

# **The Utah Association for Marriage and Family Therapy**

## **COERCIVE THERAPY TECHNIQUES POSITION STATEMENT**

February, 2003

As a result of tragic results that have been linked to controversial therapeutic techniques, attention has been focused on the appropriateness of a number of interventions that can be collectively called "coercive therapy techniques". These techniques have been used by a few therapists to treat Reactive Attachment Disorder, a rare childhood disorder distinguished by difficulty in establishing appropriate emotional attachments with adult caregivers. However, evidence suggests that these interventions present unnecessary risk and danger.

Consistent with other state and national mental health professional organizations, the Utah Association for Marriage and Family Therapy takes the position that any coercive therapy technique is a violation of the profession's Code of Ethics, which requires that marriage and family therapists respect the rights of clients and obligates them to use therapeutic treatments safely and appropriately.

This position is consistent with the Utah State Marriage and Family Therapy Licensing Act Rules. These rules define "unprofessional conduct" as including "physical contact with a client when there is a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the client resulting from the contact" (R156-60b-502-11).

Consistent with the AAMFT Code of Ethics and state regulations, the Utah Association for Marriage and Family Therapy maintains that therapists who use coercive techniques face potential sanctions from the Utah Marriage and Family Therapy Licensing Board and AAMFT's Ethics Committee.