

Prevention Education: An Overview

Child sexual abuse is a pervasive problem that one in ten children will face before their 18th birthday¹.

The Children's Advocacy Center of Hamilton County (CAC) had its highest serving year for intervention services in 2022, serving 887 children from birth to age eighteen.

These 887 children live throughout all zip codes across the county and represented every racial, ethnic, and socio-economic category. For each case that is reported and investigated, five cases are never reported², and the number of children who were likely victimized is closer to 5000. Since opening its doors in 1991, the CAC has seen over 30,000 children.

How Can We Create a Safe Community for ALL Children?

Education and Collaboration

Research-based strategies increase protective factors for children, families, and communities. Prevention strategies address individual knowledge, community response, and system-level policies.³

Collaborative partnerships are also a vital component of any prevention strategy. The Children's Advocacy Center Model includes long-standing partnerships with law enforcement, the District Attorney's Office, the Department of Children's Services, and the Juvenile Court.⁴ These partners have been around the table with the CAC since 1991.

In 2014 the Tennessee Legislature passed Erin's Law which requires the following:

- Education for students in grades PreK-12th grade age-appropriate techniques to recognize child sexual abuse and tell a trusted adult,
- Instruction for school personnel on how to identify, respond, and report child sexual abuse,
- For parents to receive information on child sexual abuse including how to make a referral,
- Sharing community resources.

[Erin's Law has been passed in 37 states.](#)

Since 2015, the CAC has worked closely with the Hamilton County Department of Education to provide training for all staff at all levels of the district. Implementing the evidence-based Stewards of Children curriculum in Hamilton County in partnership with HCDE resulted in the CAC being recognized as Facilitators of the Year by Darkness to Light, a national leader in child sexual abuse prevention, and creators of the Stewards of Children curriculum.

Since then, approximately 50% of all adults in Hamilton County have received Stewards training. This includes professionals in education, law enforcement, parents, church groups, and early childhood specialists. Stewards focuses on how to recognize, respond, and report child sexual abuse.

The CAC and HCDE continue to come together to address new legislation, policies that best address the needs of students who are part of ongoing investigations, and the integration of an evidence-based youth curriculum starting in 2016.

Collaboration was essential when students went to remote learning during the pandemic. The CAC anticipated, along with child welfare professionals across the country, that the negative impact on children's safety would be significant

¹ Townsend, C., Rheingold, A., Haviland, M.L. (2016). Estimating a child sexual abuse prevalence rate for practitioners: An updated review of child sexual abuse prevalence studies. Charleston SC: Darkness to Light. Retrieved from www.D2L.org/1in10

² i. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2015-2019 (2020)., ii. Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Incident-Based Reporting System, 2012-2016 (2017); iii. Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Incident-Based Reporting System, 2012-2016 (2017); iv. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Felony Defendants in Large Urban Counties, 2009 (2013).

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/>

⁴ <https://www.cachc.org/cachc-model/>

while at home. The CAC provided virtual trainings for educators and other school personnel to address how abuse may look different during the pandemic and how to report if they suspected safety issues at home.

What's Next?

Students continue to have complex needs outside the classroom. The CAC's Lauren's Kids Safer, Smarter Kids⁵ evidence-based curriculum focuses on safety strategies for all kids, most importantly, who are their safe adults they can speak to if they have questions, feel uncomfortable, or need help.

Research states the number one resiliency factor in protecting children is a healthy relationship with one safe, stable, nurturing adult⁶.

The CAC will continue to provide training to adults and children and create a comprehensive pathway for healing for all children victimized by child sexual abuse.

⁵ <https://laurenskids.org/>

⁶ https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pub/healthy_infants.html; Mercy JA, Saul J. Creating a Healthier Future Through Early Interventions for Children. JAMA. 2009;301(21):2262–2264. doi:10.1001/jama.2009.803 ; Shonkoff JP, Boyce WT, McEwen BS. Neuroscience, Molecular Biology, and the Childhood Roots of Health Disparities: Building a New Framework for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention. JAMA. 2009;301(21):2252–2259. doi:10.1001/jama.2009.754; https://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/CM_Strategic_Direction--Long-a.pdf