



Children's Safe Harbor

A Children's Advocacy Center





Definition of Child Abuse

As defined in Texas Family Code Subtitle E. Sec. 261.001

- Physical injury that results in substantial harm to the child, or the genuine threat of substantial harm from physical injury to the child
- Sexual conduct with a child, compelling or encouraging the child to engage in sexual conduct, causing, permitting, encouraging, engaging in, or allowing the photographing, filming, or depicting of the child if the person knew or should have known that the resulting photograph, film, or depiction of the child is obscene



The Impact

1 in 4 girls experience sexual abuse in childhood

1 in 13 boys experience sexual abuse in childhood

As of 2015 the estimated lifetime economic burden of child sexual abuse in the United States was **\$9.3 billion**



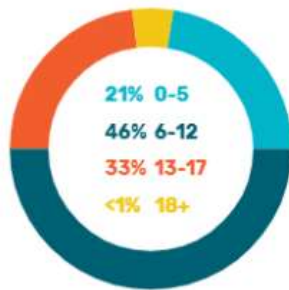
Child Abuse in Texas 2020

61,891
TEXAS CHILDREN
SERVED IN 2020



One in ten children will experience sexual abuse before their 18th birthday.

AGES SERVED:



TYPES OF ABUSE:

- 66% sexual abuse
- 17% physical abuse
- 7% child witness to crime
- 6% neglect
- 2% other
- 1% sexual and physical abuse
- 1% fatality



Around 40% of children who experience sexual abuse are abused by older or more powerful children.



Around 98% of adolescent offenders who receive appropriate treatment do not go on to re-offend in adulthood.



Only 10% of new arrests for sex crimes against children involve individuals with prior sex offense records.

582 children were victims of sex trafficking

98% of child victims knew their alleged perpetrator

19% of alleged perpetrators were juveniles



Children who are sexually abused are at significantly higher risk for mental and physical health problems, such as post-traumatic stress, anxiety, heart problems, stroke, and more.



CACTX Annual Numbers

2017 – CACs served 48,000 children

2018 – CACs served 58,432 children

2019 – CAC's served over 59,000

2020 – CAC's served 61,891

Children's Safe Harbor Annual Numbers

2017 – Safe Harbor served 1750 children

2018 – Safe Harbor served 2,166 children

2019 – Safe Harbor served 2,615 children

2020 – Safe Harbor served 2,322 children

2021 – Safe Harbor served 2,397 children



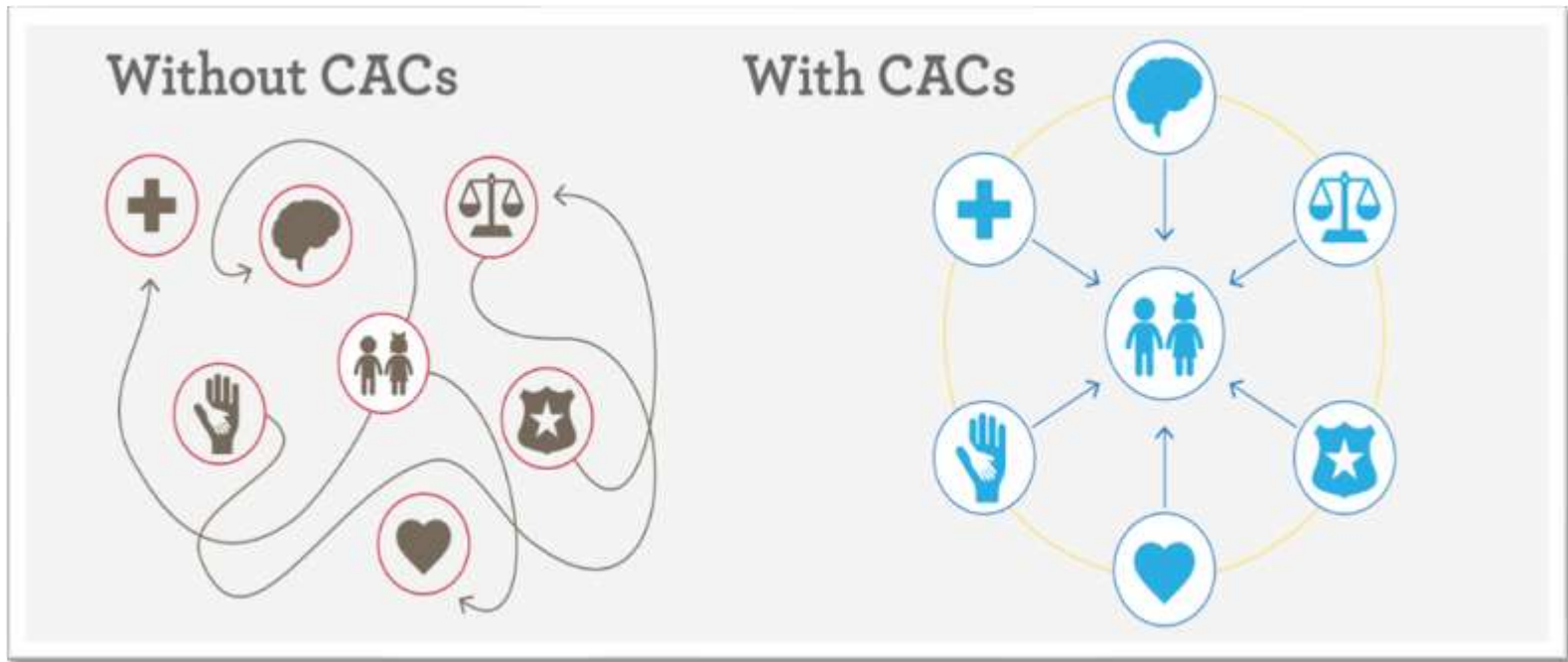
What is a Children's Advocacy Center?

- A CAC provides a child-friendly, safe and neutral location in which law enforcement and child protective services investigators may conduct and observe forensic interviews with children who are alleged victims of crimes, and where the child and non-offending family members receive support, crisis intervention and referrals for mental health and medical treatment.



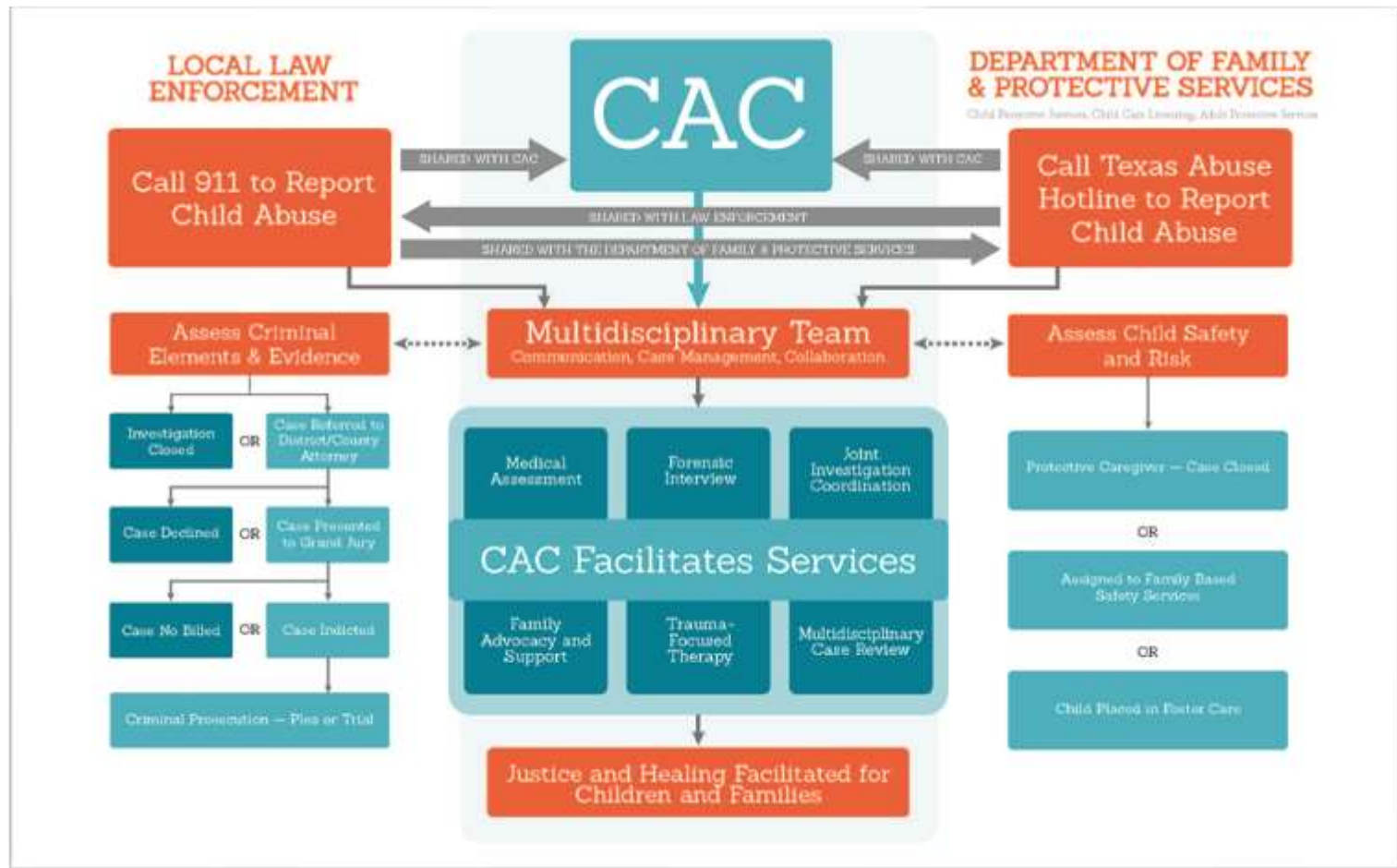


Brief History of CACs





CAC Model





Preventing Child Sexual Abuse

- Know the facts about child sexual abuse
- Know the facts about perpetrators
- Talk to your child about their body, about boundaries, and about sexual abuse
- Support your child's participation in school-based safety and prevention programs
- Take steps to increase safety in your child's environment
- Teach your child about Internet safety
- Be familiar with signs and symptoms of abuse
- Know how to respond to disclosures of abuse





Signs of Child Abuse

- Unexplained injuries
- Changes in behavior
- Returning to earlier behaviors
- Fear of certain places or people
- Changes in eating
- Changes to sleeping
- Changes in school performance or attendance
- Lack of personal care in hygiene
- Risk-taking behaviors
- Inappropriate sexual behaviors





Grooming

Grooming is a process by which an offender gradually draws a victim into a sexual relationship and maintains that relationship in secrecy. At the same time, the offender may also fill roles within the victim's family that make the offender trusted and valued.

- A predator will “groom” his/her victim over a period of time in order to break down a child's defenses and increase the child's acceptance of physical touch.
- The first contact between predator and victim is often nonsexual touching (examples: wrestling, tickling, etc).
- Nonsexual touching desensitizes the child. It breaks down inhibitions and defenses and leads to more sexualized touch when the child does not resist.
- Many predators will gain access to children by grooming the parent(s) by gaining trust
- Make the child feel “special.”
- The predator often conditions the child not to tell another adult.



Why Children Don't Tell

- Shame or guilt
- Fear of not being believed
- May believe they deserve abuse for “bad” behavior
- May not know the abuse is wrong; often believe SXAB is their own fault and they do not want to get into trouble
- Desire not to get their abuser into trouble
- Fear of being removed from their homes
- Very young children may not have the language skills to communicate about abuse
- Physical threats to hurt child or family members, but abusers often do not use physical force, but may use play, deception, threats, or other
- Emotional threats (“CPS will take you”, “You wanted it”, “Your parents won’t believe you.”)



How to Respond to an Outcry of Abuse

- Remain calm
- Always believe the child
- Assure the child that they did the right thing in telling
- Tell the child that they are not to blame for the abuse
- Do not make promises
- Let the child tell their story but **leave the questioning to the professionals**
- File a report with child protective services *and* law enforcement within 48 hours



Mandatory Reporting

Texas Family Code, Chapter 261

Anyone “having cause to believe that a child’s physical or mental health or welfare has or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect” must report the case to any state or local law enforcement agency and to the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services. Failure to report suspected child abuse or neglect is punishable by imprisonment of up to 180 days and/or a fine of up to \$2,000.



How to Make a Report

- All reports must be made **within a 48 hour** window of time to Child Protective Services and/or local law enforcement officials.
- Child Abuse Hotline(24 hours): **1-800-252-5400**. Web address: <http://txabusehotline.org>
- Anyone filing a report is immune from civil or criminal liability- if the report is made in “good faith” and “without malice”.
- The identity of the reporter is confidential. May be disclosed only on the order of a court or to a law enforcement officer for the purposes of conducting a criminal investigation.
- **You must make the report. A professional may not delegate or rely on another person to make the report.**



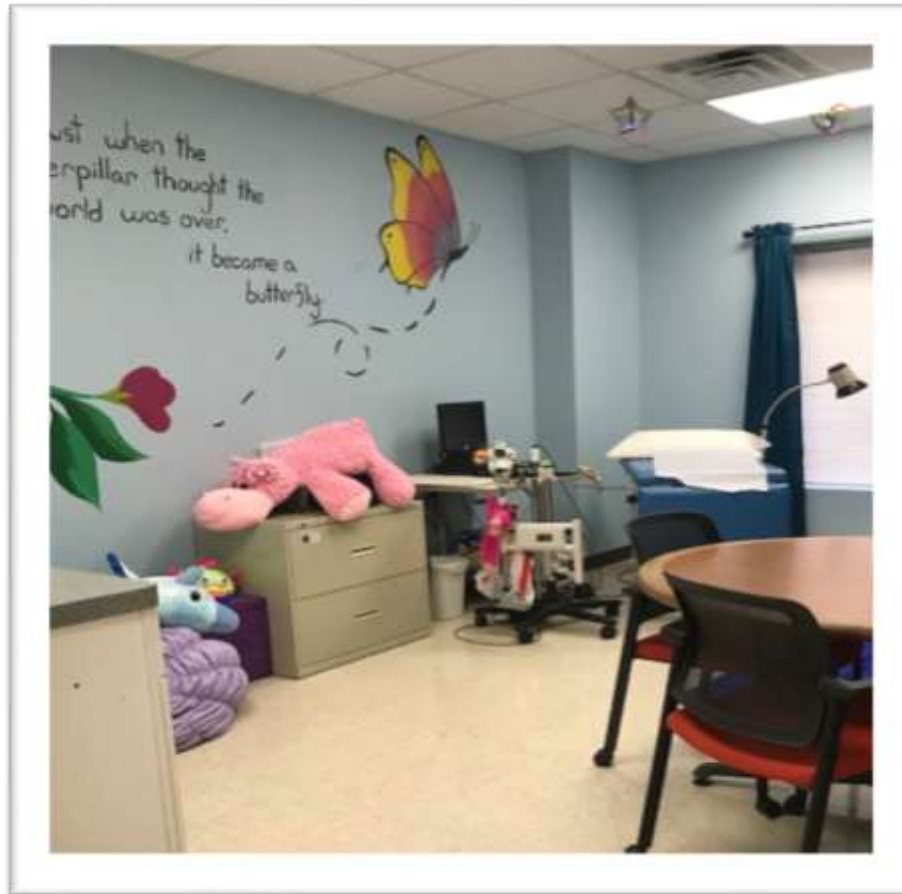
Children's Safe Harbor

- Montgomery County, Walker County and San Jacinto County
- Children ages 2 – 17 years old and adults with intellectual disabilities
- Cases of sexual abuse, physical abuse and violent crimes
- Services provided include:
 - Forensic interviews
 - Family advocacy services
 - Trauma-focused counseling services
 - Onsite sexual assault nurse examinations (SANEs)
 - Joint investigation coordination





Forensic Exams





Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners-TX-FNE

This group of forensic nurses are trained to conduct medical evaluations in a child-sensitive manner that minimizes discomfort to the child.

Can testify to any evidence or explain the absence of evidence

Can testify to any statement the child makes during the exam.





Trauma-Focused Therapy



IMPACT OF TEXAS CAC THERAPY SERVICES

71% of clients initially diagnosed with significant depression symptoms showed none after 12 therapeutic sessions.

52% of clients starting with post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms showed none after 12 sessions.



Additional Resources

- TX DFPS Report Child Abuse: www.txabusehotline.org or call 1-800-252-5400
- Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas: www.cactx.org
- National Children's Alliance: www.nationalchildrensalliance.org
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network: www.nctsn.org
- One with Courage: www.onewithcourage.org
- Internet Safety: www.netsmartz.org
- Darkness to Light: www.d2l.org



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Questions?

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