

Mandatory Reporter Training in Iowa

Position Paper

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The Iowa Professional Society on the Abuse of Children presents the following positions:

1. Iowa should have only one high-quality curriculum prepared by experts in the field of child abuse for all Mandatory Reporter Training (MRT). This curriculum should be available as an online course and should be utilized for all in-person trainings.
2. Mandatory Reporters (MRs) should be provided with legislative and other updates as they become available.
3. The curriculum should have a method of measuring a MR's knowledge to ensure knowledge is retained and the training is effective.
4. Mandatory Reporter Training should be free to all of Iowa's Mandatory Reporters.

Introduction

The Iowa Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (IAPSAC) was established in January of 2012 as a state chapter of the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC).

The mission of APSAC is: "To improve society's response to the abuse and neglect of its children by promoting effective interdisciplinary approaches to identification, intervention, treatment and prevention of child maltreatment."

The goals of IAPSAC are to:

1. Promote collaboration among all disciplines working in the area of child protection.
2. Promote education on maltreatment to professionals and community members who have contact with children.
3. Promote research on child abuse and neglect in the areas of prevention, identification, intervention and treatment.
4. Promote appropriate and effective services to children and families who have experienced child maltreatment.

Background

IAPSAC is concerned about mandatory reporter training in Iowa and therefore developed a subcommittee to research and establish our position on the matter. Our initial concerns were that:

1. The quality of the available trainings is not adequate.
2. The content of available trainings often is not current.
3. The MRT approval process does not ask for submission of actual curriculum content.

4. Mandatory reporters are not retaining the material presented in trainings.
5. Mandatory reporters may not be receiving sufficient training about how to actually make a report to DHS.
6. Mandatory reporters are not receiving updates on legislative or code changes regarding child maltreatment and mandatory reporting.

We present here significant facts, discussion and solutions pertinent to our concerns:

Iowa Code regarding MRT Curricula

Iowa Code, Chapter 93, designates the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) to review and approve mandatory reporter training curricula. A licensing or examining board may develop its own mandatory reporter training curriculum.

Iowa Code, Chapter 93, includes standards for approval of curriculums for Mandatory Reporter Training. At a minimum, the curriculum must have content for 2 hours of training. The 2 hours is to include the following: the definitions of child abuse as defined by Iowa Code Section 232.68(2); training in physical, psychological, behavioral, environmental and other relevant indicators of child abuse; requirements and procedures for reporting suspected child abuse; a review of the Code of Iowa and the Iowa Administrative Code pertaining to child abuse; a description of the assessment protocol used by the Department of Human Services (DHS) and other investigative agencies following receipt of a report; the manner in which information is shared by the DHS; an evaluation component to assess understanding; and finally, knowledge and resource material about the cause and risk factors for child abuse, assisting individuals and families who have experienced child abuse and prevention of child abuse.

Iowa Code, Chapter 93, outlines the process for application review and renewal of Mandatory Reporter Training curricula. Once approved, a curriculum is valid for 3 years. Section 93.6(4) states that the IDPH may at any time reevaluate an approved curriculum and if deemed necessary disapprove all or any part of a previously approved curriculum. In addition, Section 93.6(5) states that the IDPH may require amendments to an approved curriculum based on legislative or administrative rule changes. It is the trainer's responsibility to stay current with changes to the applicable Iowa Codes and Administrative Rules, to update staff and training attendees on the changes, and to renew the curriculum approval every three years with the Iowa Department of Public Health.

Iowa Code 232.69 outlines training requirements for mandatory reporters of child abuse. Two hours of training is required within 6 months of initial employment when the employment involves the examination, attending, counseling or treatment of children. Two hours of additional training on child abuse identification and reporting is required every 5 years. If the person is an employee of a hospital or similar institution or of a public or private institution, agency or facility, the employer shall be responsible for providing the child abuse identification and reporting training. A licensing board with authority over the license of a person required to make a report shall require as a condition of licensure that the person is in compliance with the requirement for the abuse training.

Iowa Code 232.75 provides for civil and criminal penalties to be imposed on a Mandatory Reporter who fails to make a report of possible child abuse.

Iowa Code does NOT address the cost of the required training. MRT is offered free in some instances while some organizations collect a fee.

Curricula Approval, Quality and Content Concerns

While the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) is assigned the responsibility of “reviewing and approving” MRT curricula, the process by which they review is lacking. The subcommittee discovered that the courses themselves are not being reviewed. The applicant submits only an application, not the actual content of the training that will be used during the MRT. By not viewing the actual content, the IDPH loses control over ensuring the information being presented to trainees is up-to-date, correct and in alignment with Iowa Code. This is concerning considering the importance Iowa’s residents place on our children’s safety.

IDPH currently has one person in charge of MRT review and approval. There are approximately 149 Child Abuse Mandatory Reporter Training curricula and 362 combined Child Abuse and Dependent Adult Abuse Training curricula, with any number being submitted for approval at any time. If Mandatory Reporters could utilize one State-approved and State-provided MRT, prepared by experts in the field of child abuse, the task of reviewing, approving and assuring up-to-date content would be more manageable for the one entity in charge. In addition, that one entity could guarantee the content of the trainings and eliminate any less-than-ideal options a potential MR might select amongst the hundreds available. It is the opinion of this subcommittee that it would be feasible for such a course to be provided free of charge to Iowa’s Mandatory Reporters if this change was made. An important distinction is that the **Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS)** receives Mandatory Reporters’ calls about suspected child abuse. They then investigate those concerns. The **Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH)** is currently the one entity in charge of reviewing and approving Mandatory Reporter Trainings.

Online Training

M.C. Kenny (2007) did a study on the effectiveness of providing an online program to educate professionals about child abuse and reporting practices. This training disseminated information to education and counseling students through an online module devoted to child maltreatment and examined the effectiveness of this form of teaching via a pre- and post-test that measured participants’ knowledge. This study provided evidence of the value of teaching identification of and reporting of child maltreatment through training provided online. The results demonstrate that in a relatively short period of time, future teachers and counselors can assimilate knowledge related to the detection and reporting of child maltreatment. Participants’ self-reported increases in acquired knowledge as well as significantly improved scores on the post-test, indicates the success of the online tutorial in educating. The online format was rated very favorably by participants, who had few if any suggestions for improvements. The internet is a particularly good venue to utilize for several reasons. The online format allows for independent learning, access to the information at any time, and may be helpful to students with varying learning styles. The online format also allows for

communication of accurate information on this topic. Appropriate training of MRs is essential so that they can identify and report suspected abuse immediately. Using an online training program to disseminate information is convenient, effective and a method of instruction which allows for the required testing of participants knowledge as stipulated in the Iowa Code. The IAPSAC team reviewed several states' online MRT offerings. Many dedicated child abuse professionals across our Nation have created excellent MRTs in a modern online format that is easily accessible, effective, and provides the most up-to-date information. Certainly Iowa can benefit from joining this movement. For those who prefer in-person training, the same curriculum could easily be utilized by the instructor.

Knowledge Retention

Failing to report suspected child abuse can be detrimental to children. The results of the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) study indicate that childhood trauma can have lifelong effects. In some cases, the abuse of a child has led to death, while other abused children live with a lifetime of negative effects. Although there were 4 million reports of child maltreatment made in 2015 in the United States, additional children are not accounted for because some Mandatory Reporters do not report possible abuse. Failure to report may be due to lack of knowledge of signs and symptoms of child maltreatment, lack of knowledge about the process of reporting abuse as well as negative feelings toward child protective services (Alvarez, Kenny, Donohue, and Carpenter, 2010). With proper education in Mandatory Reporter Training, there may be a decrease in the children who go unprotected.

Why would an Iowa Mandatory Reporter NOT call Iowa's DHS hotline to report the abuse? The subcommittee suspects poor training and/or lack of knowledge retention. King, Reece, Bendel and Patel conducted a study entitled "The Effects of Sociodemographic Variables, Training and Attitudes on Lifetime Reporting Practices of Mandated Reporters." They found that less training in child abuse resulted in less suspicion of child abuse and less reporting of child abuse. In this study of 382 mandatory reporters, the reporters suspected abuse on average 24 times but only reported to the proper authorities 16 times. The authors suggested that knowledge about, attitudes of, detection of and compliance with reporting can all be improved with improved training. There are several studies that indicate health care providers may benefit from improved Mandatory Reporter training. *Barriers to physician identification and reporting of child abuse* (Flaherty 2005) published in the *Pediatric Annals* stated that physicians underreport and under identify child abuse. The authors reported that with improved education this could be improved. A second study, *Health care providers' experience reporting child abuse in the primary care setting* (Flaherty 2000) was published in the *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine*. This study found that providers who had formal education in child abuse were 10 times more likely to report child abuse than those who had no formal education.

Iowa Code already calls for an assessment of MR knowledge after a MRT course is taken. Based on our review of literature, we predict that a high quality curriculum with proper evaluation of trainees' knowledge will be beneficial in a number of ways. Trainees could have immediate feedback about areas of weakness. They could then be directed to review that portion of the course. A website hosting the online MRT could be accessed anytime a MR wants

to brush-up on their knowledge or research a specific question. Better knowledge retention would hopefully lead to more correctly handled cases of child abuse in Iowa.

Updates

Currently there is no good option available for MRs to be informed of applicable changes in policy or law that occur in the 5 years between their required trainings. It is possible to periodically search the Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) website for updates to issues surrounding child abuse in Iowa. However, this strategy is deficient for many reasons. First, there is no requirement that MRs be instructed to keep abreast of changes that affect them as Mandatory Reporters. Without being told to do so, many remain unaware of the importance of checking for new statutes, policies or procedures. Second, in the subcommittee's experience, the DHS website is difficult to navigate. Any request for updates results in an email alert when the page itself has been updated, not that there are any changes of specific interest to Mandatory Reporters. Third, even if a diligent MR seeks out the updates, they will have to sort out which ones apply to them as well as decipher the legal language. Incidentally, in our search of both the IDPH website and the DHS website, we were disappointed to find an extensive document entitled "Guide for Mandatory Reporters" that has not been updated since July 2011. There were two major changes effective July 2016 of which many MRs continue to be unaware, even over a year later. Those include the addition of Human Trafficking as a category of child abuse in Iowa and the inclusion of DHS becoming involved in child sexual abuse cases where any person living in the child's home is the suspected perpetrator. Only recently the IDPH added website links to information about the 2016 Child Abuse law changes in regard to child sexual abuse and human trafficking and the 2017 Iowa Child Abuse law changes in regard to infants who are drug affected.

Beyond Iowa

The IAPSAC subcommittee was curious how other states handle child abuse reporting and mandatory reporter training. The subcommittee attempted to gather information from all 50 states by contacting the State's in-charge entity. Information was gathered through websites, email contact and phone.

A summary of the data collected includes:

- All states have mandatory reporter laws but not all states have mandatory reporter training.
- The majority of states have one agency responsible for MRT.
- At least eighteen states offer online training only.
- There is variability in how often MRT is required.
- Most states have no central database of whether a MR has taken the required MRT.

Conclusion

The Iowa Professional Society on the Abuse of Children has established the following positions:

1. Iowa should have only one high-quality curriculum prepared by experts in the field of child abuse for all Mandatory Reporter Training (MRT). This curriculum should be available as an online course and should be utilized for all in-person trainings.

2. Mandatory Reporters (MRs) should be provided with legislative and other updates as they become available.
3. The curriculum should have a method of measuring a MR's knowledge to ensure knowledge is retained and the training is effective.
4. Mandatory Reporter Training should be free to all of Iowa's Mandatory Reporters.

When Mandatory Reporters do not report suspected child abuse, the outcome can be devastating for a child. One reason Mandatory Reporters fail to report is lack of adequate education. If Iowa had one Mandatory Reporter Curriculum for all Mandatory Reporters, this could ensure that the program content is standardized to a high quality and otherwise appropriate level. All updates in legislation, Iowa Code or other changes could be posted online in a timely manner. An improved training design would include assessing the knowledge of the Mandatory Reporter. Once established, an online course could be free and readily accessible to all Mandatory Reporters.

The Iowa Code suitably covers the topic of Mandatory Reporters of child abuse and their required training. The work of IAPSAC has revealed areas where improvements can be made that will join the Code's good foundation with actions that will adequately equip Iowa's Mandatory Reporters. Mandatory Reporters are Iowa children's vital first line for prevention and identification of abuse. The Iowa Professional Society on the Abuse of Children hopes to inform, concern and ultimately inspire key parties to unite in action to incorporate the proposals presented here.

References

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State of Iowa Legislative Code website: <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/law/iowaCode>

State of South Dakota Department of Social Services website:
<http://dss.sd.gov/childprotection/>

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