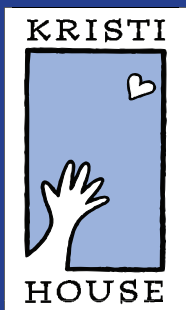


KRISTI HOUSE

Children's Advocacy Center



HANDBOOK

For Parents & Guardians



Contact names and numbers

Kristi House **305-547-6800**

Family Advocate

Therapist

Family's Protective Investigator

Assistant State Attorney

Victim's Witness Coordinator

Guardian Ad Litem

Detective

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Welcome to Kristi House and the Orlowitz-Lee Children's Advocacy Center



The staff of Kristi House is dedicated to respecting, honoring, protecting and healing the children and families who pass through our doors.

You and your child are here because of concerns about possible abuse.

Our Goals

- ♥ Try to find out what happened to your child.
- ♥ Answer any questions you or your child might have.
- ♥ Assist you and your child through the legal, medical, and protective process.
- ♥ Help you find any services you and your child need to heal.

Clients' Rights and Responsibilities

- ♥ In the provision of service to clients, Kristi House will not discriminate against any person because of race, color, religion, age, sex, handicap, marital status, sexual orientation, country of national origin, or ability to pay. Clients or their guardians may file a complaint directly with the Florida Department of Children and Families if they believe they have been discriminated against in violation of Title VI.
- ♥ Our clients or their guardians can reach us from 8:30 till 5:00, Monday through Friday. After hours, our clients can leave a voice mail message and we will return their call as soon as possible.
- ♥ Our clients or their guardians have a right to review his/her record as prescribed by Kristi House procedures. They have the right to participate and ask questions for all aspects of services being planned or delivered. Our clients or their guardians have a right to refuse treatment. We must inform other professionals involved, and close the case.
- ♥ Our clients or their guardians have the right to be told if the program cannot provide services and be advised of alternative services. Clients with co-occurring disorders will not be refused services. Coordination of therapeutic service will be the responsibility of the Case Coordinator and Therapist.
- ♥ Our clients or their guardians have the right to confidentiality. We may only release information when given written permission by the legal guardian, ordered by the court, and/or we suspect our client is being harmed, may harm himself/herself, or someone else. Our clients shall release us from any Liability and Responsibility if they speak with or disclose to the Media any information pertaining to their case and or services being provided by Kristi House, Inc.
- ♥ Our clients or their guardians have a right to discuss a grievance directly with the staff member involved. If problems are not resolved to our clients or their guardians' satisfaction, they have a right to request that the staff member's supervisors respond to the problem in writing within 10 business days.
- ♥ Our clients or their guardians have the right not to participate in any experiment or research program. Should any such program be started, the client must be advised and freely agree to be a part of it. Any tape recording or filming of any client information or communication will be done only with the client's consent.
- ♥ The guardians of our clients are responsible for the well-being and supervision of their children while at the center. All clients under 3 years of age must remain with their guardians at all times. The staff has the right to cancel or reschedule appointments for clients who put other clients or staff members at risk for harm or illness.

Your Team of Professionals

Children's and Special Needs Unit

At Kristi House Orlowitz-Lee Children's Advocacy Center we are fortunate to have a highly trained team of professionals which meets every week to respond to child abuse reports.

Forensic

Interviewers: The Forensic Interviewer will conduct fact gathering interviews of children between the ages of 3 and 11, who have been victims or witnesses of a crime. He or she will interview you and your child to try to find out

what happened. The interviews are conducted in a non-threatening, child friendly manner. These interviews are videotaped and can be used to reduce the number of times your child will have to give information and to assist the investigation and prosecution of these cases.

The State Attorney/Prosecutor: The prosecutor leads the team and has the final decision as to whether charges will be filed. They hold depositions, prefile conferences and other meetings related to prosecution decisions. Many things affect the decision to file charges. These things include age and maturity of the child, the child's ability to testify, whether or not the suspect has confessed, presence of medical evidence, and whether or not there are other witnesses.

Please help us safeguard your children and reschedule if your child is sick.

Your Team of Professionals

The Law Enforcement Officer: Miami has a number of different police departments, the largest are the Miami-Dade County Police Department and City of Miami Police Department, but many areas of Miami have their own departments including Miami-Dade Public Schools. An officer from the department in your area will interview the children, non-offending parents, suspects, and other witnesses, and gather evidence from the scene of the alleged event.

The Victim Witness Counselor: The Victim Witness Counselor is a professional in the State Attorney's office who coordinates the court preparation, helps victims and their families understand the legal process, and provides other valuable services to the victims and their families.

Guardian ad Litem: A Guardian ad Litem (GAL) is a specially trained volunteer that may be appointed by the court to represent your child during the legal process. The GAL will explain the legal proceedings to your child, and help you and your child in coping with the emotional effects of the crime and criminal proceedings. A GAL may be present on behalf of your child during any proceedings, where they can make recommendations to the court, and may file motions for protective orders on behalf of your child.

The Department and Family Protective

Investigator: The role of the Department of Children and Families is to help protect your child. The Protective Investigator conducts interviews and develops safety plans. They may refer you and your child to counseling.

Your Team of Professionals

The Doctor: Here at the Orlowitz-Lee Children's Advocacy Center we work closely with the University of Miami Child Protection Team to provide medical exams for children who have disclosed abuse. The exam for sexual abuse involves a regular check-up with magnification of the genitalia. Magnification is done with an instrument called a culposcope. Cultures may also be taken. This exam should not be traumatic or painful. Most children who experience sexual abuse have normal exams so the team does not rely on these examinations alone to prove abuse. The exams do allow the doctor to assure the child that his or her body is okay.

Case Coordinator: The case coordinator can act as the liaison for all other agencies housed at the center and other agencies that provide services within the community. He or she can help answer any questions you may have. The case coordinator can refer children and their families to any services they might need including therapy and will provide follow up to make sure the family is receiving services.

Therapist: Mental health professionals or therapists who specialize in working with kids who may have been sexually abused are important members of the team. They will help the team decide how the abuse has affected the child and his/her family, and what can be done to assist them in recovering from the experience.

What is Sexual Abuse?

- ◆ **All** sexual contact between an adult and a child.
- ◆ Child on child sexual contact can be abusive if there is a significant difference in age, development, or size.
- ◆ Sexual abuse involves a sexual activity with a child where consent is not or cannot be given.

Types of Sexual Abuse

Physical Contact

- ◆ Fondling or any kind of inappropriate touching.
- ◆ Rape or attempted rape.
- ◆ Using a child to create pornography.

Nonphysical Behaviors

- ◆ Indecent exposure.
- ◆ Talk about sex designed to shock the child.
- ◆ Allowing the child to watch or hear sexual acts or materials.

Steps Abusers Take to Set Up Children

Abusers come from all age groups, income levels and races.

Most abusers are men, but women may also abuse children. Abusers come from all age groups, income levels and races. They often

have a need for power and control. Sometimes abuse includes alcohol or drug use or other forms of domestic violence. Offenders use many tactics to gain access to children.

Seeking out children – Abusers usually pick children who are easy to get to (relatives, friends, and neighbors). They seek quiet children or children who have emotional needs for friendship and attention.

Establishing relationship with the child – Abusers often seek ways to build trust and friendship with children. They may spend time playing with them, volunteer for babysitting, buy them candy or presents.

Breaking down the child's resistance to touch – Abusers may find ways to touch children a lot. They may play games with a lot of physical contact like wrestling or tickling. Children are often confused when the touch becomes sexual.

Finding ways to isolate a child – Abusers find excuses to be alone with children.

Blaming or threatening the child to keep the secret – Abusers may say the following:

"You know you like the way I touch you."

"If you tell I might have to leave."

"If you tell no one will believe you."

"You can't tell our special secret."



Natural and Expected Sexual Behaviors For Elementary Aged Children

- ◆ Asks about the genitals, breasts, intercourse, babies.
- ◆ Interested in watching people in the bathroom.
- ◆ Uses “dirty” words for bathroom functions, genitals, and sex.
- ◆ Plays doctor, inspecting others’ bodies.
- ◆ Boys and girls are interested in having/birthing a baby.
- ◆ Shows others his/her genitals.
- ◆ Has interest in urination and defecation.
- ◆ Touches/rubs own genitals when going to sleep, when tense, excited or afraid.
- ◆ Plays house, may simulate all roles of mommy and daddy.
- ◆ Thinks children of the opposite sex are “gross” or have “cooties.” Chases them.
- ◆ Talks about sex with friends. Talks about having a girl/boy friend.
- ◆ Wants privacy when in bathroom or when dressing.
- ◆ Likes to hear or tell “dirty” jokes.
- ◆ Looks at nude pictures.

Serious Sexual Behaviors For Which You Should Seek Professional Help

- ◆ Endless questions about sex. Sexual knowledge too great for age.
- ◆ Refuses to leave people alone in the bathroom.
- ◆ Continues use of “dirty” words even after exclusion from school and activities.
- ◆ Forces another child to play doctor, to take off clothes.
- ◆ Displays fear or anger about babies or intercourse.
- ◆ Refuses to put on clothes. Continually exposes self in public despite multiple reprimands for doing so.
- ◆ Repeatedly plays with or smears feces. Purposely urinates on self.
- ◆ Touches/rubs self in public or in private to the exclusion of normal childhood activities. Masturbates on people or on objects.
- ◆ Attempts intercourse with another child. Forces sex on other children. Acts out by humping naked.
- ◆ Uses bad language against another child’s family. Hurts children of the opposite sex or younger children.
- ◆ Talks about sex and sexual acts a lot. Repeatedly in trouble in regard to sexual behavior.
- ◆ Aggressive or tearful in demand for privacy.

Helping Your Child

Children almost never tell about abuse to create a problem. More often, they fear that telling will make people angry at them. It is extremely difficult for most children to report abuse.

Some things you can say

- ♥ I believe you.
- ♥ It's not your fault.
- ♥ I am sorry this happened to you.
- ♥ It has happened to other children, too.
- ♥ I am upset, but not with you.
- ♥ I am glad you told.
- ♥ I am angry with the person who did this.
- ♥ I will take care of you.
- ♥ I am not sure what will happen next.
- ♥ You don't need to take care of me.
- ♥ You may see me cry because I am sad, but that's okay.
- ♥ I don't know why the person did this.
- ♥ You can still love someone but hate what they do.

Helping Your Child

Some things you can do

- ♥ Return to a normal routine as soon as possible.
- ♥ See that your child receives therapy. The problems the abuse causes for you and your child will not go away by ignoring them.
- ♥ Find help for yourself. You don't have to do it alone.
- ♥ Teach your child rules of personal safety. When they feel uncomfortable with anyone they should...

Speak up.
Leave the situation.
Tell a trusted adult.

- ♥ Be careful not to question your child too much. If your child wants to talk about it, listen supportively, but do not push.
- ♥ Keep your child away from the person suspected of abuse. Never leave your child alone with the person.
- ♥ Avoid discussing the case with other victims or their families.
- ♥ Never coach your child on what to say or how to act. Encourage them to tell the truth.
- ♥ Remember to give attention to your other children.

The single most important factor affecting your child's recovery is the level of support that you give them.

How Are You Feeling?

When abuse is reported, parents may feel many different emotions. The report may affect your life in many ways. Below are some thoughts and feelings parents may have when they learn about their child's abuse.

Denial. When a child is abused by someone the parent loves or trusts the first reaction may be to not believe that the abuse happened. A parent may not accept or may believe no real harm was done. Parents should know that children rarely make up stories about abuse.

Anger. At times parents feel angry at themselves for not protecting their child. They may feel angry at the person who abused their child. They may even feel angry at their child. Parents need to share their feelings with a trusted family member, friend, or professional counselor.

Helplessness. Parents often feel like things are out of their control. Some parents may fear that their children will be taken away. It is important to work with professionals at the center and let them know your concerns.

Shock & Repulsion. Parents who have a history of abuse in their own lives often have strong negative feelings when similar things happen to their own children. Parents may need to work with a therapist to overcome strong emotional reactions to abuse.

Guilt. Parents may feel it is all their fault but the offender is responsible for the abuse, not you. The best thing you can do is support your child and learn how to make things better.

Taking Care of Yourself

You are going through a very difficult time, and you probably feel pressured from many directions. Although you are trying to take care of a lot of other people, you also need to take care of yourself. Your well-being is very important. You need to find time to do something just for you and plan to do it regularly. This may be difficult to do but it is in the best interest of you and your child.

Scheduling your own time and space will help you gain a sense of control. Take the time to take care of yourself.

- ♥ Decide what you would like to do.
- ♥ Schedule time for yourself.
- ♥ Write down the time and place.
- ♥ Tell anyone who needs to know where you are going and when you will be back.
- ♥ Take care of details, such as child care and transportation.
- ♥ Enjoy yourself.

Some suggested activities: Take a walk, have lunch with a friend, go to the movies, or join an exercise class. Most importantly, join a support group. Talking to other parents can really help you feel less alone.

Facts About The Investigation and Legal System

Here at the Center there are some things being done to improve the legal system's response to child abuse.

At times, you may be asked to wait while your child is being questioned. Being left out of some of the proceedings can make

you feel as if you are not very important. In fact, you may be the key to understanding what has happened. However, in your presence, your child may be unwilling to tell important details because he or she does not want to upset you. Most interviewers will take the time to make sure your child is comfortable without you. They will let the child know where you will be and that you will be available if necessary. They will also speak with you after the child's interview is completed.

The legal process often moves slowly. Various proceedings can take place over a period of months or years. The court date may be delayed over and over again and you will have no control over this. It is best to try to work with the team to gain the best outcome for you and your child. The legal system was not designed with the needs of children in mind. The rights of the child victim are far less defined than the rights of the alleged perpetrator. Here at the Center there are some things being done to improve the legal system's response to child abuse.

- ♥ Professionals are trained on issues of child abuse.
- ♥ The number of times a child needs to tell about the abuse is being reduced.
- ♥ Agencies involved are coordinating their services.
- ♥ Children and families can receive therapy and counseling services during the legal process.
- ♥ A Guardian ad Litem may be assigned to represent the best interest of the child.

Working With the System

Here are some basic tips for working with professionals in the system.

- Be calm and reassuring to your child. Don't coach your child on what to say. It is important for the story to come out in your child's words and in the child's own time.
- When you are asked for information, try to provide as many facts as you can. Cases are built on the four W's: who, what, when and where. Don't guess if you don't know the answer to a question.
- Feelings are valuable in giving investigators insight, so tell how you feel and why you feel that way.
- Always be honest, even though the truth may not seem favorable to yourself or to your child. In the long run, you will be much better off.
- Try not to overreact. It is a difficult time and emotions are running high. Losing control can hurt the case and overshadow the needs your child.
- Love, support and protect your child at all costs. If the alleged offender is a significant person to you, it can be very difficult to balance your feelings for him or her with the need to protect your child. Remember that your child has only you to make healthy, protective decisions.
- Cooperate. You may feel that the investigators are prying into your personal life, but this is necessary and vital to the case and to your child's welfare. The sooner the facts come out, the sooner the case can be resolved and you can return to a normal life.

How to Tell Your Child About the Legal Outcome

It is best to be honest and direct with your child.

How much you explain depends on your child's age and what he or she can understand. The most important thing is let the child know that you are proud of him or her for being brave.

When the case is completed, you may feel let down or have a period of depression. It happens to most parents, even if the outcome is a positive experience. If your child hears you express disappointment in the outcome, your child may think you are disappointed in him or her. Instead, find a supportive friend with whom you can share your feelings and frustration.

Remember, you have done your best in trying to prevent further abuse and hold the offender responsible for what he or she did. Even if the case was dropped, this is a major accomplishment.

What to Say to Others

One challenge your family will face will be what to say to others about the abuse.

Your child may feel embarrassed and responsible. If there is no publicity or public awareness, you can decide whom you will tell. Let your child know with which relatives or friends you will be discussing it and let your child have some choice about who is told.

Sometimes you are not the first person to learn of the abuse. You may feel hurt that someone knew before you. However, understand that your child may have been trying to protect your feelings by telling someone else. Your child may have felt that person could tell you in a less upsetting way.

If you are especially close to your family, you will probably want to talk with them about your child's abuse and how it has affected the family. It is important to keep in mind how these relatives usually react to stressful situations. If you know they will react in a negative way, you may not want to share the information with them unless it becomes necessary. It is important to maintain your child's sense of privacy. On the other hand, be careful not to make it into a shameful secret. Remember your child did nothing wrong.

Kristi House Locations

Main

1265 NW 12th Avenue
Miami 33136

Miami Gardens

18425 NW 2nd Avenue, PH9
Miami Gardens 33169

Palmetto Bay

15321 South Dixie Highway, #213
Palmetto Bay 33157

Naranja

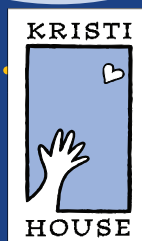
Naranja Community Center
13955 SW 264 Street • Naranja 33032

Homestead

2008 NE 8 Street • Homestead 33033

Project GOLD Drop In Center

(305) 547-6850



(305) 547-6800 • www.kristihouse.org



In Florida, any person who knows, or has reasonable cause to suspect, that a child is abused, neglected, or abandoned by a parent, legal custodian, caregiver, or other person responsible for the child's welfare shall immediately report such knowledge or suspicion to the Abuse Hotline of Florida DCF. Reports can be made by phone or online: **1.800.96ABUSE • ReportAbuse@dcf.state.fl.us**

