



## MEDIA CONTACT

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## **Alaska joins ChildFirst!**

In a true collaborative effort, Alaska's application to become a ChildFirst State has been approved by the National Child Protection Training Center (NCPTC). Although the Alaska Children's Alliance (ACA) is the lead agency on this project, it is a joint effort by the Department of Public Safety, the Department of Law, Office of Children's Services, UAA Child Welfare Academy and Child Advocacy Center staff and Multidisciplinary Team members. This nationally recognized program will train law enforcement and other child protection professionals to become Alaska ChildFirst faculty

ChildFirst is the forensic interview training program of NCPTC. Presented in collaboration with CornerHouse, this course is designed for investigative teams of law enforcement officers, social workers, prosecutors, child protection attorneys, and forensic interviewers. Students are taught the forensic interviewing protocol developed by CornerHouse. This protocol, entitled RATAAC®, has been specifically recognized and approved by a number of appellate courts. This training includes lecture and discussion, review of CornerHouse videotaped interviews, skill-building exercises and an interview practicum.

Alaska's rate of child sexual assault is six times the national average. Due to our vast and difficult terrain, law enforcement and child protection workers have many challenges in responding to child sexual abuse reports. The majority of our communities are located in areas with very limited access which is weather dependent. It is critical that there are trained child forensic interviewers throughout the state. The *ChildFirst* model was selected because it fits the culture and children of the state and has been proven to be more conducive to holding individuals accountable for the crimes they commit against children.

ChildFirst teaches students to apply the latest research to real-world situations. Through extensive workshops, students learn the psychological and legal aspects of forensic interviewing as well as a legally defensible protocol. Each student receives extensive homework assignments. These assignments reinforce students' knowledge of the pertinent literature regarding the dynamics of child abuse, linguistics, child development, and memory and suggestibility.

When those who commit crimes against children are not held accountable for their actions due to lack of evidence and disclosure from a child, through forensic interviewing, it can negatively affect the child and the perpetrator is free to molest other children. Through the *ChildFirst* RATAAC protocol, children from different cultures—no matter what their degree of readiness to disclose--have the opportunity to talk to a forensic interviewer at their own pace. The RATAAC protocol guidelines can be intertwined throughout the interview, but most importantly, the cultural aspect of Alaskan children is respected and this respect plays a major role in how the interview is conducted.

The ChildFirst state training is a 3 part process. During week one NCPTC conducts a full training hosted and observed by the chosen Alaska faculty members. In week two the Alaskan faculty will primarily teach all of the lectures and facilitate the exercises with NCPTC observing and providing feedback and encouragement. The last week will be taught entirely by the newly trained Alaskan faculty to earn the final NCPTC endorsement. At this point Alaska will join 19 other states and Japan in launching ChildFirst and will be able to continue to provide the course to meet the needs of our child abuse professionals. ChildFirst will continue to monitor the course, grade the tests and otherwise ensure compliance with the standard of excellence established by ChildFirst.