



MEDIA RELEASE

For: Children's Safe Harbor
1519 Oddfellow Street
Conroe, TX 77301

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Children's Safe Harbor encourages the community to "Know Us Before You Need Us"

Montgomery County, TX (November 2017) Turning 10 years old was a milestone. Now in the "double digits," she felt a sense of a bit more confidence ... courage ... and strength. This would be the time that she told her mother.

Two years ago, at age 8, a trusted family friend changed her life. Looking back, she could see a little more clearly the path that he had taken. He was her mom and dad's good friend – always around – always happy to help. He had even loaned her parents money during a tight spot. He eventually became her best "friend;" constantly praising her and making her feel as if she were more special than any of her other peers. Now she could see how he had used her, and she began to suspect that the threats he made were not real.

It happened for the first time at her younger sister's birthday party. He came over with lots of presents. There were about two dozen kids noisily running around the house while mom and dad were busy in the kitchen serving up colorful paper plates of cupcakes and ice cream for everybody. That's when he pulled her away from everyone to "tell her a secret." In just a few awkward minutes that seemed much longer, she knew

that he was doing something to her body, that was wrong, and she didn't understand why – so she froze. Afterwards, he warned her that if she told anyone, he'd hurt her parents and her dog, Rex. He looked mean when he said those words right into her eyes, and she believed him.

“The narrative that you just read is a compilation of several true events that have happened to the young and vulnerable children in our community,” explained Victoria J. Constance, MSPH, PhD, Executive Director of Children’s Safe Harbor. “Sadly, it’s a common occurrence that is being repeated every day in ever-increasing numbers. Once our children bravely disclose abuse of all kinds, there’s a place for solace, healing, and justice ... Children’s Safe Harbor.

Children's Safe Harbor offers specialized services to traumatized and abused children (ages 2-17) and their families. Children can share their experiences of abuse through a unique narrative investigation process called a forensic interview. Specialized medical evaluations and weekly individual, family, and group counseling services are all available at no cost to the child victims and their non-offending family members. As a nationally-accredited nonprofit organization Montgomery, San Jacinto and Walker counties, Children’s Safe Harbor is part of a nationwide effort to protect and enhance the life of every child who has the courage to battle sexual or severe physical abuse by healing the trauma of abuse and facilitating justice for children and their families.

“Statistics continue to suggest that one in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused before their 18th birthday,” continued Dr. Constance. “Ninety-three percent of the perpetrators that target our children are someone the child knows and trusts. It’s the silent epidemic that often doesn’t get talked about.”

And that epidemic continues to grow. A few years ago, Children’s Safe Harbor was seeing an average of 99 new cases of child abuse per month, which at the time was an alarming increase over previous years. In September 2017, the children’s advocacy center and the powerful investigative team that refers these cases reached their

greatest challenge by handling **179** new cases of abuse (a nearly 80% increase in the previous year's monthly totals). And then, as they assumed that September would be the record-breaking month, Children's Safe Harbor served **229** new cases in October! Dr. Constance stated, "This figure represents the depth and breadth of the storm of child abuse. While Hurricane Harvey moved through our community as a one-time historic event, child abuse continues to escalate insidiously, robbing our children of their safety and innocence."

"Our Board of Directors is working diligently with our staff and volunteers to launch a campaign named '**Know Us Before You Need Us.**' As we roll out this community outreach program, we will promote resources that educate parents about how to keep their kids safe and how to detect early warning signs. We will also continue to partner with our schools to offer prevention education to our children of all ages. Now, more than ever is the time for our community to come together and be the ones with courage," she said.

Children's Safe Harbor is currently seeking volunteers and corporate sponsors to assist with their mission: to protect and enhance the life of every child who has the courage to battle sexual or severe physical abuse.

To make a donation or to volunteer, see their website at www.ChildrensSafeHarbor.org or call (936) 756-4644, extension 234.