



National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information National Adoption Information Clearinghouse



Gateways to Information: Protecting Children and Strengthening Families

You Have the Power to Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect

Introduction

As an individual and as a member of your community, you have the power to prevent child abuse and neglect. Here are some ways to contribute your ounce—or more—of effort to prevention.

Understand the Issues

Understand the Problem. Child abuse and neglect affect children of all ages, races, and incomes. According to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System, in 2001, an estimated 903,000 children nationwide were victims of maltreatment. Most experts believe that actual incidents of abuse and neglect are more numerous than statistics indicate.

Understand the Terms. Child abuse and neglect take more than one form. Federal and State laws address four main types of child maltreatment: physical abuse, physical or emotional neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse. Often more than one type of abuse or neglect occurs within families. Some types of maltreatment, such as emotional abuse, are much harder to substantiate than others, such as physical abuse.

Understand the Causes. Most parents don't hurt or neglect their children intentionally. Many were themselves abused or neglected. Very young or inexperienced parents might not know how to take care of their babies or what they can reasonably expect from children at different stages of development. Circumstances that place families under extraordinary stress—for instance, poverty, divorce, sickness, and disability—sometimes take their toll in child maltreatment. Parents who abuse alcohol or other drugs are more likely to abuse or neglect their children.

Get Involved

Support Programs that Support Families. Parent education, community centers, respite care services, and substance abuse treatment programs help to protect children by addressing circumstances that place families at risk for child abuse and neglect. Donate your time or money, if you can.

Report Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect. Some States require everyone to report suspected abuse or neglect; others specify members of certain professions, such as educators and doctors. But whether or not you are mandated by law to report child abuse and neglect, doing so may save a child—and a family. If you suspect a child is being abused or neglected, call the police or your local child welfare agency.

Spread the Word. Help educate others in your community about child abuse and neglect. The resource listed on page 2 can be sources of free materials. Ask if you can leave a stack of brochures at your local public library, recreation or community center, government center, or other public place. You also might make material available at your church, synagogue, mosque, temple, or other faith institutions. Even grocery stores usually have places to distribute community materials.



The Clearinghouses are services of the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Strengthen the Fabric of Your Community. Know your neighbors' names and the names of their children, and make sure they know yours. Give stressed parents a break by offering to watch their children. Volunteer. If you like interacting with children, great, but you do not have to volunteer directly with kids to contribute to prevention. All activities that strengthen communities, such as service to civic clubs and participation on boards and committees, ultimately contribute to the well-being of children.

Be Ready in an Emergency. We've all witnessed the screaming-child-in-the-supermarket scenario. If we are parents, at least once that screaming child has been ours. Most parents take the typical tantrum in stride. But what if you witness a scene—in the supermarket or anywhere else—where you believe a child is being, or is about to be, physically or verbally abused? Responding in these circumstances technically moves beyond prevention to intervention, and intervention is best handled by professionals. Still, if you find yourself in a situation where you believe a child is being or will be abused at that moment, there are steps you can take. Prevent Child Abuse America suggests the following:

- Talk to the adult to get their attention away from the child. Be friendly.
- Say something like, “Children can really wear you out, can’t they?” or “My child has done the same thing.”
- Ask if you can help in any way—could you carry some packages? Play with an older child so the baby can be fed or changed? Call someone on your cell phone?
- If you see a child alone in a public place—for example, unattended in a grocery cart—stay with the child until the parent returns.

Finally—and most important if you are a parent—remember that prevention, like most positive things, begins at home. Take time to re-evaluate your parenting skills. Be honest with yourself—are you yelling at your children a lot or hitting them? Do you enjoy being a parent at least most of the time? If you could benefit from some help with parenting, seek it—getting help when you need it is an essential part of being a good parent. Talk to a professional that you trust; take a parenting class; read a book about child development. Contact the resources below to locate places that parents can get help.

Resources

Parents Anonymous, Inc.

675 W. Foothill Blvd., Suite 220
Claremont, CA 91711
Phone: (909) 621-6184
Fax: (909) 625-6304
E-mail: parentsanonymous@parentsanonymous.org
Web: www.parentsanonymous.org

Parents Anonymous encourages all parents to ask for help early to effectively break the cycle of abuse. Parents Anonymous groups meet in local community centers, churches, schools, housing projects, shelters, and prisons. Parents Anonymous also operates local 24-hour hotlines.

Prevent Child Abuse America

200 S. Michigan Ave., 17th Floor
Chicago, IL 60604-2404
Phone: (800) CHILDREN or (312) 663-3520
Fax: (312) 939-8962
E-mail: mailbox@preventchildabuse.org
Web: <http://preventchildabuse.org>

Prevent Child Abuse America promotes healthy parenting and community involvement as effective strategies for preventing all forms of child abuse. The organization's nationwide network of chapters and local affiliates work to implement direct service programs in hundreds of communities.