



From Penn State to Prevention

Early in November the nation was shocked when faced with the enormity of the sexual abuse allegations coming out of Penn State. While the events are tragic, the continuous and in depth press coverage offers an opportunity to move forward in our battle to prevent child sexual assault and exploitation (CSA&E).

The allegations out of Penn State have elevated CSA&E to a regular topic of discussion. Not only among professionals who work in the field of prevention, but also among the general public. Although sexual abuse continues to be a frightening subject for people to address, an open dialogue is vital to ensure that CSA&E becomes an abhorrent part of our past rather than remain an endemic part of our culture. Ending CSA&E cannot be accomplished as long as the extent of the problem remains a secret.

While the extensive media coverage of the Penn State tragedy has provided an important opportunity for all members of the public to discuss CSA&E, there has not been enough information reported to help people understand what they can do in their own communities to prevent it. The [National Coalition to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation](#) (the Coalition) was started several years ago when a group of organizations and thought leaders joined forces to develop a National Plan and call for action to prevent CSA&E. The goal of the National Plan is to provide action steps that individuals and organizations can take to help prevent CSA&E. The Coalition's mission is to keep the prevention of child sexual abuse and exploitation in the forefront of people's thoughts, agendas, and policy discussions in such a powerful way that child sexual abuse and the normalization of such abuse and exploitation for individual or commercial gain becomes socially, economically, politically, and spiritually unacceptable in all communities throughout our nation.

This expansive agenda is bigger than any one individual and it is bigger than any one organization. It requires a collective effort to say "no more!" The health and safety of children is the responsibility of us all. Coalition members were working hard to draw attention to the resources that were in place to prevent CSA&E before the tragedy at Penn State. Yet, many citizens and allies still don't know how to get involved. Please visit our website (www.preventtogether.org) and learn more about the work of the Coalition and our members. Learn how you can get involved to be a part of the solution.

All children deserve the right to have childhoods free from sexual abuse and exploitation and to have the opportunity to develop into healthy adults capable of having healthy relationships. We must all be a part of the solution and will be when we work together to make prevention a priority.

CSA&E needs to be prioritized because:

- Ending CSA is a strategy to end gender based violence throughout the lifespan;
- The sexual abuse of children, along with other forms of child maltreatment, is linked to a wide variety of negative health and economic outcomes;
- CSA places victims at increased risk of future sexual victimization and perpetration and may increase the risk of sexual exploitation through the prostitution of children or pornographic victimization;
- The demand for the sexual abuse of children is not new, but the current normalization of sexual harm combined with the multiple ways children are treated as sexual objects and commodities has made it more difficult to implement effective strategies to confront the problem;
- Criminal justice and punitive responses to the individuals who perpetrate CSA&E alone will not prevent others from sexually abusing or exploiting a child for individual or commercial gain.

Let us ensure that the lasting legacy of the recent events at Penn State is a focused attention on the prevention of child sexual abuse and exploitation.

For more information and to join the effort:

National Coalition to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse & Exploitation: www.preventtogether.org;
(for a list of members and links to their websites)