



VERMONT CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE
vtchildrensalliance.org

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PO Box 543, Bennington, Vermont 05201 ~ www.vtchildrensalliance.org

To Whom It May Concern:

Vermont Special Investigation Units (SIU) and Child Advocacy Centers (CAC) work on behalf of children and adults that may have endured physical or sexual violence in Vermont. There are 13 centers in Vermont that the SIU (law enforcement and child protection) are able to access to provide professional, trauma-informed and victim-centered interviews and advocacy services to alleged victims of these heinous crimes.

Each center has a multidisciplinary team (MDT) approach that includes the SIU, medical care, mental health, forensic interviewing, advocacy, and prosecution partners who follow the victim-centered approach. The team members for each center receive specialized training to execute a sound, team-based, cohesive response that is founded in ethical research. All of Vermont's CACs are supported by the State Chapter, the Vermont Children's Alliance.

The SIU/CACs began to be established in Vermont in the 1990's and most of Vermont's SIU/CACs are Nationally Accredited through the National Children's Alliance. These centers are being held to the highest standards and following best practice to serve children. Many of the centers are staffed by folks with former employment through Vermont Department for Children and Families, law enforcement, and other relevant backgrounds to the SIU work.

Attached is a brochure created by the VCA to explain a step-by-step experience for every Vermont child that allegedly endures the types of crimes that the hearsay rules offer protection to. As you can see, each child receives an interview in a comfortable, safe setting at the child-friendly CAC that is local to them. The interviews are observed by the SIU members assigned to investigate the allegations and the families receive support at the center while the interview occurs.

Although no one promises a child that they won't have to testify in front of their perpetrator, CAC staff and SIU investigators make it clear that it is a possibility. Many parents and children decide that it is not in the child's best interest to testify in front of their abuser. Each center in Vermont can provide dozens of examples in the past two decades in which children have opted out of seeking probative or prosecutorial justice in exchange for protecting their mental health.

Children that endure these types of abuse are often incredibly fragile, often times despite a strong, coherent presentation in the interview room. Children are able to regain some of the power that is crushed by their abuser while they are in the safe space that is their local CAC. They are able to tell a complete stranger about the horrors that they may have faced and how it made them feel. This strength does not often transfer to the court room, where their abuser can look them in the eye, causing intense feelings of guilt, shame, betrayal, fear, and absolute devastation.

Addison Children's Advocacy Center ♦ Bennington County Children's Advocacy Center ♦ Caledonia Children's Advocacy Center
Chittenden County Children's Advocacy Center ♦ Lamoille County Children's Advocacy Center ♦ Our House of Central Vermont
Northwest Unit Child Advocacy Center ♦ Orange County Children's Advocacy Center ♦ Orleans County Children's Advocacy Center
Rutland County Child First Advocacy Center ♦ The Child Advocacy Centers of Windsor County at The Family Place ♦ Windham County Safe Place

MDT members, such as the States Attorney Victim Advocate and the designated SIU Prosecutor for the State, will spend time reviewing what the child may endure, should they have to testify. They will let them sit on the witness stand, have them practice speaking from the stand, explain where their abuser will sit, and hope and pray that the child's strength and wits remain on the day they have to speak about their abuse in the open court room.

The following data is comprised from a few resources (see footnote citations and references throughout the document). The totals deduced are only estimations based on the data available in the left column, as calculated by Executive Director Sam Prince (Windham County).

Rates	Breakdown	# of kids
1/10 of children are abused by 18 ¹	Of 74429984 ²	7,442,998
9/10 of abused children know their abuser	Of 7,442,998	6,698,698
1/3 of abused children tell about abuse right away	Of 7,442,998	2,456,189
1/5 of child sexual abuse cases are prosecuted	Of 2,456,189	491,237
1/2 of prosecuted cases are convictions or guilty pleas	Of 491,237	245,618

***Less than 10% of kids who report their abuse right away will yield a conviction or guilty plea.**

Children that have disabilities and/or mental illnesses are almost three times as likely to be abused^{3, 4}, in contrast to their peers without these disabilities. As it stands, only one in three children that endure abuse are likely to tell about it right away⁵. Most children wait to tell. Although there is scientific evidence and decades of research supporting that delayed disclosure is normal. A child telling pieces of their experience at a time is normal⁶. A child being unable to say “no” is normal⁷. A medical evaluation showing “normal” physical findings *is normal*⁸. Many defense attorneys will use all of these things as tools to dismantle and discredit *children*. Even adults in a child's immediate life may offer doubt, disbelief, or discouragement⁹.

The strength and courage it takes for a child to share and recount the details of their abuse is insurmountable. Many adults are unable to do it. Many centers provide support and interviews to adults in their 50s, 60s, and 70s, that have *never* spoken of the abuse they endured as children. More than 90% of abused children **know their perpetrator; 30% of known perpetrators are related to the children they abuse**; the remaining 60% of perpetrators are acquittance's, family friends, clergy, coaches, therapists, teachers, doctors, music instructors, team leaders, etc.¹⁰.

There are many other parameters that significantly increase the likelihood of a child being abused: parents with mental health issues, substance abuse issues, parental conflicts (including separation and non-nuclear homes as well as partner violence), parents that are antisocial and/or delinquent, parental stress¹¹, parents with lower intellectual ability, physical disability, parental incarceration, parents that are young, a large family size, and/or children using substances, with low social skills, frequent internet use, violent behaviors¹². Children whose parents endured sexual abuse are three times as likely to endure abuse¹³.

Research is solid that between 2 to 8% of abuse allegations are false – these results remain consistent among various research projects and varying abuse types¹⁴. Again, the bravery it takes to tell is truly something to behold. Why would any child put themselves through the pain of recounting their abuse if they did not have to? Vermont and every other state in the country should be tirelessly and relentlessly advocating for abused children to not only be heard, but to be **protected**. As it stands, only 1 in 5 cases of child sexual abuse will move forward for prosecution. Of these, only 50% will result in convictions or guilty pleas¹⁵.

According to researchers, many of the cases that do not result in prosecution are a direct result of the court involvement being counter to the child/family's best interest¹⁶

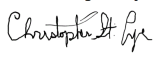
The CAC process already provides a research-based interview protocol that is supportive and reliable for children to share their experiences¹⁷. The recorded interviews are given directly to the assigned investigators to be stored with their investigative files. All materials are then made available for both the prosecution and the defense. To ask children to testify, when Vermont's systems are working so they don't have to, is indefensible and unfair.


On behalf of the Vermont CACs, SIUs, and the VCA, we are grateful to see the amendment to S.190, to include physical assault and serious bodily injury to the hearsay exception rules in 804(a). Children deserve to have the best opportunity for justice and healing, as well as a process that reduces the trauma they endure. We are pleased to see that the intention of this bill captures this.

Attachments:

- #1 24 V.S.A. § 1940
- #2 Brochure
- #3 References


Thank you,

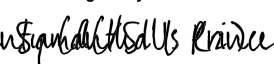
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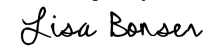
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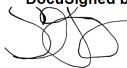
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 Director, Windsor County SIU and CACS of The Family Place

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 Sarah H. Wells, Executive Director

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 Executive Director

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 Lisa Bonser, Executive Director NUSI

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 Tara, Executive Director

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 Executive Director Vermont Children's Advocacy Center

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 Executive Director Chittenden Children's Advocacy Center

24 V.S.A. § 1940)

- § 1940. Special investigative units; boards; grants

- (a) Pursuant to the authority established under section 1938 of this title, and in collaboration with law enforcement agencies, investigative agencies, victims' advocates, and social service providers, the Department of State's Attorneys and Sheriffs shall coordinate efforts to provide access in each region of the State to special investigative units which:

- (1) shall investigate:
 - (A) an incident in which a child suffers, by other than accidental means, serious bodily injury as defined in 13 V.S.A. § 1021; and
 - (B) potential violations of:
 - (i) 13 V.S.A. § 2602 (lewd or lascivious conduct with child);
 - (ii) 13 V.S.A. chapter 60 (human trafficking);
 - (iii) 13 V.S.A. chapter 64 (sexual exploitation of children);
 - (iv) 13 V.S.A. chapter 72 (sexual assault); and
 - (v) 13 V.S.A. § 1379 (sexual abuse of a vulnerable adult); and
- (2) may investigate:
 - (A) an incident in which a child suffers:
 - (i) bodily injury, by other than accidental means, as defined in 13 V.S.A. § 1021; or
 - (ii) death;
 - (B) potential violations of:
 - (i) 13 V.S.A. § 2601 (lewd and lascivious conduct);
 - (ii) 13 V.S.A. § 2605 (voyeurism); and
 - (iii) 13 V.S.A. § 1304 (cruelty to a child); and
- (3) may assist with the investigation of other incidents, including incidents involving domestic violence and crimes against vulnerable adults.

Research Says

1 in 10 kids are abused by age 18



Internet issues and child -to- child abuse are drastically on the rise:

20% of children exposed to sexually explicit material
1 in 9 sexually exploited online
70% abused by a peer

90% of children know their abuser.
30% of known abusers are family.

Children with disabilities have an increased risk of being abused.

1 of 3 children are able to disclose abuse right away. Most kids wait.

Being abused increases the risk that it will happen again.

94% of reports are authentic.

Experiencing trauma increases physical, emotional, and mental health issues.

Your Reaction Matters!

Be a safe adult that does not doubt or question a child's disclosure.

You can make Vermont safer and support children by making a report of abuse to Vermont's 24/7 DCF Hotline:

800-649-2585

Find Your Local CAC

Franklin & Grand Isle

5 Lemnah Drive,
St. Albans, VT
(802)582-4658

Lamoille County

111 Main St.,
Hyde Park, VT
(802) 851-8116

Chittenden County

50 Cherry Street, #102
Burlington, VT
(802) 652-6800

Addison

1590 Route 7 South, #4
Middlebury, VT 05753
(802) 989-7438

Rutland County

80 West Street
Rutland, VT 05702
(802) 747-0200

Bennington County

129 Elm Street
Bennington VT 05201
(802) 442-5107

Windham County

62 Black Mountain Rd,
Brattleboro, VT
802-579-1358

Orleans County

42 Central St.,
Newport, VT
(802) 334-6002

Caledonia County

36 Eastern Ave, #4,
Johnsbury, VT
(802) 424-1227

Washington County

38 Summer Street,
Barre, VT
(802) 476-8825

Orange County

354 VT Route 110
Chelsea, VT
(802) 685-4712

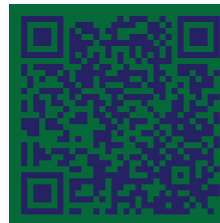
Windsor County

80 Jack + Jill Lane
N. Springfield, VT
(802) 649-3268

Windsor County

5 S Main St, Ste 203
White River
Junction, VT
(802) 295-3882

SCAN FOR WEBSITE!



Vermont Children's Alliance

Providing Support and Advocacy to Vermont's Child Advocacy Centers

What is a Child Advocacy Center? (CAC)

A CAC is a place where children (and adults) can receive services after they've reported sexual or physical abuse.

They may receive a professional, comfortable interview, support, referrals and more through the CAC.

Who is there?

Each CAC has at least two staff, to meet with people, provide support and explain the process.

Police Detectives and Child Services Investigators also meet with families at the CAC as an initial phase of their investigation.

How do we get started?

Once the police and/or child protective services receive a report of sexual abuse or physical violence they will alert the CAC and call you to set up an interview!

What to Expect at a CAC

Before You Arrive

Help your child prepare by sharing the information in this brochure!

If your child shares about what happened, be sure to listen carefully but **withhold emotional and verbal responses**.

Share information about your child, their verbal skills or any needs they may have, with investigators.

When You Arrive

CAC Staff will greet you, explain what to expect and answer questions.



Investigators will be onsite, to observe the interview while it's happening.

During the Interview

Only the interviewer and the child will go into the interview room.

The advocate will stay with caregivers or support people during this time.

Being Interviewed

Each interview strives to make the child as comfortable as possible.

Questions are asked in a non-leading manner that allows the child to share their experience in their own words.



Interviews only occur with the child's permission and ability. There is no pressure to talk.

How long will it take?

Interviews last about an hour, on average. The pace is set by the comfort and ability of the child.

Investigations are slow and thorough. If a case eventually results in court involvement, that process takes time as well. Reach out at any time!

What happens next?

A victim advocate is available to answer questions, provide support, update, and advocate on your behalf throughout the investigation.

You may speak with investigators before you leave the CAC if you wish.

Medical Services

Not everyone needs medical services or an exam. If or when the need arises, staff will help with a referral.

Most exams show 'normal' results. This doesn't mean abuse didn't occur.

Our providers use an approach to support children feeling comfortable.

Therapy

Not everyone needs a therapist right away. If or when the need arises, staff will help with a referral.

Our providers use therapy approaches that help children heal.



Remember!

You are **not** alone in this process!
We are **honored** to be available to you.

Footnotes:

- ¹ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0145213421002544?via%3Dihub#ab0010> * Of Note, the CDC reported that 1 in 7 children were abused last year:
<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/fastfact.html>
- ² <https://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/tables/pop1.asp>
- ³ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0145213400001903?via%3Dihub>
- ⁴ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1744629517698844>
- ⁵ <https://childusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Delayed-Disclosure-Factsheet-2020.pdf>
- ⁶ <https://endcan.org/2022/03/10/delayed-disclosure-of-child-sex-abuse-why-children-dont-tell/>
- ⁷ <https://www.earlyopenoften.org/get-the-facts/why-kids-dont-tell>.
- ⁸ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4215093>
- ⁹ <https://calio.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Why-Parents-Dont-Believe-Presentation-.pdf>
- ¹⁰ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24953383/>
- ¹¹ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0190740922002900>
- ¹² <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2019-08488-001>
- ¹³ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0272735820300799?via%3Dihub>
- ¹⁴ <https://www.nationalcac.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/False-allegations-of-sexual-abuse-by-children-and-adolescents.pdf>
- ¹⁵ <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/252768.pdf>
- ¹⁶ <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/252768.pdf>
- ¹⁷ <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/252768.pdf>

Additional information can be found:

- <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/fastfact.html>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/fastfact.html>
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8882933/>
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3232061/>
- <https://www.childprotect.org/facts-about-child-abuse.html>
- <https://www.d2l.org/education/5-steps/step-1/>
- <https://www.d2l.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Child-Sexual-Abuse-Updates.pdf>