



Through Our Eyes: Children, Violence, and Trauma

Videos and Resources

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The Child Advocacy Center Model Transcript

ELAINE D. STOLTE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, THE CHILDREN'S ASSESSMENT CENTER, HOUSTON, TX: The advocacy center movement started years ago because the system was fragmented. And many times children who had been sexually abused had to repeat their story over and over and go to different entities.

TRUDY NOVICKI, J.D., EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, KRISTI HOUSE, MIAMI, FL: That produced not only bad results for the children, but bad results for the system, too.

RICARDO A. RUBIALES, LCSW, THERAPY SUPERVISOR, KRISTI HOUSE, MIAMI, FL: They don't need people doubting them or questioning them in a manner that seems judgmental or critical. They need an unconditional positive regard.

ELAINE STOLTE: Here at the Children's Assessment Center, we've made a child-friendly environment, bringing everybody together under one roof so that children would not have to be re-victimized. Our law enforcement, our DAs, county attorneys, children's protective services—everybody's on board and everybody's working together as a team. Children don't have to repeat their story over and over like they did in the past. We have trained forensic interviewers who interview them and their information is recorded and then shared with all the entities necessary. We also have clinical social workers; we have therapy and psychological staff here at the Children's Assessment Center.

LAWRENCE THOMPSON, JR., PH.D., DIRECTOR OF THERAPY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES, THE CHILDREN'S ASSESSMENT CENTER, HOUSTON, TX: We see it all in the way of bad things that happen to children. More often than not, we see kids that have not only been sexually abused, they have also been physically abused, neglected, sometimes have been prostituted, even though child sexual abuse is the major way that people find their way to this advocacy center.

ELAINE STOLTE: When it first opened 15 years ago, we only had 10 partner agencies at the time, and now we have 45.

LAWRENCE THOMPSON: The Internet Crimes Against Children Team is part of this advocacy center. So many of our kids are abused one way or another via technology. And to have people knowledgeable about that, that can get this group of sexual abuse survivors to services, is huge. They're helping those children and families and bringing those types of offenders to justice.

SGT. J.D. PHILPOT, TASK FORCE AGENT, HOUSTON METRO INTERNET CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN TASK FORCE: With the advent of the Internet over the last 10 to 15 years, the predators now never have to leave their house. They're able to log on in their own home and go out and meet potential victims.

OFFICER: Police! Search warrant!

J.D. PHILPOT: They're going to start sending nude photographs of themselves to the children, or have the children produce and send nude photographs to them. At some point that predator wants to meet a live child for some type of a sexual purpose. Once it's reported to law enforcement, what we try to do is, we try to get that child into our Children's Assessment Center so that they can begin treatment, so that child can begin to heal.

ELAINE STOLTE: I know without any doubt, when they're here and they walk through our doors, the outcome of their case and their health and welfare will be much better than what it was before they came here. My heart hurts for the children who don't find their way to our doors and live with the life of trauma and abuse and it never ends.

LAURA ADAMS, ASSISTANT STATE ATTORNEY, DIVISION CHIEF, SEXUAL BATTERY AND CHILD ABUSE UNIT: If he's still, like, on probation, 2,500 feet in Dade County. When I train police officers in investigating sex crimes, I tell them you have to be able to tiptoe in steel boots. We can hopefully make sure that that offender spends the rest of their life in prison. You have to be tough and strong and know how to accurately analyze and objectively analyze the evidence, but you have to understand how delicate, not only the child victims are, but the people immediately around those children. Here at Kristi House, families can come to one location right after this horrible event has been disclosed and get the services that are necessary in one stop.

TRUDY NOVICKI: We see about 800 children a year here at Kristi House. Many of our children that come in here come in not just with sexual abuse, but also with physical abuse and neglect.

RICARDO A. RUBIALES: Do you want to come play inside now? What the children and the families need from the service providers is a comfort zone, a safe place where they can go and feel comfortable. The most important thing is the relationship between the therapist and the child and the family. Once they understand what is abuse and how it happens, then we could gradually start exploring in more detail what happened in their abuse. What are we reading today? We want to be able to reconstruct or adapt those thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that were in response to the abuse so they can realize that there's nothing to be ashamed about. It wasn't their fault, and that they're learning how to deal with it, and now they're learning how to prevent it from happening in the future.

LAURA ADAMS: We're going to do everything we can to try to keep the children from having to testify in court. If the case really does go to trial, members of the Kristi House therapy team try to ensure that that child will have sufficient support systems in place, that they can hold up to the rigors of testifying down the road.

RICARDO RUBIALES: This is showing us what the courthouse looks like.

LAURA ADAMS: For many children, actually coming to court can be very empowering for them.

RICARDO RUBIALES: None of this is about scaring you or doing anything that's going to make you feel bad.

LAURA ADAMS: When they get to the courtroom, they get to stand up for themselves. And they get to tell what really happened.

TRUDY NOVICKI: A form of abuse that has been overlooked for years in this country is our children that are being exploited in the sex trade. When we looked at children involved in prostitution, we realized that these are really victims of child sexual abuse. If a child in the state of Florida can't consent to having sex, then how can they be charged with the crime of prostitution? So now we've shifted our focus and we view these children as victims. The biggest weapon we have against child sexual abuse is talking about it, because so many victims will grow up in a home being told that this is normal, this is what normal is. And as we educate parents, as well as children, then we'll be able to change the mindset.

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