforcement agencies such as the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, U.S. Customs, the FBI, and some state and local law-enforcement departments have been using proactive investigative techniques for years. Because the production and distribution of child pornography frequently involves violations of federal law, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, U.S. Customs, and the FBI all have intelligence information about child pornography traffickers. The author strongly recommends that any law-enforcement agency about to begin the use of these proactive techniques contact nearby federal, state, and local law-enforcement agencies to determine what is already being done. Many areas of the country have organized task forces on child pornography and sexual exploitation of children. Unless law-enforcement agencies learn to work together in these proactive techniques, they will end up "investigating" each other. Preferential child molesters are also actively trying to identify and learn about these proactive techniques.

The proactive approach also includes the analysis of records and documents obtained or seized from offenders during an investigation. In addition to possibly being used to convict these offenders, such material can contain valuable intelligence information about other offenders and victims. This material must be carefully evaluated in order not to overestimate or underestimate its significance.

### **Investigating Multidimensional Child Sex Rings**

Multidimensional child sex rings can be among the most difficult and complex cases that any law-enforcement officer will ever investigate. The investigation of recent allegations from multiple young children under the age of 6 offers one set of major problems. The investigation of ten- or twenty-year-old allega-

tions from adult survivors offers additional problems. The following techniques apply primarily to the investigation of multidimensional child sex rings. (See also Chapter 5, Appendix A, and Appendix B.)

**Minimize Satanic/Occult Aspect** There are those who claim that one of the major reasons more of these cases have not been successfully prosecuted is that the satanic/occult aspect has not been aggressively pursued. One state has even introduced legislation creating added penalties when certain crimes are committed as part of a ritual or ceremony. The author strongly disagrees with such an approach. It makes no difference what spiritual belief system was used to enhance and facilitate or rationalize and justify criminal behavior. It serves no purpose to "prove" someone is a satanist. As a matter of fact, if it is alleged that the subject committed certain criminal acts in order to conjure up supernatural spirits or forces, this may very well be the basis for an insanity or diminished capacity defense. The defense may very well be more interested in all the "evidence of satanic activity." It is best to focus on the crime and all the evidence to corroborate its commission. In one case, a law-enforcement agency executing a search warrant seized only the satanic paraphernalia and left behind the other evidence that would have corroborated victim statements. Even offenders who commit crimes in a spiritual context are usually motivated by power, sex, and money.

**Keep Investigation and Religious Beliefs Separate** The author believes that one of the biggest mistakes any investigator of these cases can do is to attribute supernatural powers to the offenders. During an investigation, a good investigator may sometimes be able to use the beliefs and superstitions of the offenders to his or her advantage. The reverse happens if the investigator believes that the offenders possess supernatural powers. Satanic/occult practitioners have no more power than any other human beings. Law-enforcement officers who believe that the investigation of these cases puts them in conflict with the supernatural forces of evil should probably not be assigned to them. The religious beliefs of officers should provide spiritual strength and support for them, but not affect the objectivity and professionalism of the investigation. It is easy to get caught up in these cases and begin to see "evil" everywhere. Supervisors need to be alert for and monitor these reactions in their investigators.

**Listen to the Victims** It is not the investigator's duty to believe the victims, it is his or her job to listen and be an objective fact finder. The investigator must remember, however, that almost anything is possible. Most important, the investigator must remember that there is much middle ground. Just because one event did happen does not mean that all reported events

happened, and just because one event did not happen does not mean that all other events did not happen. Do not become such a zealot that you believe it all, nor such a cynic that you believe nothing.

**Assess and Evaluate Victim Statements** This is the part of the investigative process in child sexual exploitation cases that seems to have been lost. Consider and investigate all possible explanations of events. The information learned will be invaluable in counteracting the defense attorneys when they raise the alternative explanations.

The first step in the assessment and evaluation of victim statements is to determine how much time has elapsed since disclosure was first made and the incident was reported to the police or social services. The longer the delay, the bigger the potential for problems. The next step is to determine the number and purpose of all prior interviews of the victim concerning the allegations. The more interviews conducted before the investigative interview, the larger the potential for problems. Although there is nothing wrong with admitting shortcomings and seeking help, law-enforcement should never abdicate its control over the investigative interview. When an investigative interview is conducted by or with a social worker or therapist using a team approach, law-enforcement must direct the process.

The investigator must closely and carefully evaluate events in the victim's life before, during, and after the alleged abuse. Events to be evaluated *before* the alleged abuse include:

- background of victim
- abuse of drugs in home
- pornography in home
- play, television, and VCR habits
- attitudes about sexuality in home
- extent of sex education in home
- activities of siblings
- need or craving for attention
- religious beliefs and training
- childhood fears
- custody/visitation disputes
- victimization of or by family members

Events to be evaluated *during* the alleged abuse include:

- use of fear or scare tactics
- degree of trauma
- use of magic, deception, or trickery
- use of rituals
- use of drugs
- use of pornography

Events to be evaluated *after* the alleged abuse include:

- disclosure sequence
- background of prior interviewers
- background of parents
- co-mingling of victims

**Evaluate Contagion** Consistent statements obtained from different multiple victims are powerful pieces of corroborative evidence—that is, as long as those statements were not “contaminated.” Investigation must carefully evaluate both pre- and post-disclosure contagion and both victim and intervenor contagion. Are the different victim statements consistent because they describe common experiences or events or because they reflect contamination or urban legends?

The sources of potential contagion are widespread. Victims can communicate with each other both prior to and after their disclosures. Intervenors can communicate with each other and with victims. The team or cell concepts discussed in Appendix A and Appendix B are attempts to deal with potential investigator contagion. Documenting existing contagion and eliminating additional contagion are crucial to the successful investigation and prosecution of these cases.

In order to evaluate the contagion element, investigators must meticulously and aggressively investigate these cases. Personal visits to all locations of alleged abuse and the victims' homes are essential. Events prior to the alleged abuse must be carefully evaluated. Investigators may have to view television programs, films, and videotapes seen by the victims. It may be necessary to conduct a background investigation and evaluation of everyone, both professional and nonprofessional, who interviewed the victims about the allegations. Investigators must be familiar with the information about “ritualistic abuse of children” being disseminated in magazines, books, television programs, videotapes, and conferences. Every possible way that a victim could have learned about the details of the abuse must be explored, if for no other reason than to eliminate them and counter the defense's arguments. There may, however, be validity to these contagion factors. They may explain some of the “unbelievable” aspects of the case and result in the successful prosecution of the substance of the case. Consistency of statements becomes more significant if contagion is identified or disproved by independent investigation.

Munchausen Syndrome and Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy are complex and controversial issues in these cases. No attempt will be made to discuss them in detail (*see* Additional Readings), but they are documented facts. Most of the literature about them focuses on their manifestation in the medical setting as false or self-inflicted illness or injury. They are also manifested in the criminal justice setting as

false or self-inflicted crime victimization. If parents would poison their children to prove an illness, they might sexually abuse their children to prove a crime. These are the unpopular, but documented, realities of the world.

**Establish Communication with Parents** The importance and difficulty of this technique cannot be overemphasized. An investigator must maintain ongoing communication with the parents of victims in extrafamilial abuse cases. Once the parents begin to interview their own children and conduct their own investigation, the case may be lost. Parents must be made to understand that their child's credibility will be jeopardized when and if the information obtained turns out to be false. Further, within the limits of the law and without jeopardizing investigative techniques, parents must be told on a regular basis how the case is progressing. (See also Appendix A and Appendix B.)

**Develop a Contingency Plan** If a department waits until actually confronted with a case before a response is developed, it is probably too late. Departments must respond quickly, and this requires advance planning. There are added problems for small-to medium-sized departments with limited personnel and resources. Effective investigation of these cases requires planning, identification of resources and, in many cases, mutual aid agreements between agencies. The U.S. Department of Defense has conducted specialized training and has developed such a plan for child sex ring cases involving military facilities and personnel.

The investigation of child sex rings can be difficult and time consuming. The likelihood, however, of a great deal of corroborative evidence in a multi-victim/multi-offender case increases the chances of a successful prosecution. Because there is still so much we do not know or understand about the dynamics of multidimensional child sex rings, investigative techniques are less certain. Each new case must be carefully evaluated in order to improve investigative procedures. Because mental health professionals seem

to be unable to determine, with any degree of certainty, the accuracy of victim statements in these cases, law-enforcement must proceed through the corroboration process. If some of what the victim describes is accurate, some misperceived, some distorted, and some contaminated, what is the jury supposed to believe? Until mental health professionals can come up with better answers, the jury should be asked to believe what the investigation can corroborate.

**Multidisciplinary Task Forces** Appendix A and Appendix B set forth specific guidelines for multidisciplinary task force approaches to the investigation of child abuse and exploitation involving multiple victims or multiple suspects. Appendix A contains guidelines developed by the Los Angeles County Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect. Appendix B contains guidelines developed by Donna Pence and the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation. The guidelines set forth in these protocols can be applied to the investigation of any child sex ring. The guidelines, however, are especially pertinent to the investigation of what the author calls the multidimensional child sex ring.

Sergeant Beth Dickinson, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, was the chairperson of the Multi-Victim, Multi-Suspect Child Sexual Abuse Subcommittee that developed Appendix A. Sergeant Dickinson states, "One of the biggest obstacles for investigators to overcome is the reluctance of law-enforcement administrators to commit sufficient resources early on to an investigation that has the potential to be a multidimensional child sex ring. The concept/purpose of these protocols is to get in and get on top of the investigation in a timely manner—to get it investigated in a timely manner in order to assess the risk to children and to avoid hysteria, media sensationalism, and cross-contamination of information. The team approach reduces stress on individual investigators, allowing for peer support and minimizing feelings of being overwhelmed."

# Appendix A

## Protocols in Investigating Multi-Victim, Multi-Offender Child Sexual Exploitation

Los Angeles County Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect  
Protocols Developed by the Multi-Victim, Multi-Suspect Child Sexual Abuse Subcommittee, November 1988

Penny Weiss, Assistant Director, Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect  
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A particular thank-you goes to the extraordinary efforts of Tammy Moya, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, Juvenile Investigations Bureau, for her editing and typing of the guidelines.

### Multi-Victim, Multi-Suspect Child Sexual Abuse Subcommittee

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### Introduction

The Los Angeles County Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect (ICAN) is a multidisciplinary body committed to coordinating and improving services for the prevention, identification, and treatment of child abuse and neglect. ICAN has recognized that investigations of allegations of child abuse involving multiple victims and/or multiple suspects (MV/MS) present unique challenges for all agencies involved with these complicated cases.

Some of the common problems identified in MV/MS cases have included the insufficient allocation of resources to investigate the allegations in an expedient manner, inadequate training, confusion about who is in charge of the investigation, contamination of evidence, and the overwhelming magnitude of the investigation. Many of these cases become even more difficult if the allegations arise in a preschool setting and involve very young children.

Having identified these problem areas, ICAN members concluded that there was a critical need to develop guidelines for conducting MV/MS investigations. Assuring that the confidentiality of the investigation was not compromised was a primary consideration. It was also clear that the rights of victims and the rights of the alleged suspects must be preserved while conducting the investigation in an expedient manner. These guidelines recommend a team approach to minimize the risk of contamination, provide for more comprehensive and humane interviews with the victims, and assure that the overall investigation is more effectively and efficiently carried out on behalf of the children and families involved in MV/MS cases.

### Purpose

The purpose of this protocol is to establish guidelines for a multidisciplinary task force approach to the investigation of child abuse involving multiple victims and/or multiple suspects. While this protocol can be used in any large-scale investigation involving child abuse, it is primarily designed

for investigating allegations of child abuse in settings such as preschools and other out-of-home care facilities. The ICAN Protocol is further designed to ensure that investigations of suspected child abuse occurring in these settings are done in a timely manner, are complete, and are coordinated among the responsible agencies. These guidelines are to serve as an adjunct to the *California Administrative Code*, Title 11, Sections 930-930.8, "Guidelines for Investigation of Child Abuse in Out-of-Home Care Facilities." The intent of this protocol is to encourage a high degree of cooperation and coordination among all the agencies involved in the investigation, administration, and prosecution of these types of cases.

## Definitions

*Multiple victim* cases are the types of child abuse allegations that arise in a setting where several children are at risk of being victimized by one or more offenders. Examples of these are schools, preschools, organized youth groups, and out-of-home facilities such as group homes. These would include both licensed and unlicensed facilities.

*Multiple suspect* cases are the types of child abuse allegations that arise where more than one suspect has been named by children as having participated in or been aware of the abuse against one or more child(ren). Examples of this would be sex ring participants, child pornographers, and other offenders who, with each other's knowledge, engage in abusing children.

*Investigative team* is a team of law-enforcement investigators assigned to investigate criminal allegations of child abuse involving multiple victims and/or multiple suspects. The size of the investigative team would vary depending on the scope and size of the investigation.

*Voluntary interagency investigative team* is a voluntary association of law-enforcement agencies, county welfare and/or probation departments, child placement agencies, and state or county licensing agencies established for the sharing of information and coordination of investigations of reports of child abuse occurring in out-of-home care facilities. This voluntary investigative team could also consist of one or more specialized medical practitioners and one or more licensed therapists. Also, part of the team may consist of specialized experts who would be used by the team for purposes of consultation.

## Duties and Responsibilities

The purpose of this section is to clarify each agency's duties and responsibilities and to improve agency coordination to reduce duplication of effort. By clarifying the duties and responsibilities, the goal is to lessen trauma to child victims, to minimize the number of interviewers and interviews, to prevent the abuse of other potential victims, to increase the effectiveness of prosecution, and to provide information to the involved agencies in a coordinated and efficient manner.

**Law-Enforcement** The primary responsibility for criminal investigations of serious abuse rests with law-enforcement. The law-enforcement agency should be in charge of the investigation until such time as the allegations are determined to be unsubstantiated, or the allegations have been investigated and presented to the District Attorney for review for prosecution. The law-enforcement agency should also be the one that coordinates the voluntary interagency investigation team, making sure that all children identified as victims are referred for therapy and assistance either through the child welfare agency or victim/witness agency and Los Angeles County Mental Health Department.

**District Attorney** The primary agency responsible for the prosecution of substantiated allegations of child abuse, the District Attorney's Office, may also provide assistance to the investigative team throughout the tenure of the investigation by giving legal advice, helping to draft search warrants, observing interviews of potential witnesses, and any other assistance deemed appropriate.

**Child Welfare Agency** The county department administering children's services may be a part of the investigative team in those instances where the circumstances of the case mandate their involvement, such as children being abused by their parent or caretaker. Its involvement would be to take the necessary measures to ensure the safety of children who may require protective custody, to make placement recommendations, and to coordinate the assessment and interviews of children and adults with the appropriate law-enforcement and licensing agencies. The involvement of the child welfare agency in these types of multiple-victim, multiple-suspect investigations may involve being a part of the investigative team for only a portion of the investigation, or throughout the duration of the investigation.

**Licensing Agency** The primary responsibility of the licensing agency is to investigate allegations of child abuse, including general neglect, in a licensed out-of-home care facility. The licensing agency shall coordinate its efforts with those of the law-enforcement investigative team, as well as with the investigating child protective agency. The licensing agency shall provide back-up assistance when appropriate and requested by the investigating law-enforcement agency. The licensing agency may be involved as a part of the investigative team during all or part of the duration of the investigation. The licensing agency is responsible for taking appropriate administrative action involving any licensed facility which would include revocation or suspension of the license of the out-of-home care facility and the investigation and prosecution of unlicensed activity (regardless of the outcome of abuse allegations).

**Victim/Witness Agency** The victim/witness agency would be part of the investigative team in those instances where children were identified as having been victims of child abuse. The victim/witness agency representative would work with law-enforcement; be a member of the voluntary interagency investigative team; make referrals for medical examinations, therapeutic evaluations, and treatment; as-

sist the family with processing applications for the Victim/Witness Assistance Fund; and work with the victim and family throughout the investigation and subsequent court process.

**Medical Practitioner** The duties and responsibilities of the medical practitioner(s) are to conduct the medical examinations of the victims or suspected victims in accordance with state guidelines and protocols for the examination of suspected child abuse victims. They are to fill out the appropriate state-mandated forms and provide assistance to the investigative team in the following manner: conduct medical exams, give expert opinion regarding the nature of abuse, coordinate examinations with the investigative team, and provide additional expertise to the team, as needed.

**Licensed Therapists** The duties of licensed therapists with experience and training in evaluating victims of child abuse will be to provide evaluations of suspected victims of abuse as requested by the investigative team. These *pre-identified evaluators* provide the team with their findings in writing and fill out the mandated forms upon receiving any disclosures from children wherein abuse is suspected. Licensed therapists may be a part of the investigative team for a portion or the entire duration of the investigation. They will take the necessary steps to prepare children for investigative interviews or conduct evaluations in conjunction with investigators, whichever is determined to be in the best interest of the children and the investigation.

Licensed therapists with experience and training in treating victims of child abuse may become a part of the investigative team. Children may be referred to these *pre-identified therapists* by the investigative team for treatment as a result of their disclosing abuse or being suspected as victims because of behavioral symptoms. Therapists' treatment of children is considered confidential and need only be revealed to the investigative team when and if victims disclose additional suspects or additional crimes.

Therapists who provide evaluations and/or treatment to victims and assist the investigative team shall do so in a manner that does not compromise the integrity of the investigation. (See Sample 1, Letter to Therapist.)

## Investigative Guidelines

The primary objective of the investigation is the protection of child(ren). Investigative personnel have the responsibility to conduct an objective and unbiased investigation and to consider the rights of the victims as well as the rights of the accused.

The *law-enforcement investigative team* or *voluntary interagency investigative team* investigating allegations of abuse in out-of-home care facilities shall follow the guidelines set forth in *California Administrative Code*, Title 11, Sections 930-930.8.

In addition to following state guidelines, the ICAN Protocols established for Los Angeles County are designed

to expand and enhance those guidelines by setting forth a model approach for conducting these investigations as a team. The ICAN Protocols set forth procedures for assessment, investigation, and prosecution of multiple-victim, multiple-suspect investigations of child abuse.

**Personnel Needs** The lead investigative agency should make a timely assessment regarding the resources that should be assigned to a multiple-victim, multiple-suspect investigation. If the magnitude of the investigation indicates the involvement of numerous children, witnesses, and suspects, sufficient staff should be allocated to the investigation to assess the scope and magnitude of the problem. If one child is disclosing abuse in a setting where there is the potential for larger numbers of children also to be either victims or witnesses, many children must be interviewed in order to assess the situation adequately.

Putting together a *law-enforcement investigative team* or a *voluntary interagency investigative team* to make this assessment is the appropriate way to approach these types of investigations in most cases. It is far more effective to gear up for a major investigation by allocating sufficient resources to expeditiously determine the magnitude of the problem than to attempt to assess the situation with only one or two investigators. With proper resources, the risk assessment can be made in an expedient manner and, if the allegations prove to be either unsubstantiated or contained within only a small number of victims, the additional personnel can be returned to their normal duties. If the allegations appear to be substantiated and involve large numbers of victims or suspects, the team would already be in place and set up to continue the investigation.

**Timeliness and Planning** A team should be formed and strategies developed as soon as possible upon learning that there are allegations of child abuse involving the potential for multiple victims and multiple suspects. Team members should be brought together, briefed, and given initial assignments. Any indicated search warrants and surveillances should be done within the first 24 to 48 hours, if possible.

**Coordination of the Investigation** The most important aspect of a major investigation is to determine who is in charge of the investigation. That responsibility cannot be delegated. In a criminal investigation, the agency in charge should be the law-enforcement agency in whose jurisdiction the crime occurred.

**Needs Assessment** Phase I of the investigation consists of assessing the risk to children currently in the care, custody, or control of the alleged offender(s). This assessment must receive highest priority to determine how many children have been victims of or witnesses to abuse, and to assess what evidence has been collected and what additional evidence is needed. If any of the children assessed in Phase I have been abused, then the investigation should progress to Phase II, where children who previously had exposure to the alleged suspect would be interviewed to determine the degree of victimization with those children. If the victims identified in Phase I are very young, it is especially

important to determine if there are older victims who can corroborate the younger victims' testimony.

## The Investigation Process

**System for Communication with Parents** If the alleged crimes have occurred outside the home, the investigative team must address the concerns of the parents of the alleged victims.

1. Parents should be interviewed regarding any behavioral indicators of possible abuse they observed. (See Sample 4, Parents' Questionnaire, and Sample 5, Letter to Parents.)
2. Parents should be interviewed regarding the history of their child's contact with the alleged offender(s).
3. Parents should be advised of the nature of the investigation, and their cooperation in the investigation should be sought.
4. Parents should be made aware of the importance of keeping any information about their child's disclosures confidential, especially from the media.
5. Parents should be kept informed of the status of the investigation. This can be done without giving out specific details about the disclosures of other victims.
6. A liaison person should be selected to meet, as needed, with the parents to keep them informed. Failure to do so may result in inappropriate sharing of information, frustration over the lack of information, lack of cooperation or participation in the investigative process and, in some cases, inappropriate attempts at investigation by the parents. (See Sample 2, Parents' Liaison.)

**System for Communication with the Children** Only investigators who have experience and training in child abuse and child interviews should be assigned the task of interviewing children. Further, these investigators should also have received the POST-approved sexual assault investigation training per *Penal Code*, Section 13836, prior to being assigned to conduct these interviews.

The room where child interviews are conducted should ideally contain child-sized furniture; investigative interviewing aids, such as drawing material, anatomical drawings and/or dolls; and other material designed to make a child comfortable. This room could also contain a one-way mirror so that the interview can be monitored. The decision to use audiotapes or videotapes to record these interviews should be made on a case-by-case basis by the investigative team, and in conjunction with consultation with the prosecutor's office.

The investigative team should be aware that it is more important to limit the number of interviewers than to limit the number of interviews. How many times each child is interviewed and by whom, however, will be an important issue should the case result in prosecution. *Note:* A thera-

peutic evaluation should not replace an investigative interview.

Child investigative interviewers should have received specialized training in child development issues. The team may want to consider retaining the assistance of a child development expert to assist and advise the interviewers on the special skills needed to interview very young children. (See Sample 7, Child Interview Report.)

**System for Communication with the Medical Community** Medical professionals will generally not be involved in the everyday workings of the investigative team. When possible, not all the children in a major case should be examined by the same medical evaluator. A medical evaluator should be assigned to each team and only evaluate children assigned to him or her by that specific team.

When more than one medical evaluator is used, they should be selected from different centers and should not consult with each other about their findings, especially in the very early stages of the investigation.

If at all possible, the investigator should attempt to obtain a child's previous medical history and records and provide them to the medical evaluator. (See Sample 6, Information for Parents.)

**System for Liaison with Therapeutic Community** Therapists who assist or work with the investigative team should be selected from different programs and should be assigned to work with separate teams. The investigators should monitor the evaluator's methodology in assessing children for sexual abuse to determine if the techniques used are compatible with the investigation's needs. Likewise, evaluators should observe some investigative interviews in order to stay informed regarding the techniques used in those interviews. (See Sample 3, Therapist's Questionnaire.) Therapists should share information regarding disclosures only with their investigative counterpart, especially during the early phases of the investigation.

**System for Communication with the Media** Only the agency in charge of the investigation should be assigned the responsibility of issuing information to the media. Other agencies that are a part of the *voluntary interagency investigative team* should consult with the agency in charge before issuing any statements to the media.

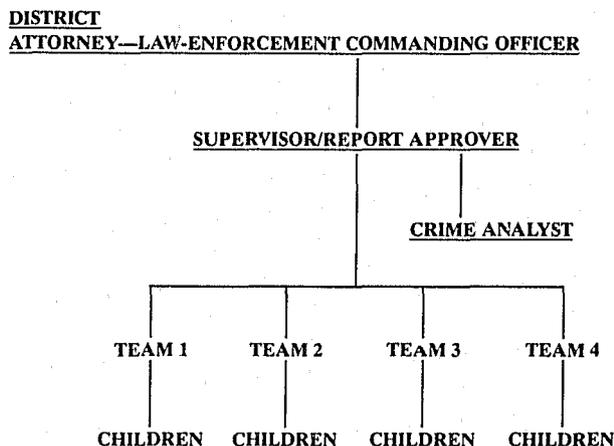
There should be a specific unit within the investigative agency not directly part of the investigative team that has responsibility for issuing statements to the press.

## Task Force Approach

The *investigative team* should include a supervisor/report approver whose duties consist of coordinating the investigation, assessing all the information that comes from the individual interviews, and delegating additional investigative interviews to specific team members, as needed. The team may include a crime analyst to provide technical advice to the team. The team would have several investigators, some of whom would be designated as "child interviewers."

If this is a *voluntary interagency investigative team*, then the investigators' counterparts—*i.e.*, licensing investigator, therapist, medical evaluator, etc.—would be assigned to separate investigators, and each would become a separate team.

What follows is an example of the possible makeup of the investigative team:



It is important that all parties involved should only share information regarding specific allegations from children within their own team and upward to the team supervisor. The team supervisor should review these specific allegations. If a child names other children as victims or witnesses, the responsibility for interviewing those other children should be delegated to another team who has received no information as to the allegations. The purpose of this is to minimize any contamination of information so that disclosures come from children in a spontaneous manner. By using this system, contamination of information or inadvertent leading questions will be minimized. If the allegations appear substantiated and the investigation continues, it then becomes important to share some information with all members of the investigative team, especially the law-enforcement component. If the early disclosures were made in a manner free from contamination, the prosecutor can then argue that specific controls were used to eliminate that factor.

### Investigative Aids

The investigative team should consider the use of charts, as well as the use of link analysis and Visual Investigative Analysis (V.I.A.) charting to assist them in recording pertinent information. The use of a computer programmed to accept and print out data in a relevant way should be utilized. Efficient clerical support should not be forgotten so that investigative reports can be prepared in a timely manner.

Each law-enforcement agency should establish a list of

experienced investigators and supervisors, both internally and externally, who can be called upon to assist in a major case investigation.

Each law-enforcement agency should establish a list of qualified individuals within its community or surrounding communities who can be utilized to assist in a major case investigation. This would include qualified medical practitioners, pre-identified evaluators, and therapists.

Each law-enforcement agency should consider the need to do cross-training of its own personnel, as well as cross-training with other potential members of a voluntary interagency investigative team. This training would consist of an explanation of each other's roles, an explanation of the task force approach, legal requirements and restrictions, confidentiality, and other specialized information deemed pertinent.

### Summary

Cases of suspected child abuse in out-of-home care facilities constitute a critical and unprecedented challenge to effective investigation. Because some of these cases have been so spectacularly unusual and frightening, many such cases are now contaminated with prejudice and fear. An active lobby and criminal defense arguments have sometimes attempted to blame agencies for creating false cases and abusing children with inappropriate investigative techniques. Without advance preparedness and clear protocols for investigation, these cases can turn into nightmares which haunt and confuse everyone involved.

A recent national survey regarding abuse in a preschool setting [D. Finkelhor, L.M. Williams, N. Burns, and M. Kalinowski, *Sexual Abuse in Day Care: A National Study (Final Report)* (Durham, New Hampshire: University of New Hampshire Family Research Laboratory, March 1988)] shows clearly the problems to be expected in such cases because of the radical difference between conventional sexual molestation and multi-suspect cases. Of 270 validated cases of sexual abuse in out-of-home care facilities, 83 percent involved a single suspect, usually male, with a typically pedophilic modus operandi. Those cases with more than one suspect, 17 percent of the sample, were almost entirely different, contradicting prior expectations and promoting disbelief, disagreement, and protective denial among parents, investigators, and the public alike. Yet these radical differences were common among almost all of the multi-suspect cases, making that category the most uniform and predictable of all. Following are the five factors that were most predictable, each of which poses a threat to ordinary detection and investigation.

**Multiple Victims** Cases averaged about 14 victims each, sometimes extending into the hundreds. The number of so many silent victims with variations in timing and scope of disclosure makes for immense logistical problems in moving quickly and documenting properly all investigative interviews before the case is hopelessly burdened by cross-ger-

mination and discovery conflicts. The great number of parents requires organization and outreach to invite cooperation and confidentiality. The pressure to identify and protect the children immediately precludes the surveillance and intelligence procedures necessary for conspiracy prosecution.

**Female Suspects** Although females are thought to comprise only 5 percent of child molesters in general, 40 percent of the perpetrators in daycare cases were females. In multi-suspect cases, 91 percent implicated females, including 17 percent with no male suspects at all. Many authorities refuse to suspect females or to act on clues implicating women. Children shared this disbelief and were more likely to report (and their complaints much more likely to be believed) abuse by males than by females, and so their late reports of females compared to males focus suspicion on the examining techniques, as if children were being talked into fairy tales. Children were also more likely to retract complaints against females, so that charges tended to be dropped or acquitted. The women suspected in out-of-home settings were especially respectable and well educated and, therefore, effectively immune from suspicion, especially since the offenses alleged were more hurtful, more penetrating, and often more bizarre than those expected from the typical male molester.

**Pornography** While pornography was alleged in less than 5 percent of the single-suspect categories, 67 percent of multi-suspect cases described pornography production or viewing. Descriptions of pornography without confiscated material constitute "the fish that got away," tending to discredit witnesses and embarrass investigators.

**Ritual** Allegations of bondage, sadism, strange games, administration of drugs, ingestion of excrement, mutilation of animals, and even ceremonial murders occurred in 54

percent of multi-suspect cases. These bizarre allegations inspire disbelief in most listeners, as well as a desperate urgency to validate grotesque allegations by those who come to believe they are true. The special terrorism and threats in such cases left children unable to remember or speak clearly to the reality of their experience.

**Disbelief and Interprofessional Conflict** Multi-suspect cases, for all the reasons above, seem impossible to handle without distrust, foot dragging, scapegoating, and sabotage within and between agencies that had learned to work together effectively in conventional cases. Investigations, already shaky from the overburden of only circumstantial evidence, collapsed for want of mutual support among allies in the face of incredulity and ridicule from adversaries.

### **Implications for Investigation**

Multi-victim, multi-suspect sexual abuse in out-of-home care is unique in its devastation to families, to public confidence, to child protective agencies, and to the basic effectiveness of all systems of justice. It has been painfully evident throughout the United States since 1984, yet most communities are now more divided and less prepared for effective, coordinated investigation than before such abuse was discovered.

Since material evidence is so crucial and so seldom obtained, and since most multi-suspect cases will proliferate into unexpected, unbelievable dimensions, and since all hope of foundation for a proper investigation may be lost as soon as such a case is publicized, everything depends on a pre-planned protocol and advance teamwork, not only within each agency, but among the many agencies involved in these cases.

**Sample 1**

**Letter to Therapist**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

Enclosed is a brief synopsis of the facts of the case under investigation involving \_\_\_\_\_ (Victim's Name).

Please note that the information you have been provided is intended *for therapeutic purposes only*. Please do not discuss the contents of this synopsis with the children or other parents—other than to remind each individual child what the child has said to either me or the police officer who did the initial interviews. It is *absolutely essential* that you not tell one child what another child has told the police or you. It is important that, before considering group therapy, the investigative team be consulted.

Prior to our leaving, we admonished the children about speaking to each other about what happened to them and what they have told their therapist, me, or the police. We urge you to reiterate that warning when you speak with them. We have encouraged them to speak with you about what happened to them as individuals. We have also told them that the reason they may want to speak with you is that it will make them feel better. We emphasize this to you, as your contact with the children should be *strictly therapeutic* and not investigative.

We acknowledge and want to emphasize that your role is to help the children work through their feelings about what happened to them and to make them feel better about their unfortunate experiences.

At this time, we would also like to thank you for providing both a psychological and physical environment that allow the children to feel comfortable enough to speak with us. It is our belief that, without you and the rapport you have developed with those children, we would not be in a position to prosecute this case properly.

Please do not hesitate to call if you have any questions about the content of this letter or the information you have been provided.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator's Name

**Sample 2**

**Parents' Liaison**

The parents' liaison performs an *informing* role. Within the bounds established by the investigators, parents have a need and a right to know the general status of the investigation. Only then can they make an appropriate assessment on participation and nonparticipation.

The liaison person performs a *reassuring/supportive* function. He or she provides a sounding board and a bridge with "the system" by providing a necessary outlet for ventilating criticism of the system and clearing up confusion and frustration.

The liaison should make no attempt to persuade an unwilling person to enter the investigation or participate in any way in the multi-victim, multi-suspect investigation.

The liaison does not perform an investigative function. Avoiding specifics will protect against a predictable complaint that the parents' liaison was a source of *cross-germination of information*.

The liaison should avoid attempting to speculate about who the bad guys are and how things will go for them—just do not do it!

Sample 3

Therapist's Questionnaire

(NAME OF AGENCY) \_\_\_\_\_

DATE & TIME \_\_\_\_\_

FILE # \_\_\_\_\_

THERAPIST INTERVIEWED: \_\_\_\_\_

SUBJECT: \_\_\_\_\_ PRESCHOOL

VICTIM: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How long have you been treating victim? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

2. What specific information is he/she disclosing regarding abuse? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

3. Whom has the victim named as perpetrator(s)? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

4. In your opinion, would this child be able to testify in court? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Why?/Why Not? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

5. Additional information: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Sample 4

Parents' Questionnaire

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ FILE # \_\_\_\_\_

SUBJECT FACILITY: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

PARENT NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DOB: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME OF CHILD: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Do you, as a parent, have any information regarding this case that you feel will be helpful? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

2. Are you willing to have your child interviewed by a member of the Child Interviewing Team? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Would you confirm the time periods your child attended the \_\_\_\_\_ Preschool?

4. Is your child seeing a therapist? If so, what is the name of the therapist? \_\_\_\_\_

5. If your child is interviewed and gives the investigators information that can be used to prosecute suspects, how do you feel about your child testifying? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

6. Additional information: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

7. Full name of you and your spouse and dates of birth: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Sample 4, continued

8. Full names of your children and their dates of birth: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. Dates, days of week, and times in subject daycare facility: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Names of persons providing care: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. What is the daycare facility's policy regarding visits by parents? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. Have you ever made unannounced visits to the daycare facility? \_\_\_\_\_  
What did you observe? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

12. Do your children talk to you about their daycare? \_\_\_\_\_  
How do they feel about it? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

13. Do you know of any injuries or accidents involving staff or children at the daycare facility? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

14. Do you question any of the facility's policies or procedures? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Sample 4, continued

15. Have you ever registered a complaint regarding the care or supervision your child received while attending the subject facility? \_\_\_\_\_  
If yes, to whom? \_\_\_\_\_  
Subject of complaint: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

16. What is your overall opinion of your child's daycare? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

17. Have you been contacted by any other agency (law-enforcement, children's services, etc.) with regard to daycare facilities? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

18. Have your children attended other daycare facilities? \_\_\_\_\_  
If yes, name of facility: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dates, days of week, and times attended: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Names of persons providing care: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

19. Do you wish to have an investigator contact you?  
\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ Prefer Not

Home phone ( ) \_\_\_\_\_  
Work phone ( ) \_\_\_\_\_

## Sample 5

## Letter to Parents

Dear Parents:

We are writing this letter to you in an effort to obtain your cooperation and support in the ongoing investigation into allegations of sexual abuse occurring at the \_\_\_\_\_ Preschool. We understand that you may have many concerns and fears and feel yourself placed in a difficult position regarding getting your family involved in this investigation. It is important, however, that we work together to define the situation, to sort fact from rumor, and to bring some kind of closure to this investigation—either to exonerate or to make arrests and obtain criminal filings. To do so requires your help.

As you are probably aware, this investigation extends farther than to just those who have been formally charged thus far. In some cases, it may only involve a few children; in others, such as the \_\_\_\_\_ Preschool, the abuse appears to be more widespread and may include children who attended as far back as \_\_\_\_\_. In these cases, it is only by talking to large numbers of children that we can begin to get a clearer picture of the scope of the alleged abuse.

You may have already questioned your child about any misconduct at his or her preschool and received a negative response.

Unfortunately, many children initially deny abuse to their parents. Some reasons for this are: 1) it is the "parents" they were warned and threatened not to tell, and 2) it is the "parents" who have often warned them not to let anyone touch them, and they may feel tremendous self-blame and guilt surrounding any touching. Additional questioning by the parent places the child in the position of continuing to lie or admitting they lied if they initially denied abuse to you.

Many times, trained professional interviewers, who can be more objective in their interviewing, can elicit disclosures about misconduct in such a way as to unlock these secrets without traumatizing the child. Some children may disclose abuse in an initial interview; others may take a long time to disclose and require an established ongoing relationship of trust with an outside person, such as a therapist, or even several interviews with a trained law-enforcement investigator.

The \_\_\_\_\_ (Name of Agency) would like to interview your child in an effort to determine if your child witnessed or was a victim of abuse at \_\_\_\_\_ Preschool. Our investigators are specialists in the area of child sexual abuse; they are highly trained and experienced. Most of them volunteered for this assignment due to their extreme concern over this problem.

Please be assured that cooperation in this ongoing investigation does not mean you and your family will become involved in the criminal justice system without your agreement. No team member will file charges on behalf of your child without your consent, should he or she be determined to be either a victim or a witness.

A list of therapists who have agreed to do evaluations on children who attended \_\_\_\_\_ Preschool will be provided upon request.

Please contact the \_\_\_\_\_ (Name of Agency) at \_\_\_\_\_ (Phone Number). The team leader is \_\_\_\_\_. If unavailable, ask for any member of the \_\_\_\_\_ Team.

Sincerely,

## Sample 6

## Information for Parents

## MEDICAL EXAMINATIONS

The dilemma of whether or not to have a child medically examined is one of the most difficult decisions parents may have to make. It is our desire to work with each parent in assisting them with accurate information to aid them in facing this situation. The policy of the \_\_\_\_\_ (Name of Agency) regarding children having a medical sexual assault examination is based on specific information surrounding your child's particular disclosures, acts reported to have occurred, statements of other child witnesses, and the experience and opinion of the investigator assigned to assist your family. All medical examinations are conducted by qualified experts who have received specialized training and experience in this field. The examinations are non-traumatic and conducted with sensitivity and privacy and are well-documented. If you feel the necessity to have your child seen by a physician prior to our recommendation to do so, please feel free to contact \_\_\_\_\_ (Name of Team Leader) for a medical referral.

**Sample 7**

**Child Interview Report**

Report Building: _____	Date _____	Time Started _____	Time Finished _____
Interview: _____			
Location/Room: _____			
Persons Present/Location: _____			
_____			
_____			
Taped Y/N _____	Audio _____	Video _____	
Media Used:			
Dolls _____	Drawings _____	Puppets _____	
Other _____			
Report Filed Y/N _____	Investigator's Report _____	Other _____	
Miscellaneous: _____			
_____			
_____			
_____			
_____			

# Appendix B

## Macro-Case Investigations

Donna Pence  
Tennessee Bureau of Investigation  
Nashville, Tennessee

### Introduction

Abuse and exploitation of children in out-of-home settings has been a phenomenon recognized by social workers and law-enforcement officials in the child protective field. The long-held stereotype of the single "stranger" offender who abuses a lone victim is one that has increasingly proved to be unrealistic. Many of these out-of-home cases now being *properly* investigated show where there is a single offender, there will probably be multiple victims (possibly involving hundreds of children) and that a number of these offenders communicate and/or associate with others of like interest.

Some investigations may well involve multiple offenders, multiple children, and multiple jurisdictions. These cases are the most complex and time consuming that an investigator is likely to work. The necessity of handling this type of situation correctly from its inception is of utmost importance.

Media reporting on alleged sexual acts committed against children in numerous out-of-home settings has elevated public and professional concern about the investigative procedures followed as well as the safety of children in general. This media attention does not stop with the initial reporting of the complaint, but continues as the investigation progresses on into the trial stages. The focus of such attention may prompt investigators to move more rapidly and prematurely than the case and caution would otherwise warrant. It is critical in the face of such media pressure that investigators proceed methodically and in an organized manner. In the final analysis, when confronted with such a case, an investigator must pause, plan, prepare, and then proceed carefully.

Another overriding concern is the avoidance of pitfalls that defense attorneys will later use to try to destroy your case. Such cases defy the public imagination (and sometimes even that of the professionals investigating the case). This incredibility factor is easily exploited by defense attorneys. These attorneys will try to convince the public jurors that "misguided zealots" (*i.e.*, the investigators) have for some reason fabricated, induced, or brainwashed this posterous tale into these innocent children's minds. The

primary defense strategy that has emerged in many cases is to identify the principal investigators as the problem, rather than the offender. By diverting attention away from the defendant, the attorney clouds the issue of exactly who is on trial and what the issues really are. The defense's task then becomes to convince the jury that it is more likely that one or possibly two well-intentioned but inept investigators planted the story in the children's minds rather than face the reality of large-scale methodical abuse of children.

To limit such strategies, investigators are cautioned against relying exclusively on one or two principal investigators and are encouraged to establish two or more separate investigative teams and even involve multiple medical examiners when possible. The fewer the workers, the greater the chance of challenge.

### Investigative Teams and Design

As soon as the possibility of a macro-case becomes known, the original investigator should request that additional personnel be assigned. These investigative teams should divide into separate units and act as separate cells with absolutely no direct exchange of information among the different teams. The overall investigation and the work of these cells should be coordinated by a central team leader.

Each cell should be assigned a cluster of potential victims to interview. It is wise to divide the high-risk population into different clusters and consequently different cells [David Corwin, Presentation at the Invitational Forum on Ritualistic Abuse of Children, Sacramento, California, March 11, 1986]. The actual interviewing styles followed are consistent with normal child sexual abuse investigations. Prior to actual child interviews, investigators should attempt to ascertain special activities, if any, that have involved the children, such as movies, television shows, games, clowns, magicians, or other similar events. Documenting such events may be important in separating fact from fantasy and in corroborating children's statements. This information may also become critical in avoiding erroneous conclusions that mix actual abuse with a special event in such a way as to mislead investigators to conclude ritualistic abuse has occurred [Richard Cage, Personal Conversation, January 1988].

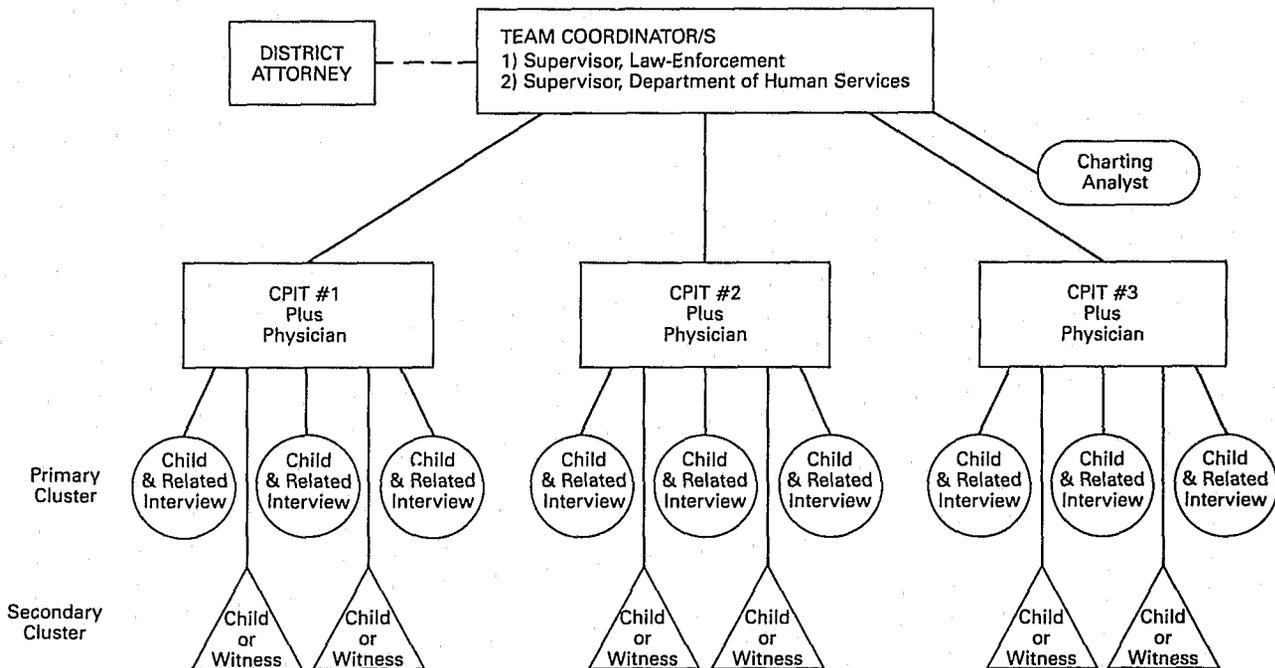
In some macro-cases where extraordinary levels of coercion have been employed by the perpetrators to enforce

the children's silence, the victims will be slow to reveal what has happened; multiple interviews may be necessary. These children may initially deny all knowledge of abuse but, then, as they feel more comfortable with the interviewer, the child may say "it happened to someone else," "it may have happened to a friend," and finally reveal that it actually happened to them. This process has been compared to peeling an onion one layer at a time. Unfortunately, the defense will later use these inconsistencies to their advantage. A different qualified physician (if available) should be identified to examine the children of each cluster [K. MacFarland, Presentation at the Seventh National Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect, Chicago, Illinois, November 11, 1985; and Charles Wilson, *Investigating Sexual Abuse in Daycare*, Child Welfare League of America, 1986].

When the cell complete their interviews (including those of the children's parents) and prepare their reports, the coordinator will then assign the new children to be interviewed. These may be children who were identified by the original cluster as other victims or witnesses, or other children whom the team coordinator has identified as "high risk." These cells will *not* be informed of the results of other cell's interviews in order to avoid the charge that the investigators were working in concert to pressure the children into telling the same stories. While each team should validate their own interviews using established validation procedures that can later be articulated in the courtroom setting, it will be the team coordinator who puts the whole puzzle together and validates that it is a macro-case rather than an isolated case or cases within a single population.

A diagram of how the structure might appear follows:

SUGGESTED INVESTIGATION STRUCTURE



This investigation format would be followed as long as the possibility of a macro-case continues. While it may not seem to be feasible to commit that many investigators to a single case, the probable outcome will be that, rather than have one or two investigators tied up for an inordinately long period of time, several investigators will finish the work in a short time. This should help assure that interviews, medical examinations, and the collection of physical evidence will be done in a timely fashion.

The team coordinator should take the investigative information submitted to him or her and, with the aid of a

charting specialist (where available) prepare association and/or flow charting of all the activities and relationships which the interviewees provide. A summary of each interview should be kept to list the name of the interviewee, the primary offender, other victims that the interviewee names, other offenders that the child names, potential witnesses, items of physical evidence mentioned, and locations where the abuse occurred. The District Attorney's office should be kept abreast of this information in order to better determine when enough information exists to obtain search warrants, at what locations, and what pieces of evidence are

believed to be present. If multiple locations have been exposed as abuse sights, the possibility of simultaneous raids on these should be explored.

Since the potential for removal or destruction of evidence exists, this part of the investigation should move as rapidly as legally possible. Once the word of an investigation is out, past experience has shown that the likelihood of finding evidence the children have stated exists, or finding it in the SAME CONDITION the children have described is rare.

As mentioned earlier, different physicians who are trained in the examination of sexually abused children should be utilized. Many of these cases will require the use of specialized equipment in sophisticated techniques beyond the capabilities of local physicians. Again, if you have only one doctor performing exams, particularly if medical evidence is discovered, then it is easy for the defense to challenge one physician's credentials, methodology of exams, and exam findings. Regrettably, many communities have few options in this area. By recruiting a different physician for each team, you minimize the chances that this will happen as well as relieve a single physician of the responsibility of having to document and testify in a multitude of cases.

By breaking down the numbers into manageable blocks, workers are less likely to feel overwhelmed and confused about what has been disclosed and where the next step should lead. As always, the chain of evidence must be carefully observed.

### **Parental Reactions**

An important consideration is the reaction of the parents of the child victims and parents of possible victims. The mismanagement of the parents may be the single most common mistake in these types of cases and the most damaging to a successful investigation in the long run. The types of parental reactions which we have identified are described below.

**Overreacting** This type of parent has a child or children who may or may not be among those who are abused. They feel that the current efforts of investigators are inadequate and that it is *necessary* for them to take the lead or augment the investigation. They may conduct repeated interviews with their own children or other children using leading questions and "isn't it true?" questions that tell them what they expect or want to hear. They may meet with other parents and pass information to them about what the other children have said or done. Both of these activities can contaminate the evidence to the extent of invalidating statements taken from these children and their parents at a later date. They might show the child(ren) photographs of possible offenders or drive them to locations where the abuse might have occurred, thus rendering later identification done under proper circumstances useless for prosecutorial purposes. They justify their actions by saying that they, as parents, are the only ones really interested in the welfare

of their child, and they want to make sure that it is all done properly and that the welfare of their child is taken into consideration. Another possibility is that the parents have had a sexual abuse issue in their background which is still unresolved.

**Overprotective** This parent has a child or children who may or may not be among those who have been abused in this situation. The typical presenting sign of this type is outright refusal to allow their child(ren) to be interviewed at all. Some parents base this refusal on the fact that they feel the child(ren) will be more traumatized by the investigation and possible prosecution than they were by any type of abuse. If they confirm behavioral factors that would tend to validate the abuse, the rationale may be that the child is young and it is best to let them forget the abuse rather than to "dwell" on it.

Another factor that should be considered is the possibility of prior Child Protective Services (CPS) contact with the family. These contacts might have involved the refusing parent on sexual or physical abuse or neglect charges. This past contact may have alienated the parents towards CPS and/or the police. No matter what their belief is on the possibility of abuse, they will refuse to cooperate.

Investigators should also not discount the possibility that there is an abusive situation which currently exists in the home that the parent is afraid will come to light if someone interviews the child.

**Retribution** This parent has a child who has been a victim of the abuse under investigation. They are enraged and want immediate and forceful action; no delays are tolerated. They frequently inundate CPS and law-enforcement investigators with telephone calls and unannounced visits, wanting progress reports. They are, for the most part, unfocused in their anger and do not engage in the direct activities of the overreacting parent. The primary damage this kind of parent can do to a case is to go to the media and disclose that either a) the investigation exists, or b) there are details of the case that investigators are keeping under wraps at this time. They may also turn against the investigators and publicly attack their efforts if they perceive that the investigation is not moving swiftly and the offenders are not in jail. Some of this rage may be directed at investigators to cover the fact that the parent may be feeling guilt for perceiving either that they failed to protect their child(ren) or they did not recognize or listen to the signals the child may have been sending regarding the abuse. The parents may feel impotent about their ability to prevent this event from recurring. If they had trusted the offender(s), or had had a friendship or other relationship with the offender, the parents may question their ability to judge people. All these possibilities may trigger a deep anger that the parent(s) will misdirect. The possibility that while being in this state the parent will kill or attempt to injure the offender should not be discounted.

**Nonbelieving** This parent has a child who may not have been a victim of the abuse under investigation. They refuse,

sometimes in the face of irrefutable evidence, that any abuse actually took place or that the offender(s) accused had anything to do with the abuse. Their denial is so great that they will even disregard their children's statement about who the abusers were and the situations under which the abuse took place. The primary damage this type of parent can do is to pressure the disclosing children into recanting. This type of pressure may be subtle (*i.e.*, withdrawal of affection when the child mentions abuse/abuser); verbal (*i.e.*, "Reverend Jones did not really do those things—you know that he is a wonderful man and would not hurt a little girl"); or physically abusive (*i.e.*, hitting, slapping, or confining the children when they talk about the abuse).

One sign that the children are being pressured is that the children will recant on one offender and name several other individuals as abusers, such as investigators, physicians, etc., or will completely deny that the abuse occurred. Part of this disbelief may come from the issues mentioned under "Retribution," above.

**Supportive** This parent has a child who may have been a victim of sexual abuse in this investigation. Their primary focus concerns the welfare of the child. They are reliable about making sure appointments are kept and supporting the goals of both the investigation and therapy.

The parents are cooperative and want to get at the truth. They may engage in questioning their child(ren) or in taking the child to locations where the abuse occurred, but their motivation in doing so is to help clarify what happened in their own minds rather than to assist with the investigation. If told that this is counterproductive, they will generally cease the questionable behavior. They seem to have accepted that events may have happened and are looking for ways to deal with it constructively.

Investigators will see parents in different modes of reaction. In some cases these represent stages through which parents must pass to deal with the trauma of their child being victimized; for others, however, investigators will see little or no movement toward healthy resolution. An effective investigation will address the issue with an eye toward moving parents to the more supportive mode. Initially, it will fall to the team coordinators to arrange for the proper environment for this process to begin.

A suggested protocol would be to call a meeting of all parents whose children are in the possible victim population as soon as the initial validation of a case has been made. This can be done by sending letters to the parents requesting a meeting (*see* Parent Notification Letter at end of chapter). The purpose of this meeting is to tell the parents that an investigation is underway and that they are requested to cooperate. Concern for the children and their well-being is stressed. It is appropriate to have one or more mental health practitioners who will assist you in leading this discussion. Expect a variety of emotions at this meeting reflecting the various ways parents react to such allegations.

In some cases, parents may be distrustful of each other, fearing that information shared will get back to the alleged offender(s). The investigator leading the discussion should be clear on what will and can be discussed and what cannot. Smaller parent groups can then be established to help the parents deal with the specific issues they may have and to keep them informed of the progress of the investigation.

## Summary

In summary, the key points in successfully investigating a macro-case are the following:

- Plan carefully—but react quickly—particularly in regard to possible physical evidence.
- Resist the temptation to respond to media pressure, and develop a strategy for all investigative agencies on how to respond to media inquiries. The team coordinators should be responsible for designating one person to be a media contact.
- Establish an investigative team large enough to interview all possible victims properly and quickly. Do not be afraid to ask for help in doing so.
- Appoint a team leader and break the team into investigative cells, isolating the cells from each other to avoid cross-contamination.
- Expect the children to reveal the abuse slowly.
- Chart and carefully document which child alleges what activity: These cases get complex very quickly.
- Understand parental reaction and try to harness their energy so they will not work against you.

### Parent Notification Letter

Dear Parent:

The (Name of Law-enforcement Agency), and the Tennessee Department of Human Services, in cooperation with the District Attorney General, are investigating allegations of child sexual abuse at (Location of Abuse). We understand your child may have some knowledge of the activities at (Location of Abuse) and is of great importance to the investigation. We realize such an investigation causes parents great concern and we want to meet with all those involved to explain the situation. We would like to ask you to come to (Location) at (Time) on (Day) (Date). We will provide you with as much information as we can at this meeting. We will also be contacting you regarding an interview with your child if we have not already done so.

We must ask you to resist the natural temptation to question your child or discuss the investigation with others. It is our goal to accurately determine what, if anything, has happened, and that job could be complicated if you discuss the situation with others or interview your child before the trained investigators have an opportunity to do so. We hope you will be able to attend the meeting on (Date).

Sincerely,

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## National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) serves as a clearinghouse of information on missing and exploited children; provides technical assistance to citizens and law-enforcement agencies; offers training programs to law-enforcement and social service professionals; distributes photos and descriptions of missing children nationwide; coordinates child protection efforts with the private sector; networks with nonprofit service providers and state clearinghouses on missing persons; and provides information on effective state legislation to ensure the protection of children.

A 24-hour toll-free telephone line is open for those who have information on missing or exploited children: **1-800-843-5678**. The TDD hotline (for the hearing impaired) is **1-800-826-7653**. The NCMEC business number is **(703) 235-3900**.

A number of publications, listed here, are available free of charge in single copies by writing the Publications Department of the National Center at the address below.

### BOOKS

- Camp Director's Guide*
- Child Molesters: A Behavioral Analysis*
- Child Pornography and Prostitution*
- Children Traumatized in Sex Rings*
- Child Sex Rings: A Behavioral Analysis*
- Interviewing Child Victims of Sexual Exploitation*
- Investigator's Guide to Missing Child Cases*
- Nonprofit Service Provider Handbook*
- Parental Kidnapping*
- Selected State Legislation*
- Youth at Risk*

### BROCHURES

- Child Protection [also in Spanish]*
- Child Protection Priorities in State Legislation*
- For Camp Counselors*
- For Hospital Professionals*
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# Child Sex Rings: A Behavioral Analysis

**Author's Preface**

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***Appendix A: Protocols in Investigating Child Sexual Exploitation***

***Appendix B: Macro-Case Investigations***

**References**

**Additional Readings**