

Jonathan Rosenfeld's Nursing Homes Abuse Blog

Children Are Frequently Targets Of Abuse In A Group Home Setting

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Group homes for children are supposed to offer safe homes for children with disabilities or children who have suffered abuse or neglect. Unfortunately, some [children in group homes](#) continue to suffer from abuse at the hands of their caregivers. Children in these homes are vulnerable to abuse and neglect and are often unable to report abuse or feel powerless to improve their situation.

Group Homes

Group homes are small, private homes in place to serve children or adults with various disabilities. Most group homes are small, with six or fewer occupants, and have round-the-clock trained caregivers. Group homes are also in place to serve “troubled teens” and children who are victims of abuse or neglect; most group homes of this type offer temporary housing for children while alternative housing is being secured either with a family member or in a foster home.

[Residential Treatment Centers](#) (RTCs) offer housing for children suffering from mental illness or behavioral problems. The number of children in RTCs is increasing. In the United States, over 50,000 children are living in RTCs. Many children are placed in RTCs because there are not adequate community-based and in-home resources available. RTCs should only be used for children who display dangerous behavior that can only be controlled in a secure setting. However, the lack of resources forces many families and social workers to place children in RTCs even though they might not offer the best environment.

Jonathan Rosenfeld represents victims of nursing home abuse and neglect throughout the country. For more information please visit Nursing Homes Abuse Blog (www.nursinghomesabuseblog.com), Bed Sore FAQ (www.bedsorefaq.com) or call Jonathan directly at (888) 424-5757.

Abuse of Children in Group Homes

Physical abuse can include sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect. Common sources of abuse at RTCs include: physical and sexual abuse, improper use of restrains, over-medication, and overly severe punishments. There are two definitional standards for abuse. The first is the harm standard, which means that behavior is considered abusive if it results in actual harm or injuries. The second is the endangerment standard, which means that physical assault by a parent or caregiver that constitutes a substantial risk of physical injury is considered abuse.

The most dangerous aspect of child abuse is that it “thrives in the shadows of privacy and secrecy . . . it lives by inattention” ([Bakan](#) – Slaughter of the Innocents: A Study of the Battered Child Phenomenon). Identification and reporting of child abuse is the first step in reducing the incidence of child abuse and improving the lives of all children in group homes. Children in group homes need to have access to an array of supportive adults including teachers, physicians, therapists, social workers, family friends, and their own friends. Having this network makes it easier for a child to report abuse.

It is very difficult for many children to open up and report abuse. They might be threatened, intimidated, scared, or ashamed to openly discuss abuse. This is especially true for children who have a history of abuse before being a resident of a group home. Some children may think abusive behavior is normal and accept abuse as a reality of life, which should never be the case. Children are more likely to report abuse to an adult with whom they have a trusting relationship. Caregivers at group homes are supposed to be trustworthy adults who are in place to protect the children from abuse, but sometimes, these caregivers are the sources of abuse. This makes it even more difficult for their victims to report abuse.

Children suffering from disabilities including mental retardation and developmental disabilities are also at serious risk for abuse and neglect because they often have difficulty communicating, which limits their ability to report abuse. These children are vulnerable to abuse because they might not be able to understand or process abuse. Because of this, it is important that caregivers and other authority figures (doctors, nurses, and social workers) pay special attention to notice indicators of abuse.

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People who interact with children in group homes, especially children suffering from disabilities, must be properly trained to recognize signs and symptoms of abuse. Training must not only cover physical indicators; it must also include behavioral changes including withdrawn behavior, bedwetting, uncommunicative behavior, depression, violence, running away, self-destructive behavior, and acting out.

Every state has mandatory child abuse reporting laws in order to qualify for funding under the [Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act](#) (CAPTA), but each state differs in the application of these laws. Despite the prevalence of abuse and neglect in group homes, children continue to suffer because of inadequate monitoring. RTCs (Residential Treatment Centers) are largely unregulated. They are only required to report major unusual incidents (MUIs), and some RTCs fail to do even this. To compound this problem, many children are placed in RTCs that are far away from their families, so family members are unable to properly monitor their children in order to ensure proper treatment.

Affect of Abuse on Children

Abuse of any person is a horrible and traumatizing experience. However, abused children often continue to suffer from problems later in life, after the abuse has ended. Some children are released from these group homes when they reach 18 years of age. They often leave the home ill-equipped to cope with life outside the group home and face the risk of homelessness, substance abuse, depression, and crime.

Sources:

Child Trauma Academy: [Physical Abuse of Children](#)

Protect: [National Association to Protect Children](#)

The Pennsylvania Journal on Positive Approaches: [Beyond Abuse, Treatment Approaches for People with Disabilities](#)

Therapistunlimited.com: [Group Homes for Teens](#)

eHow: [Information on Group Homes for Children](#)

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Strellis & Field, Chartered

Chicago Office

444 N. Wells St., Ste 202

Chicago, IL 60610

Tel: 312.201.0000

Belleville Office

216 W. Washington Street

Belleville, IL 62226

Tel: 618.235.8701

Waterloo Office

115 East Mill Street

Waterloo, IL 62298

Tel: 618.939.3402

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