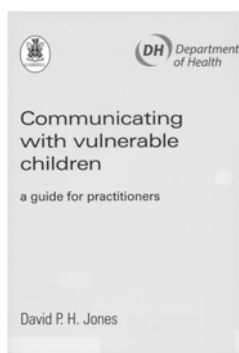


Sensitive communication with kids



Communicating with vulnerable children:
A guide for practitioners. David P H Jones.
London: Gaskell, 2003 (xvi + 188 pp, \$72.00).
ISBN 1 901242 91 9.

DAVID JONES IS WELL RECOGNISED for his research into the reliability of child testimony. This text provides a primer on good professional practice for interviewing children, based on current scientific evidence.

This is an essential area of competence for the ever-increasing range of professionals working with children who have experienced adversity or abuse. This book provides a comprehensive and well-organised summary of the area, and is relevant to all those who may communicate with vulnerable children, including professionals from health, education, welfare and the law. It describes the process of enabling children to communicate freely and honestly, and to impart reliable and accurate information. The book is based on relevant research and clinical experience. As well, it has been carefully edited by an advisory board from the Department of Health and the Family Division of the High Court of Justice in the United Kingdom, with the aim of improving practice and reducing the amount of malpractice in communication with children.

The first section covers the knowledge base of influences on childhood communication and interviewing style. It includes developmental limitations and considerations, especially regarding memory and language, and the influence of social context, including disability and culture. Childhood reliability in providing information is a small, though important, part of the problem of "erroneous concerns" in the system of child protection and notification, and the chapter about these issues helps refocus on the practitioner's responsibility for unreliability.

The second section guides practice at the different stages of communication, including response to first concerns, initial assessment and in-depth interviews. It also contains helpful chapters on the problems of using communication aids such as anatomically correct dolls, and advice on coping for parents.

Medicolegal sensitivity means that this book is not always light reading, and more case examples and diagrams would help improve accessibility. While full of useful details for even the most experienced clinicians, problems of development and mental health require more knowledge and expertise than is provided here.

On the whole, a wide range of detailed information and practical advice is clearly presented, and we would recommend this as a comprehensive and commonsense introductory text for all those who understand children, and essential reading for those who don't.

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