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FEATURE

CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT IN CULLMAN COUNTY

Child abuse and neglect do not begin and end in April

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Photo: Five percent of the children in our community are abused and/or neglected. If you see something, say something. Call 9-1-1. Call the Department of Human Resources at 256-737-5300. Call Cullman Caring for Kids at 256-739-1111. Say something.

CULLMAN - Every ten seconds in the United States a child is abused or neglected. In the time it took the average reader to finish the first two sentences of this article, two to three children will have endured horrors that most of us cannot imagine.

In Cullman County, 980 reported cases of child abuse and neglect were investigated last year. The population of children in the entire county is just under 20,000. By those numbers, five percent of children in Cullman are victims of reported abuse. Five percent of the children in our community. That's just the reported cases.

What about the unreported cases of child abuse and neglect that occur every day right under our noses?

“Child abuse is one of the hardest things to know about. You can see the bruises a lot of times on a child, but the perpetrator wants to keep things a secret. They want to make sure that nobody knows what’s happening, so they’ll either threaten the child, threaten to harm someone the child loves and even a child’s pet can be used as leverage to keep the secret,” shared Javon Daniel, executive director of Cullman Caring for Kids.

April of each year is recognized as Child Abuse Prevention Awareness Month throughout the country. Locally, the month is commemorated with many events and media spotlights to help spread awareness and honor the lives of children lost to abuse and neglect.

Cullman Caring for Kids, with their dream and mission of “no child will ever be abused, no child will go to bed hungry, no infants will ever be shaken in anger and the cycle of abuse will be stopped” strives each day to provide support for children and families to prevent abuse and education for citizens to recognize abuse and neglect when it’s happening to the little ones in our lives.

Cullman Caring for Kids defines physical abuse as any non-accidental physical injury or pattern of injuries inflicted or caused by an adult, parent, guardian, or any other person. Physical abuse can include striking, kicking, burning or biting the child, or any action that results in a physical impairment of the child. Indicators of physical abuse include, but are not limited to, bruises and welts, fractures, burns and scalds, abdominal injuries, head or brain injuries, lacerations and abrasions, bite marks, multiple injuries (old and new), history of injuries and any injuries to very young baby. While some of these injuries can occur by accident, child abuse should be suspected if the explanations do not fit the injuries. A child who is consistently withdrawn or overly aggressive, who complains of soreness, wears inappropriate clothing for the weather or who is a chronic runaway may be a victim of abuse.

“(Physical) abuse is any time a child is hurt to the point that they have a lot of bruises, need medical attention, have burns, spiral fractures of the arms where a child has been grabbed and the arm twisted, using an instrument that can cut the skin or leave bruising like belt buckles, cords or clothes hangers. That is the physical abuse of a child,” said Daniel.

The legal definition for the sexual molestation of a child is an act of a person (adult or any person who is older than the child) which forces, coerces or threatens a child to have any form of sexual contact or to engage in any type of sexual activity. Sexual abuse includes both touching and non-touching offenses such as provocative language or behavior. In its most extreme forms, it includes sexual intercourse and its deviations. Sexual abuse also includes indecent exposure, exposure to pornographic material and masturbating in front of a child. Physical offenses include fondling, making a child touch an adult’s sexual organs or any penetration of a child’s vagina or anus by any object that does not have a valid medical purpose. The sexual exploitation of a child for the purposes of prostitution or use in pornography is also a criminal offense.

“Sexual abuse is any touching of a child when the adult is trying to be aroused or to arouse the child.”

Emotional abuse is commonly defined as a pattern of behavior that can seriously interfere with a child’s positive emotional development. It is the systematic tearing down of a child. These harmful behaviors can include constant rejection or terrorizing of a child, refusal to provide basic nurturing, refusal to get help for a child’s psychological problems, failure to provide the physical or mental stimulation that a child needs to grow and exposure to domestic violence, drug abuse or criminal activity. Children who are constantly shamed, terrorized, humiliated or rejected suffer as much as children who are physically abused.

“Emotional abuse is when a child is put down. ‘I didn’t really want you. You’re no good.’ Those kinds of horrible, horrible words,” said Daniel. “Physical wounds will heal. Emotional abuse leaves scars that will never heal. You can’t tell a child that they’re worthless all of their life and expect them instantly to accept that they’re worthwhile, special and awesome, which they all are.”

Neglect is defined as a failure to provide necessary food, shelter, medical care, supervision, or education to a child under the age of 18. Neglect also includes an absence of love, security and stimulation that is necessary for positive parent-child relationships to develop. Neglect can be physical, emotional/psychological, educational or medical.

Long-term effects of abuse include diminished mental health including lifelong battles with depression, anxiety disorders, struggles with substance abuse and increased rates of suicide. Over 75 percent of adults who report experiencing physical abuse as children have battled a mental illness in their life.

That’s in the cases when the child lives to see adulthood. Not all victims are that fortunate. The yearly average of child abuse deaths in the United States is well over 1,500, meaning that five children a day die as a result of child abuse or neglect in this country. Thirteen of those deaths happened in Alabama last year.

All we know of the Alabama children who died last year from child abuse and neglect are their names.

Samantha. Joseph. Caley. Tyleah. Isabella. Timothy. Bennett. Jamarion.
Michael. Alania. Jadarrius. Lia. Aaliyah.

Posted by [Cullman Caring for Kids](#) on [Wednesday, April 6, 2016](#)

“It’s never a child’s fault. There is nothing, absolutely nothing that a child can do to deserve to be abused in any way. If abuse is happening to a child, it is because of the adult, not because of something the child has done. The child is never to blame.”

If we take a moment to reflect on a time when we, ourselves, were expecting a child, anticipating the birth of a little one in our family or the arrival of a new godchild, we can recall the excitement when the baby’s name was decided. A name for a new, miraculous life is shared with joy and, in the South, the monogramming and embroidery begin! Our names mean so much.

All we know are their names and that they died as the direct result of abuse and neglect.

Samantha. Joseph. Caley. Tyleah. Isabella. Timothy. Bennett. Jamarion.
Michael. Alania. Jadarrius. Lia. Aaliyah.

I wonder what they dreamed of being when they were grown? Did Alania know every word on the “Frozen” soundtrack? What was Joseph’s favorite food? Did Isabella play T-ball like the kids at the park by my house?

Questions roar in my head as I read their names. How did no one know these kids were being hurt? Why didn’t someone do something? Surely someone saw bruises. Could someone have made a phone call that could have saved one of their lives or all of their lives?

If you see something, say something. Call 9-1-1. Call the Department of Human Resources at 256-737-5300. Call Cullman Caring for Kids at 256-739-1111. Say something.

The 13 children whose names we know will be honored on Wednesday, April 13 from noon-1 p.m. with a prayer walk and balloon release. The walk will begin at the Cullman County Courthouse and will end at the top of the parking deck at Cullman Savings Bank where balloons will be let go and prayers will be lifted.

The Safe Kids Expo will be held on April 16 from 10 a.m.- 2 p.m. at Sportsman Lake Park. Hosted by Brooks’ Place, Cullman’s Child Advocacy Center, the event will provide invaluable information and tools to keep your child safe and protected. Lots of fun and activities will be available for the kids.

We are grateful for the events of Child Abuse Prevention Awareness Month and their effectiveness in bringing to light the staggering reality of abuse and neglect. The more we know, the more effective we can be at protecting the children in our community.

But, child abuse does not begin and end each April. Children are abused every minute of every day of the year and we, the staff at CullmanSense and The Cullman Tribune, are committed to working hand-in-hand with local advocacy agencies on behalf of the victims of these horrendous crimes.

It’s the least we can do.

For more information, visit <http://www.cullmancaringforkids.com/>
(<http://www.cullmancaringforkids.com/>).

The Cullman County Commission on Tuesday held a regularly scheduled meeting, where they proclaimed April 2016 'Child...

Posted by [CullmanSense](#) on [Wednesday, March 23, 2016](#)

City of Cullman Municipal Government: Cullman Mayor Max A. Townson has declared April 2016 Child Abuse Awareness Month...

Posted by [CullmanSense](#) on [Friday, April 1, 2016](#)

The City of Good Hope: Notes from Monday night's Good Hope City Council meeting. Good Hope and the City of Cullman Municipal Government have both declared April 2016 Child Abuse Prevention and Awareness Month.

Posted by [CullmanSense](#) on [Tuesday, March 29, 2016](#)

Also on CullmanSense



[County Commission Meets: Declares April 2016 Child Abuse Prevention Awareness Month, April 2 as Colors of Cancer Day](#)

<http://cullmansense.com/articles/2016/03/23/county-commission-meets-declares-april-2016-child-abuse-prevention-awareness>



[Townson Proclaims April 2016 Child Abuse Awareness Month in the City of Cullman](#)

<http://direct.cullmansense.com:8080/articles/2016/04/01/townson-proclaims-april-2016-child-abuse-awareness-month-city-cullman>



[Healing Through Awareness: Cullman Caring for Kids Hopes to Raise Awareness of Child Abuse in April](#)

<http://cullmansense.com/articles/2015/04/02/healing-through-awareness-cullman-caring-kids-hopes-raise-awareness-child-abuse>

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[Five Pounds of ICE nabbed in Dodge City Following Two-Month Investigation](#)



(<http://direct.cullmansense.com:8080/articles/2015/06/11/five-pounds-ice-nabbed-dodge-city-following-two-month-investigation>)



[Steele Orchard Becomes The Boogie Man's Barn For Halloween](http://www.cullmansense.com/articles/2014/10/30/steele-orchard-becomes-boogie-man%E2%80%99s-barn-halloween)

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