



# The Book of David: How Preserving Families Can Cost Children's Lives

*Richard J. Gelles*

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## **The Book of David: How Preserving Families Can Cost Children's Lives** Richard J. Gelles

Using the true story of a murdered child as a point of departure, a leading expert on family violence argues that society's first priority must be protecting children rather than preserving families. Richard Gelles was once one of the most widely published and vocal defenders of family preservation: the social policy of keeping troubled families together as a primary goal. He then ran into the true and tragic case of David Edwards, an infant who was murdered by his mother after falling through the chasms in the child welfare system. David's story convinced Gelles that the system must change. Nearly half the children who are killed by their parents each year are killed after they have come to the attention of child welfare agencies. These children must be protected by getting them out of harm's way. That means a radically new child welfare system must be developed. The first priority must be to protect children rather than preserve families. This hard-hitting book critically examines family preservation programs and argues that they do not work. Gelles goes beyond mere criticism of the child welfare system to suggest specific ways the system should be changed, such as eliminating mandatory reporting of abuse, giving better training to caseworkers, and separating the investigation of abuse from case management.

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