

MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAMS

Q: What is a multidisciplinary team?

A: A multidisciplinary team is an interagency investigative team comprised of professionals from the key disciplines involved in investigating and prosecuting child abuse cases in a particular jurisdiction. These professionals are, by written agreement, able to coordinate their work on a particular case sharing all necessary information in order to produce a more thorough and coordinated investigation.

Q: Who is involved in a multidisciplinary team?

A: Members of a multidisciplinary team include, at a minimum, specially trained staff from the local Child Protective Services agency, Prosecuting Attorney's Office, Police Departments and health care facilities. Multidisciplinary teams may also include professionals from other disciplines, including victim advocacy, mental health and probation.

Q: What do these teams do?

A: Multidisciplinary teams investigate cases of child abuse in a coordinated, planned manner. Team members work together from the initial outcry until a case reaches its final disposition. Team members may jointly conduct the initial forensic interview of the alleged victim and non-offending parent and continue to coordinate their efforts through the investigation and prosecution of the case. Key elements of the multidisciplinary approach include joint interviews and case review meetings.

Q: What is a joint interview?

A: A joint interview is an investigative interview generally conducted jointly by a member of the police department and a member of the child protective services agency. The professionals decide together who will conduct the interview, what particular information is needed by each agency, and who will take notes. A multidisciplinary team may utilize an interview specialist to conduct forensic interview for the team. Information from the forensic interview should be shared with the other team members. Often, these interviews are conducted in locations that have two-way mirrors or closed circuit television which allows team members to observe the interview. Joint interviewing results in more thorough information and in fewer interviews for the child victim.

Q: What are case review meetings?

A: Case review meetings are scheduled on a regular basis to allow team members to discuss cases currently under investigation. These meetings enable police, CPS workers, medical providers, staff from the prosecuting attorney's office and others to collaborate on cases and ensures that all professionals involved in a case have access to the information they need to make the best possible decisions for the children and families they serve.

Q: What kinds of cases are seen by multidisciplinary teams (MDTs)?

A: This varies in different localities. The multidisciplinary approach was first developed for use in sexual abuse cases. Many teams now use this approach to investigate felony level physical abuse cases as well. Some localities are beginning to use this approach for all cases of family violence.

Q: How do MDTs help child victims?

A: By using trained investigators, experienced with interagency needs and requirements, the quality of the investigative interview is improved. A coordinated intervention process reduces the number of investigative interviews of the alleged victim. This decreases the amount of system-imposed trauma for the child and their non-offending parents. Children are less likely to recant if they feel supported by the adults involved in the investigative process. Additionally, non-offending parents are kept better informed about the progress of the case and are, therefore, better able to support their child.

Q: How do MDTs promote better investigations?

A: When all professionals involved in a case are working together, each professional has the information that he or she needs to make the best possible decision for the child. In some communities, the early, coordinated intervention by law enforcement and child protective services leads to increased rates of confession and prosecution. Further, having the support of colleagues may reduce staff burn-out.

Q: Why form a multidisciplinary team?

A: Child abuse, particularly child sexual abuse, is a complex issue and a difficult crime to solve. No one discipline can handle it alone. By pooling expertise and working together professionals can be more effective in protecting children and prosecuting offenders.

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