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https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/preventingcan_sp.cfm

Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect



The statistics can feel overwhelming. In fiscal year 2011, States reported that 676,569 children were victims of child abuse or neglect (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012). However, child abuse and neglect are preventable. State and local governments, community organizations, and private citizens take action every day to protect children. You can help, too. This factsheet provides information on how communities and individual citizens can strengthen families, protect children, and prevent child abuse and neglect.

What's Inside:

- Prevention strategies
- Protective factors
- How you can help
- Resources



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Research shows that parents and caregivers who have support—from family, friends, neighbors, and their communities—are more likely to provide safe and healthy homes for their children. When parents lack this support or feel isolated, they may be more likely to make poor decisions that can lead to neglect or abuse.

Increasingly, concerned citizens and organizations are realizing that the best way to prevent child maltreatment is to help parents develop the skills and identify the resources they need to understand and meet their children’s emotional, physical, and developmental needs and protect their children from harm.

Prevention Strategies

Many State, local, and Tribal governments sponsor prevention activities and provide a variety of prevention services. Some prevention efforts are intended for everyone, such as public service announcements (PSAs) aimed at raising awareness about child maltreatment within the general population. Others are specifically targeted for individuals and families who may be at greater risk for child abuse or neglect.

Prevention requires a continuum of strategies at the individual, relationship, community, and societal levels. Another key to success is providing prevention services that are evidence based or evidence informed. This means that rather than relying on assumptions about what works, research has been conducted to demonstrate that a particular service actually improves

outcomes for children and families. This helps service providers feel confident in what they are doing, and it can help justify a program’s continued funding when resources are scarce.

Through its Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) grants, the Children’s Bureau funds several evidence-based and evidence-informed State and local prevention programs:

<http://friendsnrc.org/cbcap-priority-areas>

Child Welfare Information Gateway’s Prevention Programs webpage highlights a variety of programs that address child abuse and neglect: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/programs/>

Prevent Child Abuse America’s 50 chapters nationwide sponsor a number of evidence-based, State-specific programs to help individuals and communities prevent child maltreatment. Use Prevent Child Abuse America’s map to find your State’s chapter and website: <http://pcadb.cyberwoven.com/public/chapters/index.cfm>

State children’s trust and prevention funds collectively distribute more than \$100 million in funding each year to support a diverse array of evidence-based and innovative statewide and community-based prevention strategies. Find your local children’s trust or prevention fund on the website of the National Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds: <http://www.ctfalliance.org>. The Alliance supports these prevention strategies in the States with training, technical assistance, and publications, most of which are available on the Alliance website.

Prevention programs are more effective when they involve parents as partners in all aspects of program planning, implementation, and evaluation. Parents are more likely to make lasting changes when they are empowered to identify solutions that make sense for them.

Common activities of prevention programs include:

- Public awareness campaigns, such as PSAs, posters, and brochures that promote healthy parenting, child safety, and how to report suspected maltreatment
- Skills-based curricula that teach children safety and protection skills, such as programs that focus on preventing sexual abuse
- Parent education programs to help parents develop positive parenting skills and decrease behaviors associated with child abuse and neglect
- Home visiting programs that provide support and assistance to expecting and new mothers in their homes
- Parent mentor or leadership programs that provide role models and support to families in crisis
- Parent support groups, where parents work together to strengthen their families and build social networks
- Respite and crisis care programs, which offer temporary relief to caregivers in stressful situations by providing short-term care for their children
- Family resource centers, which work with community members to develop a variety

of services to meet the specific needs of the people who live in surrounding neighborhoods

The FRIENDS National Resource Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention, a service of the Children's Bureau, works closely with Circle of Parents® to foster parent leadership, education, and involvement. The FRIENDS website has several resources for parents, which are available at <http://friendsnrc.org/cbcap-priority-areas/parent-leadership-and-involvement>.

Circle of Parents® provides a friendly, supportive environment led by parents and other caregivers where anyone in a parenting role can openly discuss the successes and challenges of raising children. You can find more information about Circle of Parents® at http://www.circleofparents.org/about_us/index.html.

Stop it Now! is a national organization focused on preventing sexual abuse and offers information, supports, and resources for prevention. Some of its materials aimed at parents include prevention tip sheets, abuse warning signs tip sheets, and archives of its publication *PARENTtalk*. *PARENTtalk* was published from 1998 to 2007 and was written by and for parents and caregivers of youth with sexual behavior problems. These resources and more are available on the Stop it Now! website: <http://www.stopitnow.org/>

Protective Factors

Prevention programs have long focused on reducing particular risk factors, or conditions that research shows are associated with child abuse and neglect. Increasingly, prevention services are also recognizing the importance of promoting protective factors, circumstances in families and communities that increase the health and well-being of children and families. These factors help parents who might otherwise be at risk of abusing or neglecting their children to find resources, supports, or coping strategies that allow them to parent effectively, even under stress.

The following six protective factors have been linked to a lower incidence of child abuse and neglect:

- **Nurturing and attachment.** When parents and children have strong, warm feelings for one another, children develop trust that their parents will provide what they need to thrive.
- **Knowledge of parenting and of child and youth development.** Parents who understand how children grow and develop and know the typical developmental milestones can provide an environment where children can live up to their potential.
- **Parental resilience.** Parents who are emotionally resilient have a positive attitude, creatively problem solve, effectively address challenges, and are less likely to direct anger and frustration at their children.

- **Social connections.** Trusted and caring family friends provide emotional support to parents by offering encouragement and assistance in facing the daily challenges of raising a family.
- **Concrete supports for parents.** Parents need basic resources such as food, clothing, housing, transportation, and access to essential services that address family-specific needs (such as child care, health care, and mental health services) to ensure the health and well-being of their children.
- **Social and emotional competence.** Children with the ability to positively interact with others, self-regulate their behaviors, and communicate their feelings have relationships that are more positive with family, friends, and peers. Children without these competencies may be at greater risk for abuse.

Preventing Child Maltreatment and Promoting Well-Being: A Network for Action 2013 Resource Guide supports service providers in their work with parents, caregivers, and their children to strengthen families and prevent child abuse and neglect. While this resource is aimed at child welfare professionals, its helpful tip sheets for parents and caregivers address a number of parenting issues. The guide and tip sheets are available on Child Welfare Information Gateway's website:

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/preventionmonth/guide2013/>

FRIENDS offers a Protective Factors Survey to measure families' protective factors: <http://friendsnrc.org/protective-factors-survey>

How You Can Help

Parenting is one of the toughest and most important jobs, and we all have a stake in ensuring that parents have access to the resources and support they need to be successful. Entire communities play a role in helping families find the strength they need to raise safe, healthy, and productive children.

Here are some things you can do:

- **Get to know your neighbors.** Problems seem less overwhelming when support is nearby.
- **Help a family under stress.** Offer to babysit, help with chores and errands, or suggest resources in the community that can help.
- **Reach out to children in your community.** A smile or a word of encouragement can mean a lot.
- **Be an active community member.** Lend a hand at local schools, community or faith-based organizations, children's hospitals, social service agencies, or other places where families and children are supported.
- **Keep your neighborhood safe.** Start a Neighborhood Watch or plan a local "National Night Out" community event. You will get to know your neighbors while helping to keep your neighborhood and children safe.
- **Learn how to recognize and report signs of child abuse and neglect.** Reporting your concerns may protect a

child and get help for a family who needs it.

Safe, stable, and nurturing relationships are paramount to healthy child development and preventing child maltreatment. *Essentials for Childhood: Steps to Create Safe, Stable, and Nurturing Relationships*, a guide from the National Center for Injury Prevention, Division of Violence Prevention, within the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, aims to help concerned individuals and communities promote these healthy relationships: <http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/childmaltreatment/essentials/index.html>

More ideas for developing strong families in your community are available in *Preventing Child Maltreatment and Promoting Well-Being: A Network for Action 2013 Resource Guide*: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/guide2013/guide.pdf#page=66>

Resources

Child Abuse and Neglect
<https://www.childwelfare.gov/can/index.cfm>

Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect
<https://www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/>

Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect
<https://www.childwelfare.gov/responding/reporting.cfm>

Protective Factors Framework
https://www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/promoting/protectfactors/protective_factors.cfm

What Is Child Abuse and Neglect? Recognizing the Signs and Symptoms

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/whatiscan.cfm>

Long-Term Consequences of Child Abuse and Neglect

https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/long_term_consequences.cfm

References

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2012). *Child Maltreatment 2011*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office. Retrieved from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/cm11.pdf>

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