

# Educators' Intervention Practices and Training Needs on Child Maltreatment

---



*University of South Florida  
Child Maltreatment Collaborative*

*Louis de la Parte Florida  
Mental Health Institute*

*The USF College of Education*

## Authors

Ilene R. Berson, Ph.D., Project Co-Director  
Michael J. Berson, Ph.D., Project Co-Director  
Michelle A. Wolper, Research Assistant

Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute  
University of South Florida—MHC2413  
Department of Child & Family Studies  
Division of State & Local Support  
3301 Bruce B. Downs Boulevard  
Tampa, Florida 33612

### For more information contact:

Ilene R. Berson, Ph.D.  
813-974-7698  
E-mail: [berson@fmhi.usf.edu](mailto:berson@fmhi.usf.edu)

Division Phone: 813-974-6271  
Division Fax: 813-974-7376

**This report was funded by the Children's Board of Hillsborough County and the USF Collaborative for Children, Families and Communities.**

### Recommended Citation:

Berson, I.R., Berson, M.J., & Wolper, M.A. (2001). *Educators' Intervention Practices and Training Needs on Child Maltreatment*. Tampa, FL: The University of South Florida, Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute (FMHI), Department of Child and Family Studies.

Permission to copy all or portions of this book is granted as long as this publication, the Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, and the Children's Board of Hillsborough County are acknowledged as the source in any reproduction, quotation or use.

# Acknowledgments

---

**Dr. Donnie Evans** and **Melissa Thompson** of the Hillsborough County Schools deserve special recognition for their commitment and support of this research project. They served as liaisons between school district staff and the research team, and guided the development and implementation of the study. **Dr. Jane Applegate** and **Dr. Hilda Rosselli** of the USF College of Education facilitated access to the preservice teachers and have encouraged exploration of teacher preparation processes to enhance the quality and relevance of university training. The following members of the University of South Florida Child Maltreatment Collaborative are noted for their contributions to the conceptualization and fruition of the research.

- **Jean Amuso**  
USF School of Social Work
- **Beth Barrett**  
Child Welfare Institute
- **Carolyn Bricklemyer**  
Hillsborough County Public Schools School Board
- **Detective Linda Burton**  
Hillsborough Sheriff's Office
- **Paul D'Agostino**  
Child Abuse Council
- **Nikki Daniels**  
PACE Center for Girls
- **Julie Fetherolf**  
Oak Park Family Service Center
- **Bob Friedman**  
USF Department of Child and Family Studies
- **Jean Linder**  
USF College of Education

# Table of Contents

---

Acknowledgments .....	ii
<b>Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Introduction .....	1
Findings .....	2
Recommendations .....	2
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>4</b>
Background .....	4
Dimension and Scope of Problem .....	5
Purpose of the Research .....	6
Partners in the Analysis .....	6
<b>Methodology .....</b>	<b>8</b>
Phase 1: Survey of Preservice and Inservice Teachers .....	8
Phase 2: Focus Group Interviews of Elementary and Secondary Principals .....	9
Phase 3: Community Agency Interviews .....	9
Data Analysis .....	9
<b>Results .....</b>	<b>10</b>
I. Preservice Teachers .....	10
Sociodemographic Profile .....	10
Knowledge Base .....	10
Reporting Behavior .....	12
Training .....	12
Role as Child Advocates .....	13
Defining Their Roles as Child Advocates .....	13
II. Inservice Educators .....	14
Sociodemographic Profile .....	14
Knowledge Base .....	16
Reporting Behavior .....	17
Prevention and Intervention .....	19
Training .....	19
III. Focus Groups with Elementary and Secondary School Principals .....	20
Knowledge and Dissemination of Laws for Identifying and Reporting Child Abuse ...	21
Abuse Reporting Strategies .....	22
Preservice Training .....	23
Relationships with Community Agencies .....	23
Youth Sexual Offenders .....	24
IV. Local Community Agencies .....	25
<b>Discussion .....</b>	<b>27</b>
Summary of Key Findings .....	27
The Role of Mandated Reporter .....	27
Beyond Reporting: The Implementation of Prevention and Intervention Programs ..	29
Recommendations and Action Plan .....	31
Preparation of Educators .....	31

Educator’s Role in Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect .....	31
Preventing and Intervening in the Victimization of Children .....	33
Fostering Intersystem Collaboration .....	35
State Support .....	36
Ongoing Research .....	36
Funding Identification Plan .....	36
References .....	38
Appendix A: Preservice Teacher Survey .....	39
Appendix B: Survey for Teachers, Counselors, School Social Workers, School Psychologists .....	44
Appendix C: Survey for School Administrators .....	51
Appendix D: Child Maltreatment Collaborative: Focus Group Guide .....	58
Appendix E: Survey of Community Agencies .....	62

## List of Tables and Figures

---

Figure A: Are preservice teachers familiar with the Florida Child Protection Law? .....	10
Figure B: Procedures used to inform preservice teachers about state law and responsibilities for identifying and handling suspected cases of maltreatment .....	11
Figure C: While a student at USF, have you ever received any written information about Florida’s child abuse and neglect reporting requirements? .....	12
Figure D: While a student at USF, have you ever attended an extracurricular workshop or training session on Florida’s child abuse and neglect reporting requirements? .....	12
Figure E: If you have a question regarding child abuse and neglect reporting requirements, is there someone at USF with whom you can consult? .....	12
Figure F: Are pre-service teachers interested in further training on the recognition and reporting of child abuse and neglect? .....	12
Table 1: Inservice Study Participants .....	14
Table 2: Breakdown of Participants by Race/Ethnicity .....	15
Table 3: Breakdown of Participants by Sex .....	15
Table 4: Breakdown of Participants by Highest Degree Held .....	15
Table 5: Knowledge Base of Inservice Educators .....	16
Table 6: Procedures used to inform educators regarding state law and responsibilities for handling suspected abuse cases .....	16
Table 7: Procedures used to inform educators about school policies and procedures ..	17
Table 8: Reporting Behavior .....	18
Table 9: Perceived barriers to reporting child abuse .....	18
Table 10: Initiatives used as a prevention of child maltreatment .....	19
Table 11: Level of Preparation to Report Child Maltreatment .....	19
Table 12: Interest in Further Training .....	20
Table 13: Sociodemographic profile of elementary and secondary administrators who participated in the focus groups .....	20
Table 14: Initiatives offered by community agencies in school .....	25
Figure G: Level of Satisfaction with Response of Schools to Child Maltreatment .....	26

# *Executive Summary*

## Introduction

Educators have a legal mandate to report suspected child maltreatment in all 50 states. This responsibility arises from the close interaction between school personnel and children in a professional context which provides an opportunity to observe and intervene for the protection of children and the support of families. Although the legal requirement amplifies the role of educators as advocates for children, the complex issues that surround abuse and neglect often result in the unrealized potential to use schools as a resource that responds to the needs of child victims. This dilemma is underscored in Florida where educators fall below national norms as the source of abuse reports and intervene in only a small percentage of the identified cases.

In Hillsborough County there are approximately 228,040 children, and 20,417 children were alleged victims in reports of abuse and/or neglect. A large majority of the children who were victims of founded cases of abuse and neglect are school-aged; however, institutions of education have traditionally overlooked issues of child victimization and avoided the role of advocate. School staff also note a general lack of knowledge of abuse issues and little training in creating or accessing caring and supportive response networks.

In order to realize the capacity of schools for early detection and intervention of child maltreatment, a collaborative initiative between multidisciplinary groups and education programs was established to investigate the rift between teacher training and practice standards which meet the needs of children victimized by abuse. This study sought to:

1. Analyze current standards of practice in schools to identify and respond to child victims of maltreatment and their families;
2. Identify specific professional development needs of educators in the areas of child maltreatment, multidisciplinary collaboration, and school/family partnerships; and
3. Propose training which will address the needs of educators to be informed advocates for abused and/or neglected students by establishing partnerships with families and community agencies.

## Findings

The study findings indicate that neither preservice nor inservice educators receive intensive training to prepare them for child abuse detection and intervention. Many educators indicate familiarity with the Florida law requiring mandated reporting, but they note that most of their acquired information is through informal mechanisms. This has resulted in gaps in their knowledge and inadequate skill development for addressing child maltreatment. Among all of the education professionals, teachers are the least knowledgeable of child abuse. Many survey respondents indicate an interest in further training to assist them in servicing children who have been abused or neglected.

Though the district has developed policies and procedures for staff to address their roles as mandated reporters, specific policies are lacking which specify implementation of annual staff training. Similarly the university training programs fail to specify policies for educator training in child abuse identification, reporting and intervention.

Chapter 39 which serves as the child protection legislation for the State of Florida specifies that “primary prevention training for all children in kindergarten through grade 12 be encouraged in the district school system through the training of school teachers, guidance counselors, parents and children” (39.0015 [2]). The role of educators in preventing abuse is partially implemented by some staff through formal programs such as Kids on the Block; however, prevention programs for parents and educators are less common in the school district. Principals and community agencies report that child-oriented prevention programs are not integrated into school policy, and standardized programming is not structured by the district for all children to access. With the exception of elective programs in high schools, child development and parenting training programs for students are limited.

Despite their extensive access to children many educators have not realized their opportunity to intervene on behalf of a maltreated child. Overall educators reported a limited understanding of ways to work with abused children in the classroom. Formal training is infrequent and limited. Moreover, it tends to focus on indicators of abuse for identification and places little emphasis on intervention skills for dealing with families in crisis.

These findings note the importance of the interplay between legal mandates, personal experience, and institutional response, and demonstrate the need to involve educators in training and collaborative initiatives. Presently, systems for monitoring the maltreatment of school age children and the manner in which the school system and staff address maltreatment are lacking. The full implementation of policies with multiple program components that address school-facilitated prevention and intervention can enhance outcome efficacy.

## Recommendations

- Develop and implement training curriculum for preservice and inservice educators on child maltreatment and family-collaboration which complies with the provisions of Chapter 39 and the teacher professional development requirements.
- Provide school personnel with an updated copy of the *Educator’s Role in Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect*.

- Prominently post in each school a notice which outlines the mandates of the reporting law and the phone number for the central abuse hotline.
- In conjunction with community agencies, enhance the implementation of curriculum material for children geared toward the sequential program of instruction through a multidisciplinary approach on the identification, intervention and prevention of child abuse, abandonment and neglect.
- Promote school-based programs that support socially responsible behavior (including communication and conflict management strategies).
- Maintain updated protocols outlining the relationship between schools and community agencies to support services that prevent and respond to child abuse.
- Engage children and adolescents in the creation of school-community programs.
- Pilot initiatives to strengthen families through informational handouts, outreach efforts, family support and parenting programs which are based in schools.
- Advocate for full implementation of the Chapter 39 prevention provisions with allocation of funds to support the formation of Prevention Centers specified in the law.
- Develop a research agenda to establish the effectiveness of educator training and consider the correlation of child abuse/neglect with emotional and behavioral disorders.
- Explore funding to promote training, prevention and intervention.

# ***I***ntroduction

## Background

Educators in school settings in Florida and across the nation serve as a critical first line of defense in assisting with the identification and prevention of child abuse and neglect. Due to the extensive interaction between school personnel and students during the school day, educators have an important opportunity to observe children, establish a reasonable level of suspicion, and report suspected incidents. Educators in this process may play an integral role; however, they tend to lack confidence in their range of knowledge of abuse and their ability to provide appropriate intervention services to victimized children and their families. Consequently, as society struggles to address the serious social and public health problem of child abuse and neglect, educators often find themselves inadequately prepared to assist child victims in the classroom.

A tremendous gap exists between teacher training and the increasing demand for support for victimized children and their families. Schools have an important responsibility in the protection of children and serve as the system which bridges the family and community into a social network for the child. As a principal recently stated in the investigation of a child fatality, “The schools are the eyes and the ears of the community.” In schools children routinely interact with professionals who are committed to understanding children’s behaviors and needs, and these adults can have a significant part to play in the prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect if schools are readily prepared with resources and trained personnel to assist children and families who are at risk. However, most schools have struggled with the recognition of child victims of maltreatment, have failed to extend special services to abused and neglected children, and have faltered in constructing productive coalitions with families that may serve as a form of protection for the child and support for the parents.

Florida, like all states, has reporting laws which identify teachers and administrators as mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect to child protective service agencies. Despite this legal responsibility, educators typically remain unclear about applicable laws and reporting procedures (Baxter & Beer, 1990; McIntyre, 1987; Berson & Berson, 1999). Among professionals who interact with children, teachers are the least knowledgeable about child abuse information (Reiniger, Robison, & McHugh, 1995). McEvoy (1990) also indicated that relatively few education training programs require curriculum on child victimization for certification, and although educators take coursework in child development,

they have little exposure to information on family functioning (Friedman & D'Agostino, 1980). The vast majority of teachers have received no training on child abuse during their college training and little to no supplementation of information during inservice training (Hazzard, 1984; McIntyre, 1987; 1990). A lack of adequate knowledge has been identified as a significant barrier to detecting and intervening on behalf of victimized children.

Even when teachers are aware of their mandatory obligations, they are significantly less likely to report abuse than other education professionals (Crenshaw, Crenshaw, & Lichtenberg, 1995). Teachers may be hesitant to report when they believe that (a) parents are justified in their method of discipline, (b) the right to family privacy supercedes community intervention, (c) they may experience professional or personal retribution or legal ramifications, (d) parent-teacher relationships will be adversely affected, or (e) reporting makes no difference in promoting safety for children.

Compliance with mandated child abuse reporting laws also may be adversely impacted by policies and procedures in the school systems. Many school reporting procedures diffuse responsibility to designated reporters; however, this policy may contribute to teachers ignoring their duty to report. If educators believe that the responsibility for reporting abuse lies with the administrator, they may expect someone else to act on suspicions of victimization. Especially problematic is the issue that these models may violate mandatory reporting laws which often dictate that "mandated reporters remain liable for their suspicions even if they have reported to the designated receiver" (Crenshaw, Crenshaw, & Lichtenberg, 1995, p. 1110).

Findings from the Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect and the School Sentinel Questionnaire Follow-up Study concluded that (a) school policies often permit gatekeeping by school officials that perpetuates non-reporting of suspected abuse and (b) there is a tremendous need for improved training. Moreover, based on the results of *Child Maltreatment 1998: Reports from the States to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System*, Florida's educators fall significantly below the national average in reporting rates (national average is 15%, Florida is 11%). Nationwide educators have served as the largest single source of reports suspecting child maltreatment; however, in Florida, educators are less likely than social service personnel and law enforcement personnel to report abuse.

## Dimension and Scope of Problem

Based on prevalence estimates, within a 2-year span each classroom teacher may be confronted with at least one suspicion of child abuse which necessitates mandatory reporting. Although more than one half of the children who have been victims of child maltreatment are school age and an estimated 89% of teachers are in contact with abused and neglected children in their classrooms, less than 15% of the filed reports of suspected abuse come from educators (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect [NCCAN], 2000). Teachers typically do not feel equipped to address their evolving role in safeguarding the emotional and physical well being of children.

A general lack of knowledge of child abuse combined with an overburdened staff means that many cases of abuse are overlooked. Detection can be complicated by competing priorities of an intense work schedule in the schools with crowded classrooms (Tite, 1994). Teachers may have little time to engage in intensive reflective observation of individuals in the schools and lack skills in discriminating

between serious injuries. Even more pervasive is a lack of understanding of how to respond when the impact of neglect and abuse affects the educational and socio-emotional development of the child. Confusion over appropriate responses to victimized children has resulted in a pervasive failure by significant adults to protect children and ensure their safety.

In calendar year 1997, there were a total of 228,040 children under the age of 18 in Hillsborough County (Florida KIDS COUNT, 1998). In fiscal year 1999-2000, 20,417 children were alleged victims in reports of abuse and/or neglect. Of these allegations, 2,245 children were verified victims of abuse and/or neglect, and several thousand additional children had some indication of maltreatment (Florida Department of Children & Families, 2000). A large proportion of these children were school-aged; however, there has been a tendency by institutions of education to overlook these issues and to avoid the role of child advocate. Even those teachers who have received training in reporting laws and their legal responsibility to act on their suspicions of maltreatment typically report that they lack an understanding of abuse dynamics, family functioning, and child protection systems. In fact, their knowledge base may be clouded by myths about abuse that leave them helpless in the face of children who desperately need competent and caring support networks.

## Purpose of the Research

Schools cannot address issues of abuse and neglect in isolation. Without adequate systems of care that offer support and interventions, educators may resort to further perpetuation of policies of containment and control as social stressors take their toll on fragile children.

Interagency collaboration and the pooling of resources is critical. Establishing a collaborative endeavor between multidisciplinary groups and education programs may bridge the rift between teacher training and practice standards which meet the needs of children victimized by abuse. This study sought to:

1. Analyze current standards of practice in schools to identify and respond to child victims of maltreatment and their families;
2. Identify specific professional development needs of educators in the areas of child maltreatment, multidisciplinary collaboration, and school/family partnerships; and
3. Propose training which will address the needs of educators to be informed advocates for abused and/or neglected students by establishing partnerships with families and community agencies.

## Partners in the Analysis

By evolving educators' appropriate responses to victimized children and their families, these significant adults may contribute to the protection of children in the community and assist in ensuring their safety. The University of South Florida Child Maltreatment Collaborative is comprised of individuals and agency representatives with a common interest in ensuring the safety and protection of children. Each member has committed to assist in the development of a comprehensive plan of action and the gathering of information to address the need to prepare educators for their role as child and family

advocates within the school setting. Michael Berson, Assistant Professor in the Department of Secondary Education, and Ilene Berson, Faculty in the Department of Child and Family Studies at the Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, serve as co-chairs of this committee. The other members of the Child Maltreatment Collaborative include:

- USF College of Education
- Florida Mental Health Institute
- USF School of Social Work
- Harrell Center for the Study of Domestic Violence
- Child Abuse Council
- Hillsborough Pace Center for Girls
- Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office
- MacDill Air Force Base School-Age Program
- Northside Mental Health Center
- Hillsborough County Schools
- Oak Park Family Service Center
- USF Charter School
- Department of Children and Families
- Child Welfare Institute

This initiative provides that educators who may be among the first professionals to interact with a child during and following their victimization should serve as (a) informed resources, by being knowledgeable about child abuse and neglect; (b) respond appropriately to the disclosure of abuse, including accessing crisis intervention for the child; (c) react appropriately to emotional and behavioral indicators of abuse in the classroom setting; (d) report suspected abuse to the proper authorities; and (e) collaborate with community agencies and resources in responding to suspected maltreatment.

# *M*ethodology

## Phase 1: Survey of Preservice and Inservice Teachers

In this study, the researchers surveyed preservice teachers at the University of South Florida and inservice educators employed by the Hillsborough County School District, including administrators, counselors, school social workers, teachers and school psychologists. The surveys examined schools' current standards of practice for identifying and responding to child victims of abuse and neglect. Questions also identified specific professional development needs of educators in the areas of child maltreatment, multidisciplinary collaboration, and school/family partnerships. Survey protocols (See Appendices A, B, and C) were designed by the researchers from modifications of instruments developed for the NIS-3 and NCANDS Sentinel Questionnaire Follow-up Study (Sedlak & Schultz, 1997).

Hillsborough County Schools provided assistance in disseminating the surveys to principals at their school sites. Each survey packet included a letter from Donnie Evans, Ed.D., Assistant Superintendent of Instruction, encouraging participation in the study and instructing the process for distributing, completing, and returning the surveys; one administrator survey; and three surveys for other educators (i.e., counselors, social workers, teachers, psychologists). The administrator survey had a 75.3% response rate. It is approximated that the other educator survey had a response rate of 85.5%. This is estimated since it is unknown how many surveys were actually distributed by the administrators to other school staff. It was also reported to us by some of the survey participants who serve multiple school sites that several schools had requested that they complete the form; however, in compliance with the directions, only one survey was submitted per educator.

Preservice teachers were surveyed during attendance at meetings of undergraduate and graduate students of the University of South Florida College of Education who were assigned to internships in the schools. Two separate meetings were held, and the response rate for the preservice survey was 100%.

A total of 665 respondents participated in the survey phase of the study. These participants consisted of administrators (n=122), preservice teachers (n=230), school social workers (n=62), guidance counselors (n=128), school psychologists (n=71) and teachers (n=52).

## Phase 2: Focus Group Interviews of Elementary and Secondary Principals

Focus groups were conducted with elementary and secondary school administrators from schools in Hillsborough County. Eighteen elementary and secondary school principals participated in two separate focus groups to further discuss the role of schools in responding to child maltreatment. A protocol for the focus group was developed based on items of interest identified in the educator survey which required further study (See Appendix D). The Hillsborough Sexual Abuse Intervention Network (SAIN) also specified emerging areas of concern in the community (including child on child abuse and juvenile offenders of abuse) which were topics of interest for inclusion in the focus group discussion.

## Phase 3: Community Agency Interviews

Representatives of community agencies in Hillsborough County were interviewed in order to gain a better understanding of their potential collaboration with schools in preventing child maltreatment and to identify current strengths and weaknesses of their involvement with the schools. Fifteen community agencies with an interest in child welfare and protection were interviewed by telephone to gather additional information about how these agencies collaborate with schools in developing a community response to child abuse and neglect.

## Data Analysis

Survey data were analyzed using Epi Info 6.1. Frequencies of variables were calculated for preservice teachers, administrators and other educational professionals, including teachers, guidance counselors, school social workers and school psychologists. Comparisons were made among and within the three main groups of educators (i.e., preservice teachers, administrators, and other educators). Survey and focus group analyses include a summary of demographic data and a profile of the respondents' level of knowledge and past practices in responding to child maltreatment.

# Results

## I. Preservice Teachers

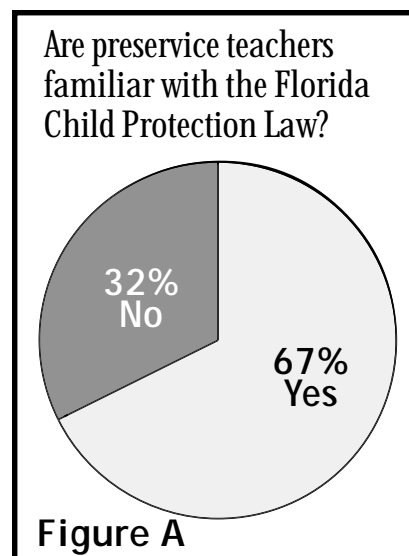
### *Sociodemographic Profile*

In order to discern the extent to which preservice teachers are prepared to address child abuse and neglect, students completing their final year of the Education degree program were surveyed. The sample of preservice teachers included 78% (180/230) females and 22% (50/230) males. The mean age of this sample was 28.7 years. Through self-report, 80% (185/229) identified themselves as white, 10% (22/229) as Hispanic, 5% (11/229) as black, 1% (3/229) as Asian, and 1% (2/229) as American Indian.

Approximately 84% (192/230) were classified as undergraduate students, while 16% (38/230) were graduate students. Thirty-six percent (84/230) were enrolled in the elementary education program at the University of South Florida, 29% (67/230) were enrolled in the secondary education program, 20% (45/230) were special education majors, and 15% (34/230) identified themselves as enrollees of other education programs at the University of South Florida.

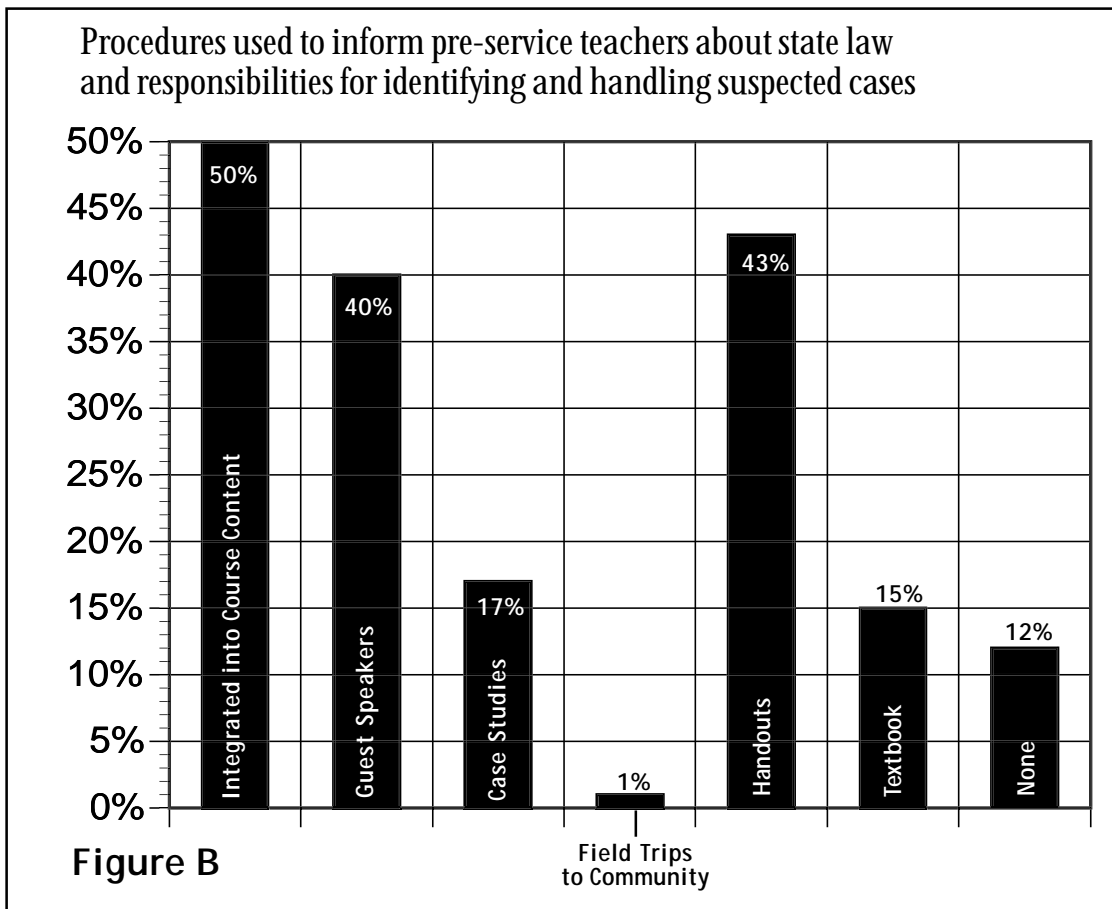
### *Knowledge Base*

Of the 230 preservice teachers surveyed, 67% (155/230) were familiar with the Florida Child Protection Law (Figure A). More specifically, 74% (171/230) were aware of the impact of the Florida mandatory reporting statute on educators and their roles and responsibilities. While a student in the teacher education program, only 24% (55/230) of preservice teachers had attended a workshop or training session on the child abuse and neglect reporting requirements of Florida. Among those respondents who had participated in formal training, 74% (42/57) of this subsample attended a session during the previous year. Only 9% (20/



230) had attended a separate workshop or training session that included the topic of family-school collaboration.

Preservice teachers reported that they receive information about child maltreatment reporting requirements in less formal ways. Fifty percent (116/230) report that in the University of South Florida programs, issues regarding state law and their responsibilities under the law for identifying and handling suspected cases of maltreatment are integrated into the content of their coursework. Forty-three percent (98/230) reported that they get information through handouts, and 40% (91/230) indicated that they obtain information through guest speakers. Fifteen percent (35/230) reported that they are informed of state laws and procedures by reading their textbooks, while only 1% (2/230) reported that they took field trips to community agencies to learn about these issues.



During their time as students in the University program, 50% (115/230) responded that they had received written information about the child abuse and neglect reporting requirements of Florida, while 29% (67/230) stated that they had never received such information. Seventy-four percent (170/230) of the sample had not attended any extracurricular workshop or training sessions on these requirements. As a result, over 50% (118/230) of the students sampled were unsure with whom they could consult at the University regarding the reporting requirements. In addition, over half of the students (117/230) have not discussed these requirements with classmates. It would appear, then, that the information is not widely discussed and circulated among these future teachers of Florida.

Furthermore, just under half (47%, 108/230) of the preservice teachers accurately described the best practice standards for reporting cases of suspected child abuse and neglect. Twenty-two percent (50/

While a student at USF, have you ever received any written information about Florida's child abuse and neglect reporting requirements?

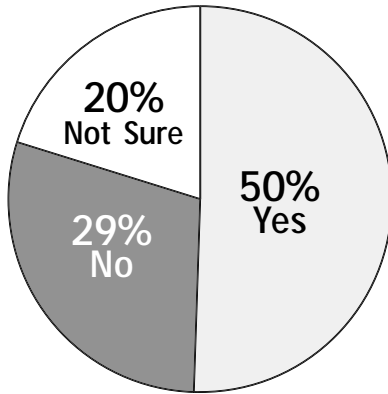


Figure C

While a student at USF, have you ever attended an extracurricular workshop or training session on Florida's child abuse and neglect reporting requirements?

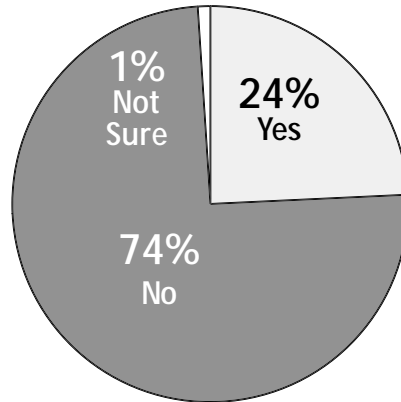


Figure D

If you have a question regarding child abuse and neglect reporting requirements, is there someone at USF with whom you can consult?

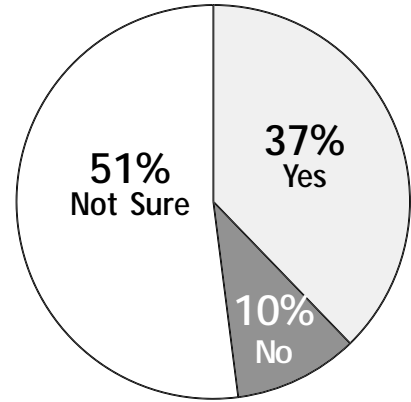


Figure E

230) were unsure as to the best practice standards. Forty-eight percent (53/230) either were unsure or felt that it was sufficient for an educator who suspects abuse or neglect to report only to the school administrator and to take no further action on behalf of a child or family.

## Reporting Behavior

Most preservice teachers have little experience with the mandated reporting process. Only 5% (11/230) of the respondents reported that they had reported suspected child abuse or neglect during their internships. The majority of preservice teachers (89%, 204/230) specified that they had not considered making a report, and only 27% (63/230) have reported every case that they suspected.

## Training

Despite findings which suggest that preservice teachers have limited knowledge and experience with child maltreatment, 62% (142/230) of those surveyed feel that they are fairly well or very well prepared to recognize and report child abuse and neglect. Many preservice teachers also acknowledged that better preparation is needed and over half (116/230) reported that they are very interested in further training on recognition, reporting and intervention.

Are pre-service teachers interested in further training on the recognition and reporting of child abuse and neglect?

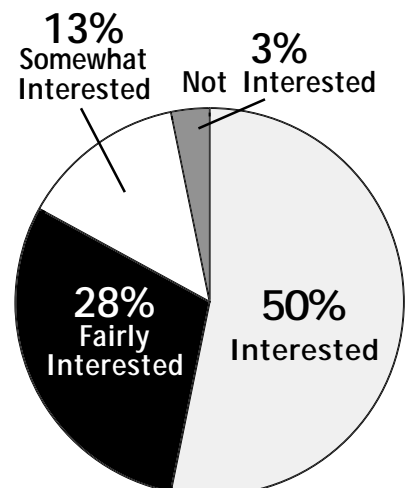


Figure F

# Role as Child Advocates

In a separate survey, 190 preservice teachers enrolled at the University of South Florida were asked the following open-ended question: “Define your role as a child advocate in the classroom and explain how you will integrate issues of child advocacy into your instruction.” Respondents were also asked to provide specific examples. Data were analyzed and organized by theme.

## Defining Their Roles as Child Advocates

Several respondents mentioned the importance of child advocacy in the classroom and that students risk academic achievement if they are not given basic social support and advocacy. “Students cannot focus on regular academic content until social needs are met” (39).

In describing their roles as child advocates, preservice teachers most commonly gave responses that would fit into the “teacher as protector” category. An overwhelming number responded that they wanted to provide a “safe” (aka “peaceable classroom”) and “trusting” learning and growing environment for their students. One respondent stated, “A child may feel alone, powerless or disconnected if he/she is being abused. If I, as an educator, can make my classroom risk free and open a child may trust in me . . . a child’s sense of trust and safety is at the heart of early development.”

Another theme is that of respect for students’ opinions. “My role . . . will be a teacher who respects her children’s thoughts and ideas, cares for her students, encourages her students to be respectful to each other, allows her students to have a voice in the classroom and makes her students feel safe and comfortable in her classroom.”

Other terms commonly mentioned when describing a good classroom are “fair” and “equal.”

- “I will provide my students with a safe classroom environment. A place they feel free to express themselves without harm or insult. I want open communication lines.”
- “I feel that as a teacher, each of my students should be looked at as an individual and as a special and unique person. Each student should be given equal opportunities to learn . . . no matter what their race, gender or ethnic and religious background.”
- “Children need to be aware that as individuals they have the right to feel safe and be treated with respect.”
- “After providing students with numerous examples of how children are not given equal rights I would explain to them that child advocacy is trying to promote equal rights for all children in all parts of the world.”

Other common themes are those of “power and authority.” One respondent stated, “I would teach my students that they have the power and authority to use free speech.”

In addition, respondents want their students to be treated fairly and for them to feel like they’re “equals” and that they have equal rights. Another common theme presented was the desire for the children to be able to voice their opinions and that children can make a difference in the world.

- “My role as a child advocate in the classroom would be to teach my students that they have a voice that should be heard.”
- “Allowing children to know they can make a difference in the world will empower them to make right decisions.”

- “My role as a child advocate is that of a voice. Young children do not always have someone to speak out for them. In my classroom I plan on encouraging students to speak out and I want them to feel comfortable coming to me for anything.”
- “If you notice a child who exhibits signs of abuse then you are responsible to speak on the child’s behalf.”
- “As their teachers, we have a voice for them that might not ever be heard.”

Continuing with the “teacher as protector” theme, several respondents explicitly mentioned “abuse.” “The students will be made aware of what abuse means, why it is wrong, and what can be done about it.” Other respondents specifically noted teachers’ responsibility to report anything that they suspect “may jeopardize the well being or safety of [the] students.”

- “In the classroom, my role as a child advocate is as follows: anytime I see a child’s rights being violated, I must aid in investigation and righting the wrong.”
- “The teacher also has the obligation to report any signs of child abuse to authorities. This includes even speculations of abuse.”
- “If I suspect any problems or abuse it is my role as a child advocate to report it to the proper person (principal and/or authorities) depending on the school I teach at.”

Although the preservice teachers in the two surveys expressed an interest in further evolving their role as advocates for children, surveys of practicing educators were necessary to clarify sources of professional information about child maltreatment and to identify training needs at the preservice and inservice levels.

## II. Inservice Educators

### *Sociodemographic Profile*

A primary objective of this study was to determine what professionals know about child abuse and neglect, their responsibilities as educators, and the legal mandate for reporting child abuse and neglect. The following is a breakdown of participants who were current faculty/staff in Hillsborough County School District:

<b>Table 1</b> <b>Inservice Study Participants</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
Administrators	122
School Social Workers	62
Guidance Counselors	128
School Psychologists	71
Teachers	52

These numbers offer meaningful information regarding how the surveys were disseminated in the school district. Survey packets with one administrator survey and three educator (teacher, social worker, guidance

counselor, school psychologist) surveys were distributed by the district office to the principal in each elementary, middle, and secondary school setting. Each principal was instructed to select staff members

to complete the surveys and return them to the district office. It is interesting to note the pattern of distribution of the surveys based on the identification of the study respondents. It appears that twice as many guidance counselors were offered the survey than school social workers and that teachers were the least likely group of educators to be offered the survey. It is possible that distribution of other information and materials on child maltreatment may follow similar patterns of dissemination in the schools.

**Tables 2** through **4** provide additional sociodemographic information about the inservice educators who participated in this study. The participants were predominantly white and female. They were clustered in the 40–49 year old range. The administrators had spent an average of 25.5 years in education positions, and had worked in their current school or facility for an average of 7.6 years. The other educators had been employed in their current school for 5.7 years, on average, and had a mean length of service in schools of 14.6 years. The majority of the respondents had completed a graduate degree; however, educational level was associated with position held.

<b>Table 2</b> <b>Breakdown by Race/Ethnicity</b>	White	African Americans	Hispanic	Other
Administrators	75%	13%	10%	2%
School Social Workers	86%	8%	6%	0%
Guidance Counselors	77%	12%	8%	3%
School Psychologists	78%	7%	11%	4%
Teachers	86%	4%	8%	2%

<b>Table 3</b> <b>Breakdown of Participants by Sex</b>	Female	Male
Administrators	76%	24%
School Social Workers	87%	12.9%
Guidance Counselors	89.1%	10.9%
School Psychologists	76.1%	23.9%
Teachers	88.5%	11.5%

<b>Table 4</b> <b>Breakdown by Participants by Highest Degree Held</b>	Bachelors	Masters	Education Specialist	Doctorate
Administrators	–	85.6%	7.2%	6.4%
School Social Workers	16.1%	79%	–	4.8%
Guidance Counselors	–	90.6%	4.7%	4.7%
School Psychologists	–	26.8%	57.7%	15.5%
Teachers	53.8%	46.2%	–	–

## Knowledge Base

Inservice educators described their training in both child abuse and neglect reporting requirements and family/school collaboration. For respondents who indicated receiving formal instruction, more specific information about the type of training was requested. **Table 5** compares the level of knowledge attained by inservice educators across professions regarding child abuse and neglect law and policy.

The vast majority of inservice educators surveyed report that they are familiar with the Florida Child Protection Law and that they are aware of the school and district policies for reporting child abuse and neglect. Despite familiarity with the law, only half of the participants have actually attended a

<b>Table 5</b> <b>Knowledge Base of Inservice Educators</b>	Teachers (n=52)	Guidance Counselors (n=128)	School Social Workers (n=62)	Administrators (n=122)	School Psychologists (n=71)
Familiarity with Child Protection Law	88%	93%	97%	98%	93%
Aware of school/district policy	96%	99%	95%	98%	94%
Attended workshop on Florida reporting	54%	54%	52%	59%	44%
Attended workshop on collaboration	48%	47%	53%	46%	62%

<b>Table 6</b> <b>Procedures used to inform educators regarding state law and responsibilities for handling suspected abuse cases</b>	Teachers (n=52)	Guidance Counselors (n=128)	School Social Workers (n=62)	Administrators (n=122)	School Psychologists (n=71)
Regular Inservice	33.3%	29.9%	29%	31.7%	18.3%
Occasional Inservice	52.9%	44.9%	56.5%	54.5%	54.9%
Staff Meetings	52.9%	49.6%	64.5%	67.5%	67.6%
School policy manual	58.8%	54.3%	54.8%	69.1%	54.9%
Teacher manual	54.9%	48%	29%	54.5%	26.8%
Administrative Handbook	33.3%	26.8%	33.9%	49.6%	21.4%
School bulletins	31.4%	38.6%	29%	46.3%	28.2%
Child Abuse Council Publications	33.3%	48.8%	30.6%	33.3%	29.6%

workshop or training session on the child abuse and neglect reporting requirements of Florida. Most of these trained educators had attended one or two sessions on reporting, although some respondents had participated in over five workshops on child maltreatment. Moreover, the most promising approaches to child abuse intervention necessitate training on the topic of family-school collaboration, yet less than 50% of the respondents affirmed attendance at a workshop that nurtured skills in this area of professional development. Despite the limited experience of many educators with formal training in child abuse and neglect, educators report accessing written information from a variety of sources, and 62% indicated that they had received information on reporting requirements during the current school year. Tables 6 and 7 list some of the other procedures for informing educators of state laws and school policies, respectively.

Results indicate that educators do not receive regular inservice training on state law and school policies for handling suspected abuse, but over half receive such training occasionally. They also tend to learn about state law through staff meetings and through consultation with their school policy manual. Less common procedures include administrative handbooks, school bulletins, and Child Abuse Council publications.

<b>Table 7</b> <b>Procedures used to inform educators about school policies and procedures</b>	Teachers (n=52)	Guidance Counselors (n=128)	School Social Workers (n=62)	Administrators (n=122)	School Psychologists (n=71)
Regular Inservice	44.2%	52.3%	35.5%	43.1%	31%
Occasional Inservice	57.7%	35.2%	50%	48%	53.5%
Staff Meetings	69.2%	70.3%	79%	81.3%	74.6%
School policy manual	73.1%	69.5%	69.4%	69.9%	69%
Teacher manual	65.4%	61.7%	46.8%	58.5%	28.2%
Administrative Handbook	48.1%	34.4%	38.7%	56.1%	32.9%
School bulletins	59.6%	49.2%	43.5%	50.4%	42.3%

## *Reporting Behavior*

Another important objective of this study was to analyze the current standard of reporting behavior among inservice educators in Hillsborough County. In order to identify specific professional development needs of educators in the area of child maltreatment, it was necessary to assess decisions to report and intervene in suspected cases of abuse. For those respondents who said they reported a suspected case of child abuse or neglect, they were additionally queried on how the cases were reported, the outcome of the most recent report, and whether that outcome would influence future reporting behavior.

The participants were asked to describe their school’s policy on reporting suspected cases of child abuse or neglect. Sixty-eight percent of the administrators and 56% of the other educators identified their school policy on reporting as requiring them to report cases directly to designated school officials and to the Abuse Hotline. Twenty percent of the principals and 28% of the educators responded that their

policy is to report all cases of suspected abuse or neglect to the Abuse Hotline only. Nearly 11% of the administrators and approximately 15% of the other educators indicated that it is sufficient to report cases to school officials only. Approximately 4% were not sure what their school district policy was for making reports.

Table 8 Reporting Behavior	Teachers (n=52)	Guidance Counselors (n=128)	School Social Workers (n=62)	Administrators (n=122)	School Psychologists (n=71)
Ever reported	42%	85%	77%	63%	34%
Reported all suspicions	69%	84%	71%	80%	63%
Satisfied with outcome of reporting	59%	50%	53%	53%	48%
Reporting not influenced by outcome	52%	75%	80%	60%	68%
Designated staff	83%	86%	74%	94%	61%
Discuss with colleagues	71%	94%	95%	89%	86%

**Table 8** describes the reporting behavior of inservice educators by position. Results indicate that teachers and school psychologists have significantly less experience reporting suspected cases of child abuse when compared to other education professionals. Remarkably, a majority of the survey participants have reported every suspected case of child abuse and neglect, although this question includes reports made to any designated authority (DCF, law enforcement, or school officials). Moreover, most respondents can identify a designated staff member in their schools with whom to consult, and the vast majority has discussed these issues with other colleagues in their work settings.

Those participants who had reported at least one case of suspected child abuse or neglect were asked to describe their satisfaction with the outcome of the most recent report. The measure of satisfaction with the outcome of reporting indicated moderate levels of approval. Roughly half of the inservice educators reported satisfaction. Dissatisfaction with the outcome of reporting negatively impacted future

reporting decisions of 28% of the principals and 15% of the other educators. In addition to lack of satisfaction, educators perceived several additional barriers to reporting child abuse.

More than 15% of the respondents indicated that they had failed to report a suspected case to a designated official or the Abuse Hotline. The noted barriers potentially mask other motives for failure to report (e.g., fear of parental retaliation, not wanting to take responsibility or get involved, perceived negative consequences for the child or family). Uncertainty and lack of evidence were the most common reasons for not reporting despite a suspi-

**Table 9**

**Perceived barriers to reporting child abuse**

- Unsure if report was warranted
- Consultation with staff resulted in decision not to report
- Interview with child resulted in decision not to report
- Not abuse but lack of parenting skills (neglect)
- Concerns for child's safety
- Dislike using hotline
- Interview with parents resulted in decision not to report
- Concerns about the Department of Children and Families
- Unsure of reporting procedures
- Other staff reported
- Lacked information on the family, and
- Gut feeling

cion. Many respondents also noted that after discussion with a designated school official or a colleague they decided that the threshold for reporting was not satisfied.

## Prevention and Intervention

Since abuse can have consequences for the developmental functioning and academic progress of a child, this study also sought to establish in which initiatives inservice teachers participate for the purpose of preventing child abuse and maltreatment and developing interventions for children who have been abused **Table 10** lists prevention initiatives and their utilization by inservice educators.

Table 10 Initiatives used as a prevention of child maltreatment	Teachers (n=52)	Guidance Counselors (n=128)	School Social Workers (n=62)	Administrators (n=122)	School Psychologists (n=71)
Workshops	46%	67%	64%	51%	70%
Presented safety curriculum	15%	58%	11%	50%	7%
Referrals to community	19%	70%	76%	52%	65%
School-based interventions	30%	26%	40%	42%	31%

Results indicate that teachers are the least likely to participate in prevention and intervention initiatives, while guidance counselors, school social workers, and school psychologists often make referrals to community agencies. Of the initiatives, attending staff workshops on child abuse prevention are the most frequently utilized method of intervention. Conversely, presentation of safety curriculum and school-based counseling are the least likely interventions to be offered.

## Training

**Table 11** describes inservice educators' perceived level of preparation to recognize and report child maltreatment, and **Table 12** illustrates their interest in further training on the recognition and reporting of child abuse and neglect.

Table 11 Level of Preparation to Report Child Maltreatment	Teachers (n=52)	Guidance Counselors (n=128)	School Social Workers (n=62)	Administrators (n=122)	School Psychologists (n=71)
Very well	23%	59%	69%	53%	46%
Fairly well	65%	39%	29%	42%	44%
Poorly	8%	2%	0%	4%	10%

Teachers seem to demonstrate the least confidence in preparedness to report child maltreatment in contrast to school social workers and guidance counselors who feel the most knowledgeable about abuse and neglect.

The majority of educators reported that they were somewhat interested in further training. Teachers appear to be the least enthusiastic about receiving further training on the recognition and reporting of child maltreatment, while school psychologists were most interested in this training.

Table 12 Interest in Further Training	Teachers (n=52)	Guidance Counselors (n=128)	School Social Workers (n=62)	Administrators (n=122)	School Psychologists (n=71)
Very interested	15%	31%	24%	29%	34%
Fairly interested	33%	26%	24%	22%	32%
Somewhat interested	46%	31%	39%	33%	27%
Not at all interested	4%	12%	10%	13%	7%

### III. Focus Groups with Elementary and Secondary School Principals

In September 2000, focus groups were conducted with elementary and secondary school administrators from a sampling of schools in Hillsborough County. Middle school administrators were invited to participate in a focus group, but they declined. **Table 13** is a sociodemographic profile of elementary and secondary administrators who participated in the focus groups.

Table 13 Sociodemographic profile of elementary and secondary administrators who participated in the focus groups		Elementary Principals (n=6)	Secondary Principals (n=11)
Number of participants		6	11
Sex	Female	100% (6/6)	36.4% (4/11)
	Male	0% (0/6)	63.6% (7/11)
Age (mean)		48.5	51
Race/Ethnicity	White	83.3% (5/6)	36.4% (7/11)
	Black	0% (0/6)	63.6% (1/11)
	Hispanic	16.7% (1/6)	63.6% (3/11)
Highest degree held	Masters	100% (6/6)	36.4% (4/11)
	Doctorate	0% (0/6)	63.6% (7/11)
Years in current position (mean)		6.5	3.1
Years in any school facility (mean)		26	27.3

# *Knowledge and Dissemination of Laws for Identifying and Reporting Child Abuse*

---

When asked about the procedures that are used in their schools to inform educators about the state law and their responsibilities under the law for identifying and handling suspected cases of maltreatment, elementary principals responded that such information is provided to teachers in written form. They said that this information is available in the teacher handbook, and it is also referred to in administrative bulletins. One principal stated that she distributes actual copies of the law to her teachers and that it is also stated at faculty meetings.

Secondary administrators responded similarly; they distribute this information via written handouts, faculty meetings, and inservices from various agencies. One principal said, “Our doors are always open, the administrative offices, guidance counselors, social workers, and the resource office . . . if you have any questions or if you’re not sure if it’s an abuse case or not.”

Despite the widespread availability of information, distribution tends to occur sporadically and in an indirect manner. The established policies typically are not conveyed in detail, and teachers have the option to access guidelines or assistance as needed. There seems to be a lack of intensive, standardized training for teachers regarding laws for identifying and reporting cases of child abuse and maltreatment.

One secondary administrator commented on the amount of time spent preparing teachers to understand the procedures: “. . . not enough. It’s a small part . . . Maybe fifteen minutes a year at most.” Another secondary administrator stated that although she did not know many specifics, the information was available in her school: “We have individuals in our schools currently that are already trained in some of these questions that we can’t answer but they are receiving all this information, like guidance counselors, social workers, psychologists, etc.”

Administrators were then asked which of the procedures were most effective in relaying the laws for identifying and reporting cases of child abuse and maltreatment. Elementary administrators responded that the most effective methods were verbal, although most reported that they primarily conveyed these policies in written documents. One principal stated, “Having it in writing allows them to go back and be reminded of it. Especially when it happens to a child in their classroom. They don’t really take it all in until afterward.”

Many of the secondary administrators indicated that they were not aware of materials available for educators on child abuse and neglect and relied on other staff in the school (i.e., guidance counselors and resource officers) to provide information to their staff on an “as needed” basis. One stated, “Periodically the division of Children and Family used to print, used to publish the criterion steps to take and the hotline number although I haven’t seen that done in the last two years.” A majority of secondary administrators reported that they have neither read nor reviewed materials that have been developed specifically for educators by the Child Abuse Council for Hillsborough County, materials prepared by the Florida Department of Education, or national guidelines that were released from the federal government that are geared specifically for educators regarding these issues.

Elementary school principals could not define the Florida Child Protection Law (i.e., Chapter 39), although after it was explained to them, they stated that they were familiar with it. Secondary administrators were able to identify a few provisions of the law, but they acknowledged that these were educated guesses rather than based on specific familiarity with the legal provisions.

Administrators were also asked if the amount and quality of the education provided by the school system were sufficient to help them identify child abuse and neglect cases. Elementary administrators responded affirmatively. “And a lot of it’s just your gut feeling too. Another thing that I tell our teachers is that they’re not making any judgment, they’re just reporting something they’ve seen or heard. They’re not making any judgments on the parents’ or child’s part. It’s not their job.”

As for providing intervention to the abused children and their families, respondents were not as optimistic: “Sometimes we don’t have that opportunity. Also they are removed so sometimes if they’re able to come back or if they find a home that’s in our district we could be supportive and a comfort area but sometimes we don’t see them or they are removed.” Also, “we get lists of places that parents can go for help but we don’t refer them.”

Secondary administrators responded that the information is available in their school; that is, guidance counselors, social workers and psychologists are receiving all of this information and can provide assistance. This arouses the issue of the availability of these keepers of knowledge and how they are utilized. One secondary administrator responded, “Make everyone aware that we have those people in our school . . . even if a teacher reports the child abuse at the same time they are directed to see the school’s guidance counselor for further help or information and at some point a school resource officer. But they’re always instructed to involve a guidance counselor at the same time because the guidance counselor may have more information about an individual child, not to mention the laws and the contacts that a teacher might not have at his fingertips.”

Secondary principals also added that they did not use a designated reporter to provide information on suspicions and to file reports of child abuse and maltreatment. When elementary principals were asked this question, they stated that their guidance counselors were the best points of contact, although it seems that their role as the designated reporter is unofficial.

## *Abuse Reporting Strategies*

---

Principals were then asked about strategies they have utilized to report child abuse in the past. Elementary and secondary principals mentioned the hotline. While elementary principals found this process to be satisfactory, they also discussed the frustrating aspects of this procedure. One elementary administrator responded, “Sometimes the time element is frustrating . . . especially on a Friday afternoon. You’re not going to see help until Monday. You’ll always wonder . . .”

While secondary principals indicated that the hotline provided a fast response, they also expressed concerns over its effectiveness. One mentioned that the hotline was “not responsive, not recording the information, I wonder if the person on the phone is competent to forward the information . . .”

Principals were then asked about some of the perceived barriers that have hampered educators from acting on suspicions and filing reports. Elementary principals cited potential retribution as a primary barrier. “Fears that someone will come in right away and start blaming the school and sometimes they’ll come directly into the school and start accusing people.”

“Especially if it’s been reported before and you feel that you’ve made the situation worse by reporting it. You know, because how the parent perceives it . . . not that that would keep teachers from reporting it, but it makes them fearful of it.”

One elementary principal pointed out, “I’m not sure that parents understand that there’s a legal responsibility and I think that the education on the part of the state to inform parents that this is the process that is going to happen and we are legally bound to do that causes problems because parents don’t understand that we’re looking out for their child and we’re following guidelines.”

Secondary principals also cited punishment as a major barrier; simply stated, a fear of being wrong: “. . . you know you start to wonder, was she really abused? So those kinds of issues come up and if you’re the one who comes on as the administrator who does that then you are kind of setting yourself up because you’re perceived as ‘you heard her side of the story and not mine’ . . . some parents get very angry sometimes. Very angry. They don’t understand. They get fearful of disciplining their children because of the fact that the child will tell something that did happen or didn’t happen. They will tell you ‘I can’t do anything with them because I’m afraid to.’”

## *Preservice Training*

---

Administrators were asked for their opinions regarding the role of the university or teacher training program in preparing teachers to address issues associated with child maltreatment. Elementary principals simply stated that training is mandatory at this level. Secondary principals concurred that such training was crucial, but they were unaware if preservice teachers received such information. Although they indicated that their own training programs typically had not addressed child abuse policies, the administrators had expected that the University was providing the needed background and training as part of the preservice program. The participants were concerned that their expectation that all students in teacher education programs received preparation in child abuse and neglect may be misguided.

## *Relationships with Community Agencies*

---

Principals were asked about their relationships with community agencies. Elementary school principals responded overwhelmingly that they do make referrals to local agencies such as The Spring, Apple Services, Charter and FASST. After referrals are made, administrators reported that they are not usually aware of the specific interventions that occur with the child. “We only know the interventions that we give them at our school, not what else is given to them. Sometimes we’ll be told what they’re *going to* do but that’s it.”

Elementary principals felt that the best prevention of child maltreatment in their schools is a local program called Kids on the Block. Some felt that elementary-level children have come forward as a result of participating in that initiative. Secondary administrators relied more on in-school resource officers, psychologists, and guidance counselors. A primary method that serves as a prevention of abuse is peer mediation. This is an effective process because “it’s confidential. It stays in the room so they feel comfortable about mediating and discussing their concerns.”

In addition, one secondary principal responded, “We also talk about some of those things in our curriculum, in our health classes and our life management skills and also in the mental health programs we talk about things like that.”

## *Youth Sexual Offenders*

---

Principals were asked if staff members were informed of youth offenders who enroll at their schools. Elementary administrators responded that they were informed of a student who committed a crime but such offenders are rarely found on an elementary level; they are more commonly found at the middle and high school levels. For a child who sexually acts out, elementary administrators respond by having the teacher talk to the guidance counselor and contact the child's parents.

Secondary school administrators responded that they were informed of offenses of current students who are enrolled at their schools, usually by school security. Then such information is posted via email for teachers to review. If a student registers who has committed a crime in the past, the focus group participants indicated that the administration is not required to know, and there is no procedure for communicating this information between the student's old school and the new facility.

If the youngster commits the felony while enrolled at the school then the school is made aware, but once the student moves then his/her record is kept confidential. "State law requires that we inform the teachers of felons in their classrooms. I'm well aware of that but we were talking about that I'm aware of those students who were in my school at this present time and one of them transfers to someone else's school. I'm told that that information is confidential and I should not share that information anymore. So therefore that [teacher] in the new site has that student unknowing." One respondent discussed an incident where one of her students had been charged with a felony off-campus and the district would not tell her what had occurred. "It's like they're not safe on the street but it's okay to bring them to your school."

The administrators did not seem aware of the legal guidelines and the school district guidelines on this issue, namely the District of Hillsborough County Child on Child Sex Abuse Policies and Procedures; however, when a copy was passed around to them, most reported that they had seen it before.

Finally, administrators voiced their opinions on the issue of child abuse and maltreatment in schools and the limitation of the school and its role in identification, reporting, and intervention. An elementary principal stated, "I think it's difficult because we only have one guidance counselor and we only have a social worker who's on campus one day per week. It's difficult when you have a school of hundreds of children and you can never provide as much support as you'd like to, just because resources are so thin. It would be much easier if we had more people so we could be more preventive."

Another elementary principal responded, "Now with the limited resources we have to prioritize. You address everything eventually but the intensity of the help that you can give depends on the amount of resources you have at the time so I think that's probably the hardest thing, in my experience. To see a need but know that you're spread very thinly."

A secondary principal stated, "I really feel being in education, and most of us have been in it for a really long time, is a concern for those kids that we don't find out about. And I think there are more of them we don't know about. They are just living a life of abuse, and our classroom teachers are the first line of seeing it. But they are not able to identify it or know that it's there. Some teachers as they get more with it, I guess would get it . . . my concern is that the cup is so full and we just keep adding to that cup and we're not taking anything else out of that cup and it's almost time to say, 'okay let's go back to what our cup contains and what has been there for 50 years that is no longer necessary and replace it with something essential that every child deserves.'"

## IV. Local Community Agencies

Surveys of community agencies in Hillsborough County that address child maltreatment were conducted to evaluate the integration of existing skills of educators and available school resources with the larger community efforts to respond to the needs of abused and neglected children. Members of the University of South Florida Child Maltreatment Collaborative identified these agencies. Representatives of a total of 15 agencies were administered this survey by telephone. The survey consisted of five open-ended questions, and each interview lasted approximately ten or fifteen minutes. Participants were assured that their comments were anonymous and that neither they nor their agency would be associated with the responses they offered. Data were analyzed and organized by theme.

Agency representatives were asked to describe initiatives they have undertaken in collaboration with area schools as a prevention of child maltreatment. Over half of the agencies surveyed reported that they did provide services in schools. For the agencies that provided services in schools, many focused on prevention, directed not only at serving students but also working with teachers and other school personnel. **Table 14** gives examples of initiatives that agencies offer, both for students and for staff.

Table 14

### Initiatives offered by community agencies in schools

#### Initiatives for students

- Rape prevention education
- Kids on the Block
- Teen pregnancy
- Parenting skills
- See individual children as needed

#### Initiatives for staff

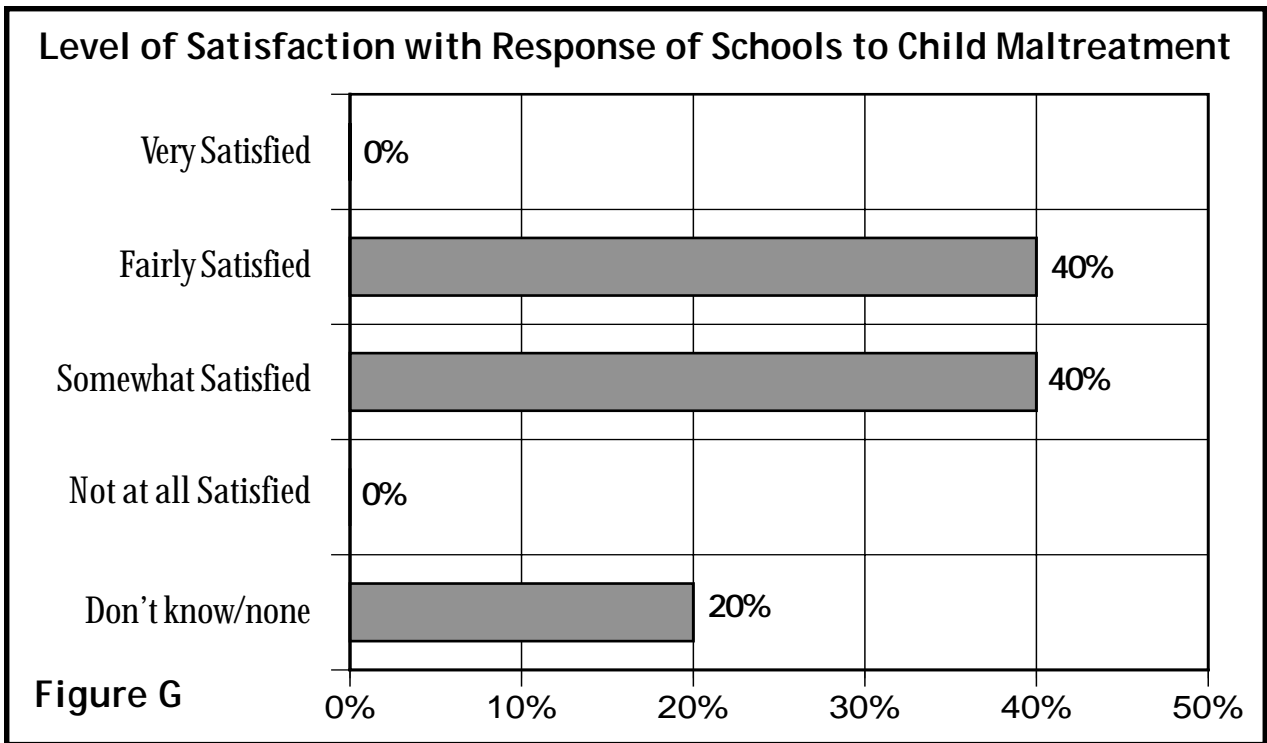
- Provide books to educators
- Talking with teachers
- Work with guidance counselor to design intervention
- Inservice education, parenting classes
- Child abuse training

Of the initiatives in which community agencies participate outside of school, the most frequently mentioned involved community-based efforts, such as forums, fairs and other educational groups that are open to the public. Also, agencies work with families on an outpatient basis after receiving referrals from schools.

Agency representatives were also asked about their perceptions of the role and responsibility of schools in addressing child maltreatment. Responses shared similar themes. Schools should be able to identify and recognize signs of abuse. They should be able to recognize what they see as well as the behavioral indicators that are symptomatic of trauma and abuse. In addition, they should acknowledge that child abuse happens, that it is a problem and that a teacher's primary role is to ensure the safety and well being of the students and be supportive of families.

Another common response was that schools should act as mandated reporters and that they should adhere to the reporting requirements. Others responded that schools should empower their staff to take appropriate action against child abuse and that they should feel comfortable reporting when they have sufficient reason to report. Some of the agency representatives were aware that school staff members are mandated reporters, while others appeared to have the impression that reporting is optional, or that the responsibility to report can legally be passed on.

**Figure G** describes agency representatives' level of satisfaction with the current response of schools to child maltreatment.



As the table indicates, the majority of respondents reported that they were fairly or somewhat satisfied with schools' response to child maltreatment: that is, they were somewhat happy with the schools' current response, but that improvements could be made. A few respondents reported that they could not measure their level of satisfaction because they did not work in the schools and were not aware of the District's current practice standards.

Finally, agency representatives were asked to share their ideas for improving the response of schools to child maltreatment and how their agencies could be involved in these efforts. Responses varied, but the most frequent suggestion was to provide education as an ongoing part of the training curriculum for all staff members regarding how to recognize and identify cases of child abuse and maltreatment. Awareness should be fostered on the consequences of failing to report suspected abuse cases. A few respondents added that such education should begin with administrators and filter down to the rest of the school staff. In addition, schools should be appropriated resources and money to this cause. Child abuse reporting should be a shared responsibility among all staff; such a burden should not rest solely with teachers, as they have tremendous burdens in meeting the educational needs of all of their students. In addition, some respondents stated that schools should have better relationships with child protection agencies and therefore greater access to local social services. Schools should initiate a more holistic approach to dealing with abuse and balance the need to serve families with the need to protect children.

Most respondents did not address the ways in which they could be involved in initiating these efforts to improve the response of schools to child maltreatment. Some responded that their agencies could provide inservice training for staff, and one noted that they offer resource fairs to educate staff and to advertise local social service agencies that could provide support.

# *D*iscussion

The following highlight some critical findings of this study.

## Summary of Key Findings

### *The Role of Mandated Reporter*

---

Mandatory reporting of child abuse and neglect is a process for increasing the capacity of child professionals to engage in early detection of maltreatment. However, this capacity has not translated into substantive school-based action. Our study suggests that although participants perceive themselves as informed about the existence of child abuse reporting legislation, they are less clear about mechanisms for reporting and intervention. Moreover, the accuracy of their specific knowledge is questionable.

Since there is no requirement for attending training as part of either preservice or inservice professional development, many educators do not know the specifics of the district or state policies for responding to abuse. School personnel are aware of the gaps in their knowledge, and many are interested in further training to assist them in servicing children. Among all of the education professionals, teachers are the least knowledgeable of child abuse. Only 23% of teachers indicated that they are very well prepared to report child abuse, and just 10% of preservice teachers noted a high level of preparation in child maltreatment. These findings were consistent with other studies that have reported that teachers and school personnel do not report cases of abuse at a frequency which reflects the degree of contact that they have with children.

Though the district has developed policies and procedures for staff to address their roles as mandated reporters, specific policies are lacking which specify implementation of annual staff training. Similarly, the university training programs fail to specify policies for educator training in child abuse identification, reporting and intervention. Only a small percentage of preservice or inservice educators have attended workshops at least every three years, and few indicated that they had formal training during the previous school year. In the University setting opportunities for discussions about abuse with peers is severely limited. Conversely, many inservice teachers rely on informal discussions with colleagues to inform and guide their decision-making processes.

The role of designated reporters is not formally recognized in the schools, but many educators rely on “experts” in their school settings to deal with suspicions in informal ways. This includes consultation with colleagues and reliance on professionals with specialized knowledge to unofficially assume the role of establishing the threshold for response. In fact, among teachers who indicated reporting abuse, a majority noted that they brought suspicions to the attention of the school principal, counselor or social worker. A markedly smaller percentage reported to the hotline. The need for a working knowledge of abuse and neglect is critical for educators to fulfill their basic functions in detecting, responding, reporting and accessing supportive services for the child; however, consultation with other school personnel can be supportive to staff and facilitate professional development and action if the climate and milieu of the school is receptive to promoting advocacy on behalf of children. This action necessitates the accumulation of substantive information about abuse and neglect through workshops, in-service training, and university-based training courses.

Support to educators can also be provided through school-based or district programs which recognize that compassion fatigue or secondary traumatization can be a challenge when attending to the needs of victimized children. There can be an emotional toll on professionals who develop sensitivity to children’s issues. Supervision and peer support are critical components to ensure that adequate people resources are not exhausted; yet formal mechanisms to provide this support were not noted by the survey respondents.

Presently, neither preservice nor inservice teachers receive intensive training to prepare them for child abuse detection and intervention. The district and University infrequently access resources in the Department of Children and Families to provide training and updates. Instead, sporadic distribution of specialized materials and directions to school staff to review district policy manuals often must suffice as training. Although handouts and written policies can be a resource, they are not sufficient in addressing the emotional reactions to abuse and working through the denial and/or discomfort of intervening. They also fail to instruct about the interdisciplinary collaborative process which is useful for clarifying questions about possible indicators of abuse, although not a replacement for reporting a reasonable suspicion. Feeling secure in making a report can be difficult for many educators, and the support of colleagues and administrators in fulfilling their legal responsibility and role as an advocate is essential for a successful intervention framework. Teachers need to acquire skill in noticing injuries and behaviors, and since abused children can be adept at providing explanations that satisfy adult questions, intensive, reflective observation of children is critical. Training and support on the complex issues of abuse and neglect are important supplements to policy manuals and handouts.

Some of the confusion and ambiguity with regard to educators’ roles in addressing abuse may be associated with the lack of specific policies regarding annual staff training on child maltreatment. Decisions are left to the discretion of local schools, a structure which may be inadequate to foster exemplary identification, reporting, and intervention practices in the schools. Moreover, funding and time restraints require prioritization of training opportunities, and some educators do not desire expertise in child maltreatment. While it has often been assumed that teachers are in the ideal position for detection, their intense work schedules and the statewide focus on accountability may distract their attention from close and personal interactions with children needed to recognize the nuances of abuse. Added to an insufficient knowledge base, a reluctance to interfere in family issues, fear of consequences to the child and themselves, the difficulty of reporting becomes clear. Improved detection necessitates training, support, and the concomitant involvement of professionals, parents, and children to evolve a culture of caring in the schools.

# *Beyond Reporting: The Implementation of Prevention and Intervention Programs*

---

Although recognizing when a student is at risk increases the potential for intervention which can assist abused and neglected children, educators have a great opportunity to facilitate the growth and development of children by presenting strategies that decrease the likelihood of abuse occurring and provide support for children's disclosures. Child abuse outcomes are impacted by the chronicity of the maltreatment, suggesting that early recognition and intervention may optimize the child's functioning and promote resilient behaviors.

Barriers that stifle attempts to help children compromise the well being and potential of students; however, the interplay of teacher education programs, school systems and the community can challenge this difficult social issue and secure resources that promote best practices. The schools are an ideal setting to foster connections between isolated families and the community. In the school setting, social networking can create a stable environment where consistent daily interaction can foster natural community-based supportive services. A program in Pennsylvania (Fantuzzo, Stevenson, Weiss, Hampton, & Noone, 1997) accomplished this objective by developing an intervention curriculum which trained resilient parents as cofacilitators and included topics which focused on parent needs for themselves (i.e., establishing trust, identifying strengths and weaknesses, focusing on stressors and coping skills, and addressing goals and barriers); parent needs in managing parent-child relationships; and parent needs to engage with the school community. When programs are implemented to create collaborative initiatives addressing child maltreatment, a supportive focus can readily be embraced by school personnel as they subsequently increase their sensitivity to the identification of children and families who could benefit from a multidomain array of services.

The role of educators in preventing abuse is partially implemented by some staff through formal programs such as Kids on the Block; however, prevention programs for parents and educators are less common in the school district. Principals and community agencies report that child-oriented prevention programs are not integrated into school policy, and standardized programming is not structured by the district for all children to access. With the exception of elective programs in high schools, child development and parenting training programs for students are limited. This piecemeal approach to prevention lacks the critical parent and community program components which are necessary for full implementation.

Chapter 39 which serves as the child protection legislation for the State of Florida specifies that "primary prevention training for all children in kindergarten through grade 12 be encouraged in the district school system through the training of school teachers, guidance counselors, parents and children" (39.0015 [2]). The Legislature has made the prevention of child abuse and neglect a state priority and has mandated the development of a comprehensive approach. Since 1983 a state plan was to be formulated by the Florida Department of Education and submitted to the Governor and Legislators. This plan necessitated an interdisciplinary collaboration between "community mental health centers; guardian ad litem programs for children under the circuit court; the school boards of the local school districts; the Florida local advocacy councils; private or public organizations or programs with recognized expertise in working with children who are sexually abused, physically abused, emotionally abused, abandoned, or neglected and with expertise in working with the families of such children; private or public programs or organizations with expertise in maternal and infant health care; multidisciplinary child protection teams; child day care centers; law enforcement agencies, and the circuit courts, when guard-

ian ad litem programs are not available in the local area.” To promote prevention and training three private, nonprofit training centers were to be established throughout the state which provided technical assistance and training on:

- a) Information provided in a clear and nonthreatening manner, describing the problem of child abuse, sexual abuse, physical abuse, abandonment, neglect, and alcohol and drug abuse, and the possible solutions.
- b) Information and training designed to counteract common stereotypes about victims and offenders.
- c) Crisis counseling techniques.
- d) Available community resources and ways to access those resources.
- e) Physical and behavioral indicators of abuse.
- f) Rights and responsibilities regarding reporting.
- g) School district procedures to facilitate reporting.
- h) Caring for a child’s needs after a report is made.
- i) How to disclose incidents of abuse.
- j) Child safety training and age-appropriate self-defense techniques.
- k) The right of every child to live free of abuse.
- l) The relationship of child abuse to handicaps in young children.
- m) Parenting, including communication skills.
- n) Normal and abnormal child development.
- o) Information on recognizing and alleviating family stress caused by the demands required in caring for a high-risk or handicapped child.
- p) Supports needed by school-age parents in caring for a young child.

The Center would also evaluate current programs in the local districts and establish standards for best practice.

To date, neither the Department of Education nor the Department of Children and Families can identify the existence of state or local plans as specified in Chapter 39. Progress is still lacking in implementation of initiatives that inform and instruct parents of school children and appropriate district school personnel in the detection of child abuse, abandonment, and neglect; in the proper action that should be taken in a suspected case of child abuse, abandonment, or neglect; and in caring for a child’s needs after a report is made. Furthermore, as stipulated in Chapter 39 strides have not been made in the development of curriculum materials to be used in providing instruction through a multidisciplinary approach on the identification, intervention, and prevention of child abuse, abandonment, and neglect to children in the district, their families, and school staff.

The Hillsborough County School District has established procedures for reporting, but the intent of the legal mandate is not just to legislate a report, but also to reinforce action for the protection of children. With regard to schools, action can extend to monitoring the intellectual, physical and socio-emotional functioning of children; creating a supportive and caring climate in the classroom; and offering interventions in conjunction with community agencies. Despite their extensive access to children many educators have not realized their opportunity to intervene on behalf of a maltreated child.

Overall educators reported a limited understanding of ways to work with abused children in the classroom. Formal training is infrequent and limited. Moreover, it tends to focus on indicators of abuse for identification and places little emphasis on intervention skills for dealing with families in crisis. Not surprisingly, there is widespread interest in additional training to supplement current incomplete levels of knowledge. This identified need presents an opportunity to introduce developmental interventions to educators which empower abused and neglected children with constructive problem solving skills and build on their strengths, interests, and capacity to cope with stress. The skills needed by educators include strategies to provide consistent messages of worth and safety to children in schools.

Teachers need to create a classroom environment that is safe, nurturing and responsive to the needs of an abused child. In this context, educators will find many opportunities to attend to children's basic needs for warmth and security. Children's ability to achieve is impacted by fulfillment of these basic needs and can be accomplished by communication and conflict management strategies to provide alternatives to rage, violence and despair. A classroom that also provides access to snacks can create a comforting environment for children in need. Overall, the classroom should foster a strength-based orientation and approach, and as a result academic success will contribute to resilience.

These findings note the importance of the interplay between legal mandates, personal experience, and institutional response, and demonstrate the need to involve educators in training and collaborative initiatives. Presently, systems for monitoring the maltreatment of school age children and the manner in which the school system and staff address maltreatment are lacking. The full implementation of policies with multiple program components that address school-facilitated prevention and intervention can enhance outcome efficacy.

The necessity of involving educators in the response to child maltreatment is supported by evidence which indicates that child abuse or neglect can contribute to educational and behavioral difficulties in the classroom. School-based interventions which are structured without regard for complex family problems fail to optimize the coordination of assistance and support. It is critical that educators understand the multidimensional symptoms and effects of child maltreatment. Moreover, the contributions of educators to an interdisciplinary response to abuse and neglect is essential to facilitating detection and prevention. The following recommendations describe changes which can reinforce the role of the school as a bridge between the community and family.

## Recommendations and Action Plan

### *Preparation of Educators*

---

#### **Educator's Role in Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect**

##### *Preservice Education*

Studies surveying college education curricula confirm that at least 1 out of 3 programs have no information about child abuse in the regular curricula (Kleemeier, Webb, Hazzard, Pohl, 1988) As a result of a lack of knowledge teachers may hesitate to intervene to protect children. By including a

component on child maltreatment in preservice education, the University can be proactive in addressing child victimization. Specialized training needs to address identifiers of abuse and neglect and development of alternative interventions. Successful initiatives should be consulted in designing training programs at the preservice level. One example is the comprehensive model developed at Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis to prepare educators and schools to address child maltreatment. At the University of South Florida a model program is offered by SunCoast Area Teacher Training (SCATT) which provides prospective teachers at the Undergraduate and Graduate levels the opportunity to participate in workshops and seminars on salient topics, including child abuse and neglect. Unfortunately, not all students take advantage of this optional program and although the SCATT trainings are of high quality, a single training session may not be sufficient to provide comprehensive skill development in reporting, prevention and intervention services.

Representatives of the USF Child Maltreatment Collaborative will provide ongoing information to the College of Education Curriculum Reform Committee as they reorganize and modify existing courses to ensure that there is adequate preparation of preservice teachers to address child abuse and neglect. Additionally, the Collaborative and its community agency representatives will continue to participate in training sessions with SCATT to provide more intensive skill development in child maltreatment and the role of educators as advocates in the school.

### ***Inservice Education***

Some studies have found that two-thirds of teacher-initiated reports do not go beyond the principal's attention, and the majority of children in need of help "masquerade as normal so convincingly that their abuse will go completely undetected" (National Child Rights Alliance, 1997). While preservice education can provide a general foundation of knowledge on child abuse, inservice training is necessary to establish an applied understanding within the context of the local community and school. Moreover, inservice training establishes a district and school culture which values children's well being and commits to combating child abuse and neglect.

For optimum effectiveness, the district should provide intensive inservice training for teachers and other school staff on child maltreatment and family-collaboration; design curriculum with training outcomes; and create objectives that address the reporting law, working definitions of abuse and neglect, symptoms of child maltreatment, reporting procedures, and educators' attitudes and personal biases about reporting. Using case scenarios, participants should practice effective strategies in identifying and responding to abusive situations. These training programs should be provided regularly to reflect current standards of practice and knowledge about child abuse issues and procedures. Educators should also be offered continuing education points, or by collaborating with the University to develop a course for educators on Child Maltreatment, teachers could earn college credit.

In Florida, teacher certification requirements (231.24) stipulate that college credits or continuing education points that result from training in child abuse and neglect may be applied toward any specialty area. Moreover, the School Community Professional Development Act (231.600) mandates collaboration between "administrative personnel, managers, instructional personnel, support personnel, members of district school boards, members of school advisory councils, parents, business partners, and personnel that provide health and social services to school children" when establishing professional development activities. These programs should be designed to meet state and local objectives and address identified student needs. They also can be created in concert with community agencies and the University. Since Chapter 39 requires the development of a plan of action which includes training on child

maltreatment, it is recommended that Hillsborough County School District establish a school community professional development program which can serve as a model statewide for complying with the provisions of Chapter 39 and the teacher professional development requirements. This program would have benefits for the school staff in enhancing the knowledge and skills of educators while meeting their continuing education requirements. Simultaneously, it would meet the needs of children in the district by promoting their safety and well being.

The School District should provide teachers with a copy of the *Educator's Role in Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect* which has been recently updated by the Child Abuse Council. Other written materials, including school policies should accompany training and be disseminated to all school employees, students, parents, and members of community agencies. Periodically these materials should be refined and updated with representatives from the community, school system, families in the district, and other relevant groups.

In compliance with Chapter 39, the district should prominently post in each school a notice which outlines the mandates of the reporting law and the phone number for the central abuse hotline.

Of special concern to educators, should be the relationship between abuse and disabilities. In some cases, the abuse contributes to impairments of children's cognitive, emotional or behavioral functioning which subsequently necessitates special education services. In other cases, the interaction of a child with a disability and parental/family stressors may contribute to a higher risk of abuse in the home. Since maltreatment appears to be a potential problem among populations of students with exceptionalities, evaluations of children in special education programs should include efforts to determine if abuse/neglect are contributing factors, and prevention programs should be specifically geared toward children with developmental disabilities and emotional and behavioral disorders. Specific training in the University and inservice professional development should highlight the prevalence of child maltreatment among high-risk populations of children.

Training on the development and sustenance of collaborative partnerships with families, educators, and community agencies is necessary to not only engage educators in their mandated responsibility as reporters, but also in leading comprehensive school-based interventions which prevent and treat child maltreatment and its consequences. Training also needs to be accompanied by established mechanisms to address stress and secondary trauma from abuse related intervention. Initial efforts should focus on the informal designated personnel who must struggle with the complexity of abuse but may lack the necessary supports to provide effective results.

Upcoming meetings between representatives of the USF Child Maltreatment Collaborative and Hillsborough County School District will be focusing on the development and implementation of training curriculum for inservice educators. These efforts will be conducted in conjunction with the committee formulated by the Child Abuse Council to rewrite and update the educators' manual on child abuse to ensure the consistency and accuracy of information.

## Preventing and Intervening in the Victimization of Children

Schools are often relied upon to be the center of prevention and intervention efforts. Personal safety programs are implemented in many school sites throughout Hillsborough County School District; however, these programs are not mandated in all schools and they tend to be infrequent. There remain

a number of opportunities to improve practices in the schools that will identify and support children who have been abused and neglected.

The focus in schools on high stakes testing does not negate children's needs for support and prosocial skills. We are faced with the conundrum of teaching what we measure. But there is no state or national test for affective survival skills. Nonetheless, educators need to incorporate into curriculum resilience training and measurements of affective functioning. This can be accomplished by integrating communication and conflict management strategies into instruction.

A sequential program of instruction should be implemented with a multidisciplinary approach to the identification, intervention and prevention of child abuse, abandonment and neglect. As specified in Chapter 39, the curriculum materials should be geared toward instruction at four progression levels, K-3, 4-6, 7-9, and 10-12.

Specific prevention programs in schools need to focus on teaching appropriate behavior which can counter the learned abusive interactions. Punitive responses are not sufficient in moderating discipline problems and violent behaviors which may be associated with abuse and neglect. The critical component of successful intervention is a uniform structure and consistent expectations. Peer mediation, which is currently incorporated into many of the schools, demonstrates an evolving school-wide culture that is supportive of socially responsible behavior. Continued initiatives that involve a whole school response to conflict and a commitment to open communication and problem solving skill development enhance the schools' role in providing a safe and supportive environment for children at-risk. Teachers and administrators also have an opportunity to model for students their roles in a community of caring by listening to children's issues and responding in a responsible and respectful manner. To ensure that all schools in the system have an effective and caring approach to intervention, community-wide planning is recommended that involves families and neighborhood agencies in forming comprehensive plans and coordinating interagency services.

Educators need guidance in recognizing the broader response needed to respond to suspected child abuse and neglect. Obligations of educators extend beyond the legal mandate of reporting and include the professional dictate of fostering intellectual and emotional development by observing a child's strengths, skills, interests, talents and methods of coping with distress to assure appropriate interventions which respond to the child's academic challenges and demands (Barrett-Kruse, Martinez, & Carll, 1998). Effective intervention offers empowerment of young victims with constructive problem-solving skills and caring and supportive contexts. Beyond the legal responsibility to report abuse, teachers have opportunities to create classroom environments where all children feel safe, valued, and respected (Lowenthal, 1996). This can be best facilitated by clear classroom expectations and predictable routines which assist students in regaining control of their environment. Instruction in social skills helps students feel confident in their role as valued contributors to the class setting and assist them in achieving a sense of control.

Interventions that may be designed should incorporate multi-level strategies which serve the needs of parents and children in creating safety in their homes and the community. School-based prevention programming should include a focus on child development, protection, and linkages with community resources and supports. These interventions could include outreach activities which promote prosocial parent-child interactions through school-based parenting services, supportive parent networks, and social skills training in which parents serve as volunteers in the school and assist in evolving the social effectiveness and support of child victims.

## Fostering Intersystem Collaboration

An important skill for educators to possess is when and how to seek outside assistance in order to address issues related to victimized children. By reinforcing the role of educators in a multidisciplinary partnership between school, community, mental health, medical, social service, and law enforcement professionals, teachers may experience increased levels of certainty in their identification of abuse and more lenient decision criteria for reporting. This can be accomplished by minimizing the perceived costs of reporting and maximizing benefits.

Presently, the trauma from abuse and neglect exceeds the capacity of the school system to respond to child victims. Schools should work to coordinate a collaborative and productive response to abuse by facilitating communication between school faculty, parents, the child, DCF, and community agencies. This includes follow-up after a suspected case is reported. To initiate this partnership, a forum for discussing the public policy implications of school involvement in child maltreatment intervention should be initiated.

The school district can increase its effectiveness in addressing child maltreatment by collaborating with community child protection agencies. This includes welcoming programs in the schools that are offered by the community agencies, releasing educators to maintain an active role on committees addressing child abuse, maintaining updated protocols outlining the relationship between schools and community agencies, and cosponsoring parent and educator training programs in partnership with community agencies.

School-community programs and partnerships can promote training and staff development programs, public awareness initiatives, and access to school facilities and resources. This may include parenting education and initiatives to make children aware of their rights and supports to protect their safety. It is also important that children and adolescents have opportunities to participate in creating safety at a developmentally appropriate level. This promotes confidence and competence as they learn to shape solutions to critical social issues. A community-wide multidisciplinary response involves critical stakeholders in identifying the most effective ways to achieve sustainable social outcomes for children.

### *Helping Children by Strengthening Families*

Although school-based responses to child maltreatment are necessary, they are not a sufficient remedy to the trauma of abuse. Family support and parenting education programs prevent family crises that can lead to break-ups and out-of-home placements. Efforts to involve maltreating parents are crucial to successful intervention. A school-based plan should include viable methods to initiate contact with parents. Although universal prevention efforts are helpful, they need to be accompanied by outreach efforts that involve maltreating parents who often are socially isolated and lack natural supports. A forum for providing this needed support and service can be initiated through involvement with Kinship Care Support Programs in Hillsborough which not only engage families that have already experienced multiple risk factors affecting maltreating families, but also their approach is based on the premise of fostering family and community strengths that can be used to maximize intervention effectiveness. This approach can be further evolved in a partnership with the schools to actualize school and community strengths by identifying and engaging kinship families who not only exemplify resiliency but also are connected to the community.

Additionally, community forums may be a valuable mechanism for educating parents as to the negative consequences of abuse and the alternatives and services in the community. These forums can

also provide an opportunity to offer parent training resources and lists of parent support services to families.

## State Support

The State of Florida has already demonstrated tremendous insight by establishing in Chapter 39 a comprehensive plan for the prevention of abuse, abandonment, and neglect of children. However, the capacity of schools to facilitate this role cannot be actualized until additional financial resources are provided to fund training and partnerships between educators and the communities in which the children live. Policymakers should be encouraged to provide funding that supports the current provisions of Chapter 39. An interprogram task force should re-establish a statewide perspective, and support the establishment of the professional training centers for educators and schools to address child maltreatment. This effort will contribute to a standardization of practice, intensified training, and better accountability of practices in schools to web the tide of abuse.

Members of the USF Collaborative in conjunction with community partners will be contacting the Family Source as they spearhead efforts to raise awareness among legislators about the needs of children statewide. A community action plan will be developed to address full implementation of prevention mandates in Chapter 39.

## Ongoing Research

The University of South Florida needs to continue its role as an engaged university that works in partnership with the community and schools to study and build upon the community's strengths. The partnership needs to incorporate the extensive knowledge and valuable suggestions of natural helpers in children's lives as intervention strategies are designed.

The University can provide ongoing support in the form of follow-up studies which determine the impact of training on the behavior of educators in reporting and implementing interventions in the school setting. Additional research examining factors which impede reporting should be undertaken to explore possible solutions for eradicating barriers to safety and support. Studies are also needed to consider the correlation of child abuse/neglect with emotional and behavioral disorders. This can be expanded to identify the competencies that teachers need to work with maltreated children. Empirical research which establishes the effectiveness of educator training can provide validation and clarification of the knowledge, attitudes, and skills which enhance prevention and intervention initiatives.

## Funding Identification Plan

Child abuse prevention needs to be addressed through integration into school policy and programming. Schools are an important system in child abuse prevention initiatives; however, proactive prevention efforts are receiving little resource allocation. Although interventions may be valuable, implementation requires a financial capacity to involve families and communities while facilitating collaborations. Resources are needed to forge partnerships and build the schools' capacities to address their responsibility to child abuse prevention.

Nationally, less than ten percent of the funds allotted for abuse and neglect are designated for prevention (Rabasca, 1999). In addition to local and state resources, the USF Child Maltreatment Collaborative, in conjunction with representatives from Hillsborough County School District, will be

exploring funding available to promote training, prevention and intervention. Several potential grantors have already been identified and letters of inquiry are in the preparation stage. The funding entities include the Salomon Family Foundation which funds innovative programs focusing on the treatment of child abuse; the Allstate Foundation with an area of interest on child safety advocacy; the Gerber Foundation which addresses child abuse prevention and others.

# References

---

- Barrett-Kruse, C., Martinez, E., & Carll, N. (1998). Beyond reporting suspected abuse: Positively influencing the development of the student within the classroom. *Professional School Counseling, 1* (3), 57-60.
- Baxter, G., & Beer, J. (1990). Educational needs of school personnel regarding abuse and neglect. *Psychological Reports, 67*, 75-80.
- Berson, M. J., & Berson, I. R. (1999). Recognizing and responding to child maltreatment: A teacher's challenge to care. In J. M. Seryak (Ed.), *Dear Teacher: If You Only Knew* (2nd ed.). Bath, OH: The Dear Teacher Project.
- Crenshaw, W. B., Crenshaw, L.M., & Lichtenberg, J.W. (1995). When educators confront child abuse: An analysis of the decision to report. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 19* (9), 1095-1113.
- Fantuzzo, J. W., Stevenson, H. C., Weiss, A. D., Hampton, V. R., & Noone, M. J. (1997). A partnership-directed school-based intervention for child physical abuse and neglect: Beyond mandatory reporting. *School Psychology Review, 26*, 208-313.
- Florida Department of Children and Families. (2000, October). *Children in Foster Care: Hillsborough County Data*. Presentation to the Children's Board of Hillsborough County, Tampa, FL.
- Friedman, R. M., & D'Agostino, P. A. (1980). The effects of schools upon families: Toward a more supportive relationship. In R. Volpe, M. Breton, & J. Mitton (Eds.), *The Maltreatment of the School-Aged Child*. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company.
- Hazzard, A. (1984). Training teachers to identify and intervene with abused children. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology, 13* (3), 288-293.
- Kleemeier, C., Webb, C., Hazzard, A., & Pohl, J. (1988). Child sexual abuse prevention: Evaluation of a teacher training model. *Child Abuse and Neglect: The International Journal, 12* (4), 555-561.
- Lowenthal, B. (1996). Educational implications of child abuse. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 32* (1), 21-25.
- McEvoy, A. W. (1990). Child abuse law and school policy. *Education and Urban Society, 22*, 247-257.
- McIntyre, T. C. (1987). Teacher awareness of child abuse and neglect. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 11*, 133-135.
- McIntyre, T. (1990). The teacher's role in cases of suspected child abuse. *Education and Urban Society, 22* (3), 300-306.
- National Child Rights Alliance. (1997). <http://linux.hartford.edu/~jerry/ncra.html>
- Rabasca, L. (1999, April). Child abuse prevention efforts still too few. *APA Monitor*, p. 30.
- Reiniger, A., Robison, E., & McHugh, M. (1995). Mandated training of professional: A means for improving reporting of suspected child abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 19*, 63-69.
- Sedlak, A.J., & Schultz, D. J. (1997). *Follow-up to the NIS-3 and NCANDS studies: Sentinel questionnaire follow-up study*. Rockville, MD: Westat.
- Tite, R. (1994). Detecting symptoms of abuse of child abuse: Classroom complications. *Canadian Journal of Education, 19*, 1-14.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau. (2000). *Child maltreatment 1998: Reports from the states to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Weitzel, S., & Shockley, C. (1998). *Center for the Study of Children's Futures: Florida KIDS COUNT*. Tampa, FL: University of South Florida, Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, Department of Child and Family Studies.

## Preservice Teacher Survey

### *General Instructions*

We are appreciative to you for participating in this study that is being undertaken in collaboration with the University of South Florida Child Maltreatment Collaborative; the University of South Florida Collaborative for Children, Families, and Communities; the Children's Board of Hillsborough County; Hillsborough County School District; the Pace Center for Girls; and the Child Abuse Council. The survey asks questions about you and about interventions and training regarding children suspected of being abused or neglected. Your answers will be combined with responses from hundreds of other educators to help us identify factors that influence decision-making in cases of suspected child abuse and neglect. Your answers are strictly confidential, and no one but the researchers will review your survey form.

The survey will take about 20 minutes to complete. If you have any questions or need assistance with items in the survey, please call Ilene Berson, Ph.D. at (813) 974-7698; or Michael Berson, Ph.D. at (813) 974-7917. Thank you for taking part in this important research effort.

Please circle or check the appropriate response or fill in the correct information.

1. What is your gender?  
 Female  
 Male
2. How old were you on your last birthday? \_\_\_\_\_ years
3. What is your race or ethnic group?  
 American Indian or Alaskan Native  
 Asian or Pacific Islander  
 Black, not Hispanic  
 Hispanic  
 White, not Hispanic  
 Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is your current educational level?  
 Graduate student  
 Undergraduate student
5. In which program are you enrolled?  
 Elementary education  
 Secondary education  
 Special education  
 Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

6. Are you familiar with the Florida Child Protection Law?
- Yes
- No
7. Are you aware of the impact of the Florida mandatory reporting statute on educators and their roles and responsibilities?
- Yes
- No
8. Based on the dictates of the Florida mandatory reporting statute, is it sufficient for an educator who suspects abuse or neglect to report only to the school administrator who may then determine the best course of action?
- Yes
- No
- Don't Know
9. What procedures are used in your University program to inform preservice teachers about state law and their responsibilities under the law for identifying and handling suspected cases of maltreatment? (Check all that apply.)
- Integrated into content of courses
- Guest Speaker(s)
- Case Studies
- Field Trips to community agencies
- Handouts
- Textbook content
- Other (Please identify) \_\_\_\_\_
- None
10. While a student in the University of South Florida teacher education program, have you ever received any written information about the child abuse and neglect reporting requirements of the State of Florida?
- Yes
- No
- Not Sure
- 10a. If you answered yes to 10, in what year did you last receive such information? \_\_\_\_\_ YEAR
11. While a student in the University of South Florida teacher education program, have you ever attended a workshop or training session on the child abuse and neglect reporting requirements of Florida, which was not a part of your course requirements?
- Yes
- No
- Not Sure
- 11a. If you answered yes to 11, about how many workshops training sessions have you attended on this topic? \_\_\_\_\_ NUMBER OF WORKSHOPS

- 11b. If you answered yes to 11, in what year did you last attend a workshop/training session on this topic?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ YEAR
- 11c. If you answered yes to 11, who was the sponsor or presenter for the last workshop you attended? \_\_\_\_\_
12. While a student in the University of South Florida teacher education program, have you ever discussed with classmates the child abuse and neglect reporting requirements of the State of Florida?
- Yes
- No
- Not Sure
13. If you have a question regarding the child abuse and neglect reporting requirements, is there someone at the University with whom you can consult?
- Yes
- No
- Not Sure
- 13a. If you answered yes to 13, what is the name, job or position title of the designated person who assists with child abuse and neglect issues?  
 \_\_\_\_\_
14. While a student in the University of South Florida teacher education program, have you ever attended a separate workshop or training session that included the topic of family-school collaboration?
- Yes
- No
- Not Sure
- 14a. If you answered yes to 14, about how many workshops training sessions have you attended on this topic? \_\_\_\_\_ NUMBER OF WORKSHOPS
- 14b. If you answered yes to 14, in what year did you last attend a workshop/training session on this topic?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ YEAR
15. Which of the following best describes best practice standards for reporting cases of suspected child abuse and neglect?
- Requires that I report all cases of suspected child abuse or neglect directly to both designated school officials or administrators and to the Abuse Hotline, child protective services (Department of Children and Families; DCF) or to the police.
- Requires that I report all cases of suspected child abuse or neglect to designated school officials or administrators only. I am provided with written documentation if a report is made to the Abuse Hotline.
- Requires that I report all cases of suspected child abuse or neglect to designated school officials or administrators only. I am provided with oral communication if a report is made to the Abuse Hotline.
- Requires that I report all cases of suspected child abuse or neglect to designated school officials or administrators only. There are no procedures for informing me about the outcome of this report.
- Requires that I report all cases of suspected child abuse or neglect directly to the Abuse Hotline, child protective services (DCF), or to the police.

- Requires that I **NOT** report any cases of suspected child abuse or neglect directly to the Abuse Hotline, child protective services (DCF) or to the police.
- Other (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- Not sure

16. While in your practica or your internship, have you ever reported suspected child abuse or neglect?

- Yes
- No

16a. If you answered yes to question 16, how many times have you reported child abuse and neglect to the Abuse Hotline, DCF or the police? \_\_\_\_\_ Number of Times

16b. If you answered yes to question 16, how did you report the suspected abuse and neglect?

No	Yes		Number of Cases
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Directly to Abuse Hotline	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Directly to Police (Law Enforcement)	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Directly to Designated School Official	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Directly to University Supervisor/Faculty	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Reported anonymously	_____

16c. If you answered yes to question 16, was the outcome of the most recent case you reported satisfactory?

- Yes
- No
- Not Sure

16d. If you answered yes to question 16, would the outcome of this case influence whether you would report again?

- Yes
- No
- Not Sure

17. While in your practica or your internship, have you reported every case of child abuse and neglect that you suspected?

- Yes
- No

18. While in your practica or your internship, has there ever been a time when you considered reporting a case to Department of Children and Families or the police, but did not do so?

- Yes
- No

18a. If you answered yes to question 18, please state your reason for not reporting.

19. Please check all initiatives in which you have participated that serve as a prevention of child maltreatment.

- Attended workshop(s) on child abuse prevention. How many? \_\_\_\_\_ In what year? \_\_\_\_\_
- Presented safety curriculum for children (e.g., Kids on the Block) Please identify the curriculum that you used \_\_\_\_\_

Made referrals for community agencies for children and their families. Please identify the agencies to which you have made referrals. \_\_\_\_\_

20. How well prepared are you to recognize and report child abuse and neglect?

- Very well prepared
- Fairly well prepared
- Poorly prepared
- Not at all prepared

21. Are you interested in further training on the recognition and reporting of child abuse and neglect?

- Very interested
- Fairly interested
- Somewhat interested
- Not at all interested

If you are interested in participating in a follow-up interview regarding educators' roles in addressing child maltreatment, please provide your name, address, phone number, and Email below.

---

---

---

---

---

Thank you for taking part in this important study.

# Appendix B

---

## Survey for Teachers, Counselors, School Social Workers, School Psychologists

### *General Instructions*

We are appreciative to you for participating in this study that is being undertaken in collaboration with the University of South Florida Child Maltreatment Collaborative; the University of South Florida Collaborative for Children, Families, and Communities; the Children's Board of Hillsborough County; Hillsborough County School District; the Pace Center for Girls; and the Child Abuse Council. The survey asks questions about you, about your institution, and about interventions and training regarding children suspected of being abused or neglected. Your answers will be combined with responses from hundreds of other educators to help us identify factors that influence decision-making in cases of suspected child abuse and neglect. Your answers are strictly confidential, and no one but the researchers will review your survey form.

The survey will take about 20 minutes to complete. If you have any questions or need assistance with items in the survey, please call Ilene Berson, Ph.D. at (813) 974-7698; Michael Berson, Ph.D. at (813) 974-7917; or Melissa Thompson at (813) 272-4466. When completed, the survey should be returned to Melissa Thompson, ROSSAC, Route 7. Thank you for taking part in this important research effort.

Please circle or check the appropriate response or fill in the correct information.

1. What is your gender?  
 Female  
 Male
2. How old were you on your last birthday? \_\_\_\_\_ years
3. What is your race or ethnic group?  
 American Indian or Alaskan Native  
 Asian or Pacific Islander  
 Black, not Hispanic  
 Hispanic  
 White, not Hispanic  
 Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is your highest degree held?  
 Bachelors  
 Masters  
 Educational Specialist  
 Doctorate
5. What is your current position in the school district?  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. How many years have you been employed in your present school?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ years in current facility
7. How many years have you been employed in any school facility?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ total years
8. Which grade levels are represented in the school in which you are currently working? (Check all that apply.)
- K
  - 1
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5
  - 6
  - 7
  - 8
  - 9
  - 10
  - 11
  - 12
  - Other (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_
9. What is the approximate size of the student body at the school?
- Over 2,000 students
  - 1,000 to 1,999 students
  - 500 to 999 students
  - 250 to 499 students
  - Less than 250 students
10. Please estimate the percentages of students in the following racial and ethnic groups in your school. (These percentages should sum to 100%.)
- |                                   |        |
|-----------------------------------|--------|
| American Indian or Alaskan Native | _____% |
| Asian or Pacific Islander         | _____% |
| Black, not Hispanic               | _____% |
| Hispanic                          | _____% |
| White, not Hispanic               | _____% |
| Other (specify)                   | _____% |
| TOTAL                             | 100%   |
11. Approximately what percentage of students in your school receive free or reduced price lunch?  
 \_\_\_\_\_% of students
12. How many students do you work with in an academic year? \_\_\_\_\_

13. Are you familiar with the Florida Child Protection Law?
- Yes
- No
14. What procedures are used in your school/district to inform educators regarding state law and their responsibilities under the law for identifying and handling suspected cases of maltreatment?
- Regular Inservice
- Occasional Inservice
- Staff Meetings
- School Policy Manual
- Teacher Manual
- Administrative Handbook
- School Bulletins
- Child Abuse Council, Inc. Publications
- Other (Please identify) \_\_\_\_\_
- None
15. Are you aware of your school/district's policy for reporting child abuse or neglect?
- Yes
- No
16. What procedures are used in your school/district to inform educators about school policies and procedures? Mark all that apply.
- Regular Inservice
- Occasional Inservice
- Staff Meetings
- School Policy Manual
- Teacher Manual
- Administrative Handbook
- School Bulletins
- Other (Please identify) \_\_\_\_\_
- None
17. During the time that you have worked in this school, have you ever received any written information about the child abuse and neglect reporting requirements of the State of Florida, Hillsborough County School system, or your school facility?
- Yes
- No
- Not Sure
- Check all that apply. I have received written information on the following requirements:
- State of Florida requirements
- Hillsborough County School District requirements
- School facility requirements

- 17a. If you answered yes to 17, in what year did you last receive such information? \_\_\_\_\_ YEAR
18. During the time that you have worked in this school, have you ever attended a workshop or training session on the child abuse and neglect reporting requirements of Florida?
- Yes
- No
- Not Sure
- 18a. If you answered yes to 18, about how many workshops training sessions have you attended on this topic? \_\_\_\_\_ NUMBER OF WORKSHOPS
- 18b. If you answered yes to 18, in what year did you last attend a workshop/training session on this topic? \_\_\_\_\_ YEAR
- 18c. If you answered yes to 18, who was the sponsor or presenter for the last workshop you attended? \_\_\_\_\_
19. During the time that you have worked in this school, have you ever discussed with co-workers the child abuse and neglect reporting requirements of the State of Florida?
- Yes
- No
- Not Sure
20. If you have a question regarding the child abuse and neglect reporting requirements, does your school have a designated staff member with whom you can consult?
- Yes
- No
- Not Sure
- 20a. If you answered yes to 20, what is the job or position title of the designated staff member who assists with child abuse and neglect issues? \_\_\_\_\_
21. During the time that you have worked at this school, have you ever attended a workshop or training session that included the topic of family-school collaboration?
- Yes
- No
- Not Sure
- 21a. If you answered yes to 21, about how many workshops training sessions have you attended on this topic? \_\_\_\_\_ NUMBER OF WORKSHOPS
- 21b. If you answered yes to 21, in what year did you last attend a workshop/training session on this topic? \_\_\_\_\_ YEAR
22. Which of the following best describes your school policy on reporting cases of suspected child abuse and neglect?
- Requires that I report all cases of suspected child abuse or neglect directly to both designated school officials or administrators and to the Abuse Hotline, child protective services (Department of Children and Families; DCF) or to the police.
- Requires that I report all cases of suspected child abuse or neglect to designated school officials or administrators only. I am provided with written documentation if a report is made to the Abuse Hotline.

- Requires that I report all cases of suspected child abuse or neglect to designated school officials or administrators only. I am provided with oral communication if a report is made to the Abuse Hotline.
- Requires that I report all cases of suspected child abuse or neglect to designated school officials or administrators only. There are no procedures for informing me about the outcome of this report.
- Requires that I report all cases of suspected child abuse or neglect directly to the Abuse Hotline, child protective services (DCF), or to the police.
- Requires that I **NOT** report any cases of suspected child abuse or neglect directly to the Abuse Hotline, child protective services (DCF) or to the police.
- Other (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- Not sure

23. When reporting suspected child abuse or neglect, are you required to provide a written report?

- Yes
- No
- Not Sure

23a. If you answered yes to 23, where are these written reports stored?

- confidential file with restricted availability
- child's permanent folder
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
- Not sure

24. During the time that you have worked at this school, have you ever reported suspected child abuse or neglect?

- Yes
- No

24a. If you answered yes to question 24, how many times have you reported child abuse and neglect to the Abuse Hotline, DCF or the police? \_\_\_\_\_ Number of Times

24b. If you answered yes to question 24, how did you report the suspected abuse and neglect?

No	Yes	Number of Cases	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Directly to Abuse Hotline	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Directly to Police (Law Enforcement)	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Directly to Designated School Official	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Reported anonymously	_____

24c. If you answered yes to question 24, was the outcome of the most recent case you reported satisfactory?

- Yes
- No
- Not Sure

- 24d. If you answered yes to question 24, would the outcome of this case influence whether you would report again?
- Yes
  - No
  - Not Sure
25. Following a report of suspected child abuse or neglect, what interventions occur with the child and family? (Check all that apply.)
- The school informs the family that a report has been made.
  - School-based interventions are initiated with the child and family.
  - A school representative continues to communicate with a liaison from the Department of Children and Families.
  - A school representative attends meetings/staffings with the Department of Children and Families and/or other multidisciplinary staff.
26. Please check all initiatives in which you have participated that serve as a prevention of child maltreatment.
- Attended workshop(s) on child abuse prevention. How many? \_\_\_\_\_ In what year? \_\_\_\_\_
  - Presented safety curriculum for children (e.g., Kids on the Block) Please identify the curriculum that you used.  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - Made referrals to community agencies for children and their families. Please identify the agencies to which you have made referrals.  
\_\_\_\_\_
27. How well prepared are you to recognize and report child abuse and neglect?
- Very well prepared
  - Fairly well prepared
  - Poorly prepared
  - Not at all prepared
28. During the time that you have worked at this school, have you reported every case of child abuse and neglect that you suspected?
- Yes
  - No
29. During the time that you have worked at this school, has there ever been a time when you considered reporting a case to DCF or the police, but did not do so?
- Yes
  - No
- 29a. If you answered yes to question 29, please state your reason for not reporting.

30. Are you interested in further training on the recognition and reporting of child abuse and neglect?
- Very interested
  - Fairly interested
  - Somewhat interested
  - Not at all interested

If you are interested in participating in a follow-up interview regarding educators' roles in addressing child maltreatment, please provide your name, school address, phone number, and Email below.

---

---

---

---

Please return the survey to Melissa Thompson, ROSSAC, Route 7.

Thank you for taking part in this important study.

## Survey for School Administrators

### *General Instructions*

We are appreciative to you for participating in this study that is being undertaken in collaboration with the University of South Florida Child Maltreatment Collaborative; the University of South Florida Collaborative for Children, Families, and Communities; the Children's Board of Hillsborough County; Hillsborough County School District; the Pace Center for Girls; and the Child Abuse Council. The survey asks questions about you, about your institution, and about interventions and training regarding children suspected of being abused or neglected. Your answers will be combined with responses from hundreds of other educators to help us identify factors that influence decision-making in cases of suspected child abuse and neglect. Your answers are strictly confidential, and no one but the researchers will review your survey form.

The survey will take about 20 minutes to complete. If you have any questions or need assistance with items in the survey, please call Ilene Berson, Ph.D. at (813) 974-7698; Michael Berson, Ph.D. at (813) 974-7917; or Melissa Thompson at (813) 272-4466. When completed, the survey should be returned to Melissa Thompson, ROSSAC, Route 7. Thank you for taking part in this important research effort.

Please circle or check the appropriate response or fill in the correct information.

1. What is your gender?  
 Female  
 Male
2. How old were you on your last birthday? \_\_\_\_\_ years
3. What is your race or ethnic group?  
 American Indian or Alaskan Native  
 Asian or Pacific Islander  
 Black, not Hispanic  
 Hispanic  
 White, not Hispanic  
 Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is your highest degree held?  
 Bachelors  
 Masters  
 Educational Specialist  
 Doctorate
5. What is your current position in the school district? \_\_\_\_\_
6. How many years have you been employed in your present school?  
\_\_\_\_\_ years in current facility
7. How many years have you been employed in any school facility? \_\_\_\_\_ total years in any school

8. Which grade levels are represented in the school in which you are currently working? (Check all that apply.)
- K
  - 1
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5
  - 6
  - 7
  - 8
  - 9
  - 10
  - 11
  - 12
  - Other (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_
9. What is the approximate size of the student body at the school?
- Over 2,000 students
  - 1,000 to 1,999 students
  - 500 to 999 students
  - 250 to 499 students
  - Less than 250 students
10. Please estimate the percentages of students in the following racial and ethnic groups in your school. (These percentages should sum to 100%.)
- |                                   |             |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| American Indian or Alaskan Native | _____%      |
| Asian or Pacific Islander         | _____%      |
| Black, not Hispanic               | _____%      |
| Hispanic                          | _____%      |
| White, not Hispanic               | _____%      |
| Other (specify) _____             | _____%      |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                      | <b>100%</b> |
11. Approximately what percentage of students in your school receive free or reduced price lunch?  
 \_\_\_\_\_% of students
12. Are you familiar with the Florida Child Protection Law?
- Yes
  - No

13. What procedures are used in your school/district to inform educators regarding state law and their responsibilities under the law for identifying and handling suspected cases of maltreatment?
- Regular Inservice
  - Occasional Inservice
  - Staff Meetings
  - School Policy Manual
  - Teacher Manual
  - Administrative Handbook
  - School Bulletins
  - Child Abuse Council, Inc. Publications
  - Other (Please identify) \_\_\_\_\_
  - None
14. Are you aware of your school/district's policy for reporting child abuse or neglect?
- Yes
  - No
15. What procedures are used in your school/district to inform educators about school policies and procedures? Mark all that apply.
- Regular Inservice
  - Occasional Inservice
  - Staff Meetings
  - School Policy Manual
  - Teacher Manual
  - Administrative Handbook
  - School Bulletins
  - Other (Please identify) \_\_\_\_\_
  - None
16. What procedures are used in your school/district to inform parents and community members about school policies and procedures for identifying and handling suspected cases of maltreatment?
- Meetings
  - School newsletters/flyers
  - School manual
  - Newspaper/Media
  - Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
  - None
17. What procedures are used in your school/district to inform students about school policies and procedures for identifying and handling suspected cases of maltreatment?
- School Policy manual
  - Student handbook
  - Newsletter

- Information Integrated into Curriculum
- Kids on the Block Program
- Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- None

18. During the time that you have worked in this district, have you ever received any written information about the child abuse and neglect reporting requirements of the State of Florida or Hillsborough County School system?

- Yes
- No
- Not Sure

Check all that apply. I have received written information on the following requirements:

- \_\_\_\_\_ State of Florida requirements
- \_\_\_\_\_ Hillsborough County School District requirements

18a. If you answered yes to 18, in what year did you last receive such information?  
\_\_\_\_\_ YEAR

19. During the time that you have worked in this school, have you ever attended a workshop or training session on the child abuse and neglect reporting requirements of Florida?

- Yes
- No
- Not Sure

19a. If you answered yes to 19, about how many workshops training sessions have you attended on this topic? \_\_\_\_\_ NUMBER OF WORKSHOPS

19b. If you answered yes to 19, in what year did you last attend a workshop/training session on this topic?  
\_\_\_\_\_ YEAR

19c. If you answered yes to 19, who was the sponsor or presenter for the last workshop you attended?  
\_\_\_\_\_

20. During the time that you have worked in this school, have you ever discussed with your staff the child abuse and neglect reporting requirements of the State of Florida?

- Yes
- No
- Not Sure

21. If staff members have a question regarding the child abuse and neglect reporting requirements, does your school have a designated person with whom they can consult?

- Yes
- No
- Not Sure

21a. If you answered yes to 21, what is the job or position title of the designated staff member who assists with child abuse and neglect issues? \_\_\_\_\_

22. During the time that you have worked at this school, have you ever attended a workshop or training session that included the topic of family-school collaboration?
- Yes
- No
- Not Sure
- 22a. If you answered yes to 22, about how many workshops training sessions have you attended on this topic? \_\_\_\_\_ NUMBER OF WORKSHOPS
- 22b. If you answered yes to 22, in what year did you last attend a workshop/training session on this topic?  
\_\_\_\_\_ YEAR
23. Which of the following best describes your school policy on reporting cases of suspected child abuse and neglect?
- Requires that staff report all cases of suspected child abuse or neglect directly to both designated school officials or administrators and to the Abuse Hotline, child protective services (Department of Children and Families; DCF) or to the police.
- Requires that staff report all cases of suspected child abuse or neglect to designated school officials or administrators only. Staff are provided with written documentation if a report is made to the Abuse Hotline.
- Requires that staff report all cases of suspected child abuse or neglect to designated school officials or administrators only. Staff are provided with oral communication if a report is made to the Abuse Hotline.
- Requires that staff report all cases of suspected child abuse or neglect to designated school officials or administrators only. There are no procedures for informing staff about the outcome of this report.
- Requires that staff report all cases of suspected child abuse or neglect directly to the Abuse Hotline, child protective services (DCF), or to the police.
- Requires that staff **NOT** report any cases of suspected child abuse or neglect directly to the Abuse Hotline, child protective services (DCF) or to the police.
- Other (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- Not sure
24. When reporting suspected child abuse or neglect, does your school require a written report?
- Yes
- No
- Not Sure
- 24a. If you answered yes to 24, where are these written reports stored?
- Confidential file with restricted availability
- Child's permanent folder
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
- Not sure

25. During the time that you have worked at this school, have you ever reported suspected child abuse or neglect?
- Yes
- No
- 25a. If you answered yes to question 25, how many times have you reported child abuse and neglect to the Abuse Hotline, DCF or the police? \_\_\_\_\_ Number of Times
- 25b. If you answered yes to question 25, how did you report the suspected abuse and neglect?
- | No                       | Yes                      |  | Number of Cases |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|-----------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Directly to Abuse Hotline              | _____           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Directly to Police (Law Enforcement)   | _____           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Directly to Designated School Official | _____           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Reported anonymously                   | _____           |
- 25c. If you answered yes to question 25, was the outcome of the most recent case you reported satisfactory?
- Yes
- No
- Not Sure
- 25d. If you answered yes to question 25, would the outcome of this case influence whether you would report again?
- Yes
- No
- Not Sure
26. In total, approximately how many cases of child maltreatment have been reported to the Abuse Hotline, DCF or the police by representatives from your school during the last academic year? \_\_\_\_\_
- 26a. Based on the number of reported cases in question 26, are you noting an increase, decrease or no change in the total number of reports over the last 3 years?
- Increase
- Decrease
- No Change
27. Following a report of suspected child abuse or neglect, what interventions occur with the child and family? (Check all that apply.)
- The school informs the family that a report has been made.
- School-based interventions are initiated with the child and family.
- A school representative continues to communicate with a liaison from the Department of Children and Families.
- A school representative attends meetings/staffings with the Department of Children and Families and/or other multidisciplinary staff.

28. Please check all initiatives in which you have participated that serve as a prevention of child maltreatment.
- Attended workshop(s) on child abuse prevention. How many? \_\_\_\_\_  
In what year? \_\_\_\_\_
  - Presented safety curriculum for children (e.g., Kids on the Block) Please identify the curriculum that you used. \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Made referrals to community agencies for children and their families. Please identify the agencies to which you have made referrals. \_\_\_\_\_
29. How well prepared are you to recognize and report child abuse and neglect?
- Very well prepared
  - Fairly well prepared
  - Poorly prepared
  - Not at all prepared
30. During the time that you have worked at this school, have you reported every case of child abuse and neglect that you suspected?
- Yes
  - No
31. During the time that you have worked at this school, has there ever been a time when you considered reporting a case to DCF or the police, but did not do so?
- Yes
  - No
- 31a. If you answered yes to question 31, please state your reason for not reporting.
32. Are you interested in further training on the recognition and reporting of child abuse and neglect?
- Very interested
  - Fairly interested
  - Somewhat interested
  - Not at all interested

If you are interested in participating in a follow-up interview regarding educators' roles in addressing child maltreatment, please provide your name, school address, phone number, and Email below.

---



---



---



---



---

Please return the survey to Melissa Thompson, ROSSAC, Route 7

Thank you for taking part in this important study.

## Child Maltreatment Collaborative: Focus Group Guide

Name of Moderator \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

No. Attendees \_\_\_\_\_

Location \_\_\_\_\_

### *Beginning the Focus Group*

The first few minutes of a focus group interview are extremely important. They set the tone for everything that follows. If the participants are made to feel comfortable that their opinions and ideas are really important and that they will be accepted in a nonjudgmental way, they will offer much more information.

### *During the Focus Group*

Your primary job during this group interview is to stimulate discussion by asking questions, listening to responses, asking for clarification when ideas are not fully explained, finding ways to get greater detail when appropriate, and by leading the discussion on to new issues when it's time to do so.

- Try to make sure each person participates. This can be done by addressing each person directly and taking turns.
- Early in the interview, a large number of ideas may come up. Try to write them all down and make sure they get discussed.
- Remember, only one issue can be effectively discussed at one time. Try to keep people on one topic until it is fully explored.
- If anyone becomes hostile during the interview, you may want to suggest that the group take a break. At that time, you can invite the hostile participant to leave. If the person refuses, you may want to discourage participation through lack of eye contact.

## I. Introduction

### *Give an explanation*

“Good morning/afternoon. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am an interviewer with the Child Maltreatment Collaborative at the Florida Mental Health Institute at the University of South Florida. A primary goal of the Child Maltreatment Collaborative is to evaluate current standards of practice in schools to identify and respond to child victims of maltreatment and their families.”

“Thank you for coming. A focus group is a relaxed discussion whose members are recruited to discuss a particular topic, with the intent to yield insights on why people feel as they do about a particular issue or behavior.”

## *Present the purpose*

“We are here today to talk about your attitudes, experiences and beliefs regarding the role of schools as a prevention of child abuse and maltreatment. I am not here to share information or to give you my opinions. Your perceptions are what matter. There are no right or wrong or desirable or undesirable answers. You can disagree with each other, and you can change your mind. I would like you to feel comfortable saying what you really think and how you really feel.”

## *Discuss procedure*

“I will be taking notes and tape recording the discussion so that I do not miss anything you have to say. As you know everything is confidential. In the final report no one will know who said what. I want this to be a group discussion, so feel free to respond to me and to other members in the group without waiting to be called on. However, I would appreciate it if only one person did talk at a time. The discussion will last approximately 30 minutes. There is a lot I want to discuss, so at times I may move us along a bit.”

## *Participant introduction*

“Now, let’s start by everyone sharing their name and how long they’ve been working with Hillsborough County Schools.”

## *Rapport building*

“I want each of you to think of an adjective that best describes your attitude about your current child abuse reporting requirements as educators. We’re going to go around the room so you can share your choices. Please briefly explain why you selected the adjective(s) you did.”

## II. Interview

- What procedures are used in your school/district to inform educators regarding state law and their responsibilities under the law for identifying and handling suspected cases of maltreatment?  
**Probe:** Give time for participants to respond – if necessary, list some options (inservice, staff meetings, manuals, bulletins, etc.)
- Do you focus on new teachers in orientation, existing teachers, counselors, school social workers, etc?
- Of these materials, which have you found the most useful?  
**Probe:** Tell me more about why you have found this most useful. Of the materials not mentioned — Why haven’t you found \_\_\_\_\_ useful? How could it be more useful?
- Are you familiar with the Florida Child Protection Law?  
**Probe:** What do you think are the provisions of this law?
- Are you aware of your school/district’s policy for reporting child abuse or neglect?  
**Probe:** Tell me more about that.
- Do you feel that the amount and quality of education provided by the school system is sufficient to help you identify child abuse and neglect cases? Do you feel that the amount and quality of education provided by the school is sufficient to help you provide intervention to abused children and their families?
- What do you think is the role of preservice education (i.e. the university) in providing this knowledge?

- Are there different procedures for reporting child abuse and child neglect? Should these two things be handled differently? If so, how, and which is more severe?
- What strategy/strategies have you used to report child abuse in your school?
- Of these strategies which ones have been most effective?  
**Probe:** Tell me why you think they have been effective.
- Which have you found to be least effective?  
**Probe:** Tell me why you think they have not been effective. It's interesting, \_\_\_\_\_ found that strategy to be effective, what do you think may account for the difference?
- Do you use a designated reporter? If so, does that fit in with the state statutes and the district guidelines? Overall, how satisfied are you with the abuse reporting process and its outcomes?
- What are the perceived barriers in reporting suspected abuse (e.g., lack of knowledge, fear of consequences, need for team support, lack of trust in DCF, feel overwhelmed, don't want to interfere with families, etc.)
- Are you aware of an instance where abuse was suspected but not reported to DCF or the police? What were the barriers to reporting?
- Following a report of suspected child abuse or neglect, what interventions occur with the child and family? How often do you or your staff make referrals to community agencies? Are you aware of community agencies in your community to assist families with these issues? Identify some.  
**Probe:** Give participants time to think of their own options. If necessary, jog their memory with phrases such as school-based interventions, intervention with Department of Children and Families, etc.)
- What initiatives have you participated in that serve as a prevention of child maltreatment?  
**Probe:** If necessary, probe them with keywords such as workshops, presentations, referrals, etc.
- Which initiatives are most and least effective?  
**Probe:** Why do you feel this way?
- How well-prepared are you to recognize and report child abuse and neglect?
- What kind of prevention programs do you have at your school? (e.g., training for students about abuse, training for parents in child development and parenting, awareness programs, staff training and identification in reporting, Meghan's Law to identify child predators, etc.)
- Are staff members informed about youth offenders who enroll their schools? What do they do when they learn of an offender in the school? How do you handle children who sexually act out?
- What is the significance of establishing a collaborative network between schools and families? What types of goals can be accomplished with this partnership?
- What are your thoughts on the topic of family-school collaboration?  
**Probe:** Have you ever received any training or had any discussion about this topic?

### III. Closure

“Though there were many different opinions about \_\_\_\_\_, it appears unanimous that \_\_\_\_\_ . Does anyone see it differently? It seems most of you agree \_\_\_\_\_, but some think that \_\_\_\_\_ . Does anyone want to add or clarify an opinion on this?”

“Is there any other information that you think would be useful for me to know?”

“Thank you very much for coming this morning/afternoon. Your time is very much appreciated and your comments have been very helpful.”

# Appendix E

---

## Survey of Community Agencies

1. Please describe any initiatives undertaken by your community agency in collaboration with the schools as a prevention of child maltreatment (i.e., inservice education, interaction with Department of Children and Families, community-based programming, parenting classes, family counseling, safety curriculum for children).
2. Please describe what you perceive should be the role and responsibility of the schools in addressing child maltreatment.
3. How satisfied are you with the current response of schools to child maltreatment?
  - Very satisfied
  - Fairly satisfied
  - Somewhat satisfied
  - Not at all satisfied
4. Please share your ideas for improving the response of schools to child maltreatment and describe how your agency might be involved in these efforts.
5. If you are interested in participating in a follow-up interview regarding educators' roles in addressing child maltreatment, please provide your name, address, and phone number below.

---

---

---

---