

A Child's Journey to a Brighter Tomorrow

By: Jenifer Patterson, Communications & Outreach Education Coordinator

Picture yourself as a young child. What are your best memories? Building sandcastles on the beach with family? Playing in the park with siblings and friends? Achieving a milestone in school or sports? These happy memories are the foundation of who you are today and on which your life was built.

Unfortunately for many children, happy memories are overshadowed by traumatic events. National statistics prove that at least 1 in 7 children have experienced child abuse and/or neglect in the past year. In Adams County that would equal 2,893 children.

In 2023 the Adams County Children's Advocacy Center (ACCAC) supported 217 child victims, accompanied by 225 caregivers and 86 siblings. Most of the child victims visiting our Center were abused by someone they knew and trusted: parents, stepfathers and stepmothers, close relatives, and family friends.

Child abuse rips away a child's innocence, self-esteem, and sense of security. Experiencing child abuse is isolating and life altering. No child, ever, should have to suffer this trauma. But, as a community, we can build brighter tomorrows for these children.

Recently, adult survivors shared their insights about the damaging legacy of abuse:

- *"Because of abuse I have few childhood memories, only flashbacks."*
- *"Sexual abuse left me with a high pain tolerance. I endured to survive."*
- *"The biggest crime of child abuse is learning not to love yourself."*
- *"It's a challenging journey through life, never feeling safe and growing up hating yourself, believing you caused and deserved it."*
- *"My abusers' power came from my silence and shame. Don't let the abuser who stole your joy keep stealing it even one more day."*
- *"I existed only to satisfy my abuser's lust and amusement. I was not a person, or a human being, I was invisible. I don't want to be invisible anymore."*

Together Let's End the Legacy of Child Abuse

Each of us knows someone who has survived child abuse. Maybe that someone is you. We invite you to help support child victims as they heal from the trauma of abuse while also working to prevent future abuse by educating children and adults.

Individuals & Families

- Combat child abuse by learning how to recognize, react and report suspected child abuse.
- Educate the kids in your life how to stay safe from abuse. If you are not sure how to do this, the Center can help.
- If you know of or suspect abuse, report it to ChildLine, this can be done anonymously.

Organizations, Businesses & Churches

- Host a Child Abuse Training for adults at your organization (Free)
- Sponsor a "Child Safety matters" presentation in a classroom at a local school
- Follow us and share our social media posts about child safety on your pages

The ACCAC has many FREE resources on our website, social media, & YouTube channel and in school child safety trainings, on location trainings for adults, monthly speaker series, and support groups. Let us work together to make brighter tomorrows for Adams County kids and families, including yours.