



Newsletter of:
**Texas Legislative Caucus for
Missing & Exploited Children**

Volume 3 Edition 5

78th Legislative Session

June-July 2003

Dear Members,

The 78th Session was an historic one with many advances in Texas law that are designed to help protect our children. The hard work and support of the members of the TLCMEC was evident in the passage of these important bills (see page 3 for a partial list of the child protection legislation which was passed this session). We should be proud of the strides we have made for the children of Texas.

But our work is not done. Many families are also in need of basic education to help prevent abusive or neglectful episodes in their own homes. Statistics provided by the Center for Public Policy Priorities indicates that Texas could do much better in many of the indicators of child well-being. Fortunately, many of these risk factors are preventable. We encourage you to share this newsletter, its data, and the related contact organizations with your constituents.

The combination of legislative and non-profit work with grass-roots education can, we believe, make the exploitation of innocent children a rarity.

Keep up the good fight,

Co-Chair
Rep. Toby Goodman

Co-Chair
Rep. Miguel Wise.

What Is Child Abuse Prevention?

The goal of child abuse prevention is simple—to stop child abuse and neglect from happening in the first place, sparing children and families emotional and physical trauma and decreasing the need for costly intervention and treatment services. The best way to prevent child abuse and neglect is to support families and provide parents with the skills and resources they need.

Why Does Child Abuse Occur?

Although all the causes of child abuse and neglect are not known, a significant body of research has identified several risk factors associated with child abuse. Studies also have shown that when there are multiple risk factors present, the risk is greater. For example, lack of preparation or knowledge of critical issues surrounding parenting, financial or other environmental stressors, difficulty in relationships, and depression or other mental health problems can all lead to abusive or neglectful behavior. Parents may lack an understanding of their children's developmental stages and hold unreasonable expectations for their abilities. They also may be unaware of alternatives to corporal punishment or how to discipline their children most effectively at each age. Parents also may lack knowledge of the health, hygiene, and nutritional needs of their children. These circumstances, combined with the inherent challenges of raising children, can result in otherwise well-intentioned parents causing their children harm or neglecting their needs.

How Is Child Abuse Prevented?

Prevention efforts build on family strengths. Through prevention activities such as parent education, home visitation, and parent support groups, many families are able to find the support they need to stay together and care for their children in their homes and communities. Prevention efforts help parents develop their parenting skills, understand the benefits of nonviolent discipline techniques, and understand and meet their child's emotional, physical, and developmental needs. Prevention programs also can help parents identify other needs they may have and offer assistance in getting that additional support. Undoubtedly, our attention is best focused on prevention efforts that create healthier environments for children and foster confident, positive parenting.

For more information visit the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children website: www.missingkids.com

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Texas Children In Need

The Lone Star State ranks toward the bottom when it comes to several key indicators that measure the well-being of children nationwide, according to the "High Cost of Being Poor" 2003 Kids Count report released on June 11, 2003.

Kids Count ranked Texas 37th in the nation based on 10 key indicators of child well-being, such as the percentage of low-birthweight babies, infant mortality rate, juvenile violent crimes, children in poverty and teen pregnancy--a constant concern for El Paso.

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Nationally, 17 percent of children lived in poverty in 2000, but that number was higher in Texas --22 percent.

Dayna Finet, analyst for the Center for Public Policy Priorities in Austin, said Texas took another plunge for the worse, according to more recent data.

"The Census Bureau ranked Texas 36th for the number of children living in poverty in 2002, and we saw that ranking drop to 44th in the nation in 2003," Finet said. "Texas also had the worst rate of any state for uninsured children."

Twenty-two percent of children in Texas were uninsured in 2000, compared with twelve percent nation-wide.

Finet said cuts in the 2004-05 state budget for Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program threaten to cut off many children from health-care services.

El Pasoan Alice Armendariz, 28, said she depends on CHIP to provide health-care services for her three sons.

"I make minimum wage (\$5.15 an hour), and CHIP is the only way that I can afford medical insurance for my kids," she said.

Kids Count is a national and state-by-state effort to track the status of children. By providing benchmarks of child well-being, it seeks to add to local, state and national discussions about the ways to improve children's futures.

You can access additional information on how Texas on the key indicators of child well-being at www.cppp.org/kidscount/index.html

by: Diana Washington Alvarez

Article adapted from and courtesy of the El Paso Times, June 11, 2003.

Preventing the Exploitation of Children



The words **sexual exploitation** evoke a number of reactions and feelings. Perhaps one of the most devastating is silence—our inability or unwillingness as a society to speak about this horrific problem. That same silence can also impact a child who has been sexually exploited. Children may be frightened or intimidated into not telling. They may feel that they will not be believed or what happened is their fault. All of these feelings may cause them to hide their pain.

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) is working to bring sexual exploitation to the forefront; raise awareness about this issue; and help combat its negative, long-term effects. They want to help families and communities support the courageous child victims who come forward so that they begin healing. And, the NCMEC wants to make more people aware of the problem so that other children don't have to suffer in silence.

The NCMEC wants people to know that the sexual exploitation of a child has multiple victims and the effects can extend like tentacles into the community. Often people feel powerless to fight its insidious nature because the problem seems too huge and overwhelming. Or we do not really want to confront the issue of who the perpetrator might be. We do not want to believe that it could be a person in a position of trust or responsibility living in our own neighborhoods.

There are steps that need to be taken. When taken they would lead to a reduction in the incidence of sexual exploitation, an improvement in how we protect our children from this scourge, and caring and support for those children who have suffered at the hands of these predators. It is all about empowerment and giving children, parents, and communities the strength to overcome what they have lost, so that they can live healthy and productive lives.

It is only through unified and diligent preparation and persistent prevention efforts that the sexual exploitation of children can be effectively addressed. For information regarding NCMEC's resources to help prevent the sexual exploitation of children, visit www.cybertipline.com or call 1-800-843-5678.

Parental Guidelines:

In case your child might someday be the victim of sexual exploitation...

In case of child exploitation, there are key steps that families can take to help children begin the healing process.

What Are the Signs of Sexual Exploitation?

Parents should be alert to these potential indicators of sexual exploitation

- changes in behavior, extreme mood swings, withdrawal, fearfulness, and excessive crying.
- bed-wetting, nightmares, fear of going to bed, or other sleep disturbances.
- acting out inappropriate sexual activity or showing an unusual interest in sexual matters.
- a sudden acting out of feelings or aggressive or rebellious behavior.
- a fear of certain places, people, or activities, especially being alone with certain people because children of any age should not be forced to give affection to anyone if they don't want.
- be alert to signs that your children are trying to avoid someone, and listen carefully when your children tell you how they feel about someone.
- pain, itching, bleeding, fluid, or rawness in private areas.

If you observe any of these behaviors in your children, talk to them about the causes. Behavioral changes such as these may be due to causes other than sexual exploitation such as a medical, family, or school problem, but be sure to work with your child to get to the root of the problem. Also keep in mind that sometimes children do not always demonstrate obvious signs such as these but may do or say something that hints at the exploitation.

What Should Families Do When Children Disclose That They Have Been Sexually Exploited?

Don't

- underreact to or minimize the information
- overreact to the information or panic
- criticize or blame your child

Do

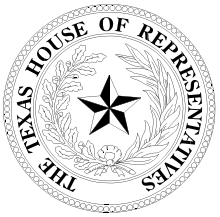
- respect your child's privacy
- support your child and the decision to tell
- show physical affection, and express love and support with words and gestures
- explain to your child that you understand it was the offender's responsibility, and not your child's
- remember that children seldom lie about acts of sexual exploitation
- keep the lines of communication open
- seek appropriate medical care for your child
- notify law enforcement
- in cooperation with law enforcement, alert the child-protection, youth-services, child-abuse, or other appropriate social-services organizations
- consider the need for counseling or therapy for your child and the entire family

Statistic of The Month

Each week, child protective services (CPS) agencies throughout the United States receive more than 50,000 reports of suspected child abuse or neglect.

If you have any information that you wish to be included in next month's newsletter, please email it to:
BRITTANY.WERME@house.state.tx.us





The Honorable Miguel D. Wise
Texas State Representative
P.O. Box 2910 - Capitol Station
Austin, Texas 78768-2910

