

Title: Observing Self-injurious Behavior

Author: Gerald P. Koocher and Patricia C. Keith-Spiegel, *Children, Ethics, and the Law: Professional Issues and Cases*, University of Nebraska Press, 1990.

Description: In order to get baseline data for an experimental study on self-injurious behavior in autistic children, participants were observed without intervention unless the child was engaging in behavior that would cause permanent injury. The authors present this case as an example of best practice.

Headings: Special Populations and Cultural Competence; Minors (children, adolescents); Mental health disorders, participants with (including addictive disorders and developmental disabilities); Observational; Risks and Benefits

Case Type: Illustrative

Observing Self-injurious Behavior

Investigators at a large state hospital facility designed an experimental technique to reduce the frequency of self-injurious behavior in autistic children. In order to assess the effectiveness of their experimental technique, it was necessary to gain information about each child's rate of self-injurious behavior. Each child was observed and videotaped individually for 1 hour without any intervention unless it was judged that the child was engaging in a behavior that would cause permanent injury. Instances and time sequences were recorded.