

Contact: Pam Clasgens
256-327-3761 direct line
256-533-5437 main line
pclasgens@nationalcac.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The National Children's Advocacy Center Issues Statement to Better Inform National Dialogue on Sexual Abuse and Sexual Harassment

HUNTSVILLE, AL (November 12, 2017) – The National Children's Advocacy Center would like to share accurate information about child sexual abuse to better inform the national dialogue and understanding of emerging media coverage about sexual abuse and sexual harassment.

The National Children's Advocacy Center (NCAC) was created in 1985 to coordinate the multidisciplinary response to child abuse, especially child sexual abuse. Since our inception, the NCAC has served as a model for more than 1,000 Children's Advocacy Centers operating in all 50 states and in 29 countries throughout the world. Since 1985, we have served more than 10,000 victims of child abuse from North Alabama and trained more than 140,000 professionals from throughout the world.

1 in 10 children will be sexually abused before the age of 18.¹ To put this in context, child sexual abuse occurs at 75 times the rate of childhood cancer. As disturbing as this sounds, it was worse 30 years ago. In the 1980's, 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 7 boys was sexually abused prior to age 18.²

Most victims of child sexual abuse never disclose during childhood.³ In fact, many people reading this article were victims of sexual abuse who have never told another person about this experience.

Most child sexual abuse is committed by an individual known to the child.⁴ As such, it is often a person the child knows and trusts, and someone who is also trusted by the child's caregivers and others in the community.

People often believe that children fabricate allegations of abuse, asking if children lie when they are at the NCAC. While it is true that we occasionally have children who fabricate a story, the most common lie we hear is children who say, "nothing happened" when it really did. How can this be? It is simple – disclosing child sexual abuse is very difficult.⁵

As we consistently see played out, when individuals speak out about abuse, the intense and deeply personal questioning and attacks are initiated. Why would anyone want to subject themselves to this ordeal, even if it was so they could get assistance for the trauma they experienced? Let me restate these dynamics another way. If you speak out about what I have done, I will come on the attack and people will believe me, not you. What an ingenious way to maintain power over the secret. This cannot, and should not be allowed to continue. Who wants to be a victim of child sexual abuse? There surely is no great status associated with this experience - ask any survivor.

How many of you have ever witnessed child sexual abuse? Probably almost none unless you witnessed your own abuse. **The reality is that child sexual abuse occurs in secret and typically only two people know what happened – the victim and the offender.** Additionally, there is rarely medical evidence or other proof of the abuse.^{6,7} Thus, the investigation is challenging but essential for determining whether abuse has occurred.

We should appropriately investigate all allegations of child sexual abuse. We should demonstrate support for survivors of child sexual abuse. We should not espouse opinions about the veracity of allegations based on limited information. We should demand accountability for those who harm children. It is adults' responsibility to protect children and support survivors of abuse.

For information or to arrange an interview with NCAC Executive Director Chris Newlin, contact Pam Clasgens, NCAC Community Awareness and Prevention Director, 256-327-3761 (direct line), 256-533-5437 (main line) or pclasgens@nationalcac.org.

About the NCAC: The NCAC revolutionized the response to child sexual abuse in the U.S. All of the 1,000 children's advocacy centers that exist in the U.S. and 29 countries are based on the model developed in Huntsville, AL in 1985. The NCAC provides services to children and families in Huntsville/Madison County, and is a national and international leader in training for professionals.

The NCAC models, promotes, and delivers excellence in child abuse response and prevention through service, education and leadership. For information, contact 256-533-5437 or visit www.nationalcac.org.

¹ Townsend, C., & Rheingold, A. A. (2013). Estimating a child sexual abuse prevalence rate for practitioners. Charlotte, NC: Darkness to Light.

² Finkelhor, D. (1994). Current information on the scope and nature of child sexual abuse. *Future of Children, 4*(2), 31-53.

- ³ London, K., Bruck, M., Wright, D. B., & Ceci, S. J. (2008). Review of the contemporary literature on how children report sexual abuse to others: Findings, methodological issues, and implications for forensic interviewers. *Memory, 16*(1), 29-47.
- ⁴ Finkelhor, D. (2012). Characteristics of crimes against juveniles. Durham, NH: Crimes against Children Research Center.
- ⁵ Münzer, A., Fegert, J. M., Ganser, H. G., Loos, S., Witt, A., & Goldbeck, L. (2016). Please tell! Barriers to disclosing sexual victimization and subsequent social support perceived by children and adolescents. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 31*(2), 355-377.
- ⁶ Hobbs, C. J. (2012). Physical evidence of child sexual abuse. *European Journal of Pediatrics, 171*(5), 751-755.
- ⁷ Adams, J. A., Harper, K., Knudson, S., & Revilla, J. (1994). Examination findings in legally confirmed child sexual abuse: It's normal to be normal. *Pediatrics, 94*(3), 310-317.

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