

Child Abuse Prevention – ChildSafe Wants to Start the Healing

This newspaper column was written by ChildSafe's Clinical Director Val Macri-Lind to draw attention to National Child Abuse Prevention Month. It appeared on the editorial page of the Fort Collins Coloradoan on April 18, 2011.

When we hear about child sexual abuse or child molestation we think, “repulsive,” “disgusting,” and “unbelievable.” We recoil, look away, and deny that such an ugly truth can happen in our lovely city. But if our only response is to say those words and look away, victims are left to *feel* repulsive, disgusting, and rejected. They are left to cope as best they can, in secret, with their trust in others damaged and their self-concepts compromised. Victims often turn to drugs and alcohol to numb the pain, get involved in abusive relationships because those seem familiar, and turn their rage upon themselves or the society that abandoned them.

That's why we started ChildSafe 25 years ago, so that victims could be seen, heard and helped to heal the wounds that come from being used sexually, usually by someone who they loved and trusted. ChildSafe is a non-profit treatment center for child victims of sexual abuse and their non-offending family members as well as adults who were victims as children. Last year we provided services to 524 individuals.

Statistics say that 1 out of 4 children will be sexually victimized at least one time before their 18th birthday. Such a staggering number leads some to question, “Don't kids make this up to get attention or to get back at someone?” Or “Don't mothers make this up to get custody of their children or to seek revenge on their exes?” On a typical Thursday night at ChildSafe, you'll find a group of mothers meeting to make sense of what has happened to their children. It is incredulous to think that they would voluntarily put themselves through the hell they are living. Many are in debt with legal fees, are emotional wrecks, and are left to pick up the pieces of damaged children and try to put them back together again. Statistics say that only 2 – 8% of allegations are false and of those a smaller percentage are actual lies. Some of our own statistics may also surprise you. % of the children we help are male, % of the victims we treat are 12 and under, and % of family members we serve are male. Child sexual abuse is not a female issue, it is a human issue. ChildSafe is there to help victims and their families to pick up the pieces and move from victims to survivors to “thrivers.”

People always ask us, “How can you listen to those stories day after day?” “Don't you burn out?” The simple answer is “No.” Because there is hope. The therapists at ChildSafe feel honored to accompany these brave individuals along their journey away from hurt and toward healing. It takes such courage to confront the horrors of the past and learn to accept that the abuse was not their fault and that they deserve to lead happy, productive lives.

During National Child Abuse Prevention Month, let's commit to taking child sexual abuse out of the shadows so that victims feel seen, heard, and supported in their healing. And join ChildSafe in continuing our mission for another 25 years or until child sexual abuse is merely an ugly remnant of the past.

Val Macri-Lind