



Good morning task force members and thank you for this opportunity to participate in this defining moment for the children of Pennsylvania. My name is Kimberly Duffy and I am the Director of Programs and Forensic Interview Specialist for the Adams County Children's Advocacy Center. I have held this position for 5 years. However, my career in child welfare began 15 years ago when I accepted a position as a caseworker at Adams County Children and Youth Services. I remained there for ten years conducting child abuse investigations with a specialization in sexual abuse and then supervising the caseworkers conducting the investigations. Within my career, I have witnessed the benefits of a cohesive multidisciplinary team approach to child abuse investigations. When the Adams County Children's Advocacy Center opened its doors for service in 2006, this county that already had a strong team was able to take a huge step forward in the fight against child abuse.

Child abuse investigations share little in common with the investigations of most other crimes. Generally speaking, there are only two people who can give the details of the incidents that occurred and the main body of evidence may be a child's body which heals quickly and holds many secrets. It is this reality that not only requires but demands the best we can offer from the systems put in place to protect our children. One piece of this puzzle is the forensic interview.

Imagine for a moment that you are an eight year old child and someone that you love and trust did something to you that is unspeakable. You are embarrassed, you are ashamed, and deep down inside you are afraid that it was your fault. You don't like to talk about what happened because each time you do it feels like it is happening all over again. The secret came out and now your parents have brought you to a strange place with the simple instruction...just tell the truth. If only it were that simple. In this moment of crisis and intense emotion, you need someone who understands the dynamics of sexual abuse and how it impacts children. You need someone who understands how to ask questions in a developmentally sensitive manner and can help remove the blocks and problems which may interfere with your ability to talk about what happened. You need a trained forensic interviewer.

Imagine now that you are the parent of that eight year old. You believe that someone has violated your child. Your child is suffering and in need of help and you alone do not hold all

the answers. You need someone who understands how to ask your child questions in manner which demonstrates their credibility. You need someone who understands how to ask questions in a manner that will not invoke further harm to your child and will open the door for the healing process to begin. You need a trained forensic interviewer.

Finally, imagine that you are the caseworker or law enforcement officer who is assigned this case. You see a child and family in need and you want to provide them with the best service possible. Your job is to seek the truth and protect all involved. In order to do your job to the best of your ability, you need to be able to gather a statement from the child that contains the forensic elements of who, what, when, and where and corroborative details. This statement needs to be made in a non-leading, neutral fashion devoid of taint and suggestion. You need access to a trained forensic interviewer or the tools and training necessary to equip you to complete this task.

A forensic interview is a neutral, legally sound fact-finding interview. It is typically the cornerstone of a child abuse investigation, effective child protection and subsequent prosecution, and may be the beginning of the road toward healing for many children and families. The manner in which a child is treated during the forensic interview may significantly impact the child's understanding of, and ability to respond to the intervention process and/or criminal justice system. Forensic interviews support accurate and fair decision making by the involved multidisciplinary team in the criminal justice and child protection systems.

Forensic interviews differ from ordinary conversations in that they have a definite purpose, a questions-answer format, and a well-defined goal. Most protocols break the interview down into stages. Typically, the initial stage is for rapport building and narrative practice and may include interview instructions and competency assessment. The second stage is for information gathering utilizing free recall/open ended questions followed by more focused questions and possibly interview aids. The goal is to elicit as much information using free recall/open ended questions as possible and to return to this questions style after each focused question. The final stage is closure.

Considerable research supports specific methods for conducting interviews. Being interviewed in a warm, supportive manner, with attention to rapport building at the beginning of the interview, leads children to provide more accurate and detailed information (Carter, Bottoms, & Levine, 1996; Goodman, Bottoms, Schwartz-Kenney, & Rudy, 1991). Children's

positive associations with the investigation increase when they feel the interviewer has been emotionally supportive (Berliner & Conte, 1995; Hemy 1997; Tedesco & Schnell, 1987). There is scientific evidence suggesting that interviewers are more successful when they provide a supportive yet non-suggestive atmosphere. Open-ended questions that ask children to tell what happened produce longer responses with more detail than focused questions (Bottoms, Quas, & Davis, 2007). Age appropriate language increases the accuracy and credibility of children's responses (Perry, McAuliff, Tam, & Claycomb, 1995; Saywitz, Jaenicke, & Campro, 1990).

Ideally, forensic interviews are conducted in a child-friendly setting or environment by a professional specifically trained to take a child's statement. Forensic interviewing skills include knowledge of child development, cultural competence, and how children use language. Forensic interviewers are trained to understand children's communication, talk with them clearly, and put them at ease, while still collecting sound investigative information. Communities can vary with regard to who conducts the forensic interview. At minimum, anyone in the role of forensic interviewer should have initial and ongoing formal forensic interviewer training, supervision, and participate regularly in peer review. Research demonstrates that interviewers who use a structured protocol and receive regular supervision and feedback improve the quality of their interviews (Lamb, Sternberg, Orbach, Esplin, & Mitchell, 2002; Lamb, Sternberg, Orbach, Hershkowitz et al., 2002). This role may be filled by a children's advocacy center employed forensic interviewer, law enforcement officer, or child protective services worker.

Forensic interviews should be observed by multidisciplinary team investigative members via closed circuit TV or through a one way mirror to negate the necessity for multiple interviews of the child. The one interview will serve the information needs of multiple agencies. Any additional interviews, if necessary, are conducted to allow children to disclose information at their own pace or go into more detail as needed, but they avoid asking children to "tell their story" repeatedly. Without the multidisciplinary team and the related forensic interview method, children may be asked about their abuse again and again by multiple interviewers who are not working together. Many forensic interviews are digitally recorded. This allows multidisciplinary team members the ability to review the child's statement without the need for additional questioning of the child. It also helps to capture an image of the child at the time of disclosure which can assist in the prosecution of the case.

There are several nationally recognized forensic interview protocols which are research and evidence based. These include but are not limited to: the CornerHouse Forensic Interview protocol or RATAAC, the National Children's Advocacy Center protocol, the American Professional

Society on the Abuse of Children, and the Nation Institute for Children's Health and Development. Each of these protocols requires trainees to participate in 40 hours of intensive training to become certified as a forensic interviewer. Advanced training is also available for seasoned forensic interviewers who want to hone their skill sets and stay abreast of current research and practices.

Thanks to a partnership between the Pennsylvania Children and Youth Solicitors Association and the Pennsylvania State Police and funding from the Children's Justice Act, Pennsylvania became certified in March of this year as a ChildFirst state. ChildFirst is a week-long training for multidisciplinary teams developed by the National Child Protection Training Center in Winona, Minnesota. Teams are trained on the RATAC forensic interview protocol and other elements critical to the successful investigation and prosecution of child abuse cases including hearsay, corroboration, preparing children for court, and testifying in court. For the first time, Pennsylvania can now offer an in-state training program on the leading practices in child abuse investigation.

As Pennsylvania moves forward in the battle against child abuse we need to ensure that the practices put in place are in-line with national standards. At a minimum, every child involved in an abuse investigation should receive the benefits of a cohesive multidisciplinary team approach and access to a trained forensic interviewer either through a children's advocacy center or in the field. These basic principles will reduce the trauma that children and families experience and improve the quality of investigations. My dream for Pennsylvania is that one day we will be able to provide every child and family with access to a children's advocacy center which encompasses child-friendly services at every level of the healing process and supports a strong, cohesive multidisciplinary team approach.

Thank you.

## **Biography**

Kimberly Duffy, LSW, Director of Programs/Forensic Interview Specialist

Kimberly has fifteen years of investigative experience handling child abuse cases. She worked for Adams County Children and Youth Services for almost ten years. Initially, as a caseworker, conducting the investigations with a specialization in sexual abuse investigations and then, as a casework supervisor, overseeing the investigations. Kim has been the forensic interviewer for Adams County Children's Advocacy Center since February 2007. In addition to her responsibilities as the forensic interviewer, Kim facilitates the non-offending caregiver psycho-educational group, sits on the Adams County Child Abuse Prevention Task Force and the Adams County Child Death Review Team, and is a trained facilitator of the child abuse prevention program, Darkness to Light/Stewards of Children. In 2006, she created the minimal facts protocol for Adams County and has provided training to first responders since that time. In 2009, Kim was selected as a faculty member for the Pennsylvania ChildFirst Team. In March of 2012, Kim accepted a part-time position as Training Coordinator for the Pennsylvania State Chapter of CACs and MDTs for the MDT Continuous Practice Improvement Program.

### **Forensic Interviewing Related Training:**

- Forensic Interviewing Training, Huntsville, Alabama, May 2004
- CornerHouse Child Sexual Abuse Forensic Interview Training, McHenry, Maryland, April 2007
- Forensic Evaluation Training, Huntsville, Alabama, May 2007
- Advanced Forensic Interviewing Training, Huntsville, Alabama, May 2007
- Talk To Me Like I Am Three, MCRC Educational Call with Julie Kenniston, LSW, May 14, 2009
- Interviewing Child Witnesses of Violent Crime, NCPTC webinar with Amy Russell, September 2, 2009
- The Best Kept Secret: Mother Daughter Sexual Abuse, The Annual Mid-Atlantic Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect with Julie Brand, October 28, 2009
- National ChildFirst Interviewing Children and Preparing for Court, NCPTC, November 16-20, 2009
- When Faith Hurts: Overcoming Spirituality Based Blocks and Problems Before, During and After the Forensic Interview, with Victor Vieth, Esq., and When the Victim is Very Young: Investigating and Prosecuting Cases of Child Sexual Abuse When the Victim is Pre or Non-Verbal with Victor Vieth, Esq., hosted by the Philadelphia Children's Alliance, December 11, 2009
- When Words Matter, NCPTC, July 12-15, 2010
- NCA Leadership Conference, June 6-8, 2011, Washington, D.C.
- APSAC Symposium, July 14-16, 2011, Philadelphia, PA