

# APSAC ALERT



Volume #12      Issue #3

## Special Points of Interest:

- *There are many notable gaps in state-sponsored mandated reporter training curricula.*
- *Only a few trainings identified reasons why reports should be made, only about one fourth included a definition, indicators, and examples of each type of maltreatment, the average number of suggestions for responding to a disclosure made by a child was three, and few curricula addressed barriers to reporting or the impact of reporting on the reporter.*
- *The trainings as a whole are not currently providing mandated reporters with the types of information they need to adequately discharge their duty, but this can be remedied by some relatively simple reforms to the content of training curricula and monitoring of its implementation.*

## State-Sponsored Mandated Reporter Training: An Analysis of the Curriculum

**Amy J. L. Baker, PhD**

**Stacie LeBlanc, JD, MEd**

**Trinae Adebayo, MA**

**Ben Mathews, PhD**

Child abuse and neglect is a public health epidemic that is associated with significant negative effects for children as well as their families and society at large (Stoltenborgh et al., 2015). Since the 1960s, mandated reporting laws have been passed requiring key professionals who suspect child maltreatment to inform the appropriate authorities. In this way, mandated reporters play a vital role in prevention and intervention, identifying the

majority of substantiated cases of child maltreatment (United States Department of Health and Human Services [US DHHS], 2021). However, child maltreatment is still under-reported and many mandated reporters do not report known and suspected cases. This is partly because child maltreatment is a complex phenomenon that has legal, medical, social, and behavioral elements. In addition, different forms of child maltreatment have different definitions, manifestations, indicators, and types of associated harm. Thus, to be effective in discharging their duties and protecting children, mandated reporters require proper education and training to develop cognitive knowledge and appropriate affective dispositions.

However, research consistently finds that professionals feel they have not had sufficient training about essential domains including the indicators of different types of child abuse and neglect, the nature and scope of the reporting duty, and how to comply with the duty (e.g., Kenny, 2004; Mathews, 2011; Hawkins & McCallum, 2001).

## Current Study

The current study was designed to examine the content of training for mandated reporters in U.S. state-sponsored online training curricula to identify key gaps and areas for improvement. To do this, we conducted a deductive qualitative content analysis of documents using publicly available electronic data (Krippendorff & Bock, 2008; Walsh et al., 2013). The

trainings were located through an electronic search, allowing for the harvesting and analysis of comparable data across states. In all, 44 state-sponsored mandated reporter curricula were accessed. A coding and evaluation matrix was created based on a review of the literature and consultation with experts in the field. We identified ten thematic domains informed by theory and research about the required elements of mandated reporter training (Carter et al., 2006; Hawkins & McCallum, 2001; Mathews, 2015; Mathews, 2017; Rheingold et al., 2015; Smeekens et al., 2011). Each curriculum was coded for each variable dichotomously and independently by two of the authors, with 93.6% percent agreement ( $\kappa=.83$ ). All differences were resolved through discussion between the two coders.

**Table 1. Proportion of curricula that covered each topic.**

**Theme 1:**

**Reporting Legalities**

Who is a mandated reporter (100%)  
Failure to report is a crime (77.3%)  
Laws to protect tribal status (18.2%)  
Reporting is confidential (84.1%)  
Immunity for good faith reporting (86.4%)  
Criminal penalties for not reporting (27.3%)  
Licensure penalties for not reporting (25.9%)  
Reputational damage for not reporting (0%)

Examples (47.7%)

Child indicators (90.0%)

Parent indicators (22.7%)

Included all four (20.5%)

Corporal punishment versus abuse (54.5%)

Accidental versus non-accidental injuries (56.8%)

Photographs of injuries (22.7%)

**Theme 2: The Role of the Mandated Reporter**

To protect children (61.4%)  
Prevent damage to children (4.5%)  
Promote well-being of children (6.8%)  
Change the family (0%)

**Theme 4B: Child Maltreatment: Sexual Abuse**

Definition (84.1%)  
Examples (79.5%)  
Child indicators (79.5%)  
Parent indicators (36.3%)  
Included all four (definition, examples, child indicators, and parent indicators) (25%)  
Sex trafficking (70.5%)  
Grooming (11.4%)

**Theme 3: Reasons to Report**

Child maltreatment is a form of trauma (20.5%)  
Child maltreatment is an ACE (20.5%)  
Child maltreatment affects brain development (25%)  
Mentioned all three (9.1%)

**Theme 4C: Child Maltreatment: Psychological Maltreatment**

Definition (72.7%)  
Examples (52.3%)  
Child indicators (70.5%)  
Parent indicators (27.3%)  
Included all four (definition, examples, child indicators, and parent indicators) (11.4%)

**Theme 4A: Child Maltreatment: Physical Abuse**

Definition (88.6%)

**Theme 4D: Child Maltreatment: Physical Neglect**

Definition (86.4%)  
Examples (81.8%)  
Child indicators (81.8%)  
Parent indicators 34.1%)  
Included all four (definition, examples, child indicators, and parent indicators) (25%)  
Neglect versus poverty (43.2%)

**Theme 5: Dos and Don'ts When Children Disclose**

What types of questions to ask (59.1%)  
Do not investigate (70.5)  
Do not make promises to the child (56.8%)  
Do not judge the child (15.9%)  
Do not share information unless necessary (29.5%)  
Believe the child (25%)  
Show care for the child (11.4%)  
Stay calm (59.1%)  
Average number of suggestions: 3.3 (SD=2.1)

**Theme 6: Barriers to Reporting**

Parent would find out and become angry at the reporter (38.6%)  
Uncertainty that the situation was actually abuse (59.1%)  
Parent will retaliate against the child (20.5%)  
Reporting will disrupt clinical work with the family (06.8%)

As these data clearly illustrate, there are many notable gaps in state-sponsored mandated reporter curricula. Specifically, only a few trainings identified motivating reasons why reports should be made; only about one fourth included a definition, indicators, and examples of each type of maltreatment; the average number of suggestions for responding to a disclosure made by a child was three; and few curricula addressed barriers to reporting or the impact of reporting on the reporter. It can be concluded that the trainings as a whole are not providing mandated reporters with the types of information and skills they need to adequately discharge their duty. Comprehensive information about definitions, examples, and indicators of the

**Theme 7: Mechanisms of Reporting**

To whom to make the report (88.6%)  
When to make the report (79.5%)  
What information is required in a report (93.2%)  
When a child would be removed from home (54.5%)  
What happens once a report is made (77.3%)  
Categories of findings (43.2%)  
Who is notified of findings (63.6%)

**Theme 8: Impact on Mandated Reporter**

Reporting can be stressful (2.3%)  
Coming into contact with child maltreatment can be traumatic (2.3%)  
Coming into contact with child protection services can be stressful (0%)

**Theme 9: Helping Families**

It is important to help families when parenting problematic but not abusive (4.5%)  
How to help families (4.5%)

**Theme 10: Mechanics of the Training**

Included videos (61.4%)  
Embedded links for additional information (81.8%)  
Self-assessments (75.0%)  
Narrated text (38.6%)  
Animations (0%)

major types of childhood maltreatment was missing. In addition, the trainings lack the kinds of information that would motivate reporters to see their role as part of society's effort to protect children, and they are failing to adequately address reluctance about reporting. Additionally, mandated reporters are rarely provided training on the dos and don'ts to provide a trauma-informed response to a child's disclosure. Fortunately, improvements are possible.

**Recommendations**

We recommend an immediate and concerted effort to upgrade the content of curricula so that

mandated reporters will be well-informed, motivated, and able to optimally participate in the protection of children from all forms of child maltreatment as part of a broader child protection system. APSAC members can take a leadership role in reviewing their state's curriculum and suggesting ways to upgrade and enhance it through the proper state-level child advocacy channels. In addition, until current trainings are upgraded, all child maltreatment professionals can supplement their own training using the rubric provided here to ensure that they are familiar with all forms of maltreatment definitions, examples, child indicators, and parent indicators. They should ensure that they are informed regarding the multiple ways that maltreatment negatively impacts children, families, and society and be aware of their duty and to report suspected cases and the mechanisms for doing so.

## References

Carter, Y., Bannon, M., Limbert, C., Docherty, A., & Barlow, J. (2006). Improving child protection: A systematic review of training and procedural interventions. *Archives of Diseases of Childhood*, 91(9), 740–743. <https://doi.org/10.1136/adc.2005.092007>

Kenny, M. C. (2004). Teachers' attitudes toward and knowledge of child maltreatment. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 28(12), 1311–1319. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chabu.2004.06.010>

Krippendorff, K., & Bock, M. A. (Eds.). (2008). *The content analysis reader*. Sage Publications.

Hawkins, R., & McCallum, C. (2001). Effects of mandatory notification training on the tendency to report hypothetical cases of child abuse and neglect. *Child Abuse Review*, 10(5), 301–322. <https://doi.org/10.1002/car.699>

Mathews, B. (2011). Teacher education to meet the challenges of child sexual abuse. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 36(11), 13–32. <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2011v36n11.4>

Mathews, B. (2015). Mandatory reporting laws: Their origin, nature, and development over time. In B. Mathews & D. Bross (Eds.), *Mandatory reporting laws and the identification of severe child abuse and neglect* (pp. 3–27). Springer.

Mathews, B. (2017). Optimising implementation of reforms to better prevent and respond to child sexual abuse in institutions: Insights from public health, regulatory theory, and Australia's Royal Commission. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 74, 86–98. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chabu.2017.07.007>

Rheingold, A., Zajac, K., Chapman, J., Patton, M., de Arellano, M., Saunders, B., & Kilpatrick, D. (2015). Child sexual abuse prevention training for childcare professionals: An independent multisite randomized controlled trial of Stewards of Children. *Prevention Science*, 16(3), 374–385. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-014-0499-6>

Smeekens, A., Broekhuijsen-van Henten, D., Sittig, J., Russel, M., ten Cate, O., Turner, N., & van de Putte, E. (2011). Successful e-learning programme on the detection of child abuse in emergency departments: A randomised controlled trial. *Archives of Diseases in Childhood*, 96(4), 330–334. <https://doi.org/10.1136/adc.2010.190801>

Stoltenborgh, M., Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J., Lenneke, R. A. A., & van IJzendoorn, M. H. (2015). The prevalence of child maltreatment across the globe: Review of a series of meta-analyses. *Child Abuse Review*, 24(1), 37–50. <https://doi.org/10.1002/car.2353>

United States Department of Health and Human Services (US DHHS). (2021). *Child maltreatment 2019*. Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau.

knowledge of legislative and policy duties to report child sexual abuse. *The Elementary School Journal*, 114(2), 178–199. <https://doi.org/10.1086/671934>

Walsh, K., Mathews, B., Rassafiani, M., Farrell, A., & Butler, D. (2013). Elementary teachers'

## News from APSAC

### Live from New York, it's APSAC!

December 14-16, 2021

Live from New York, It's APSAC" will take place December 14-16 (ending at noon on Dec. 16) and will include four in-depth institutes and additional related training. Participants are permitted to move between the following institutes:

1. Issues and Strategies in Presenting Evidence in Forensic Interview
2. Sexual Behavior Problems in Children and Adolescents
3. Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Children and Families
4. Child Sexual Exploitation Investigation and Prosecution



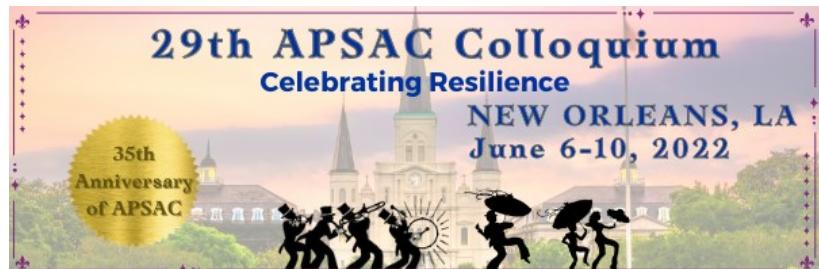
SPONSORED BY:  THE NEW YORK FOUNDLING

[Learn More](#)  
[Register Now!](#)

### Call for Proposals for APSAC's 29th Colloquium

"Celebrating Resilience" | June 6-10, 2022

APSAC is excited to announce the Call for Proposals for the 29th APSAC Colloquium to be held in New Orleans, LA, June 6-10, 2022. APSAC's 29th Colloquium will bring high-quality learning opportunities to child maltreatment researchers and practitioners across experience levels and professions. Sessions will be designated as beginning, intermediate, or advanced level content. The deadline to submit is November 18, 2021.



[Submit Your Proposal](#)

### Enjoying the Alert? Become an APSAC Member!

If you are enjoying the APSAC Alerts and other resources, please consider becoming an APSAC member or renewing your membership. APSAC offers low-cost individual and organizational memberships to meet every budget. If you have questions about membership, email [info@apsac.org](mailto:info@apsac.org).

[Become a Member](#)  
[Renew Your Membership](#)

# About the Authors

## APSAC Alert

### Editorial

#### Team

**Editor-in-Chief: Lisa Schelbe, PhD, MSW**

**Associate Editor: Carlo Panlilio, PhD**

**Amy J. L. Baker** has a PhD in developmental psychology and is currently the director of research at the Vincent J. Fontana Center for Child Protection of the New York Foundling. She is the author or co-author of several books and over 100 academic articles on issues related to child maltreatment and children's well-being.



**Stacie LeBlanc** is an attorney with a master's degree in early childhood development. She is currently the president of the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children, is Adjunct CAST Professor at Tulane University and the co-founder of the Up Institute. She is a former child abuse prosecutor, forensic medical center director, and Children's Advocacy Center Executive Director. She has written five books for children and families, has developed prevention programs, and is a frequent lecturer on solutions to child maltreatment.



**Trinae Adebayo** was formerly Research Assistant at the Fontana Center for Child Protection of the New York Foundling. She is currently Data Manager at PRIDE Research Consortium. She has a Master's degree in sociology from Arizona State University.



**Ben Mathews** is Professor in the School of Law at Queensland University of Technology, and is Adjunct Professor at Johns Hopkins University, Bloomberg School of Public Health. He has published three books, 20 government reports, and 90 refereed articles and chapters. His multidisciplinary research focuses on how social and legal systems can best prevent, detect, and respond to child maltreatment, and he has special expertise on child sexual abuse prevention (within and beyond institutional settings), civil statutes of limitation, and mandatory reporting



The American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children  
Strengthening Practice Through Knowledge  
[apsac.org](http://apsac.org) [@The\\_AP SAC](https://twitter.com/The_AP SAC)

In partnership with: **THE NY FOUNDLING**  
[nyfoundling.org](http://nyfoundling.org) [@TheNYFoundling](https://twitter.com/TheNYFoundling)