

## **The Role of the Forensic Expert in Cases Involving Intrafamilial Child Sexual Abuse Allegations**

Deirde D'Orazio, PhD  
Susan Napolitano, PhD

### **Level**

Intro/Intermediate

### **Track**

Sex Offender/Juvenile

### **CE**

CPA/BBS/BRN/CJER

### **Bio**

**Deirdre D'Orazio, PhD** is a clinical and forensic psychologist in state service and private practice. She is employed by the California Department of State Hospitals where she has held a variety of positions over the past twenty-two years servicing forensically committed individuals with sexual offenses, including as director of the sexual offense treatment program and evaluation services at DSH-C; SVP-evaluator, and currently with CONREP Operations in the Community Forensic Partnership Division. She is a member of the California Sex Offender Management Board. She serves on the leadership board, Adult Clinical Committee, Forum editorial board, and co-chair of the Secondary Prevention Workgroup for the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers, where she holds the designation of fellow. Deirdre is a board member of the Sexual Offender Civil Commitment Network. She is also a recipient of the Fay Honey Knopp award by the California Coalition on Sexual Offending for positive and sustained contributions to the field of sexual offending intervention. Deirdre has publications, professional trainings, media interviews and research in the areas of sexual offense risk assessment, paraphilic disorders, best practices in sexual offense specific treatment, program development and evaluation, and professional ethics and supervision. She has provided evaluations, expert witness testimony and direct treatment services for more than 1,800 individuals that have perpetrated or been harmed by violent or sexual crimes. She holds psychologist licenses in California, Minnesota, and North Dakota and is a certified trainer for multiple risk assessment tools: Static 99R, Stable and Acute 2007, SRA-FV.

**Susan Napolitano, PhD** is a clinical and forensic psychologist. As a Sexually Violent Predator Evaluator with the Department of State Hospitals, she conducts risk assessments of individuals convicted of sexually violent offenses. In her private practice she has treated and evaluated victims of sexual violence for over 30 years. As an expert, Susan is routinely retained to review child forensic interviews and assess to the appropriateness of interview techniques as well as the veracity of sexual abuse claims. She has testified in over 100 cases involving sexual abuse allegations and child custody. Susan earned her Ph.D. in 1991 followed by two years post-doctoral training in child and adolescent psychology. She received training in child forensic interviews from the Child Abuse Training and Technical Assistance center and was a Child

Forensic Interview Specialist with the Madera Child Sexual Abuse Assault Response Team from 2006 through 2010.

### **Narrative**

Forensic mental health experts in the field of sexual offense intervention are often called upon to provide professional opinions in a broad range of legal matters involving sexual abuse. This workshop focuses on the role of the forensic expert in cases involving intrafamilial sexual abuse disclosures made by a child when the legal circumstance precludes the expert from interviewing the child. Providing expert opinions involving a child's sexual abuse disclosure, often involving veracity, is common in juvenile, dependency, and family courts, as well as in administrative law proceedings and criminal and civil legal matters. Attendees will be educated about the types of referral questions, strategies for working with attorneys, ethical challenges and professional practices for the forensic expert involved in these types of cases. The workshop will discuss characteristics of true and false sexual abuse allegations including the influence of age, memory and other developmental characteristics on sexual abuse disclosures by children. The workshop will offer an analytical approach to assessing investigation reports (e.g., law enforcement and child welfare reports, sworn testimony) and interview protocols, techniques and video recorded and/or transcripts of child forensic interviews. Attendees will become familiarized with a variety of research and professional constructs involving this topic including child abuse accommodation syndrome, parental alienation and estrangement, family reunification, grooming, risk of sexual abuse, safety planning, and sexual abuse dynamics.

### **Learning Objectives**

1. List three types of referral questions to forensic experts involving cases where minors disclose child sexual abuse perpetrated by a family member
2. Describe two sexual abuse related dynamics that result in victims submitting to abuse, returning willingly and failing to tell others about the abuse
3. Describe three aspects of child development and memory, interview content and style and situations with increased likelihood of false or inaccurate reports of abuse
4. Describe three recommended professional practices and methods for ethically and effectively communicating with attorneys regarding matters involving child allegations of sexual abuse by a family member.