**For Immediate Release**



**What Parents Must Know to Protect their Children from Sexual Assault**

**Charlotte –** Recent news about the Boy Scouts of America on the heels of the conviction of former assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky prompts United Family Services to issue the following message to parents**: Learn the facts about preventing child sexual abuse.**

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, childhood abuse, neglect and exposure to other traumatic stressors – known as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) – contribute to a wide range of health and social problems including alcoholism, illicit drug use, depression and suicide attempts.

“We want everyone to know that we are prepared to answer your questions about the realities of child sexual assault and the programs and services that we have in place to support victims of sexual abuse and their families,” said United Family Services Victim Services Coordinator Ashley Lantz.

A great resource for parents is Darkness to Light and its Stewards of Children program. It provides seven steps families can take to protect children from sexual assault.

Those steps include:

* **Understand the risks and realities of child sexual assault.** Experts estimate that **1 in 4 girls** and **1 in 6** boys are sexually abused before their 18th birthdays. People who abuse children look and act just like everyone else. In fact, they often go out of their way to appear trustworthy to gain access to children.
* **Minimize opportunity.** Understand that abusers often become friendly with potential victims and their families, enjoying family activities, earning trust, and gaining time alone with children. Think carefully about the safety of any one-adult/one-child situations. Choose group situations when possible.
* **Talk about it.** The abuser shames the child, points out that the child let it happen, or tells the child that his or her parents will be angry. The abuser is often manipulative and may try to confuse the child about what is right and wrong. Children who disclose sexual abuse often tell a trusted adult other than a parent. For this reason, training for people who work with children is especially important.
* **Stay alert.** Learn the physical and emotional signs of abuse. If you find physical signs that you suspect are sexual abuse, have the child physically examined immediately by a professional who specializes in child sexual abuse.
* **Make a plan.** Learn where to go, whom to call and how to react if you learn of child sexual abuse. All 50 states require that professionals who work with children report reasonable suspicions of child abuse. Some states require that anyone with suspicions report it.
* **Act on suspicions.** By acting on suspicions of child sexual abuse, you will save not only one child, but perhaps countless others.
* **Get Involved.** Ask that schools and organizations in your community have child sexual abuse prevention policies. Ask other adults to do the same.

For more details visit the Darkness to Light website: <http://www.d2l.org/site/c.4dICIJOkGcISE/b.6035035/k.8258/Prevent_Child_Sexual_Abuse.htm>

If you suspect the abuse of a child, or have questions about child sexual abuse, please contact United Family Services hotlines, your local Department of Social Services (DSS), or local child abuse reporting hotlines:

[**North Carolina Department of Social Services**](http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/cps/index.htm)
Toll-Free: 800-422-4453 (Childhelp)

**Cabarrus County DSS 704 920 1400**

**United Family Services**

**24-hour Rape Crisis Hotline 704 721 0110**

**Child Abuse Reporting**

**Hotline 704 920 2277**

**Union County DSS 704 296 4300**

**United Family Services**

**24-hour Rape Crisis Hotline 704 283 7770**

**Child Abuse Reporting**

**Hotline 704 296 4300**

**Mecklenburg County DSS 704 336 3600**

**United Family Services**

**24-hour Rape Crisis Hotline 704 375 9900**

**Child Abuse Reporting**

**Hotline 704 336 2273**

In Union County, United Family Services operates the Tree House Children’s Advocacy Center. The Tree House is a child-friendly place where child abuse professionals can work together to support and protect children who are victims of sexual abuse, severe physical abuse and witnesses to violence.  The safety needs of children and families are addressed so that they can feel safe and are able to move forward with their healing.

“Our responsibility is to create public awareness about the realities of child sexual abuse,” said United Family Services Chief Strategy Officer Amanda Wilson. “While preventing abuse and neglect is key to giving kids a healthy future, we will always need to rely on adults to protect children. By knowing the signs and definitions of abuse, you can help us respond when it does occur.”

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United Family Services assists more than 25,000 people annually throughout our geographic footprint that includes Mecklenburg, Cabarrus, Union and South Iredell counties.  We also reach thousands more through our educational and prevention programs as well as institutional advocacy efforts.

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