

AN INTRODUCTION TO CHILD ABUSE/ NEGLECT PREVENTION

Is it possible to prevent child abuse and neglect ?

YES !!...It **IS** possible to prevent child abuse and neglect !

Why does prevention matter ?

Research has demonstrated that effective child abuse/neglect prevention programs have many positive outcomes, such as:

- enabling parents to nurture and appropriately discipline their children,
- preventing child suffering,
- decreasing juvenile delinquency and crime,
- reducing substance abuse,
- promoting safer communities,
- preventing child deaths, and
- saving money.

The consequences of child abuse and neglect are extremely expensive. In a 2003 bulletin, the Public Children Services Association of Ohio estimated that child maltreatment cost our state \$3.7 billion dollars a year. Until a significant “up front” investment in services to prevent child abuse and neglect is made, we will continue spending staggering amounts of money to intervene after the damage has been done.

How can child abuse and neglect be prevented ?

The ***goals*** of prevention are two-faceted: to stop actions or situations that are harmful to children, and to promote actions or situations that contribute to child well-being. ***Decreasing risk factors*** and ***increasing protective factors*** are the foundation for all prevention efforts.

RISK FACTORS are characteristics which may *increase the likelihood* of child abuse/ neglect. A parent/caregiver may possess certain characteristics which increase the risk of abusing or neglecting their children. On the other hand, a child may have characteristics which make them more vulnerable to being abused or neglected. Even the family’s social environment can present factors which make it more likely that child abuse or neglect may occur. It is generally not one risk factor by itself, but the presence of multiple risk factors that increase the likelihood of child abuse and neglect.

Characteristics of parents/ caregivers which may increase risk

- being a single parent
- low frustration tolerance
- less than 12th grade education
- physical exhaustion/ lack of sleep
- unrealistic expectations for children

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- lack knowledge about age-appropriate discipline
- poor anger or stress management skills
- were abused or neglected as a child
- lack of a social support network
- immaturity, impulsivity
- substance abuse
- mental illness

Characteristics of children which may *increase risk*

- premature birth
- special health needs
- physical or mental handicap
- lack of responsiveness to caregiver
- constant or strong need for attention
- chronic/excessive irritability and crying
- emotional/behavioral disturbance
- disobedience

Characteristics in the social environment which may *increase risk*

- poverty
- unemployment
- inadequate medical care
- domestic/ family violence
- the belief that children are property
- acceptance of physical violence
- values which accept physical or demeaning punishment
- the belief that parents should be able to discipline their children however they see fit
- inadequate community resources to support families in times of need

On the other hand, **PROTECTIVE FACTORS** are characteristics which function to *decrease the likelihood* of child abuse/ neglect. As with risk factors, a parent/ caregiver may possess certain characteristics which decrease the risk of abusing or neglecting their children. Similarly, children have characteristics which may make them less vulnerable to being abused or neglected. Even the family's social environment can contain factors which make it less likely that child abuse or neglect may occur.

Characteristics of parents/ caregivers which may *decrease risk*

- both parents live with the child
- are bonded with the child
- had a positive childhood themselves
- understand normal child development
- have realistic expectations for the child
- able to manage stress and anger
- adequate problem-solving skills
- have a helpful support system
- personal resiliency*

Characteristics of children which may decrease risk

- good health
- flexible temperament
- adequate social skills
- bonded with primary caregiver
- relationship with a supportive adult
- positive school experience
- personal resiliency*

*Resiliency is the ability of an individual to successfully function in spite of unfavorable life circumstances. Some degree of resiliency is believed to be due in part to the individual's inborn personality, however, there are also certain types of life experiences which can contribute to individual resilience.

Characteristics in the social environment which may decrease risk

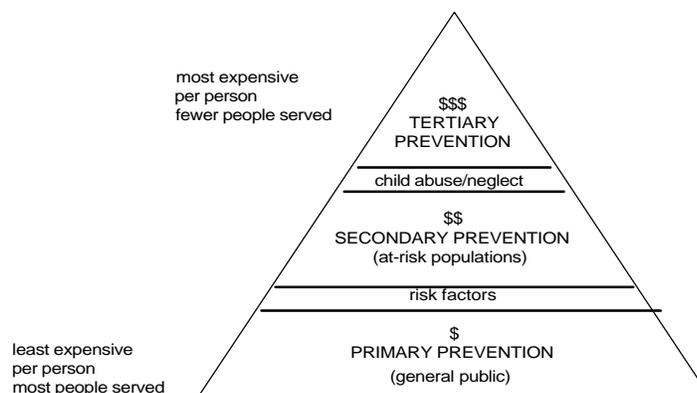
- general cultural standards which reject violence
- adults view children as individuals with rights
- schools support families beyond the classroom
- community resources are adequate to meet the needs of families
- community values encourage alternatives to corporal punishment

How does prevention work ?

Prevention of child abuse/ neglect is accomplished from two approaches:

- by **reducing or eliminating risk factors** which includes providing life skills training to improve anger management and problem-solving skills, educating parents about realistic expectations for child behavior, helping parents develop support systems, providing respite care services to reduce caregiver stress; and
- by **developing or strengthening protective factors** such as teaching children personal safety skills, promoting parent-child bonding, providing life skills training for youngsters, assigning a youth mentor.

The Prevention Triangle



Are there different types of prevention ?

Child abuse/ neglect prevention can be visualized as a three level triangle, where each level focuses on services to a different population. **Primary prevention** is the foundation and broadest level of the prevention triangle. Primary prevention services are voluntary, targeted to the general public, and include such activities as public awareness materials and events to inform and educate people about child abuse, neglect and the importance of prevention, parenting classes and support groups, child development screening, information and referral services, child safety training and family strengthening activities. Primary prevention services reach the broadest audience and generally have the lowest per person cost.

Secondary prevention is the middle level of the triangle, and involves services directed to parents, children and families who have risk factors, but abuse/ neglect has not yet been identified. Some types of services (such as parenting classes, parent-child family life education, or parent support groups) can be classified as both primary prevention or secondary prevention. However, because of an increased risk for maltreatment, services at the secondary level are typically more comprehensive or intensive than at the primary level. Typical secondary prevention services which include home visitation, case management/service coordination, respite care, crisis stabilization and mentoring programs target fewer people than primary prevention and are more costly.

The top level of the prevention triangle represents **tertiary prevention** which is usually referred to as *intervention, protective services or treatment*. This level of service occurs *after child abuse/ neglect has been detected* and focuses on preventing the *re-occurrence* of maltreatment. This level includes some of the same type of services provided under secondary prevention, but often involves provision of multiple services, services over a longer period of time or more frequent and/or intensive services. For these reasons, services at this level tend to be the most expensive.

Who is responsible for preventing child abuse and neglect in Ohio ?

EVERYONE has the responsibility and the power to prevent child maltreatment. This includes government agencies, private organizations, schools, businesses, faith communities, and the media, as well as individual citizens.

Government Agencies

The Ohio Children's Trust Fund is a division of state government which has responsibility for developing a comprehensive statewide plan to prevent child abuse and neglect. All fifty states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico have passed legislation authorizing a children's trust fund.

In Ohio, the Children's Trust Fund receives income from fees on birth and death certificates and surcharges on divorce and dissolution filings. Each year, most Trust Fund income is distributed to all 88 counties to support prevention-focused

services at the local level; the balance of income funds prevention projects with statewide significance.

Some of the public children services agencies in Ohio conduct prevention activities at the county level, and some even have special service units that work with at-risk families and children *before* abuse or neglect has occurred.

Private Organizations

Almost every community has one or more private agencies that offer various types of prevention services; some of these organizations provide only one service, while some sponsor a wide range of prevention-related services.

Prevent Child Abuse Ohio is a private organization that provides awareness and educational services throughout the state.

Schools

Some school districts employ home-school staff who provide secondary prevention services to students and families at risk of abuse or neglect. Schools may also incorporate child safety training, life skills or education about positive parenting into the curriculum.

Businesses

There are a number of different ways that businesses contribute to the preventing child abuse and neglect. For example, an employer may offer flexible work schedules which are more family-friendly and reduce parent stress, they may sponsor life skills training such as stress or anger management during lunch periods, or a business may even provide its services without charge to local prevention agencies or offer paid leave so employees can volunteer for prevention-related service projects in the community.

Faith Communities

Faith communities make a substantial contribution to preventing child abuse and neglect. Many provide material goods such as food and clothing to families in need, and some offer free or inexpensive child care, emergency babysitting, or mentors for young parents. Congregations may also sponsor family life education classes and parent-child activities which strengthen family relationships.

The Media

Public awareness campaigns help citizens become knowledgeable about the importance of preventing child abuse and neglect, about local agencies that provide prevention services, and about what the average citizen can do to help prevent child maltreatment. Outdoor advertising companies have donated free billboard space in support of prevention. Newspapers have run feature articles about community activities and events being conducted to recognize Child Abuse/ Neglect Prevention Month each April, and local cable stations and newscasts can let the public know about local programs which support parents and strengthen families.

Individuals

There are a multitude of things that anyone can do in the course of their everyday life that will help prevent child abuse and neglect and make a difference. The following section outlines 40 things that you (and everyone you know) can do to make a difference:

In Your Family

- Talk to your child(ren) about child abuse and what they can do to stay safe.
- Use non-physical discipline and set a good example of how to be a positive parent.
- Sign a copy of **“A Parent’s Pledge”**, post it at home as a reminder & follow it on a daily basis.
- Coach your child(ren) about how to resolve conflict in non-violent ways and set a good example in resolving your own conflicts.
- Talk to your teen(s) about how to be a good parent.
- Thoroughly evaluate the safety of your child’s day care setting; tell babysitters and day care providers *never* to shake or physically punish your child(ren).
- Develop friends you can rely on for support during stressful times.
- Know your own stress level & take a break/ ask for help before reaching your limit.
- Participate in parent education classes and/ or read about positive parenting.
- Attend or start a parent support group.
- Get involved in your child(ren)’s school or PTO; help organize a health & safety fair, family activity night, or workshops about family well-being at the school.

In Your Neighborhood or Community

- Wear a blue ribbon pin or sticker as a symbol of your commitment to child abuse/ neglect prevention; when someone asks about the blue ribbon, explain what it means, give them yours & ask them to do the same.
- Find out what agencies in your community offer services that support families to prevent abuse/ neglect.
- Develop friendships with your neighbors and their children.
- Talk to friends, relatives & neighbors about things they can do to prevent child abuse/ neglect.
- Offer to baby-sit, run errands or car pool for relatives, friends & neighbors under stress and let them know about local resources which can help.
- Call local law enforcement if you suspect family violence or child abuse/ neglect in your neighborhood.
- In public places, when you see a child being or about to be physically maltreated:
 - **Express an understanding comment to provide support**, such as *“Shopping with kids can be a real test of patience.”*
 - **Offer friendly assistance** *“You sure have your hands full, what can I do to help?”*

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- **Ask a neutral/distracting question** such as “*How is that kind of pizza?*”

- Contact public officials to tell them about child abuse/ neglect & the importance of prevention.
- Write letters to local newspapers about what each individual and the community as a whole can do to prevent child abuse and neglect.
- Call in to talk radio shows to discuss the importance of preventing child abuse and neglect.
- Contact reporters and ask that they follow up stories on child abuse/ neglect tragedies with articles about how such tragedies can be prevented in the future.
- Encourage school officials to include personal safety training for children & parenting education for teens as required subjects.
- Urge your school district to provide programs to prevent substance abuse for students at all levels.
- Get schools or community centers to sponsor after school programs which provide adequate supervision & constructive activities for children.
- Volunteer with a child/ family service agency (office work, direct services, become a parent mentor or Big Brother/ Big Sister).
- Work with your public library to have a display and distribute brochures about child development, parenting and prevention of abuse & neglect.

In Your Workplace

- Be friendly with co-workers and encourage them to talk about their family & children.
- Provide emotional support, for co-workers under stress; let them know about local resources which are available to help.
- Talk to co-workers about ways to prevent child abuse and neglect.
- Ask your employer to publish articles in the company newsletter about family well-being and what can be done to prevent child abuse/ neglect.
- Have your Personnel Department or EAP distribute information promoting family well-being.
- Wear a blue ribbon pin or sticker as a symbol of your commitment to child abuse/ neglect prevention; when someone asks about the blue ribbon, explain what it means, give them yours & ask them to do the same.

In Your Spiritual Community

- Ask spiritual leaders to talk about child abuse, neglect and prevention during services.
- Pass out blue ribbon pins & encourage people to wear them.
- Host a community information fair for child & family service agencies during Child Abuse/ Neglect Prevention Month (April).
- Invite a prevention professional to speak at adult education classes.
- Include personal safety training in children’s education classes.
- Recruit a group to volunteer on a regular basis at a social service agency.
- Organize an emergency babysitting service for members of your congregation.

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- Establish a fellowship group which focuses on parent education and support, especially for young and first-time parents.
- Create a lending library of pamphlets, books and videos about positive parenting, typical child development and non-physical discipline.
- Ask that a copy of these suggestions be printed in your church newsletter.

**A lot has been learned about
how child abuse and neglect can be prevented.
We know that each one of us *CAN* make a difference.....
YOU are the *KEY* to preventing child abuse & neglect
*Please do YOUR PART !***