

SPECIAL  
POINTS OF  
INTEREST:

- Several organizations have been working together to develop a multi-tiered credentialing proposal.
- The majority of respondents support credentialing.
- There are pros and cons associated with credentialing forensic interviewers.
- Several options are being addressed: basic, intermediate, advanced, and Diplomate.
- Many forensic interviewers believe the field is ready to take the next step in developing forensic interviewing as a profession.



# APSAC ALERT

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## Credentialing Forensic Interviewers

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### Introduction

Leaders from APSAC and the National Child Protection Training Center (NCPTC) and the National Association of Certified Child Forensic Interviewers (NACCFI) have been working together to develop a multi-tiered credentialing proposal that recognizes basic standards for the field but also allows forensic interviewers to grow professionally. This summary provides an outline of a multi-tiered credentialing process, summarizes responses from front-line professionals, offers some thoughts on the benefits of a credentialing process, and responds to some of the concerns raised by several national leaders as well as front-line professionals. For the full article and references, please see the *APSAC Advisor*, Summer 2011.

### Basic forensic interviewing credential

To create uniformity in the field, the basic credential should be compatible with the forensic interviewing credentials currently in place for Children's Advocacy Centers (CAC) accredited by the National Children's Alliance (NCA). NCA requires that

forensic interviewers working at a CAC successfully complete 40 hours of state or nationally recognized forensic interview training or, at the very least, document satisfactory completion of competency-based child abuse forensic interview training that includes child development. NACCFI proposes a compatible standard for all forensic interviewers, whether or not they conduct their work in a CAC. In addition, all interviewers must adhere to an ethical code developed for the field.

### Intermediate forensic interviewing credential

In addition to the completion of a state or nationally recognized forensic interviewing course, a forensic interviewer applying for this credential must complete an additional 40 hours of advanced course work on forensic interviewing, have conducted at least 25 forensic interviews, and have participated in at least one peer review process in which one or more of the applicants' interviews were critiqued. The forensic interviewer must again sign an acknowledgment of ethical guidelines pertaining to this work and abide by these guidelines. Finally, the interviewer must take and com-

plete a nationally accepted examination documenting that the interviewer has acquired basic knowledge relevant to forensic interviewing.

### Advanced forensic interviewing credential

In addition to the basic forensic interview training, an applicant for this credential must have completed a minimum of 80 hours of advanced course work on forensic interviewing, have conducted at least 100 forensic interviews, and participate in a quarterly peer review process. The forensic interviewer must again sign the acknowledgment pertaining to ethical standards.

### Diplomate in forensic interviewing

In addition to the completion of basic forensic interview training, an applicant for Diplomate status must have completed a minimum of 160 hours of advanced training in forensic interviewing. The applicant must have conducted a minimum of 500 forensic interviews and must document continued participation in a quarterly peer review process. The forensic interviewer must continue to acknowledge an understanding of and adherence to ethical guidelines. Finally, and

most important, the applicant must submit three transcripts or videotapes of forensic interviews conducted in at least three different years for blind review by an expert panel.

### **Input from Front-Line Professionals**

Seven hundred-twenty professionals fully responded to a survey NACCFI developed online through 2010. There were several important findings:

1. The vast majority of respondents were front-line professionals actively practicing as forensic interviewers, coming from all regions of the country from CACs, law enforcement agencies, and child protection agencies;
2. Forensic interviewers taking the survey had diverse levels of experience and educational backgrounds and most could meet basic or advanced credentialing standards pertaining to training;
3. The vast majority of respondents support credentialing and basic tenets of the credentialing process proposed by NACCFI and a large percentage of respondents supported the number of training hours and actual forensic interviews required for each of the four credentialing tiers.

### **The Case for the Credentialing of Forensic Interviewers**

Based on practice and research in the field, there appear to be at least ten strong arguments for moving in this direction:

1. In cases of child sexual abuse, the competence of forensic interviewers may be more important than the competence of any other member of the multidisciplinary team;
2. Credentialing will establish not only minimal standards for entry into the profession of forensic interviewing—but

also minimal continuing education standards for remaining in the profession;

3. Credentialing will not only assist in establishing minimal standards for entering or remaining in the field—but it will also assist in developing an ethical code for the profession;
4. Credentialing that includes the development of an ethical code may also assist in removing unethical practitioners from the field;
5. Credentialing will extend the minimal standards in place at CACs to all interviewers and will provide recognition for forensic interviewers who exceed minimal standards;
6. A credentialing association made up of practicing forensic interviewers will ensure that standards for the field are determined by those who actually do the work;
7. Credentialing may be helpful to the prosecutor in qualifying a forensic interviewer as an expert witness;
8. Credentialing may assist the prosecutor in limiting or excluding the testimony of defense experts;
9. Credentialing is as important to the children of tomorrow as it is to the children of today;
10. This is the generation ideally qualified to develop a credentialing process.

### **Concerns About Credentialing**

*Will a credentialing process hurt those forensic interviewers who cannot meet the standards?*

An initial tier of credentialing that is compatible with the existing NCA standards can be obtained by nearly every child protection professional in the United States. If the concern is that interviewers who fail to meet even the minimal standards set by the NCA will be attacked, this issue is already

upon us. Since the NCA standards are already in place, these standards can be used to attack forensic interviewers both in and outside of CACs who fail to receive quality forensic interview training, who fail to participate in peer review, or who otherwise fail to adhere to better practices in the field. Although we can and should do everything possible to expand training options for those who cannot currently take advantage of these opportunities, we should not be protective of those forensic interviewers who have these opportunities available to them but choose not to take advantage of them.

*For MDTs that have limited resources, is it not better to put money into training and peer review as opposed to a credentialing process? MDTs can and should put their dollars into high-quality forensic interview training and peer review. Having said this, teams that make this investment should be recognized for having put more resources into the growth of their forensic interviewers. Simply put, a team that sends its forensic interviewer to a two-hour workshop should not be placed in the same category as a team that has sent its forensic interviewer through hundreds of hours of basic and advanced training and that has participated in dozens of peer reviews. The organizations are committed to developing a credentialing process that does not unfairly burden front-line professionals.*

### **Conclusion**

In recent decades, forensic interviewing has dramatically improved in the United States. The growth of Child Advocacy Centers and the development of numerous national and state forensic interviewing courses incorporating pertinent research have made a significant difference in the quality of these interviews and in the



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**Enhancing the ability of professionals to respond to children and their families affected by abuse and violence.**

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The American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children is the leading national organization supporting professionals who serve children and families affected by child maltreatment and violence. As a multidisciplinary group of professionals, APSAC achieves its mission in a number of ways, most notably through expert training and education activities, policy leadership and collaboration, and consultation that emphasizes theoretically sound, evidence-based principles. Details and information about joining APSAC are available on the web at [www.apsac.org](http://www.apsac.org). Or, call 1.877.402.7722.

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lives of the children for whom this is all about. It is for this reason that many forensic interviewers believe the field is ready to

take the next step in developing forensic interviewing as a profession, complete with an ethical code and other standards for the

field. It is important to develop an infrastructure that will give these interviewers the opportunity to take this next step.

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