

“My name is Erin Merryn I come here today from Chicago to speak on a very important topic that is near and dear to my heart. A topic I am very passionate about.”

“One in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused before their eighteen birthday. There are currently forty two million survivors of sexual abuse in America alone. Three million of those are children. We are just talking about America. Those three million kids could fill forty six national football stadiums. As I often tell people these children are sitting in our classrooms. Yet we often fail to address the warning signs. We often label these kids behavior disorder, emotionally disturbed, but we never get to the root of the problem. We give them aids, we hold them back, and we put all these resources into these children but we are often failing these kids because we are not educating them. We are not giving them a voice and empowering them to speak up and tell if someone is ever doing anything inappropriate.

When I was just a little six year old I met my best friend in school her name was Ashley. Ashley and I began doing everything together and it was at Ashley’s house I had my first sleepover. I was so excited as that little six year old going off to my best friend’s house. I fell asleep that night only to wake up that night to her uncle coming into the room and sexually abuse me for the first time. This man went on to sexually abuse me many more times in my childhood. I didn’t go home and tell my parents the next day what he had done. No I stayed silent because the only message I was getting as a child from this man was, “this is our little secret, I will come get you Erin, I know where you live, if you tell anyone nobody will believe you.” I was being brainwashed with this so I continued to stay silent. At seven years old this man raped me. I can remember that day as if it happened yesterday. This man continued to sexually abuse me until I was 8 1/2 years old. Finally my saving grace came when I moved to a new house. But moving only got me that much closer to my next abuser. It wasn’t that stranger danger I was taught about

every year, don't go look for the lost puppy, don't talk to strangers, or as I put in my childhood diary, "I sobbed the whole way home over and over in my head I thought about what just happened. In school a guy called officer friendly teaches us about strangers, never answer the door when my parents aren't home, I thought people like my cousin jumped out of bushes and attacked you at night, they don't warn us about our own family, they don't teach us that in school."

You see from ages eleven to thirteen an older cousin was sexually abusing me. Once again getting the only message this is our secret Erin nobody will believe you. I knew as a child how to duck and cover from a tornado, how to run out of a burning building, how to evacuate a school bus, how to tell a teacher if I am being bullied, internet safety, and what to do in a lock down situation if there was a gunman in my school, but we fail to teach kids on the prevention of sexual abuse. On empowering them if someone is abusing you, you speak up and tell a safe adult. You tell a parent, a teacher, a school social worker, a family member, somebody but you don't keep this a secret.

I was also taught DARE we teach this across this country. I am sure we teach it right here in Kansas. You see DARE teaches us the eight ways to say no to drugs but I ask you today where are the eight ways on how to get away and tell today. They never came in my childhood and the only message as I mentioned that I got, "This is our little secret, nobody will believe you, I will come hurt you."

How did I finally find my voice then? Well unfortunately it was learning my little 11 year old sister was also being molested by this same relative. You see these perpetrators live in our backyards. I guarantee every single one of you knows someone that has been sexually abused.

We live in a society that looks the other way, pretends it isn't going on, when it is really in our faces all the time we just fail to recognize it. There are people like Jerry Sandusky living in all our communities. There out there.

Erin's Law will give children the tools on the difference between a safe touch and unsafe touch, safe secret and unsafe secret, how to get away and tell today. I want educators to be educated on the warning signs to look for and the proper way to handle a child that discloses abuse. I want that seven year old that is being sexually abused tonight to be educated on how to tell through age appropriate curriculum. So she will go to school tomorrow and report it. Because right now in our society that little 7 year old will stay silent and continue to be abused by that step-father for years and it isn't until she is 30 years old in drug rehab finally coming to terms with what she never dealt with because she wasn't educate. My goal here and across this nation is to get this law passed in every state. Every child deserves to be empowered with their voice and not to keep this a secret. Every child should know how to speak up and tell, the same way they know how to not talk to strangers or use drugs. I say to all legislators across this country the only ones that should be against this bill to help give kids a voice and educate our educators are the sexual offenders themselves. Help me protect kids by giving them the voice I never had. Help the children of Alaska know how to speak up and tell. Thank you!" -Erin Merryn