



One
broken heart
at a time

One broken heart at a time
One more innocent victim
of crime

I just want it to stop
Please don't call a cop
He said he would kill me
next time

I don't want to talk about that
I just want to sit and chat
If the truth could be known
I feel scared and alone
But, I'd rather you thought
I'm a brat

I can't trust you
You don't have a clue
You can't undo
What I've been through
You'll take their side
And feel satisfied
It just can't be true
They wouldn't do that to you
After all, they love you

Just wait until I'm all grown
I'll have my very own throne
And when I have a kid
I will always forbid
My family to visit my home.

Jackie Johnson

A Tragic Statistic

Sadly, Greene County and southwest Missouri lead the state in substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect. The Child Advocacy Center, which serves an 18-county area, consistently sees more children a year than any of the other 14 centers statewide.

"He said if I told anyone this was happening, that he would hunt me down and kill me."

Angela, 12 years old

"I know it happened on Father's Day because I didn't have a present for him so he said that could be my present to him."

Gabriel, 6 years old

"I was in the fourth grade. I got kinda scared because I didn't know what he was doing to my body. One time, when it was done, he reminded me not to tell . . . and then I 'pinky promised' that I wouldn't."

Emma, 9 years old

"Why do people keep hurting me?"

Will, 7 years old

"My adopted dad started touching me. When I told my mom, she didn't believe me. It went on for a while and then it got really scary. I decided to tell her again. She told me that if I told she'd give me up and I couldn't live there any more. And besides, no one would believe me anyway."

Shane, 13 years old

"He sees me crying. He sees me in pain and he just keeps doing it. And when he was gone (they took him away) he said, 'we'll be back together in the end, Marie, we will.' He says, 'just don't tell anybody and we'll be back together.' And that's why I didn't tell. He told me he loved me."

Marie, 11 years old



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One
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Because innocence is a precious thing.

The children who visit the Child Advocacy Center have endured a lot in their young lives — physical and sexual abuse; the witnessing of a crime; exploitation through the Internet and child pornography. These are the allegations that bring children to our house.

Reducing a Child's Pain

Before the Child Advocacy Center opened its doors in 1995, children had to endure even more trauma as a result of the criminal investigation that followed such allegations. In an effort to learn the facts of a case, a child was subjected to repeated interviews with well-meaning social, legal, medical and law enforcement agencies. Even worse, a child was questioned and examined in cold, clinical and even scary settings ~ emergency rooms, police stations and state agencies. While well intentioned, this process only added to the pain a child had to endure. Just as tragic, it seldom yielded the information needed to ensure safety or prosecute a case.

When an allegation of abuse occurs today, a child is brought to our wonderful, child-friendly house on Walnut Street. Inside our doors a child is greeted by delightful murals, a toy-filled reception area and professionals trained to work with the unique needs of each child. We provide two critical investigative services ~ Forensic Interviews and Sexual Assault Forensic Exams.

Forensic Interview

A Forensic Interview is an objective, non-leading and age-appropriate evidence-gathering process. It helps determine the facts of a case while limiting or even eliminating additional trauma to the child. The CAC has three interviewers who are trained in a research-based method called "Child First." The interview takes place in one of our two calming, age-appropriate interview rooms and is permanently recorded to reduce the times a child is interviewed.

Sexual Assault Forensic Exam

A Sexual Assault Forensic Exam begins with a head-to-toe, well-child examination and is conducted in one of southwest Missouri's most amazing examination rooms. All four walls and the ceiling teem with undersea creatures and unexpected images to delight and distract a child. The room is also equipped with a colposcope, a high-tech piece of equipment that can magnify and forensically-record physical evidence of abuse or neglect.

A Team Approach

Even though the investigative services take place at the CAC, an investigation still involves many individuals. Behind the scenes, members of a multidisciplinary team from law enforcement, Children's Division, the juvenile office and medical field observe each interview; discuss outcomes of the SAFE exam; share information; and determine a course of action that is in the best interest of the child.

The CAC serves 18 counties in southwest Missouri: Cedar, Christian, Dade, Dallas, Douglas, Greene, Hickory, Howell, Laclede, Oregon, Polk, Pulaski, Stone, St. Clair, Taney, Texas, Webster and Wright.

The CAC's youngest client was a badly-bruised 6-day-old.

Nearly 90 percent of the time, an abuser is a parent, stepparent, boy/girl-friend of parent, relative or family friend.

Approximately one-half of the children served by the CAC live in Greene County; the other half live throughout our service area.

The CAC's "average" client is a 6-year-old, Caucasian female.

Child Abuse Myths

Myth: Only strangers are abusers.

Fact: In approximately 88 percent of cases, the victim knows the offender, usually a relative, family member, family friend, babysitter or older friend of the child.

Myth: The majority of victims tell someone about the abuse.

Fact: Only one-third of all victims tell their parents or other adult for fear of being blamed, punished or accused of lying.

Myth: A child can say "stop" if he/she wants to.

Fact: Children seldom question adult behavior, having been taught to obey. They are coerced or forced into abusive situations with bribes, threats or abuse of authority.

Myth: Family sexual abuse only happens in low-income families.

Fact: Abuse crosses all classes of society. No racial, social or economic class is immune to abuse.

Myth: Men and women abuse children equally.

Fact: Current data indicates men are the perpetrators in the majority of cases. However, experts also believe female perpetrators are more common than first suspected.

Myth: Non-violent sexual behavior between a child and adult will not damage the child.

Fact: Nearly ALL victims will experience shame, guilt and anger and develop a poor self-image.



The poem on this bookmark was given to the Child Advocacy Center by Ms. Johnson after she attended our May 2008 dinner.