

It's time to confront child sexual abuse in our own community.

Every day, I hear the voice of sexual abuse survivors grow louder and stronger. #MeToo has empowered many survivors to break their silence and tell the world that they are not to blame for what has happened to them. These brave men and women have called out their offenders, but many of them had to hold in this trauma for far too long because they were not believed, threatened, or even told to suppress it.

Child sexual abuse survivors experience that same feeling of helplessness, which is why child sexual abuse continues to be one of the most underreported crimes around the world. **Studies show that one in ten children under the age 18 will be affected – and only one-third will report it.** (Darkness to Light)

This is why we, the adults in our children's lives, need to pay attention, believe them and take action. It demands that we have an open discussion about child sexual abuse in our community. It is up to us to do everything we can to help them. That will only happen if we run toward the problem, not cower away.

If we are truly committed to ending the cycle of abuse, we must do our part to change how we talk about it, how we deal with it and what we need to do to stop it by recognizing the warning signs.

The Children's Assessment Center will be convening community leaders for the first ever **Summit to Stop Child Sexual Abuse** on March 23, 2018. Together with our partners from the Sheriff's Office, Grand Rapids and Wyoming police, the Prosecutor's Office and Department of Health and Human Services are asking leaders to make this issue a community priority.

The Summit will allow leaders from government, education, faith-based organizations, business, philanthropy and the media to deepen their understanding of this crisis and develop a plan of action to end child sexual abuse in Kent County once and for all.

We will protect our children.