



AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

WORKING GROUP ON INVESTIGATION OF

MEMORIES OF CHILDHOOD ABUSE

FINAL REPORT

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PREFACE

The American Psychological Association (APA) has long been concerned with the many issues raised by memories of childhood abuse and with the anguish that many individuals have experienced as a result. APA is in a unique position to assure that scientific knowledge and professional expertise inform future discourse on these issues and to alleviate the suffering of those affected by the consequences of memories of childhood abuse. It is imperative to stress that at no time should the controversies regarding adult recollections explored in this document be allowed to obscure the fact that child sexual abuse is a complex and pervasive problem in America, and one that has historically gone unacknowledged.

The APA Council of Representatives voted in February 1993 to establish a working group to review current scientific literature and identify future research and training needs regarding the evaluation of memories of childhood abuse. In March, 1993, members of the working group were named by the Board for the Advancement of Psychology in the Public Interest, in close consultation with the Boards of Professional and Scientific Affairs. The members of the working group are; Judith L. Alpert, Ph.D., Laura S. Brown, Ph.D., Stephen J. Ceci, Ph.D., Christine A. Courtois, Ph.D., Elizabeth F. Loftus, Ph.D., and Peter A. Ornstein, Ph.D.

The working group met August 7-8 and December 17-19, 1993. Members of the group felt that four months between meetings did not allow sufficient time to appropriately address the complex and significant issues in their charge. A June 17-19, 1994 meeting allowed the group to restructure the format of its final report to include reviews of both the trauma and memory literature, commentary on those reviews, and responses to the commentaries. The working group released an Interim Report, identifying significant points of agreement on November 11, 1994.

Drafts of the literature reviews and commentaries were reviewed at a December 16-18, 1994 meeting. A draft of the first six sections of the report was presented to the Board of Directors in June 1995 and significant revisions of those sections were completed in August. The concluding section, summarizing the points of agreement and disagreement in the body of the report and identifying responsible future actions, was completed in February 1996. The complete final report was presented to the APA Board of Directors on February 14, 1996.

The report of the Working Group on Investigation of Memories of Childhood Abuse is an important and thorough first step. It does not, nor should it, offer a "solution" to the "problem" of adult memories of childhood abuse. This report offers a clear and concrete delineation of the issues that must be faced, the knowledge that must be sought, and the differences that must be reconciled for the science and profession of psychology to attend responsibly to the dilemmas posed by adult memories of childhood abuse.

As this document unfolds, so does a spirit of heartfelt advocacy. While it may be argued that a less adversarial approach may have lead to a more pragmatic and immediately applicable document, it is clear that the perspectives advanced are rooted firmly in the literatures under review. This document will perform a great service if it leads to a widespread questioning of the divisive public discourse around this issue and reinforces the collaboration between psychological science and practice to the ultimate benefit of the public we are all committed to serve.

With this report the Working Group has discharged its responsibilities as set forth by Council. This report includes substantive reviews of the applicable literature on trauma and on memory, and clear recommendations for future research and training directions.