A close-up portrait of a young girl with dark hair and a yellow and blue shirt. The image is the background for the text.

The Children's Assessment Center

Helping Children and Families Recover from Abuse

“No one ever keeps a secret as well as a child.”

— Victor Hugo

EXPERTS IN THE TREATMENT OF CHILD ABUSE

The Mission of The Children’s Assessment Center is to provide a professional, compassionate and coordinated approach to the treatment of sexually abused children and their families and to serve as an advocate for all children in our community.

“The Children’s Assessment Center is a shining light of the 25th Congressional District. Harris County should be proud of the accomplishments of both the government and nonprofit entities that have come together to work collectively in the best interest of children.”

— Ken Bentsen, United States Congressman

“The Children’s Assessment Center was founded upon the goal of providing a compassionate and coordinated approach to treating sexually abused children through volunteerism, partnership and innovative collaboration. To this day, we remain committed to this vision, and will continue to ensure that no child will be without the necessary support to heal from the trauma of child sexual abuse.”

— Susan French, Co-Founder, 1st Board President of The CAC Foundation, and Chair of The CAC’s \$11 million Capital Campaign

“The Children’s Assessment Center represents an exciting achievement; a primary example of how the public and private sectors can work successfully for the betterment of children’s lives.”

— George W. Bush, Governor of Texas

“The CAC is truly fulfilling its mission in an effective way. A child that finds his or her way to The Center is one of the lucky ones.”

— Carroll Robertson Hochner, Board Member and Immediate Past President of The CAC Foundation

“The Children’s Assessment Center is a model for the nation. The partnership among state, county, city and nonprofit agencies creates comprehensive, effective and caring solutions for the needs of our most vulnerable children.”

— Robert Eckels, County Judge of Harris County

“The continuation of The Children’s Assessment Center’s program is vital to the young children in Harris County. Without their dedication and devotion, child sexual abuse victims would be without the necessary treatment and services to recover from their abuse and lead normal, healthy lives.”

— Anita Stude, Philanthropist and Board Member of The CAC Foundation

“The terrible physical and emotional pain that children endure as victims of sexual abuse is damaging enough. Too often and in too many places in this country, well-meaning people are literally crying out in frustration because the maze of uncoordinated programs and services victimizes these children. The Children’s Assessment Center, however, has been at the forefront of making a child’s journey not only more efficient, but also more child-friendly. You should be so grateful to have a place like this in the community.”

— Hillary Rodham Clinton, First Lady of the United States

Child sexual abuse is an issue that makes people extremely uncomfortable because we want to believe our children are safe and that we can protect them from child predators. We don't like to think about anyone harming innocent children. Sadly, however, many of our children *are* victims. When child sexual abuse remains undiscovered or untreated, it causes a lifetime of damage that scars children and destroys families, leaving offenders free to continue the abuse, and crippling future generations of our children.

Child sexual abuse is not a new phenomenon; however, as community awareness increases, more children are reporting being sexually abused. The Children's Assessment Center is responding to their outcries and helping a growing number of children each year. By educating people about prevention, intervention and treatment, we are addressing the devastating reality of child sexual abuse – and reclaiming a childhood for thousands of children in our community.

Consider the facts:

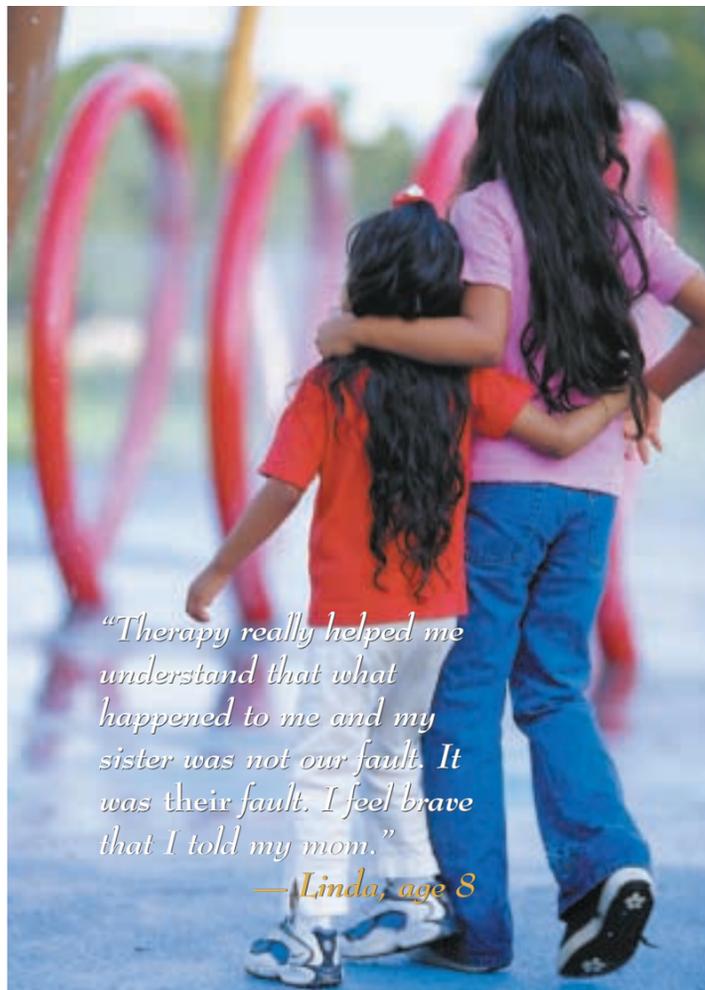
- According to the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, one out of five boys and one out of three girls will be sexually abused before the age of 18. Sexual abuse of boys is most often under reported and under treated.
- Men and women from all races, religions and socioeconomic classes commit sexual abuse.

Child Sexual Abuse is Real... Recovery Begins with the Truth

- Sexual abuse usually occurs with someone a child knows and trusts. The offender begins the process by befriending the child to win companionship.
- Sex offenders who molest children, or pedophiles, are often young, family-oriented and respected members of the community.
- In most cases, sexual abuse occurs over a period of time and escalates in frequency and intensity, rather than being a one-time occurrence.
- Reporting sexual abuse is only the first step of the healing process.
- Many children report only a piece of the abuse during their first disclosure and then tell more about the abuse as they feel safer.
- Most sexually abused children do not have physical evidence of their abuse, due to the body's ability to heal rapidly.
- In cases of incest, all family members need treatment for the child to heal, because sexual abuse affects relationships among all family members, not just the alleged offender and the child.
- According to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, about 25 percent of convicted sex offenders in Texas are residing in Harris County. However, these are only the known and supervised offenders.

*"I love going to The Center and playing in the BIG playroom."
— Jaymie, age 6*





“Therapy really helped me understand that what happened to me and my sister was not our fault. It was their fault. I feel brave that I told my mom.”

—Linda, age 8

Prior to the establishment of The Children’s Assessment Center (CAC), the system designed to protect and treat sexually abused children often made matters worse. Young girls and boys who had the courage to disclose were subjected to traumatic emergency room examinations and asked by strangers to repeat their stories an average of 8 to 15 times, a process that frightened and essentially victimized them over and over again. Responding to this situation, the Harris County Child Abuse Task Force, a collaborative entity comprised of social workers, physicians, attorneys, law enforcement officers and psychologists, set out to create an alternative to protect children and offer a seamless investigative, assessment and treatment process.

In 1991, with the support of Houston’s most influential community leaders, the necessary resources were assembled to establish The Children’s Assessment Center, a children’s advocacy center benefiting all child victims of sexual abuse. Today, The CAC is a testament to what can be accomplished when an entire community pulls together to achieve a common goal. Now, sexually abused children in Harris County are treated in a child-friendly environment, where professionals work together to protect their safety and security.

Located near the Texas Medical Center, this internationally respected advocacy program occupies a 56,000-square-foot facility, built primarily from donated funds. The CAC is the largest center of its kind in the United States and employs an extraordinarily effective, multi-disciplinary team approach.

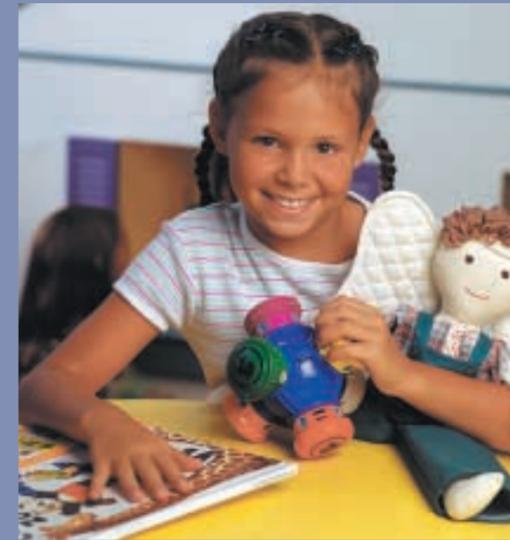
The CAC is dramatically altering the cycle of sexual

abuse occurring in Houston and Harris County through its services and community outreach efforts. The CAC’s programs are designed to promote the child’s complete well-being, thereby reducing the risk of continued abuse, and preventing the possibility of children becoming adult offenders.

“We focus entirely on the child’s needs, which makes all the difference as we work to protect and treat children and families. Our program is also invaluable to legal professionals, helping them prepare better cases for prosecution of offenders, and changing the child’s involvement in the criminal justice system,” says Ellen T. Cokinos, Founder and Executive Director

of The Children’s Assessment Center.

The CAC provides a refuge to children and their families – a safe place where they can recover from sexual abuse and the trauma and shame that often result from victimization.



Changing the Cycle of Abuse



The CAC’s multi-disciplinary team includes:

- Social workers for the referral and protection of children alleging abuse;
- Law enforcement officers skilled in working with abused children for reporting and investigation;
- Forensic interviewers for obtaining accurate, videotaped information;
- Medical doctors and nurses for specialized physical examinations and ongoing pediatric health-care services;
- Psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and therapists for therapy and psychological services;
- Lawyers and legal professionals for protection from and prosecution of offenders; and
- Volunteers for support and guidance of the child throughout the recovery process.



The Children's Assessment Center meets the physical and emotional needs of Harris County's sexually abused children ages birth to 18. Food and clothing, complete medical care and therapy are available to any child in need — 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The CAC employs bilingual interviewers and therapists, including those skilled in American Sign Language, to ensure that all abused children have access to its services. Additionally, The CAC assists local law enforcement with interviews or medical examinations of children who are victims of severe physical abuse, or who have witnessed trauma.



Life-Changing Results Through a Practical, Child-Centered Approach



*"I knew I could trust them to keep me safe."
— Monica, age 9*

Specialized Interviewing Program

Texas law mandates that all cases of child abuse and neglect must be reported to Children's Protective Services (CPS) or a law enforcement agency. Every child referred to The CAC by these agencies meets with a skilled professional who is specially trained to interview children in a non-threatening and non-leading manner. A videotape of this interview preserves the child's disclosure and demeanor, eliminating the need for additional interviews. This video is then confidentially shared with a limited number of individuals — namely attorneys and law enforcement officers. Because of the quality of the case preparation, most cases result in a plea of guilty by the defendant, avoiding the need for the child to appear in court.

Individual Assessment and Treatment

Upon referral, every child is evaluated and a unique, coordinated treatment plan is designed by therapists, caseworkers, family and caregivers. Regular review meetings are conducted throughout treatment to monitor the progress of children and families.

Medical Clinic

The CAC's on-site medical clinic is operated by faculty and staff from The University of Texas — Houston Health Science Center. These expert physicians and nurse practitioners administer sexual-abuse examinations and rape-evidence collection kits, utilizing state-of-the-art and noninvasive methods of examination. Children are able to watch or participate during the exam, a process that helps to ease their fear and anxiety. The clinic also provides: wellness examinations, physicals, immunizations, DNA blood testing, follow-up examinations, expert testimony in criminal and civil court cases, and after-hour phone consultations.

Therapy and Psychological Services

The CAC offers a variety of services ranging from crisis intervention and psychological evaluations to group, family and individual therapy, to meet the needs of both adult and child clients. Many of the adults in therapy are nonoffending caregivers who need to care for and protect their children and overcome their own feelings of shame and guilt. The CAC also helps foster parents handle problems that arise as children confront their fears and anger in therapy. Adults need this support so that children will have a safe home environment where they can thrive. Using a holistic approach that helps restore the child's sense of self, comfort and safety, The CAC capitalizes on the power of expressive therapies. Through play, movement, art and music, children can express their feelings in creative ways. Therapy teaches children that they are not alone, helps them understand that the abuse is the responsibility of the offender, and ultimately provides a healthy, guilt-free way to avoid long-term trauma.

Clinical Social Work Program

Clinical social workers provide guidance and assistance to the families of children who have been molested by nonrelatives or individuals living outside their home. These professionals work directly with law enforcement officers, legal professionals and therapists to coordinate investigations and treatment services, as well as to advocate on behalf of the child throughout the entire process.

Community Outreach Program

The CAC works to protect children by increasing awareness in the community about child sexual abuse. The Center's outreach programs are designed to help schoolteachers and counselors, physicians, nurses and social workers identify the signs and symptoms of sexual abuse, and to teach them how to respond when a child calls out for help. The CAC also collaborates with its partner agencies to provide law enforcement officers, attorneys and judges with training in investigative techniques, and information about the ways in which sexual abuse may impact a child's testimony in court.

Scientific Research

The Children's Assessment Center conducts research studies approved by a committee at The University of Texas and designed to ensure the highest standards. Ongoing studies, some of which are through academic institutions or on behalf of the government, are under way to expand the knowledge of center professionals about assessment and treatment of sexual abuse.



Academic Training Center

Highly respected among academic institutions and universities, The CAC serves as an internship site for both graduate and undergraduate students in

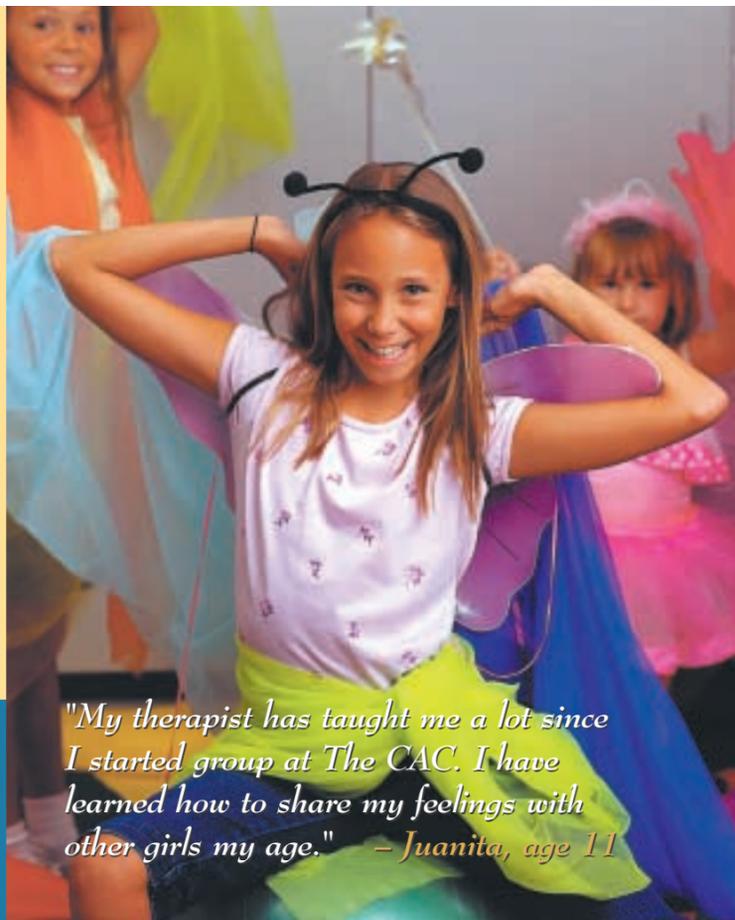
the fields of medicine, mental health, social work and criminal justice. The CAC helps train future leaders and professionals from each of the major universities in the region, including The University of Texas Medical School, The University of Texas School of Nursing, Baylor College of Medicine, The University of Houston, Sam Houston State University, Texas Southern University, Our Lady of the Lake University and Rice University.

National and International Resource

The CAC serves as a model for other agencies from the United States and around the world, assisting them in training multidisciplinary professionals and developing collaborative partnerships in their communities. The Center offers customized training to meet the unique needs of a variety of organizations, communities and cultures.

The Children's Assessment Center is working not only to better the lives of Houston's children and families, but also to set a higher standard of professionalism and efficiency in the field of child-abuse treatment. The results can be found in their stories. We are grateful they could find the care, respect and healing they needed here at The CAC.

Listen to Their Own Words



"My therapist has taught me a lot since I started group at The CAC. I have learned how to share my feelings with other girls my age." – Juanita, age 11

"One story that exemplifies our work here is José, an 11-year-old Hispanic boy who was sexually abused by his father. As a result of the abuse, José told me, 'It isn't worth loving anyone because they might hurt you.' We introduced him to play therapy because it's an excellent way for children to express their feelings. He is making tremendous progress. His outlook is more positive and he smiles often. José's mother is surprised at the trust level he demonstrates. A child that was reluctant to talk is now glad he came to therapy, and he tells me that he doesn't feel so bad anymore."

– Alberta Torres, Therapist

"I had the opportunity to provide therapy to Sylvia after she had been molested by her father several years ago. What she learned in therapy gave her strength and courage to cope with a recent rape by some boys at her school. When she came in to talk about the rape she said, 'At first I felt like it was my fault. Then I



remembered everything I had learned in therapy here and knew that it wasn't my fault, so I was able to tell you about being raped instead of keeping it a secret.'"

– Julia Wolf, Coordinator of Therapy Services

"Before the incidents with her step-brother, my daughter had always been very verbal and outgoing. Afterwards, she shrank into her own shell. She was terrified of being away from me and would burst into tears at times. You helped us put everything into perspective and gave us the counseling we desperately needed. Your guidance not only gave me my little girl back, it gave me a stronger and more confident young lady. What started out as a nightmare last January has turned into a learning and growing experience for both of us."

– Jim, a grateful parent

The Children's Assessment Center was founded more than a decade ago to address the unique needs of sexually abused children and to provide a place for healing and growth for these children and their families. It is one of the most innovative and successful collaborative agencies in the United States, impacting the lives of thousands of children every year. The CAC depends heavily on the continued assistance and involvement of the Greater Houston community. Trained volunteers support The CAC's program by supervising and playing with children who are waiting for services in the playroom area; increasing community awareness; and securing critical donations of clothing, food and toys. The CAC is a public/private partnership between Harris

County Commissioner's Court and The Children's Assessment Center Foundation. Fifty percent of the annual budget must be secured through contributions from generous foundations, corporations, organizations and individuals.

Whether you have the heart to spend time with a recovering child or the desire to make a financial donation, your gift will be used to help children recover from their trauma and change the cycle of abuse in our community, to reopen the door to childhood for boys and girls who might have hidden behind the locked doors of secrecy and shame forever. The benefits of your generosity to the children we serve – and the world they will inherit – cannot be measured.

Changing the World for Children

"Thank you for believing me. You've helped me more than you'll ever know." – Karen, age 10



It takes a lot of people to keep a facility like this operating efficiently and effectively. This Center is the result of a dream; a vision; and countless hours of effort on behalf of the staff, Board and community in relating the message of hope and healing and the ability to rebuild trust. You can make a difference in the lives of these young children by volunteering your time or by making a monetary donation. As you can see from this amazing facility, The Center needs your continued help and support. Let's join hands together in this important partnership.



How You Can Help

To refer a child
to become a volunteer,
to inquire about our services or
to make a donation,
please call us at 713-986-3300
or fax us at 713-986-3553.

To report a case of child
abuse or neglect in Texas,
please call 1-800-252-5400
or your local law enforcement agency.



CREATIVE TEAM:

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We extend special thanks to the children pictured in this brochure who are the friends and family of The CAC.

*"There is always one
moment in childhood
when the door opens and
lets the future in."*

– Graham Greene

The CAC program, employees and supporters have been awarded and honored by:

- The National Association of Counties
Acts of Caring Award, and the Legacy Award for Excellence and Innovation
- The Greater Houston Collaborative for Children
Spirit of Collaboration Award
- American Institute for Public Service
- KPRC/TV 2 and Reliant Energy/HL&P
Jefferson Award for Volunteer Leadership
- National Council of Jewish Women
Hannah G. Solomon Award
- Child Advocates, Inc.
JC Penney Spirit of the American Woman Award
- National Children's Alliance
Volunteer Leadership – Individual Award
- Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas
Team Excellence Awards for Outstanding Children's Advocacy Center, Medical Professional, Direct Services, and Mental Health Professional
- Houston Bar Association
Liberty Bell Award
- American Ad Federation
*The Addy Awards 1998
Public Service Radio*
- American Ad Federation
*The Addy Awards 2000
Certificate of Excellence in Video Production*
- Federal Bureau of Investigation
Director's Community Leadership Award



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