



## **“FORENSIC INTERVIEWING WITH CHILDREN: A SUCCESSFUL FOLLOW-UP”**

Most professionals working with children have the underlying fear that someday they will have to testify in court regarding one of these cases. Unless you qualified yourself as a forensic specialist within the field, most professionals get butterflies on their tummies when they think of the possibility of testifying in court. Obtaining the necessary forensic information from a child, or adolescent, seems to be a daunting task! In an attempt to address the development of professionals, the Western Cape Association for Play Therapy organized a second forensic workshop during October 2007 for all people in the helping professions to aid expertise in handling child abuse.

The Western Cape Play Therapy Association is a multi-disciplinary, professional body for play therapists and professionals working with children and their families, within the Western Cape. The Association aims to do the following:

- Professional support to members
- The development of professionals' service delivery
- The establishment of interdisciplinary consultation
- Making provision for learning opportunities by providing study groups, courses and workshops.

The Association invited **Prof Susan Kreston**, a Visiting Professor in Law from the United States of America, who is an expert on criminal law, domestic violence, child abuse and child trafficking, to present a forensic workshop for professionals in South Africa. Prof Kreston provides international training in physical abuse, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation prosecution.

Prof Kreston presented an one-day workshop during October 2007 in Cape Town on preparing and testifying in court, as well as interviewing children for forensic purposes. The workshop was attended by 100 professionals from a variety of disciplines. Newly developed interviewing booklets from the FBI were distributed at the workshop with the aim of equipping professionals in the interviewing process.

**During the presentation, Prof Kreston highlighted the importance of the use of appropriate language with children when trying to obtain forensic**

**evidence.** Please remember to always take the child's age into consideration! Some of the tips Prof Kreston gave, were:

- Do not assume that because a child uses a word, she knows what it means
- Do not assume that both of you mean the same thing, e.g. "He tickled me"
- Avoid use of legal terms and technical terms, e.g. defendant and ejaculation
- Avoid use of multi-syllabic words, e.g. preceding
- Avoid use of words with more than one meaning e.g. talk
- Avoid abstract terms e.g. justice, truth
- Avoid the use of relationship words. Use names (Johan) instead of "your uncle", etc.
- Avoid the use of quantifiers, e.g. "a couple," "several," "few", "once or more than once", "A million times". Be specific and exact!
- Avoid "do you remember"-questions: Not "Do you remember telling the police?". Just ask "Did you tell the police?"
- Avoid shifting back and forth between topics without signaling to the child
- Avoid shifting back and forth in time without signaling to the child
- Try to link events to something important to the child
- Prior to 9 years of age children are usually poor with time concepts
- NEVER ask the child to guess, say this is a game or invoke anything indicative of play/pretend

To really make it practical:

- Examples of Age-Inappropriate Language would be:

Long, Complex Sentences like: When you were with your Uncle in the bedroom of the blue house your Mom took you to, what did he do to you?

- Examples of Developmentally Sensitive Language would be:

Several Short Sentences like:

Where did your Mom take you that day?

Who was there?

What room were you in?

What happened?

Prof Susan Kreston rendered a comprehensive and excellent presentation on the forensic interviewing of children and adolescents. The Western Cape Association for Play Therapy will be hosting four study groups and one workshop throughout 2008 – again with the aim of empowering professionals working in the field of service delivery to children. Please note that these activities will be CPD-accredited for Social Workers and Psychologists. Should you be interested in attending any of the activities, please contact Dr Munita Dunn (Chair Person) for more information at 021 – 873 1181 / 082 782 3616 or at [dunnm@hugenote.co.za](mailto:dunnm@hugenote.co.za)

*Join us in the quest for the enhancement of service delivery to  
children in South Africa!*