

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION DIVISION 37'S GUIDE TO ADVOCACY: LEGISLATIVE SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES



**APA DIVISION 37: SOCIETY FOR CHILD AND FAMILY
POLICY AND PRACTICE**

APA DIVISION 37: SECTION ON CHILD MALTREATMENT



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INTRODUCTION

The American Psychological Association's (APA) Division 37 (Society for Child and Family Policy and Practice) and Division 37's Section on Child Maltreatment, in cooperation with the APA Government Relations Office (GRO), is excited to provide you with this document, *American Psychological Association Division 37's Guide to Advocacy: Legislative Support for Children, Youth, and Families*.

This guidebook and the other materials on this CD have been produced by the Task Force for Child and Family Advocacy Training. The goal of our group is to build advocacy capacity for the application of psychological knowledge to public policy affecting children, youth, and families.

Working in partnership with APA State Psychological Associations and other organizations, we can build on existing knowledge and tap existing advocacy expertise. By using these materials and tools, any psychologist interested in working to improve the lives of children and their families can receive training. We hope, in turn, that these individuals will share this information with others. This train-the-trainer approach will allow us to expand the grassroots advocacy base exponentially.

Our intent in creating this CD was not to "reinvent the wheel." There are many resources currently available through APA, governmental, and other groups. After providing the basics, we will point you to resources that provide the information that we have found to be helpful. Feel free to use this information as you see fit.

Armed with the skills and resources, each of us will be prepared to meet with federal representatives on their home turf, as well as state and local officials to advocate effectively for the needs of children, youth, and families.

WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

The American Heritage Dictionary defines advocacy as the “act of pleading or arguing in favor of something, such as a cause, idea or policy” (www.thefreedictionary.com.) The term advocate is derived from the Latin “ad” which means “to” and “vocare” which means “to call; one who pleads another’s cause.”

Many organizations provide their own definitions, generally focusing on the individual and delivery of services. Children at Risk defines advocacy as simply “speaking up” (www.childrenatrisk.org), following with “that’s legal any time, by anyone.” As another example, the National Foster Parent Association defines an educational advocate as someone who “evaluates children with disabilities and make recommendations about services, supports and special education programs” (www.nfpainc.org).

However, advocacy can also be defined with a much broader view. The Joint Commission on Mental Health of Children (1970) first defined the concept of *child advocacy* from this perspective:

The child deserves an advocate to represent him and his needs to the society in which he lives--an advocate who will insist that programs and services based on sound child development knowledge be available to every child as a public utility--the promotion of national, state, and community responsibility and initiative in developing comprehensive and systematic programs of prevention and treatment, in increasing the accountability of those who [ad]minister relevant programs, and in coordinating and organizing resources for supportive, effective and coordinated programs for our children and youth (p. 9).

Although the purpose of this guidebook is primarily to focus on legislative advocacy on behalf of children, youth, and families, we ask that you not lose sight of the numerous ways that you can advocate. We suggest that *advocacy can and must take place on an individual, community, state, federal, and global basis*.

The purpose of these efforts, we believe, is aptly described by Partners in Advocacy, United Kingdom -- *to create positive change in the lives of individuals to protect them from harm, insure inclusion in society, and allow for personal empowerment, as developmentally appropriate* (<http://www.partnersinadvocacy.org.uk/index.htm>; Paul Williams, personal communication, May 11, 2006).

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES: THE UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION OF PSYCHOLOGY



As psychologists, we are faced with problems every day that require the strength of a nation to solve. Poverty, hunger, homelessness, violence, and other traumas rip families apart and create difficulties not only in the present but often for generations to come.

As the APA Government Relations Office has noted, taking part in the political life of our country is a right and a privilege exercised by too few Americans. As professionals, and as human beings, we can no longer sit by idly and expect that our lawmakers will “do what is best.” It is our moral and ethical obligation to provide them with our perspective and knowledge founded in research to allow them to make informed decisions for their constituents, particularly children and youth who have no voice of their own.

THE HISTORY OF ADVOCACY FOR SOCIAL POLICY:

UNDERSTANDING THE BIG PICTURE*

HISTORICALLY, IT HAS BEEN DIFFICULT

FOR PSYCHOLOGISTS TO HAVE

SUBSTANTIVE INFLUENCE ON SOCIAL

POLICY.

You may be amazed to know that in any given legislative year as many as 10,000 bills are introduced in the U.S. Congress. At the state level, the numbers can also be daunting. For example, in Wisconsin for 2005, over 1,600 bills were being considered. Only a very small percentage (approximately 6% at the federal level) actually becomes law.

These laws govern every aspect of our lives, from communication to recreation, transportation to education, as well as the social programs for health and welfare for children and families.

Historically, it has been difficult for psychologists to have substantive influence on social policy. During the 1960s and early 1970s, some success was experienced. In the 1980s and 1990s, however, less supportive organizations have provided a steady stream of policy reports, statewide initiatives, books, grass-roots advocacy, and judicial rulings that have been the primary influence. Existing legislation and programs, such as the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), experience a continued, yearly, on-going battle just to maintain funding.

Significant new social policy affecting children and families, including health care reform, childcare initiatives, and economic support has been stalled. Included among the many causes for this lack of movement forward is that the United States has diluted accountability by shifting responsibility back and forth from the federal to state level. Currently, the trend is toward state level programs, but unfortunately the

* Information taken from the following sources:

Maton, K. I & Bishop-Josef, S. J. (2006). Psychological research, practice, and social policy: Potential pathways of influence, *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 37, 140-145.

Portwood, S.G. (2005, 2006), President's Column, Division 37, American Psychological Association, Section on Child Maltreatment Newsletter, Volume 10, Number 1 and Volume 11, Number 1.

majority of states are experiencing severe financial problems, resulting in *reduction* of social programs.

Psychologists have experienced many barriers to success in advocating for social policy, including:

- The timing of their efforts in regard to other issues,
- Lack of follow-through by interested parties,
- Inconclusive research findings,
- Lack of direct relevance of research efforts

Active and sustained public support is critical to ensure resources and services are provided to all children and families in need. *The prevention of child neglect and abuse is the responsibility of adults.* As a group, psychologists must make concerted efforts to be heard in order to make an impact.

Specifically, psychologists *must*

- **Join forces** with researchers from other disciplines and practitioners in the community and
- **Be more proactive** in communicating with policymakers.

**PSYCHOLOGISTS MUST JOIN FORCES
WITH RESEARCHERS FROM OTHER
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MAKERS.**



THE IMPORTANCE OF ADVOCACY AT FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL LEVELS

ADVOCACY AT

THE FEDERAL LEVEL

IS CRITICAL

BECAUSE LEGISLATION

PASSED BY CONGRESS

AFFECTS ALL STATES, CITIES,

AND COMMUNITIES.

Advocacy at the federal level is critical because legislation passed by Congress affects all states, cities, and communities. It is through legislation that federal programs and funding levels are established. For example, The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), passed in 1974, is federal legislation that provides grants to public and non-profit agencies to support the prevention of child abuse and the assessment and treatment of children suspected of being abused. In addition, this legislation provides funding for the investigation and prosecution of perpetrators. In over 30 years, it remains the sole federal program aimed specifically at child abuse prevention.

Funded by the Labor, Health, and Human Services, and the Education Appropriations bill, this legislation enables states to maintain and expand efforts to assist children. To date, full funding for the program has never been secured –actual funding has *always* fallen short of the amount authorized. This impacts *direct* services to children at the *community level*.

State legislation is equally important, not only because federal laws such as CAPTA, Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) must be implemented, but also because state legislative efforts have the potential to create innovative programs to meet more specific socioeconomic, cultural and geographical needs. In addition, state agencies, such as those that protect children from abuse, child and family welfare agencies and local advocacy groups play important roles that require our input.

At a community level, local police departments and school boards would benefit from psychologists' perspectives and research-based information.

APA ADVOCACY

APA GOVERNMENT RELATIONS OFFICE



The APA Government Relations Office (GRO) represents the largest and most visible national presence advocating for issues related to psychology.

The GRO is a liaison to Capitol Hill advising congressional decision-makers on a wide range of legislative and regulatory issues. In addition, the GRO maintains

contact in the federal agencies, working with agency staffs as they implement legislation and formulate regulations. Through the advocacy program, the GRO also maintains important connections between APA and other professional societies, organizations, and coalitions to advance common policy interests.

There are three divisions in the Government Relations Office: Science, Public Interest and Education Policy.

Learn more about the GRO by visiting:

<http://www.apa.org/ppo/>

APA ADVOCACY

GRO PUBLIC INTEREST POLICY UNIT



Increasing access to mental health care for women and their families

The APA Public Interest Policy Unit actively engages in shaping federal policy to promote psychology in the public interest, including issues involving children, youth, and families. This group is a part of the APA Public Interest Directorate, which supports and promotes efforts to apply the science and profession of psychology to the advancement of human welfare.

The major objectives of the directorate include the promotion of psychological knowledge to impact solutions to human injustice, promote equal opportunity, and foster empowerment for all segments of society. In addition, the group seeks to increase training and education opportunities to better understand the problems pertaining to groups experiencing discrimination, and

also support improving educational training opportunities for all persons.

Annie Toro, J.D., Associate Executive Director for Public Interest Policy Unit

currently provides overall direction for public interest policy initiatives. Ms. Toro is also responsible for child, youth, and family issues, including child mental health, child welfare, child health, child care, Head Start and Special Education.

Mary Campbell, Director, Children, Youth, and Families Office supports the work of the APA Committee on Children, Youth, and Families, and liaisons with interested divisions, state associations, other organizations, and federal agencies.

Learn more about the Public Interest Policy unit by visiting

<http://www.apa.org/ppo/pi/>.

APA ADVOCACY

APA GRO PUBLIC POLICY ADVOCACY NETWORK



APA's Public Policy Office administers the Public Policy Advocacy Network (PPAN) in collaboration with the Science, Education, and Public Interest Directorates, as well as the American Psychological Association of Graduate Students (APAGS). PPAN is an opportunity for grassroots advocacy participation.

This network offers a means for individual psychologists to learn about public interest initiatives. This includes providing them with timely information on legislative and regulatory issues of importance. PPAN sends e-mails to provide individual members with periodic legislative updates and calls-for-action.

Information updates are general announcements detailing the legislative activity surrounding a specific topic.

Action alerts are requests for members to take direct action usually in the form of contacting members of Congress to advocate on an issue or specific piece of legislation.

To learn more about PPAN, visit their website at <http://www.apa.org/ppo/ppan/>

Sign-up for e-mails at <http://www.apa.org/ppo/forms/joinppan.html>

APA ADVOCACY

DIVISION 37: SOCIETY FOR CHILD AND FAMILY POLICY AND PRACTICE

DIVISION 37: SECTION ON CHILD MALTREATMENT



APA Division 37 Society for Child and Family Policy and Practice is committed to the application of psychological knowledge to advocacy, service delivery, and public policies affecting children, youth, and families. This group's mission is to advance research, education, training, and practice through a multidisciplinary perspective. Division activities, which include published works, have focused on such topics as: divorce and custody, child abuse prevention, pediatric AIDS, drug-exposed infants, latchkey children, homelessness, and systems of care.

Division 37's Section on Child Maltreatment was established in 1994 to support and promote scientific inquiry, training, professional practice, and advocacy in the area of child maltreatment. This group is the only permanent organization within the APA specifically developed to address issues related to child abuse and neglect.

Learn more about Division 37 by visiting:
<http://www.apa.org/divisions/div37/homepage.html>

Learn more about the Section on Child Maltreatment by visiting:

<http://www.apa.org/divisions/div37/childmaltreatment/child.html>

APA ADVOCACY

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