



“Just because you can’t see it, doesn’t mean it isn’t there.”

Chaucie’s Place reacts to death of Linkin Park Lead Singer, Chester Bennington

We recently learned of the death by suicide of Chester Bennington. Not only was Chester the talented lead singer of Linkin Park, he was also a friend and father. Chaucie’s Place would first like to offer its deepest sympathies to those affected by his death. Many of us here at Chaucie’s Place were inspired by his words and music. However, Chester’s death causes us to examine what brought him to the sad decision to take his own life. To do this, we would need to begin when Chester was just 7 years old.

At age 7, Chester began being sexually abused by an older male friend. “I was getting beaten up and being forced to do things I didn’t want to do. It destroyed my self-confidence. Like most people, I was too afraid to say anything,” he explained to *Kerrang!* in 2008. This sexual abuse continued until Chester was 13 years old. It was around this time that Chester decided to tell his father who was a detective specializing in child sexual abuse. As Chester’s father began to build a case against his abuser it was discovered that Chester’s abuser was also a victim of sexual abuse. It was at that time that Chester decided to not pursue the case.

Although Chester had decided not to seek revenge against his abuser, Chester began to travel down a turbulent and dark road. Like many victims of child sexual abuse Chester became addicted to drugs and alcohol. Chester struggled with inner demons from the ramifications of what his abuser had done. It was not until Chester began singing in several different bands that he found refuge. As Linkin Park rose to popularity so did Chester’s battle with addiction. When listening to his lyrics, fans got a glimpse of the demons Chester was battling. Those same demons that many victims of child sexual abuse live with daily.

Although later in his life Chester became sober, those demons still haunted him. When one of Chester’s best friends Chris Cornell (lead singer of Soundgarden) took his own life in May, Chester dedicated the song “One More Light,” to him. “Should’ve stayed, were there signs, I ignored?/ Can I help you, not to hurt, anymore?/ We saw brilliance, when the world, was asleep/ There are things that we can have, but can’t keep,” he sang.

On July 20, 2017 what would have been Chris Cornell’s 53rd birthday, Chester took his own life. With his suicide many of us were then left to ask the question to ourselves, “Were there signs we ignored?” Suicide is a tragic reality in the lives of all ages but it’s important to know that suicide can be prevented. As a victim of child sexual abuse Chester was seven times more likely to take his own life. At Chaucie’s Place we have dedicated ourselves to raising awareness of the risks and warning signs of suicide and child sexual abuse.

Lifelines[®], a suicide prevention program travels to schools and organizations in around central Indiana. Lifelines[®] teaches many community members how to recognize risk signs and warning

factors of suicide and how to proceed. With suicide being the second highest cause of death of youth in Indiana, our mission is one of extreme importance. Tom Shriver, Lifelines Program Coordinator stated, "I have personally dealt with suicide and I know the devastating effects it can bring to those surrounding our lost loved ones. That is why I choose to fight the stigma of mental illness and suicide every day."

With Chester Bennington, also being a victim of child sexual abuse we examine what programs we implement at Chaucie's Place to empower children to tell a trusted adult and say no to unwanted sexual abuse. "Our Smart Steps® program teaches kids that their bodies are their own. It empowers children to tell a trusted adult if they or another person have been touched inappropriately and it inspires them to spread the mission of not only Chaucie Quillen but also those like Chester Bennington, who struggled for so long," said Smart Steps™ Program Coordinator, Jessica Herzog.

Suicide and child sexual abuse are preventable. That is why at Chaucie's Place we also have the Stewards of Children® program. This program trains parents and adults on how to recognize, prevent and react responsibly to child sexual abuse. It encourages adults to overcome denial, fear and the stigmas that surround this epidemic and allows them to create awareness and personal power. Stewards of Children Program Coordinator, Shannon Besore stated, "I believe the issue of child sexual abuse should not be the responsibility of the child but rather the responsibility of the adults involved in the child's life. That is why I feel Stewards of Children is so important. It teaches adults what questions to ask and what signs to look for to intervene. It also explains how each adult in Indiana is a mandated reporter of sexual abuse. It gives them the confidence and knowledge to help every child in any way possible."

Chester Bennington and Chaucie Quillen were not alone in their experiences. Many are struggling with sexual abuse, mental illness and suicidal thoughts. If you are someone who has or are still experiencing these things, there are people who can help. Contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or contact the Crisis Text Line by texting "HELLO" to 741741. Chaucie's Place will continue our mission of prevention and education in the community. Meanwhile we hope that Chester Bennington's story will inspire many to continue fighting the stigma of mental illness, suicide and child sexual abuse. As Chester Bennington once sang, "Just because you can't see it, doesn't mean it isn't there."

