

philosophy as myopic, opining that offenders are a heterogeneous group in need of more individualized treatment.

Although this book provides a broad review of scientific literature regarding sex offender risk evaluations, it provides little published data supporting SVP evaluation instruments or methodologies. In addition, the author incorrectly cites the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision regarding SVP law as *Hendricks v. Kansas*, instead of *Kansas v. Hendricks* (521 U.S. 346 (1997)). While the author's work is a partisan approach to the contentious matter of SVP evaluations, his lucid analysis displays the potential shortcomings of SVP evaluations. This book will be a useful text, however, for any mental health expert testifying in SVP commitment cases.

## **Deviant Peer Influences in Programs for Youth: Problems and Solutions (Duke Series in Child Development and Public Policy)**

Edited by Kenneth A. Dodge, Thomas J. Dishion, and Jennifer E. Lansford. New York: The Guilford Press, 2006. 462 pp. \$49.00 hard cover; \$26.00 soft cover.

Reviewed by Diane H. Schetky, MD

This provocative book describes what happens when delinquent or high-risk youth are grouped together for interventions that supposedly are designed to rectify their aberrant behavior. Segregation of troublesome and troubled youth from the mainstream has been institutional policy for years. The practice of grouping these youths together with their deviant peers in special education classes, mental health facilities, child welfare systems, and/or juvenile justice programs has been rationalized as a means of enhancing public safety. Also, group rehabilitation programs are less costly than are one-on-one interventions. In addition, removing high-risk youths from the mainstream enables teachers to focus on teaching instead of being sidetracked with disciplining students.

The editors have pulled together extensive psychological and other research that examines the effects of deviant peer influences on intervention programs for

youths. The book is the product of a multidisciplinary work group that included more than two dozen scholars who met regularly over three years to study the problem of deviant peer influences. In addition to reviewing the literature, the scholars conducted meta-analyses, visited programs, and deliberated about problems and solutions. The group amassed an impressive body of research and provided strong recommendations supported by their findings.

The book is divided into three sections. There is good use of cross-referencing, but there is a certain amount of repetition, which is to be expected in a book of such sweeping scope. Each chapter contains a summary of the salient points for readers who prefer not to review all of the research data.

In Part I, the pervasive practice of grouping high-risk youths in rehabilitation programs and the adverse outcomes are examined. Perspectives are offered through ecological, epidemiological, and developmental frameworks. The authors raise concerns about the possible iatrogenic effect of peer contagion on existing interventions for troubled youths.

Part II contains extensive reviews of research on how the presence of negative peer influences affects the rehabilitation of high-risk youth in a variety of settings and contexts. Chapters address outcomes associated with deviant peer influences in mental health care, education, juvenile justice and diversion programs, child welfare programs, community programs, street gangs, and neighborhood and housing programs. The authors conclude that many interventions, such as segregation or group therapy for delinquent offenders, harm the youths they were intended to help because of the adverse effects of peer contagion. For example, when high-risk and troubled youths are grouped together for activities, peer responses to deviant acts are overwhelmingly positive. Normative behaviors are usually punished by those same peers. Also, deviant youths in residential programs spend much of their time together unless they are in highly structured programs. In contrast, high-risk boys assigned to groups with nondeviant peers significantly decrease their rates of antisocial behavior.

Several researchers have looked at the relationship between group foster home placement and subsequent delinquency. These outcomes are summarized in the book. High-risk children with histories of abuse and disorganized attachment function better

in individual foster placements than in group settings. The authors state that close and consistent supervision by adults, effective discipline, adult mentorship, and separation from delinquent peers have been more effective treatments for severe antisocial behavior than has care in traditional group homes.

The authors cite data regarding school practices. Retained students are often viewed as failures and are 11 times more likely to drop out of school than are nonretained students. Also, retained students are 25 percent more likely to drop out of high school than are low-achieving but socially promoted students. In addition, youths who dropped out of high school are at much higher risk of committing crimes. The problems of emotionally disturbed (ED) students in special education programs are noted also. They are more likely to drop out of school: only 42 percent graduate. ED students are at higher risk of expulsion and most ED students have been arrested one or more times.

Part III introduces promising solutions and recommendations. There is a helpful table that describes which interventions work or do not work and in which setting(s). The authors advocate school-based prevention and prosocial programs. The well-documented impact of peer contagion compelled the authors to recommend against placing delinquent youth in group settings unless there is no other option. The authors stress that when public safety dictates that a youth must be placed away from home, it is critical to have a degree of structure in daily activities and an adequate staffing ratio. They further recommend that youths be placed in small family-type units with a high level of staff supervision. A conscious effort should be made to minimize contact between these youths and their deviant peers.

This book should be essential reading for anyone evaluating and/or treating minors, especially child forensic psychiatrists who are often in a position of recommending evidence-based dispositions, interventions, and treatment(s) to the court. It also makes compelling reading for forensic psychiatrists, as it provides insight into how criminal defendants got to their present circumstances. The results of research into current incarceration practices reported in the book raised my concern about the impact of deviant peers on inmates and to what extent it contributes to high recidivism rates. Policy makers and administrators of institutions who care for children should read the book, as policies often lag years behind research

data. While the recommendations are certainly more costly than the status quo, they are probably less costly than the current revolving-door experiences of youths and young adults in the juvenile and criminal justice systems.

## **Children of Divorce: A Practical Guide for Parents, Therapists, Attorneys, and Judges**

By William Bernet, MD, and Don R. Ash, JD, MJ. 2nd edition. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company, 2007. 189 pp. \$31.50.

Reviewed by Solange Margery, MD, and  
Stephen B. Billick, MD

William Bernet is a child and adolescent psychiatrist who has authored several publications about the clinical and legal particularities of divorce and custody cases, including "The Therapist's Role in Child Custody Disputes" (*J Am Acad Child Psychiatry* 22:180–3, 1983) and "Child Custody Evaluations" (*Child Adolesc Psychiatr Clin N Am* 11:781–804, 2002). The Honorable Don Ash has earned recognition for his expertise in divorce and child custody. His judicial research led the Tennessee legislature to ratify a Parenting Plan statute in 2001 (Tenn. Code Ann. §36-6-401 *et seq.*) The collected experiences of both experts are reflected in *Children of Divorce: A Practical Guide for Parents, Therapists, Attorneys, and Judges*.

The authors proffer practical advice and suggested parameters for people directly or indirectly involved in divorce and custody cases. The book contains descriptions of cases in which the best outcomes came from creative solutions that departed slightly from the usual guidelines. Case examples were collected from the authors' personal experiences, the news media, and case law, among other sources. Cases cited include those that have helped define custody guidelines as well as children's and parental rights.

The book consists of 21 chapters. In several of the chapters, the authors elaborate on problems that develop in the course of divorce and custody and on solutions to these problems. For example, the second chapter, "Fighting and the Children," reviews how divorcing couples fight over, through, and in front of