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.
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 this emerge 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.
• 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

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

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 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.
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.

Medical Clinic
The CAC’s on-site medical clinic is operated by faculty and staff from The University of Texas – Houston Health Science Center. Those 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 therapy. 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. Those 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 underway 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.

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 those agencies meets with a skilled professional who is specially trained to interview children in a non-threatening and nonleading manner. A videotape of this interview preserves the child’s disclosure and allows, 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.

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

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

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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 those 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 childabuse 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.

“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 the recent rape by some boys at her school. When she came 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

“Thank you for believing me. You’ve helped me more than you’ll ever know.”

– Karen, age 10

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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.

“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
- KHSC/TV 2 and Reliant Energy/HLP
  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