

## DISTRICT ATTORNEY INVESTIGATOR GIVES PRACTICAL ADVICE ON SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE IN YOUR HOME

The world of child physical and sexual abuse investigations is a complex one. No two cases are alike; children's bodies and minds respond to abuse in ways that society wouldn't always expect; and just when you think you've seen it all, another bizarre, heartbreaking story comes to light.

But though some personal factors of abuse are widely unpredictable, there are trends in the world of investigations that seem to remain fairly consistent.

Summertime, for example. Laid back, carefree, filled with the laughter of little ones running in the sunshine, splashing in the blow-up pool, eating freeze pops. Teenagers staying up late, hanging with friends, so few worries other than boredom. Ahh, innocence. If only it could last forever. If only some kids could experience it at all, really. But because some don't- in fact some live the exact opposite of blissfully innocent lives- and have no one to reach out to during the summer, investigators often see a surge in reporting once the break has ended and school is back in session. Back to normal.

Except this year's normal will be different.

Summer in Terrebonne Parish began, in essence, on March 16<sup>th</sup>. It will last twice as long as usual. Some children are not only distanced FROM friends, teachers, counselors- they are isolated WITH their abusers. Abusers who are parents with no job to go off to; abusers who are parents' girlfriends/boyfriends who take their anger out on anyone who gets in their way; abusers who are older siblings they share a bedroom or close living space with; abusers they can't get away from. Ever. These are the situations that are ripe with opportunity.

None of this is normal, or at least usual, or at least it shouldn't be.

There are parents out there who will relate to what I've just mentioned above. If you are one of them, and you know or suspect that a child is being abused in your home, I challenge you to consider taking the following steps:

1. Trust your instincts.
2. Keep your eyes and ears open.
3. Be aware of everything going on in your home.
4. Ask questions.
  - Are you ok?
  - Is anyone bothering you?
  - Has anyone scared you?
5. Let your kids know you are safe to talk to. You won't get mad at them or anyone else.
6. DON'T REACT to any shocking news they give you. Tell them you are sorry that happened to them and invite them to tell you more. They may not want to, and that's ok!
7. Be supportive- Physically, verbally, emotionally.
8. Report.

Reports of suspected abuse in Terrebonne Parish can be made to the following agencies:

- Terrebonne Parish Sheriff's Office 985-876-2500
- Houma Police Department 985-873-6371
- Terrebonne DCFS 1-855-452-5437

For further guidance contact Terrebonne Parish District Attorney Investigator Dawn Buquet @ 985-873-6500 or dawnbuquet@tpda.org.