



ECCAC
Emerald Coast
Children's Advocacy Center

September
2026
Newsletter

[Donate](#)

[Events](#)

[Services](#)

[Memberships](#)

[Report Abuse](#)



Celebrating DCWAF's Incredible Gift to ECCAC

We are incredibly excited and grateful to share that the Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center received an extraordinary \$280,000 gift from the Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation (DCWAF)!

This transformational investment will help ECCAC continue providing advocacy, healing, prevention education, and support to children and families throughout Okaloosa and Walton

Counties.

Each year, the incredible DCWAF team, Board of Directors, volunteers, donors, vintners, sponsors, and supporters come together to make gifts like this possible, not only for ECCAC, but for many children's charities throughout our community. Their collective generosity is transforming the lives of vulnerable children across Northwest Florida.

We are especially grateful to Jack and Candis Wilson for hosting our Patron Dinner and for being such a special part of making this incredible gift possible.

To everyone who joined us in celebrating and to the entire DCWAF family: thank you. Your generosity and belief in our mission allow us to continue empowering children, restoring hope, and helping create safer futures.

Please join us in thanking DCWAF and everyone who makes this extraordinary generosity possible! 💙



HOW DO KIDS PREPARE FOR COURT?



Preparing Children for Court at the ECCAC

For a child, walking into a courtroom can feel overwhelming. Especially when they don't know what to expect.

That's why ECCAC advocates work alongside our partners at the State Attorney's Office to help children prepare for the court process.

Our model courtroom provides children with an opportunity to become familiar with the courtroom layout, learn who may be present, understand the roles of the people involved, and walk through what they may experience when it is their turn to speak.

We can't change the circumstances that brought a child to court, but we can help ensure they don't have to walk in wondering what will happen next.

By helping children understand the process and what to expect, our team works to replace some of the fear of the unknown with knowledge, confidence and support.



Digital Safety: Five Conversations Every Parent Should Have

Online Grooming

Grooming often doesn't look dangerous at first. It can begin with a compliment, shared interest, or friendly conversation before someone slowly works to build trust and push boundaries. Talk with children about who they are communicating with and remind them they never have to keep uncomfortable conversations a secret.

Fake Friends & Catfishing

People online are not always who they claim to be. Fake profiles, stolen photos, and false identities can make it difficult to know who is behind the screen. Encourage children to question interactions that become overly personal, ask for secrecy, or pressure them to move conversations to another platform.

Gaming & Private Chats

"It's just a game" can quickly become more than that. Voice chats, private messages, friend requests, and gaming servers can create opportunities for strangers to connect with children. Know which platforms your child uses and talk about what information should stay private.

Sextortion & Image-Based Exploitation

Children may be pressured or manipulated into sharing an intimate image and then threatened with having it shared. The most important message to communicate is simple: You are not in trouble. If someone is pressuring or threatening them, they should stop responding and tell a trusted adult immediately.

Oversharing & Digital Footprints

Children and adults alike may be sharing more than they realize. Photos, location tags, school uniforms, birthdays, and daily routines can reveal pieces of information that, over time, create a clearer picture of a child's life. Before posting, take a moment to consider what a stranger might be able to see or learn.

We cannot monitor every online interaction our children have. But we can prepare them.

Talk early. Talk often. Stay connected. And make sure your child knows they can always come to you, without fear of getting in trouble.

The internet has changed. Our conversations need to change with it.



ECCAC Department Leadership (from left to right): Kerri, Serena, Julie, George, Solange, Debi, Emily, and Leah

Celebrating Our Incredible Team at the 2026 ECCAC Staff Retreat! 💙

Our 2026 ECCAC Staff Retreat was a wonderful opportunity to step away from our daily routines, come together as a team, and celebrate the incredible people behind our mission.

From team building and connection to plenty of laughter and well-deserved fun, the day was all about staff appreciation!

During our retreat, our team also took time to focus on what makes ECCAC special—our culture and the values that guide the work we do together. We discussed ways to strengthen and streamline our protocols, improve communication across departments, and shared important updates from each of our teams. These conversations help us continue growing, working together more effectively, and providing the very best support to the children and families we serve.

We are so grateful for each member of our ECCAC family and the compassion, dedication, and heart they bring to supporting children and families in our community every day.

Thank you to our amazing team for all that you do, you make a difference, and we appreciate you! 💙🦋



ECCAC Therapists, Michael and Jami



ECCAC HR Manager, Emily, and Therapist, Mia



ECCAC CARES In Home Support Service Specialists, Ann and Priest



Our Prevention Team is BACK to SCHOOL

As another school year begins, we're incredibly grateful for our Prevention Team, who are back in classrooms across Okaloosa and Walton Counties teaching the Monique Burr Foundation's Child Safety Matters program.

Last school year, the team taught 1,143 lessons and reached more than 17,000 students, empowering children with the tools to recognize unsafe situations, set healthy boundaries, and speak up to trusted adults.

Their work helps create safer communities and gives children the knowledge and confidence to know that their safety, and their voice, matters. 💚🦋



ECCAC

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The kids are back in school. . . and so is our Prevention team!



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Last school year, they taught 1,143 lessons and reached more than 17,000 students — creating opportunities for education, empowerment, and life-changing disclosures.



THERAPY GRADUATION DAY



Therapy Graduation Days at ECCAC

A therapy graduation is a meaningful milestone: a time to celebrate the progress, healing, strength, and growth a child has experienced throughout their therapeutic journey.

While every child's journey looks different, each graduation represents important steps forward and the tools they have gained along the way.

Our therapy team loves making these moments special, recognizing each child and celebrating all they have accomplished. From decorations and flowers to thoughtful gifts and words of encouragement, therapy graduations are a reminder that healing is possible and that every step forward is worth celebrating.

We are so proud of every child who reaches this important milestone and honored to be part of their journey. 🦋



[DONATE to ECCAC](#)



ECCAC's Back to School Drive was a SUCCESS!

Thank you to everyone who donated school supplies, stuffed backpacks, and helped local children begin the school year feeling prepared, confident, and cared for.

Your generosity is helping ensure children in our community have the supplies they need to walk into the classroom ready to learn.

We are especially grateful to: Angie Wallace-Banks and Beal House – FWB; Sage and Carmen with Eyebrow Experts Destin; Joe Kneeland and Quennie Kayser with Home2 Suites – FWB; Emme Shannon and the Hurlburt Field SAPR Team; George Tenezaca and his wife; Kayra, Tremia, Nataya, Mia, Jessica and Candance; MidSouth Bank; Executive Air LLC; KRock 100.3;

Mariner Wealth Advisors; Intuitive Research and Technology Corporation; BAE Systems; Howard and Susan Zemser; and so many others who showed up for our kids.

Thank you for helping us fill backpacks with kindness, confidence, and the support of a community that cares.



DONATE to ECCAC



ECCAC Volunteer Spotlight: John and Margi

For more than eight years, John and his wife, Margi, have generously given their time to support children and families at our Pierce Family Advocacy Center in DeFuniak Springs.

They began volunteering shortly after the center opened, and they have been an important part of our ECCAC family ever since.

Before moving to the Emerald Coast, John dedicated 32 years to his local police department in Wisconsin, including 21 years as Police Chief. His lifelong commitment to serving and protecting his community continues today through his volunteer work at ECCAC.

“We enjoy the work, we enjoy the people, and it feels great to be able to do this for the community,” John shared.

John sits at our front desk and greets children and families as they enter, while Margi takes lead in our clothing closet, ensuring the kids have everything they need.

We are so grateful to John and Margi for the time, care, and heart they have poured into our organization and the community we serve. 🧡

Thank you, John and Margi, for helping us create a safer, brighter future for children. 🦋

Make a Direct Impact - Volunteer with the ECCAC!

Support the ECCAC Mission – Volunteer Today

If you have any questions about events and volunteering contact our Community Engagement Manager, Christopher: (251) 809-4067 or email at (Christopher@eccac.org)

Join us in making a difference for children in our community. By volunteering with ECCAC, you help support the hope, care, and safety for children who need it most. Every hand makes an impact.

Volunteer with ECCAC



ECCAC Healing

Fact:

Our brains have a natural ability to heal.

EMDR therapy helps support that process by helping the brain reprocess difficult memories so they become less distressing over time.

Just as our bodies have a natural ability to heal from physical injuries, our brains also have an incredible capacity for healing. For children who have experienced difficult or traumatic events, however, certain memories can remain distressing and continue to affect how they feel, think, and respond to the world around them.



EMDR, or Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing, is one of the therapeutic tools that can help children process these difficult experiences. Through guided techniques, EMDR helps the brain begin to reprocess distressing memories so they become less overwhelming and have less impact on a child's daily life.

Summer Water Safety Starts with You 🌊

Life on the Emerald Coast means plenty of time at the beach, pool, and waterways. A few simple precautions can help keep those summer memories safe. 💛

Remember to:

- 👁️ Designate a distraction-free Water Watcher to supervise children.
- 🛖 Keep young children within arm's reach and never let them swim alone.
- 🚦 Use properly fitted U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jackets when needed.
- 🏠 Secure home pools with four-sided fencing, self-latching gates, and alarms.
- ❤️ Learn CPR and consider swim lessons for children.
- 🌊 At the beach, check warning flags and choose lifeguarded areas when possible. Teach children caught in a rip current to stay calm, float, and swim parallel to shore.

And don't forget: drowning is often silent and can happen in seconds.



Free Pool Guard Alarms Available at ECCAC!

ECCAC has free Pool Guard alarms available for local families to add an extra layer of protection around home pools. Stop by the center to learn more and pick one up while supplies last!

Together, we can help make sure every child enjoys a fun, safe summer on the Emerald Coast. 💧

FREE at the
ECCAC
POOL GUARD ALARM



Pick One Up for FREE at
the Niceville Center and
Swim Safe this Summer!

Thank you for being part of the ECCAC community.

Your support helps us provide safety, hope, and healing for children every day.

Together, we're making a lasting difference—one child at a time.

-The ECCAC Team

OUR MISSION

We seek to heal and prevent the trauma of childhood abuse and neglect by providing advocacy, child-friendly therapies, and a safe environment for kids to feel seen, heard, and understood. We restore lost innocence, provide hope, and make a difference in all the lives we touch.





 **Rise to the challenge.** 
Help us restore childhood joy and hope for the future. 

DONATE NOW



Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center | 401 McEwen Drive | Niceville, FL 32578 US

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