



Cella Bella's

Helping Hands

OUR MISSION

To bring awareness at the earliest age, helping kids understand how to say "STOP!" through education utilizing caregivers, speakers and literature.

- 1 in 11 adolescents' reports being a victim of physical dating violence
- 1 in 5 female high school students' reports being physically or sexually abused by a dating partner
- 1 in 3 male/female teens reports knowing a friend or peer who has been hit, punched, slapped, choked or physically hurt by his/her partner

Domestic Violence & Abuse Facts

- 3 out of 4 individuals know a victim of domestic violence
- An estimated 1.3 million women are victims of physical assault by an intimate partner each year.
- Females are 84% of spousal abuse victims and 86% of abuse victims at the hands of their boyfriends
- 1 in 33 men and 1 in 12 women will be stalked in their lifetime
- 81% of women stalked by a current or former intimate partner were also physically assaulted by their partner
- 75% of murder suicides occur in the home

Domestic Violence is one of the most underreported crimes.

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Cella Bella's Helping Hands Foundation

The Helping Hands Foundation was inspired by Cella Bella's commitment to ending child abuse in the United States. "Helping Hands" refers to physically flashing one's palms upward as if to say "STOP" in a threatening situation. We encourage children to use their hands as symbolic tools in defending themselves against abuse from adults. Helping Hand's goal is to raise public awareness about child abuse, domestic violence, and sexual assault by engaging children and adults alike in using the "helping hands" hand gesture.

1. Cella Bella's Helping Hands Foundation aims to raise awareness about what child abuse looks like in its earliest stages through speaking engagements. We teach children to say "NO" using their "helping hands" gesture and talk to a trusted adult as soon as possible.
2. We also assist caregivers in our community. Caregivers are often forgotten, homeless and have been affected through some type of domestic violence. Our foundation provides financial assistance to get caregivers into homes, provide certification, and educate them about elderly abuse and how to report it.

Child Abuse and Neglect

Cases of child abuse and neglect are far too common within our country's communities. On average, more than five children die each day as a result of child abuse or neglect in the United States. There are over 6.2 million reports of child abuse and neglect each year. Over 15 million children witnessed violence in their homes each year.

While precise legal definitions vary across the United States, child abuse can be broadly defined as an act or failure to act that result in a child's serious harm or risk of harm, including physical or emotional harm, exploitation, or death. Neglect occurs when a caretaker fails to provide for a child's basic needs. Children are some of the most vulnerable members of our society due to their dependence on others to meet their needs. In the majority of child abuse cases, the adults in their lives are the ones responsible for abusing them.

The consequences of abuse and neglect can be profound and can have long-term effects into a child's lifecycle. We have seen the strength and resilience of survivors. We believe that every child has a right to a safe childhood free of violence. These experiences can be immensely painful, and we honor the strength, courage, and time that the healing journey takes of survivors. It is our sincerest hope and intention that the information and resources in this section and throughout our website can help along that journey. In addition, it's our goal for this information to be shared and used as a tool to protect children and prevent violence before it begins.

What is child abuse?

Child abuse is defined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as any recent act or failure to act on that results in a Child's serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse, exploitation, or death. An act or failure to act that presents a risk of serious harm to a child is also considered to be child abuse.

Child abuse is most commonly perpetrated by someone the child knows. He or she can be a caregiver, relative, family friend or any adult in a position of authority over the child. Abusers can also be strangers to the family and child. Although the government definition refers specifically to abuse enacted by parents and caregivers, *any* adult or older child can perpetrate abuse during a child's youth. Peer against peer abuse can result in equally serious emotional, physical, and mental trauma.

Each state provides its own legal definition of child abuse within civil and criminal statutes, but they are informed by the following definitions of various forms of child abuse:

Physical: A non-accidental physical injury as a result of punching, beating, kicking, hitting, shaking, throwing, stabbing, choking, hitting, burning, or otherwise harming a child, that is inflicted by a parent, caregiver, or other person who has responsibility for the child. Such injury is considered abuse regardless of whether the caregiver intended to hurt the child.

Sexual: A form of child abuse that includes any sexual act performed with a child by an adult or other child, with or without force or threat force. It may start a seemingly innocent touching and progress to more serious acts including verbal seduction or abuse, anal or vaginal intercourse, oral sex, sodomy, manual stimulation, direct threats, and implied threats, or other forms of abuse.

Emotional: A pattern of behavior that impairs a child's emotional development or sense of self-worth. This form of abuse is almost always present in the other forms of abuse identified. It may include constant criticism, threats or rejection, as well as withholding love, support, or guidance. Emotional abuse is often difficult to prove, and therefore, Child Protective Services may not be able to intervene without clear evidence of harm to the child.

Psychological: This is a pattern of behavior that affects a child's sense of worth by communicating to the child that he or she is not worthy, loved, or important. Psychological abuse may include harsh demands, constant criticism, threats and yelling. Witnessing other violent incidents such as domestic or school violence is also a form of psychological abuse due to the intense fear it produces and the indirect threat to a child's safety it causes.

What is neglect?

Child neglect is the leading form of child abuse in the United States and occurs when a caretaker fails to provide for a child's basic needs, which include inadequate food, clothing, shelter, education, supervision, medical care, or safekeeping. As a result of such treatment, the child's psychological, physical, mental, or emotional development can be impaired.

7 Ways to Prevent Child Abuse

The burden of preventing child abuse has been resting on the smallest shoulders in our society for years: the children. Children are the most vulnerable and least powerful individuals in our society and the least likely to be able to protect themselves from a powerful adult. This is especially true considering that the majority of sexual abuse (93%) happens at the hands of an adult well known to the child. When children are abused by adults they are often confused by the fact that an adult is supposed to be a protector, a caretaker, and worthy of trust simply by being an adult. Child abusers are often “experts” at emotional manipulation of children, gaining their trust well in advance of the actual abuse. In light of these facts, it’s clear that the time has come for adults to assume responsibility for protecting children.

The following facts and the “7 Steps to Protecting Our Children From Sexual Abuse” are directly quoted here with the permission of the nonprofit organization from **Darkness to Light**. Its website (<https://www.d2l.org/>) an invaluable resource that is well worth bookmarking.

Step 1:

“Learn the facts and understand the risks. Realities - not trust - should influence your decisions regarding your child.”

- 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will be sexually abused by their 18th birthday. Consider this the next time you see several children when walking through a mall, or down the street, or inside a classroom, or at a ball game; Look around and do the math. It is a sad reality but we can make a positive change.
- Only 1 in 10 children report the abuse themselves. Those children who keep the abuse a secret, or those who tell and are not believed, are far more likely to suffer from psychological, emotional, social, and/or physical problems that will follow them into adulthood.
- 22% of abused children are under eight years old.
- The average age of the abused child is nine years old.

Most likely you know a child who either has been or is being abused.

It is also likely that you know an abuser! Most are not “strangers” but are friends and family members.

- 34% of victims are abused by family members.
- 59% are abused by people the family believes are trustworthy. In fact, it is a common tactic of abusers to first establish a trusting relationship with the parents of the child.
- Many young children are abused by larger, older children.
- Those who abuse children have no characteristics that set them apart for us to identify them as abusers. They look and act just like us and go out of their way to appear trustworthy.
- Those who sexually abuse children are drawn to places where they will have easy access to children (and are often those we consider to be “wonderful” with children)

such as sports leagues, faith centers, clubs, and schools. It is important to be sure that the clubs, leagues, etc., where your child is involved have a policy about doing background checks on its volunteers.

Step 2:

Minimize opportunity - “If you eliminate or reduce one adult/one child situations, you will dramatically lower the risk of sexually abuse for your child.”

- Remember abusers often befriend the child and the child’s family in order to gain their trust.
- Always look for group situations to involve your child in rather than placing a child alone with one adult.
- Strongly encourage policies limiting “one adult, one child” situations in all activities, such as faith groups, sports teams, and school clubs. Make sure parents and caregivers can observe or interrupt activities at any time, and background checks have been done on all volunteers and others working directly with children.
- Insist that paid personnel and volunteers receive quality training on prevention, recognition, and reporting of child abuse.
- **Drop in unexpectedly when your child is alone with any adult!**
- Monitor your child’s Internet use. The Internet has become a favorite medium for pedophiles to interact privately with children. Their goal is to lure children into physical contact after gaining their trust.
- Set an example by personally avoiding “one adult, one child” situations with children other than your own.

Step 3:

Talk About It. Children often keep secrets, but barriers can be broken down by talking openly about it.

It is VERY IMPORTANT...

To understand why children don’t tell:

- Children are afraid of disappointing their parents.
- Children are afraid of disrupting the family.
- The abuser sometimes threatens the child or a family member.
- The abuser shames the child by pointing out that she/he let it happen, or tells him/her that their parents will be angry.
- Some children who do not intentionally disclose abuse, and are afraid or ashamed to tell when it happens again.
- Some children are too young to understand. Many abusers tell children the abuse is “okay” or a “game.”

To know how children communicate:

- Children who disclose sexual abuse often tell a trusted adult other than a parent. Therefore, training people who work with children in any capacity is very important.
- Children may tell parts of what happened, or pretend it happened to someone else to gauge adult reaction.
- Children will often shut down and refuse to tell more if you respond emotionally or negatively.
- If your child does not talk to you, don't think it's a sign of poor parenting.

To talk openly with your child:

- Teach your child that it is your job to protect him/her.
- Teach your child that it is not their responsibility to protect others.
- Demonstrate daily that you will not be angry, no matter what your child tells you about any aspect of his life.
- Listen quietly. Children have a hard time telling parents about troubling events.
- Teach your child about their body, about what abuse is, and when age-appropriate, about sex.
- Teach them words that help them discuss sex comfortably with you.
- Teach your child that it is against the "rules" for adults to act in a sexual way with children and use examples.
- Start early and talk often. Use everyday opportunities to talk about sexual abuse.

Step 4:

Stay alert. Don't expect obvious signs when a child is being sexually abused. Signs are often there but you have to spot them.

Learn the signs:

- Physical signs of sexual abuse are not common; although redness, rashes, or swelling in the genital area, urinary tract infections, or other such symptoms should be carefully investigated. Physical problems associated with anxiety may also occur, such as chronic stomach pain or headaches.
- Emotional or behavioral signals are more common. These can vary from "too perfect" behavior, to withdrawal and depression, to unexplained anger and rebellion.
- Sexual behavior and language that are not age-appropriate can be a red flag.
- Be aware that some children exhibit no signs whatsoever.
- If you find physical signs that you suspect as sexual abuse, have the child physically examined immediately by a professional who specializes in child sexual abuse.
- NOTE: the National Children's Alliance phone number is 1-800-239-9950.

Step 5:

Make a plan. Learn where to go, who to call, and how to react.

Don't overreact. Just as you stay calm when your child breaks an arm and follow plans you've made in advance, stay calm and follow a plan if your child reports abuse.

If you react with anger or disbelief the response from the child may be the following:

- The child shuts down.
- The child changes his story in the face of your anger and disbelief, when in fact, abuse may actually be occurring.
- The child changes his account around your questions so future telling appears to be "coached". This can be very harmful if the case goes to court.
- The child feels even more guilty.

Note: VERY few reported incidents are false.

Offer support. It is very important to think through your emotional response before you're in a position where you expect abuse. Hopefully, you'll never need to use the skills, but you will be prepared to respond in a supportive way if the need arises.

- Believe the child and make sure they know it.
- Don't ask questions. This could be confusing to the child, make them upset, and could damage criminal prosecution of the offender.
- Assure the child that it is your job to protect them and that you'll do everything you can for them.
- Report all cases of abuse, whether inside or outside the family. The child's safety is much more important than any emotional conflict you may have to face. Remember: you are the adult.
- Don't panic. Sexually abused children who receive psychological help can and do heal.
- Remember Texas is a mandatory reporting state. Act on suspicions and report. If the abuse is outside the family, report to the police or sheriff's department. If the abuse happened within the family, report to the Department of Social Services.

Step 6:

Act on suspicions. A child's well-being may depend on it.

If you are in a situation where you suspect abuse, but do not have any proof, you may be reluctant to report. Many of us do not trust our gut feelings, even though they are most often right. A child cannot afford for you to take the chance of doubting your intuition.

If you suspect child abuse, please call one of the following:

- The National Children's Alliance at **1-800-239-9950** for a CAC in your area or visit their website listed on our links page.
- From Darkness to Light at **1-866-367-5444**.
- Childhelp USA Child Abuse Hotline at **1-800-422-4453**.

Step 7:

Get involved.

Volunteer and donate to organizations that fight the tragedy of abuse:

- Your local Child Advocacy Center
- Prevention programs
- Crisis information and referral services
- Rape crisis centers

Use your voice and your vote to make your community a safer place for children.

- Ask your elected officials what legislation they are supporting to protect children.
- Support legislation that protects children (contact Prevent Child Abuse NC for more information on current legislation. See web address on Links page.)
- Demand that local government put more money into effort to fight child abuse.
- Contact members of Congress.
- Write letters to the newspaper in your area.

Break the cycle of silence.