

Letter to the Editor: Adults must find same courage as children victimized by abuse

Written by By Greg Abbott, Attorney General of Texas
Thursday, 12 May 2011 10:14 -

MAY 5, 2011 - Thanks to Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas, the word "courage" is increasingly associated with the fight against child abuse. Child advocates serving on the front lines of the state's battle to prevent abuse have long recognized the need for courage as they labor tirelessly to protect young victims. But no courage is more difficult to muster than that shown by a child who summons the strength to speak out against an abuser. As adults, however, we cannot possibly expect children to find this courage if we do not ourselves have the courage to openly discuss this terrible crime.

The child abuse statistics are staggering. According to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, in FY 2010 one out of every 100 Texas children was a victim of abuse or neglect. Put another way, every eight minutes an abuser harmed a child in our state. Even more startling is the fact that, every 38 hours, an abuser took the life of an innocent and helpless child.

But there is hope. Each year, 40,000 little victims seek--and find--refuge at local Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) across Texas. Protected by the safety and security of a CAC and its seasoned professionals, each of these children demonstrates remarkable courage and somehow manages to talk about the unimaginable,horrific abuse at the hands of someone they grew up loving and trusting. Fortunately, their youthful courage is nurtured and fortified by a CAC's supporting cast--which includes local law enforcement officials, child protective services, prosecutors, medical professionals, mental health experts and victims' advocates.

Sadly, these young victims must summon more than just the courage to cry for help. Each month, hundreds of children appear in courtrooms across Texas, take the stand, face their perpetrators and courageously relive abuse as they recount their devastating story to a jury of 12 strangers.

These brave children are an inspiration to us all. Just like these children, adults can--and must--speak up about child abuse. To help protect young victims, all Texans must educate themselves about the signs and symptoms of child abuse. Once adults are taught to recognize abuse, Texas will begin to not only prevent abuse before innocent young lives are lost--but we will be capable of acting proactively so that children need not do so on their own.

An educated community is the single best tool that we have to prevent abuse. Informed adults

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can learn, listen and report suspected abuse--which ensures that life-saving interventions occur at the earliest possible moment.

Child abuse--particularly sexual abuse--depends upon a thick veil of secrecy. Yet every day there are children across Texas who step forward and muster the courage to tell their heart-breaking stories.

As we observe Child Abuse Prevention Month, all Texans need to remember that they can demonstrate exemplary courage of their own. As Attorney General, I hope that each and every Texan will take a stand, join the fight to protect our children, and support the Children's Advocacy Centers as they strive to advance their One With Courage campaign. Together, we can make a difference in the thousands of young lives--and the future of our great state.

To learn more about the signs and symptoms of abuse, and to find your local Children's Advocacy Center, please visit www.onewithcourage.org.