



Child Protection in America: Past, Present, and Future

John E. B. Myers

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Child abuse and neglect are intractable problems exacting a terrible toll on children and rending the very fabric of our society. What can be done to reduce the suffering? If there were simple solutions to abuse and neglect they would have been discovered long ago. There are no easy answers, but in this vivid history of child protection in America, John E.B. Myers introduces realistic policies that will reduce maltreatment and strengthen the system that protects our children.

Before it is possible to design viable improvements in today's system, it is necessary to understand how it evolved. The sweeping, beautifully written account of child protection in America traces its growth from colonial days to the present--from the rise and gradual disappearance of orphanages, the growth of foster care, the birth of organized child protection in 1874, and the rise of private societies to prevent cruelty, to the twentieth-century transition to government-operated child protection.

Myers goes on to describe the principal causes of child maltreatment, including intergenerational transmission of violence, poverty, substance abuse, cultural violence, excessive corporal punishment, sexual deviance, evolution, mental illness, and domestic violence. Once the causes of maltreatment are clear, it is possible to create solutions. Some of the proposals outlined have been in play for more than a century, while others are new. Policies to combat poverty, expand nurse home visiting programs, increase access to day care, strengthen a sense of community, outlaw corporal punishment, rethink our attitude toward alcohol, and lower the toxicity in popular culture are rooted in a deep understanding of the cycle of violence and challenge traditional ways of thinking.

Since it will never be possible to prevent all maltreatment, it is critical to strengthen the existing child protection system. Attainable reforms such as dealing with the lingering effects of racism in the child welfare, reworking funding mechanisms, refocusing leadership, creating a less adversarial system, strengthening foster care, and reinventing the juvenile court point to flaws in our system but demonstrate that progress is possible.

This provocative book will challenge all those concerned with children's welfare to move toward real solutions that will make life better for America's most vulnerable children.

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