

# **Abuse in the Family**

## **An Introduction**



**Alan Kemp**

# ABUSE IN THE FAMILY: AN INTRODUCTION

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ALAN KEMP

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*This text is dedicated to anyone who has ever suffered abuse at the hands of someone in their family . . . and to each of you who wants to help. I would like to add a special dedication in memory of Judi Clark, a bright spirit, whose life ended before she could complete her training.*

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*Alan Kemp, MSW (University of Washington), is professor of Social Services/Mental Health and the director of the Social Service/Mental Health Program at Pierce College. He is a certified clinical social worker, marriage and family therapist, and mental health counselor who has had extensive experience with abuse recovery and in treating abuse in the family, especially child maltreatment and domestic violence. He is a Diplomate in Clinical Social Work (DCSW) with nearly 20 years of experience, including 5 years under contract with the United States Air Force.*

# PREFACE

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## **Why Do We Need an Introductory Text on Abuse in the Family?**

I don't think we can deny that family abuse, in one form or another, is now a major social concern. Over the last 35 years or so, both the public and members of the professional community have become increasingly interested in this issue. Attorney General Janet Reno asserts that it may be the leading contributor to most of today's social problems.

In addition to being a human service educator, I am also a clinician. My clinical experience has convinced me that understanding family maltreatment is vital to being competent at dealing with some of the most important real-life concerns of clients.

When I was in school preparing for my career in human services, I didn't get formal training on handling abuse issues. I got most of my training after I left school and when I was already in practice, usually through workshops, self-directed study, and professional supervision. Learning to handle abuse cases in the field is something like reading the repair manual after your car has broken down. Because this is how many clinicians learn, I've become convinced that we ought to start teaching prospective human service providers about family abuse issues before they start to practice.

When I began my college teaching career, one of the first courses I taught was a course dealing with family maltreatment. It made perfect sense to offer such a course, yet I soon learned that formal courses on the subject were something of a new thing. I also discovered that finding a textbook wasn't so easy. While there were a number of scholarly books dealing with one or more aspects of family maltreatment, I couldn't find anything that really seemed geared for the classroom.

## Who Is This Text For?

This book is written for students in a variety of disciplines, who need a comprehensive introduction to the subject of family maltreatment. I hope it will meet the need for a readable, yet instructive, text on the subject. It is intended to serve as an introduction, not as an exhaustive examination of all aspects of the field. There are a number of other professional and technical volumes that deal extensively with such specialized areas as intervention and treatment (many of these are included in the Suggested Reading sections located at the end of each chapter).

Since the course I regularly teach on the subject has no prerequisites, I don't assume that the reader already has a background in the social sciences, and I certainly don't assume the student has already been out in the field, though many have. I hope the text will appeal to a broad audience, especially those who want to become human service workers, social workers, teachers, counselors, therapists, psychologists, or nurses, though I also hope it will be a useful introduction to anyone who wants to know more about the subject. It is written in a style that might be appropriate for use in community college, university, and beginning-level graduate courses.

## Philosophy and Structure

Each major topic area will be looked at from an *ecological* or *systems* perspective. This means that we aren't interested in just single explanations but, rather, interacting explanations from a variety of levels: social and cultural, family, and individual. When this happens, a number of important questions seem to get raised, reminding us that the kind of issues we're dealing with are complex. What social and cultural influences are at play? How do family relationships influence maltreatment? What personality and individual factors are at work?

The family abuse domain is not a unified field of study, but is divided into a number of semiautonomous specialty areas: child physical abuse, child neglect, child emotional or psychological maltreatment, child sexual abuse, sexual offenders, domestic violence, and elder abuse. There seems to have been a tendency for professionals and researchers to focus their attention on one or more very specialized areas. Sometimes even within a particular specialty, such as child physical abuse, they might concentrate on just a small part of the issue. As a consequence, researchers and professionals sometimes carry out their work independently, unaware of what others are doing. By bringing each of the maltreatment topic areas together in one text, I hope to give students a more unified view.

The text is divided into eight chapters. The first chapter serves as a survey of the family abuse landscape. It includes an overview of the various forms of maltreatment but also introduces the systemic or ecological perspective adopted throughout the rest of the text. In this vein, the reader is oriented to the *macro-meso-micro* format, with which we explore the interacting levels of explanation. We will be examining broad social and cultural

influences, relationship factors, and individual characteristics in our effort to understand what happens in family maltreatment. This survey chapter also introduces the reader to some basic discussion about the social sciences, the scientific method, and how to interpret what we read when it comes to family maltreatment. Chapters 2 through 4 deal with child physical abuse, child psychological maltreatment and neglect, and child sexual abuse. Chapter 5 discusses intervention in child abuse cases, including investigation, risk assessment, court involvement, treatment, and other forms of intervention. In Chapter 6 we discuss sex offenders and also touch on society's attempts to deal with them. In Chapter 7 we cover the problem of domestic violence, and in our discussion we look at its definitions, possible causes (including society's attitudes about women), and some new (and, I think, exciting) research about batterers. We discuss steps that are being taken to help victims and things we can do to deal with perpetrators. In the final chapter, Chapter 8, we explore the often neglected issue of elder maltreatment. Here again, we explore its reasons, including society's attitudes about the elderly, and we look at what is being done to help solve the problem.

Studies and research are cited, and wherever possible we try to use that research as we test and explore various concepts and theories. Whenever appropriate, I also include clinical experiences, case examples, media reports, and other supplemental information to add relevance and enhance interest. These are usually highlighted in a box and placed near relevant text or discussion. Figures, charts, tables, and other aids to assist in understanding the data are also included whenever appropriate.

The reader will find that each chapter is structurally similar. Once you become familiar with the organization of one chapter, you'll find considerable consistency in each of the others. Each chapter contains a chapter summary at its conclusion. Since critical thinking has become an increasingly important concern, at the end of each chapter you will find a section titled "Legal and Ethical Concerns: Critical Thinking Questions." Much like the questioning of Socrates in ancient times, these questions are designed to encourage students to critically examine issues that raise significant moral and ethical questions. You will also find a review guide, suggested activities, and a few suggested readings at the conclusion of each chapter. Key terms and concepts are highlighted in bold type throughout the text. While descriptions and definitions accompany the terms and concepts in the discussion, you will also find a glossary at the end of each chapter.

## **A Few Personal Comments to Students**

Before turning to how to use this text, it may be appropriate to make a few comments of a more personal nature. Those of us working in human services do not do our work in a vacuum. We live in families too, and some of us may have been exposed to family abuse in one form or another. The kind of material presented here has a way of "kicking up" personal issues related to maltreatment that may have occurred in your own life. One of the reviewers of this text really brought this issue home. She commented that



over half of all students taking her courses are in various stages of dealing with maltreatment that they themselves have experienced in their own family spheres. I have found this to be true among students in my courses as well. If reading this material brings up issues for you, I will tell you that it may be better to grapple with this now, rather than bumping into it later, when you're already in the field. Working with abuse issues can be emotionally challenging for anyone, so be prepared to do some personal introspection and experience a certain amount of discomfort. If you get into major distress, seek professional assistance outside the classroom. Should you find yourself becoming particularly troubled by the material presented in this text, I strongly encourage you to consult a professional therapist. You may also want to notify your professor, and perhaps even consider taking the course at another time, if you suspect the distress you experience is unmanageable.

In addition to monitoring any reactions you may have relating to prior maltreatment, I also hope you will look at the feelings and attitudes you have about each of the topics and themes. I want to challenge you to examine whatever feelings may surface, and use them as a way to learn more about your own attitudes and beliefs. Why do you think or feel as you do? How well do your old beliefs fit with the new information you are being exposed to? What are the implications of this new information? Does it change your preexisting attitudes? If so, why? If not, why not?

## **How to Use This Text**

I think it's always good to initially skim through the book and stop to take a close look at material that interests you. You may also want to skim the chapters before sitting down to read and study them. After completing a chapter, you may want to go back and give a second look at some of the topic areas. The chapter summaries may help you organize your thinking into a more coherent whole. As mentioned earlier, each chapter contains a series of legal and ethical questions which are designed to spark discussion and critical thinking. The review guide is designed to help you as you study and try to master the material. Initially, I suggest that you may want to use it to assess how much of the material you've learned. While terms are defined within the context of the discussion, you might want to use the glossary at the back of each chapter for quick reference. Since a text such as this cannot possibly deal with every issue related to family maltreatment, a number of other suggested readings are included at the end of each chapter. A number of these readings are considered classics, while others represent cutting-edge works in the field. Reading material and discussing it is one thing, but when it comes to really getting a grasp of the issues, sometimes the best way to do this is by doing something active and getting involved. As a way of providing you with some direction in this regard, I've included a number of suggested activities at the back of each chapter. While you probably don't have time to do them all, you may find that doing at least some of them will make the written material more meaningful.

## A Few Concluding Comments

One of the things I always like to tell my students is this: Any system of education is also a system of ignorance. Let me explain. Any time an educator prepares a lecture or writes a paper or chapter, we tell the student or reader what we think is important. There are many other things that might be important that we don't include. The danger of this is that important insights and ideas can be overlooked. While this text tries to be as comprehensive as space allows, there is much that isn't included. I encourage you to be a critical consumer of the concepts, positions, and information presented. By all means, go to the original sources and explore any issue that sparks your interest.

Finally, let me say that, regardless of whether or not you decide to purchase or adopt this text, I want to thank you for taking the time to consider it. If you have comments or questions, I'd be happy to hear from you.

## Acknowledgments

When I began to think about writing this acknowledgment, I came to realize just how many people I need to thank. Each in his or her own way has not only helped make this a better text but me a better person, and for this I am truly grateful.

First of all I need to say a special thank-you to my friend and colleague Dennis Morton. As a sociologist, not only has Dennis given me a broader perspective about human relationships, but he has taught me how important it is for a social scientist to have a big heart. He's done this by modeling it. Dennis has read drafts of the manuscript in various stages of development and has been there to bounce some of the big-picture ideas back and forth with me. I hate to confess this, but sometimes I even woke him up, forgetting that, unlike myself, teaching in the afternoon and evening, he has to get up very early every day to teach his first course. Dennis not only helped with his insights and encouragement, but when I was considering taking an extra year to write the text, he gave me the good counsel to finish it sooner rather than later. I'm glad this book is here now, and I can truly thank Dennis for the encouragement and support that helped make it happen.

I also want to say a special thank-you to my friend and colleague Pam Slyter, who served as another sounding board. When I needed a "writing break" or someone to talk to about one or another part of the manuscript, she was always willing to talk. She has always been clear and honest in the feedback she provides, something I really admire in her. My friends Arthur and Susan Tirotta were there when the book was just an idea. Not only have they given me their love and support along the way, but they've also read various drafts, providing important input. My friends Willis and Laurie McNabb have been a constant source of encouragement and support. My friend Elizabeth Warren is another person who's been there from the beginning—encouraging, listening, and supporting in intangible but critical ways. My friends John and Lynn Civitello helped me even before I began working on this project, as they knew and supported me when I worked on some

extremely challenging cases. It was this experience that gave me the seasoning I needed to become a more mature abuse-trauma therapist. In this regard I can't say enough about my many past and present clients who, through their lives, have demonstrated how to survive brilliantly and courageously despite incredible challenges.

I have many other friends, family members, colleagues, and students who have also helped me in important ways, and I'm sure they don't understand how, so I'll tell them. First of all, they were tolerant when I was caught up with the writing. When I got stretched too thin and even got a little cranky (okay, a lot cranky), they put up with me. They were understanding when I couldn't make it to one function or another because of my writing schedule. My students are always a source of inspiration, and at least two classes became guinea pigs when I "field-tested" various drafts of the manuscript. I want to thank my former division chair, Sam Samuelson, as well as my current division chair, Karen Colleran, each of whom has encouraged me at various times. The people in my own department also deserve some special thanks, especially my assistant, Clemintene Benjamin, who is a very special person and who gives of herself so freely. The other faculty members in the Social Service/Mental Health program at Pierce College, Dinah Martin and Larry Ruiz, helped by reading portions of the manuscript at various stages and offering feedback guided by their own experience and wisdom. Dinah helped with the discussion about innovations in child welfare. Larry assisted with his perspective about domestic violence intervention as well as Native American culture. Economist and statistician Tom Phelps assisted with the discussion about correlation. Marty Lobdell offered important perspectives on the false memory/repressed memory debate. Teaching at a community college like Pierce can be a wonderful experience. There is a wealth of diversity and talent in such places. I also owe Pierce a debt of gratitude for giving me a chance at the greatest opportunity in the world: community college teaching.

If I completed this book and didn't thank a special class of people—librarians—I wouldn't feel right. In a way they're almost like a staff that someone else has to pay. I want to especially thank Barb Perkins, librarian at Pierce College, who tracked down copies of the many books and journal articles I needed. When I was late returning things (which was often) she was persistent in her efforts to get them back, but always did so in a good-humored way. I asked a lot from Barb and I really appreciate how helpful she was. I am also indebted to the library at Pacific Lutheran University, which made its electronic databases available to me. Sharon Brewer and all the staff of the library at Western State Hospital in historic Ft. Steilacoom, Washington, also deserve special kudos. They were always most welcoming. They provide a little-known service in an out-of-the-way gold mine of a library.

I have many other friends and colleagues, each of whom has taught me something important. One lesson I appreciate most of all is the value of diversity. My colleague Dale McGinnis, who has now stepped over into the other world, was an especially good teacher in this regard. I don't think I would have the appreciation for culture that I now have had it not been for

Dale's understanding, humor, wit, and genius for teaching. By sitting at his feet, I learned what it means to be a "real teacher." I also want to thank April West-Baker, director of our Title III Native American Program, who encouraged me to include discussion about culture when it came to the subject of child physical maltreatment. Anthropologist Lynn Stagg helped me with a better understanding of the material about Iroquois culture, which I included in the survey chapter. I also want to thank Michelle Andreas, Mike Avey, and Dr. Boatamo Mosupyoe for being my colleagues and for sharing their insights about human behavior and multiculturalism.

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I also want to thank Lisa Gebo, my editor at Brooks/Cole Publishing Company. Lisa became more like a partner than a mere editor. Right now, I can hear her saying something like, "I don't deserve the credit." She does deserve the credit. Her spirit and enthusiasm for this project have meant a lot, and I can't say enough about what a nice experience it was to have this kind of partnership. The rest of the staff at Brooks/Cole has been great, too. Just to mention a few, I want to thank Amelia Keeney, the Brooks/Cole representative in my area; Lisa Gebo's assistants, Lisa Blanton and Susan Carlson; and Cat Collins, my permissions editor. They've all been a big help, as have the staff at Ex Libris for shepherding the project through production; Nancy Benedict for the crisp, open design, and Jennifer McClain for her thorough editing of the manuscript.

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Finally, dear reader, I want to thank you. Were it not for you, this book would not exist. I hope you find it a useful tool.

Alan Kemp  
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Tacoma, Washington

# CONTENTS

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## CHAPTER 1

### Survey of the Family Abuse Landscape

1

Family Abuse as a Matter of Public Concern	2
Family Abuse as a Focus of Professional Attention	2
Defining Abuses	5
Considering Basic Human Needs	6
Fuzzy Lines Between Types of Abuse	8
Continuums of Abuse	8
A Continuum in Child Sex Abuse Cases	10
Family Abuse Spillover	10
Using Social Science Methods to Study Abuse in the Family	11
Social Science and Scientific Method	11
Correlational Studies	12
Descriptive and Inferential Statistics	13
Some Key Research Issues	13
Official Reports and Survey Data	14
Confusion and Misuse of Research Data	14
The Need for a Conceptual Framework	15
Systems or Ecological Approaches	15
A Systems-Oriented Model: General Systems Theory	16

A Pioneering Ecological Model	18
The Ecological Framework Adopted in This Text	19
A Big Picture Look at Family Maltreatment: The Macro Level	19
Family and Small Group Influences: The Meso Level	23
Individualistic Explanations: The Micro Level	28
Relationships Between Forms of Abuse	30
Chapter Summary	31
Legal and Ethical Concerns: Critical Thinking Questions	32
Suggested Activities	33
Review Guide	33
Suggested Reading	35
Chapter Glossary	35

## CHAPTER 2

### Child Physical Abuse

39

Social and Historical Context	41
Defining the Problem	43
Intent and Result	43
Considering Culture when Defining Abuse	44
Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1974	44
Toward a Working Definition	45
Continuum of Abuse	46
Overview of Major Types of Injuries	47
Psychological Impacts	49
General Psychological Impact of All Types of Child Abuse	50
Psychological Impact Specific to Child Physical Abuse	50
The Developmental Factor	51
Intergenerational Transmission: The Violence-Begets-Violence Theory	52
A Systems or Ecological Approach to Understanding Risk and Resiliency Factors	56
Risk Factors	56
A Blending of Factors	61
Resiliency or Protective Factors	62
A Special Category of Child Physical Abuse: Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy	63

Chapter Summary	63
Legal and Ethical Concerns: Critical Thinking Questions	65
Suggested Activities	66
Review Guide	66
Suggested Reading	68
Chapter Glossary	68

## CHAPTER 3

### Child Psychological Maltreatment and Child Neglect

70

Child Psychological Maltreatment	71
What Is Psychological Maltreatment?	72
Controversies	73
Definitions	74
What Do We Need to Know About Psychological Maltreatment?	77
Basic Human Needs and Psychological Maltreatment	77
Human Development and Psychological Maltreatment	78
Research on the Impact of Psychological Maltreatment	81
Explanations of Causes and Risk Factors	85
Resiliency: Protective Factors	90
Child Neglect	92
Neglect of Neglect	92
The Serious Nature of Child Neglect	93
Some Possible Causes for the Inattention to the Problem	93
Social Costs of Neglecting Neglect	94
Definitions and Categories of Neglect	95
Failure to Thrive Syndrome (FTT): A Special Category	96
Explanations of Causes and Risk Factors	97
Resiliency: Protective Factors	100
Chapter Summary	101
Legal and Ethical Concerns: Critical Thinking Questions	102
Suggested Activities	103
Review Guide	103
Suggested Reading	105
Chapter Glossary	106

---

## CHAPTER 4

### Child Sexual Abuse

109

- The Problem 110
  - Professional and Societal Neglect of the Issue 111
  - Rediscovering Child Sexual Abuse 112
  - How Big Is the Problem 113
- The Victims 118
  - Basic Information about Victimization 118
  - Impact of Child Sexual Abuse On Victims 121
  - Indicators of Abuse 124
- Models of Victimology and Emerging Trends 125
  - The Medical Model 125
  - Psychiatric Diagnosis 126
  - Diagnostic Labeling and Child Sexual Abuse 129
  - The Four-Factor Traumagenic Model 130
  - Abuse-Related Accommodation: An Emerging Model 132
  - Current State of the Art in Victimology 135
- Chapter Summary 136
  - Legal and Ethical Concerns: Critical Thinking Questions 136
  - Suggested Activities 137
  - Review Guide 138
  - Suggested Reading 138
  - Chapter Glossary 139

---

## CHAPTER 5

### Child Maltreatment:

#### Investigation, the Courts, and Intervention

143

- Reporting Suspected Child Maltreatment 144
- Child Protective Services Investigation and Interviewing Procedures 145
  - Validated Interviewing Procedures 146
  - The Issue of Multiple Interviews 148
  - Videotaping Interviews 148
  - The Use of Anatomically Detailed Dolls 149
  - Classic Work on Investigatory Interviewing 150



Risk Assessment	151
Initial Intervention by CPS	152
Juvenile Civil Court Action—Dependency Proceedings	153
Social Service Intervention	156
Child Abuse and Criminal Proceedings	157
Coordinated Response and Law Enforcement Investigation	158
Prosecution of Criminal Cases	159
Testimony in Criminal Cases	160
Sentencing	165
False Memory/Repressed Memory Controversy	165
Problems, Issues, and Trends in Intervention	168
Traditional Interventions	168
State-Funded Care: Problems and Issues	168
The Family Preservation/Child Protection Controversy	169
An Overview of Intervention Approaches	172
Chapter Summary	178
Legal and Ethical Concerns: Critical Thinking Questions	179
Suggested Activities	180
Review Guide	181
Suggested Reading	183
Chapter Glossary	184

---

## CHAPTER 6

### Sexual Offenders

188

Types of Offenders	190
Psychiatric Diagnosis and Sexual Offenders	192
Profile Models	193
The Fixated-Regressed Profile Model	193
The Situational-Preferential Profile Model	195
The Four-Factor Offender Model	196
The Addiction Model	198
A Special Class of Offenders: Children and Adolescents	200
Concluding Comments About Sexual Offenders	203