Investigating Child Abuse
Chapter Five
Introduction

• Different agencies become involved where abuse of neglect of a child is suspected
• Social services agencies investigate to provide evidence
• Law enforcement officers (LEOs) conduct investigations into suspected abuse and neglect against children
• LEO must determine if probable cause exists:
  • Determine a crime has been committed
  • Identify the offender for possible prosecution
Four critical steps for child abuse and neglect investigations

1. Go to the source of information
   - Collect information about the injury
   - Conduct interviews

2. Get records and reports
   - Seek prior reports on abuse
   - Review medical records from doctor, clinic, or hospital

3. Interview
   - Interview all persons who had access to child
   - Always interview the caretakers separately

4. Go to the scene
   - Conduct thorough investigation of the scene
   - Collect evidence
Children with Disabilities

- Children with disabilities at significant increased risk for neglect and abuse of all forms
- Hospitalized children with disabilities twice as prevalent among maltreatment than those without disabilities
  - Children with more than one disability were at even higher risk of physical and sexual abuse
- Children with disabilities abused and neglected three times more than children without disabilities
Introduction to Physical Abuse

• Criminal prosecution of physical abuse more common than prosecution of emotional maltreatment
• Line between accident and intentional harm can be blurry, evidence becomes extremely important
• Multiagency and/or interdisciplinary team approach helpful in gathering information from various sources
• Allegation of abuse in not confirmation that a child has been victimized
Age Dating of Bruises

- *Involves noting the color of bruising present and documenting this information*
- How can one determine the age of a bruise?
  - Bright Red: 0 to 2 days old injury
  - Bluish or Purple: 2 to 5 days old
  - Green: 5 to 7 days old
  - Yellow: 7 to 10 days old
  - Brown: 10 to 14 days old
  - No evidence after 2 to 4 weeks
Pattern Injury

- Common household items are frequently used as weapons against children in abusive situations
- Examples include:
  - Hairbrushes, flyswatters, hangers, belts, and baseball bats
  - The most common dangerous weapon remains the hand
- Look for patterns on the locations that have been identified as suspicious
- Bruise patterns on the child may help to identify and retrieve the weapon as evidence
Injuries to the Head

• Infants rarely suffer head injuries that are an accident
• Examples of intentional injury include:
  • Hemorrhaging beneath the scalp,
  • Retinal hemorrhage, shaken baby syndrome,
  • Injury from multiple slapping or hitting,
  • Whiplash (without automobile accident),
  • Any bruise to the ear,
  • “Cauliflower” ear,
  • A black or swollen eye
Burns

• Intentional burn injuries often go unnoticed
• Children will suffer a significant burn in less time than an adult
• Make up approximately 10 percent of child abuse cases and 10 percent of hospital admissions of children to burn units
• Examples:
  • Forcing a child under hot water
  • Inflicting cigarette or lighter burns
  • Pushing/holding on a heating or electrical unit
  • Placing child in oven or microwave
Family Abduction

• The most common kind of abduction is parental child abduction
• *Family abduction:*  
  • is the taking, keeping, or concealing of a child or children by a parent, other family member, or person acting on behalf of the parent or family member, that deprives another individual of his or her custody or visitation rights
• The majority of kidnappings are family kidnappings
• Family abduction is a serious problem both in scope and its effect
Missing Children’s Assistance Act, 1984 as Title IV of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act

- Congress mandated a national response to the problem of missing and exploited children to be coordinated by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) along with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
- The National Center for Prosecution of Children,
  - a major source of information on parental kidnapping
- An estimated 262,000 children are abducted annually
- Almost 80 percent are kidnapped by a parent or family member
Munchausen by Proxy

- It involves both physical abuse and medical neglect against a child
- The offender suffers from a psychological maltreatment categorized as factitious disorders (DSM IV-T-R)
- It is characterized by repeated unnecessary medical tests and procedures, which are demanded by a caretaker and cause physical injury to the child
- Common methods of fabricating illness are:
  - lying, poisoning either with drugs or other substances, suffocation, specimen tampering, chart falsification, injection of urine or fecal matter into the child, laxatives, excessive medications
- An estimated 9 to 31 percent of victims die as a result of the abuse
- Approximately 98 percent of the perpetrators are women
- Victims equally divided male and female children
Shaken Baby Syndrome

- Medical term used to describe the violent shaking of a child and injuries that can occur
- Is a relatively new classification of death or injury to infants, and the number of child victims is uncertain
- 10 to 12 percent of all deaths due to abuse and neglect are attributable to the shaken baby syndrome
- Children from birth to age two are at the highest risk because their neck muscles are underdeveloped and their brain tissue is fragile
- Between 1,000 to 3,000 children are diagnosed every year
- About 100 to 120 them die
- Long term effects: learning and physical, visual, and speech disabilities
Child Death Due to Abuse

- Physical abuse is the most common cause of death to children committed by their own parents
- Most children are under the age of four die from child abuse and neglect than from automobile accidents, falls, fires, drowning, suffocation, and choking on food
- No longer is child abuse considered a family affair
- An estimated 1,530 children die of child abuse and neglect each year
- Children aged three and younger are the most frequent victims
Different Types of Child/Family deaths

- Feticide: felonious destruction of a fetus
- Fratricide: killing of a brother or sister
- Filicide: killing of children by parents
  - Most perpetrators are in their mid-20’s
  - In two-adult families, with male present
  - As many as 50 percent are married
Child Death Review Teams

- More than four children per day die as the result of abuse and neglect in the United States
- Research shows that as many as 50 percent of child deaths listed as “undetermined” or “accidents” are actually caused by child abuse
- Child death review teams address the concern that child abuse fatalities were not properly investigated
- Review teams include: pediatrician, medical examiner, prosecuting attorney, social worker, mental health professional, police officer, nurse, educator, and paramedic
Sexual Abuse Introduction

- Fastest growing form of reported child abuse at one time
- Sexual abuse an issue of power and control, not love and intimacy
- Considered less of a concern than physical abuse
- Pre-school age children victimized more frequently than 20 years ago
- Over 78,000 cases sustained in 2006
- Girls more likely than boys to be sexually abused
- Ages 12-15 year olds in the most danger
- Legal procedures for validating an episode make it very difficult for prosecution
Forms of Sexual Abuse

- Sexual assault on a child: any forced, exploitive, or coercive sexual contact or experience with a child
- State laws vary widely, three elements required:
  - A significantly older person
  - A person who engaged in sexual activity
  - Activity involving someone who is legally a child
Forms of Sexual Assault

- Molestation
- Rape
- Voyeurism
- Exhibitionism
- Pornography
- Forced prostitution
- Incest
Symptoms of Sexual Abuse

• *Reports of sexual abuse declined in recent years*
• Behavior changes: sexual acting out; excessive masturbation, unusual interest in or avoidance of all things sexual
• Sleep problems or nightmares
• Depression, aggressiveness, suicidal behavior, refusing school, headaches
• Aversive reactions to particular foods, soreness in the genitals
• Physical Indicators
• Behavioral Indicators
• Caretaker Indicators
Sexual Abuse Typologies

- Engagement phase
- Progression phase
- Suppression phase

**Sexual abuse accommodation syndrome:**
1. secrecy
2. helplessness
3. entrapment and accommodation
4. delayed, conflicted and unconvincing disclosure,
5. retraction
The Role of Police in Child Abuse

- Controversial
- Specialized police units developed by the 1970’s to investigate and prosecute physical and sexual abuse to children
- Current trend: multidisciplinary teams and interagency cooperation between police and child protective agencies
Interviewing children

• Courts are afforded wide discretion in modify trial practices to accommodate the special needs of children
• Children’s competency and credibility are of concern:
  1. *competency*: means that a person is fit to stand trial and to take the oath
  2. *credibility*: refer to whether or not the child witness can be believed
• Videotaping Child Interviews
• Forensic Interviewing