

Utah Psychological Association
Coercive Treatment Techniques (including “Holding Therapy”)
OFFICIAL POSITION STATEMENT
Approved by UPA Board January 17, 2003

Recent attention has been given by the media and the community to a variety of practices described as “coercive therapy techniques.” These include practices such as prolonged restraint other than for the protection of the individual or others, prolonged noxious stimulation, interference with bodily functions such as vision and breathing, and the forced administration of substances such as water or other fluid (other than medication prescribed by an appropriately licensed professional). These coercive practices, typically employed with children and adolescents, have been described by such labels as holding therapy, attachment therapy, re-birthing, and rage therapy. Some therapists employ the same labels for noncoercive techniques and actually use other methods. The Utah Psychological Association, therefore, maintains that it is critical to refer to actual techniques, rather than the name given to them, to prevent misunderstanding. The phrase “coercive therapy techniques” accurately encompasses the intrusive and potentially abusive behaviors described above.

Despite multiple cases of injury and/or actual deaths of children treated with these so-called therapy techniques, a few therapists continue to advocate their use. The Utah Psychological Association, as well as a number of other professional organizations, maintains that there is **no scientific evidence** to support the effectiveness of such interventions. In addition, coercive therapy techniques are **contrary to most State and mental health facility regulations** that prohibit the use of physical intervention, except as required for the immediate protection of the individual or others (for example, the Utah Department of Human Services Policy and Resource Manual, Section 5-03, “Provider Code of Conduct”). The Utah Psychological Association also maintains that such techniques are **prohibited by the Utah State Psychologist Licensing Act Rules (R156-61-502)**. Finally, there is a strong clinical consensus that coercive therapy techniques are, in fact, **contraindicated and potentially dangerous**, constituting a form of physical and/or emotional child abuse.

The Utah Psychological Association, therefore, strongly opposes the use of coercive therapy techniques. Use of such techniques by a member of the UPA constitutes grounds for investigation by the organization’s Ethics Committee and for potential professional censure.

Utah State Psychologist Licensing Act Rules

R156-61-502. Unprofessional Conduct

“Unprofessional conduct” includes:

(12) physical contact with a client when there is a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the client resulting from the contact.