

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH

Abused children benefit when professionals coordinate their efforts to investigate cases and protect the children involved. A multi-disciplinary approach does not require a formal center. It does require that the professionals make efforts to communicate from the earliest opportunity, coordinate investigations, limit repeat interviews by different agencies and by multiple interviewers, and continue to share information throughout the pendency of the case. All agencies involved in the investigation of child abuse are encouraged to use a multi-disciplinary approach whenever possible, including the use of MDICs where available. The goal of this approach is to reduce trauma to the child, improve coordination of service delivery, ensure forensic defensibility of services [i.e., medical and interview components], and enhance the courts' ability to protect communities.

Multi-disciplinary team professionals should view their function as part of a team. The team must consist of three or more people and usually includes, but is not limited to, a member of law enforcement, a CSW, a prosecutor, a child advocate, a medical professional, a mental health representative, and a public education professional. [WIC §18951(d)] While the individual effort of each professional is crucial, the child benefits most when all professionals coordinate with each other.

The team should identify one member to conduct the primary, forensic interview with the child. Preference should be given to a trained forensic interview specialist.

In geographic areas where there are no multi-disciplinary centers, or a multi-disciplinary team approach is not feasible, all agencies are urged to make efforts to limit the number of interviews and reduce trauma to the child victim to the extent possible.

When a formal multi-disciplinary approach is used, all agencies should communicate and coordinate actions on cases arising out of the same events. WIC §830 allows for the disclosure of confidential juvenile court records among team members. However, pursuant to *Brady v. Maryland*, 373 U.S. 83 (1963), if a member of the prosecution team is present when potentially exculpatory confidential information is disclosed, that information must be provided to the defense during criminal discovery.

There are a number of established multi-disciplinary centers and resources for forensic examinations in Los Angeles County. [See Index of Appendices] The Office of Criminal Justice Planning [OCJP] publishes the *State Compendium of Multi-Disciplinary Teams*.