

Evaluating Juveniles' Adjudicative Competence: A Guide for Clinical Practice

By Thomas Grisso, PhD. Sarasota, FL: Professional Resource Press. 2005. 172 pp. \$18.95.

Reviewed by Lillian M. Tidler, MD

If you read this book, you will want it for a resource and reference. This guide for clinical practice also poses a variety of questions and discusses dilemmas that arise when addressing juveniles' adjudicative competence, which is an evolving area in psychiatry and the law. When the developmental perspective is considered in relation to competence abilities, the potential impact is broad, complex, and intricate. One disadvantage of the book is that there is an inverse relationship between the complexity of the topic and the amount of information devoted to it. Nevertheless, the topics covered are highly relevant, and the reference sections supply the reader with guidance as to where to search for additional information.

This 172-page instructional guide is designed for the use of "mental health professionals who evaluate adolescents' adjudicative competence," as noted by the author, Dr. Thomas Grisso, and is intended to accompany a condensed companion guide that was written for lawyers and judges. Dr. Grisso notes that this guide is written with the presumption that the reader has a background in child clinical development. In fact, he states, "The most basic theme of this guide is the need for a developmental perspective in forensic evaluations of youths. Simple transfer of concepts and methods used in adult forensic evaluations constitutes incompetent practice in evaluations for juvenile courts." As long as the reader of this instructional guide has the requisite background for appropriate interpretation and usage of the information presented, it will be most useful as a resource guide. Dr. Grisso warns the reader that this guide is not a primer on the developmental clinical perspective regarding children and adolescents that is needed for conducting forensic evaluations of children and adolescents:

First, the guide presumes that the clinician is qualified to perform *general clinical evaluations of children and adolescents*. According to the ethical standards of every mental health profession, this requires training and experience in developmental psychology, child psychiatry, or child and family social work, as well as the mental disorders of children and adolescents and special methods for assessing youths' abilities, traits, and disorders. The guide presumes this background, in that it does not provide a "primer" on developmental psychology or mental disorders of children and adolescents. The importance of child specialization cannot be overstated. For example, forensic mental health professionals who are highly experienced in performing forensic evaluations of adults in criminal court may not be qualified to perform similar evaluations of juveniles' competence to stand trial, unless they have the child clinical developmental training and experience to do so.

The reader without the requisite background of training and experience needed, as stated by Dr. Grisso, could oversimplify and misinterpret the information provided in the guide.

This guide is divided into four main parts accompanied by four appendices that provide forms and interview guides designed to be used by appropriately trained evaluators to structure the competency-to-stand-trial evaluation of child and adolescents.

Part I, "Fundamental Legal and Psychological Concepts," provides an effective and brief synopsis of some key points involved in the adjudicative competence in the juvenile justice process, including the importance of the developmental perspective and developmental characteristics relevant to adjudicative competence, with a brief overview and pertinent references regarding neurological, emotional, and psychosocial development. Information presented regarding research from the MacArthur Juvenile Adjudicative Competence Study (Grisso *et al.*, 2003) on the capacities of youths as trial defendants is succinct and informative. In this section, there is mention of developmental features of competence assessments for juveniles. As this area is one of the most salient aspects for the reader/evaluator, case vignettes and discussion would have made this section more interesting and useful.

Part II, "Preparing for the Evaluation," provides a useful outline for organizing the process of conducting the evaluation. Topics covered include informa-

tion related to determining the purpose of the evaluation, making contact with the attorney, planning the scope and method of the evaluation for the individual case, making contact with caretakers, and determining whether records exist that may provide relevant information for the evaluation. The related Appendix A provides forms that assist with documenting the different aspects of these topics.

Part III, "Data Collection," provides an informative discussion on the importance and relevance of data needed and how these are related to evaluating competence. The sections, "Obtaining a Developmental and Clinical History" and "Evaluating Developmental and Clinical Status," provided some useful highlights. However, for the reader who has not had training and experience in these areas, Part III should not be considered a guide for obtaining a clinically relevant or thorough developmental and clinical history/status of children and adolescents. Of key interest to the reader is the section, "Assessing Competency Abilities," and the Juvenile Adjudicative Competence Interview in the related appendix.

Part IV, "Interpretation," begins with the section, "Overview of Interpretive Objectives," and is followed by the section, "Formulating Opinions Related to Competency." These sections provide some interesting theoretical constructs to assist the evaluator in synthesizing the information and in formulating and conveying the opinions in a manner that is clear, relevant, and clinically meaningful. The limited examples regarding how aspects of mental disorders may specifically influence abilities related to competence to stand trial should be extremely interesting to the reader. The discussion of connecting the clinical aspect of the evaluation with the functional abilities related to competency is relevant and is enhanced by the few brief case examples that are provided. The section, "Formulating Remediation," provides a framework for conceptualizing how the competency deficits may or may not be amenable to different types of remediation. The final section, "Writing the Report," provides some guidance regarding possible outlines and some examples of written reports.

Clinicians with the requisite background should find this book to be of practical use in conducting evaluations of juveniles' adjudicative competence.

Forensic Neuropsychology Casebook

Edited by Robert L. Heilbrunner. New York: The Guilford Press. 2005. 362 pp. \$50.00.

Reviewed by E. V. Fortney, PhD

In the Preface to the *Forensic Neuropsychology Casebook*, Robert L. Heilbrunner reveals his motivation for editing a book about the experiences of neuropsychologists in the courtroom: like most psychologists, he enjoys a good story. His enthusiasm for using the science of psychology to carve windows into others' experiences, and to get as close to the truth of their stories as possible, is shared by the other contributors to the book. But what is particularly compelling about the text is not just the cases the writers describe, but the personalities of the writers themselves that breathe through the pages and bring this medico-legal science alive.

Each chapter in the book is written by a clinical neuropsychologist, who tells the story of his or her involvement in a forensic case from start to finish. Sections present, in turn, adult civil cases, pediatric civil cases, and criminal cases. The format of the chapters is fairly consistent: the referral, the background of the case and pertinent information about the patient, a review of records (often including a discussion of the process by which those records were obtained), the interview and testing, the formation of the opinion, communication with attorneys, the deposition, the trial, and a "Lessons Learned" section. The structure was employed flexibly enough to allow the writers to bring forward what they thought were the most salient points of their cases.

However, this relatively dry listing of the component parts becomes a skeleton for the creativity and the passion for science that the writers use to add flesh and blood to both the legal and the medical. Among the chapters, we meet one neuropsychologist who writes like a poet, quotes Oscar Wilde, and bares her soul, telling readers about a case where she was *not* the hero of the day, and why she thinks we should know about it. Another chapter introduces us to a neuropsychologist who at first blush comes across as rather arrogant, but who ultimately betrays his sensitivity through a thoughtful analysis of a murky and complex clinical subject, pain. Paul L. Craig sends us his missive from the edge, describing his perilous trip