



# Child Welfare Information Gateway

PROTECTING CHILDREN ■ STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

FACTSHEET

April 2008

Disponible en español  
[www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/preventingcan\\_sp.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/preventingcan_sp.cfm)

## Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect



The statistics can feel overwhelming. In 2006, an estimated 905,000 children in the United States were found to be victims of child abuse and neglect. However, child abuse and neglect can be prevented. State and local governments, community organizations, and private citizens take action every day to protect children. You can help.

Research has shown that parents and caregivers who have support—from family, friends, neighbors,

### What's Inside:

- Prevention programs
- Protective factors
- How you can help

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Administration for Children and Families  
Administration on Children, Youth and Families  
Children's Bureau



**Child Welfare Information Gateway**  
Children's Bureau/ACYF  
1250 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Eighth Floor  
Washington, DC 20024  
703.385.7565 or 800.394.3366  
Email: [info@childwelfare.gov](mailto:info@childwelfare.gov)  
[www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov)

and their communities—are more likely to provide safe and healthy homes for their children. When parents lack this support or feel isolated, on the other hand, 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 abuse 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 Programs

Prevention activities are conducted by many State, local, and Tribal governments, as well as community and faith-based organizations. The services they provide vary widely.

Some prevention services are intended for everyone, such as public service announcements (PSAs) aimed at raising awareness about child abuse within the general population. Others are specifically targeted for individuals and families who may be at greater risk of child abuse or neglect. An example of this might be a parenting class for single teen mothers. Some services are developed specifically for families where abuse or neglect has already occurred, to reduce the negative effects of the abuse and prevent it from happening again.

Common activities of prevention programs include:

- **Public awareness**, such as PSAs, posters, and brochures that promote healthy parenting, child safety, and how to report suspected abuse
- **Skills-based curricula** that teach children safety and protection skills. Many of these programs focus on preventing sexual abuse
- **Parent education** to help parents develop positive parenting skills and decrease behaviors associated with child abuse and neglect
- **Parent support groups**, where parents work together to strengthen their families and build social networks
- **Home visitation**, which focuses on enhancing child safety by helping pregnant mothers and families with new babies or young children learn more about positive parenting and child development
- **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

Two elements have been shown to make prevention programs more effective, regardless of the type of service or intended recipients. Involving parents in all aspects of program planning, implementation, and evaluation helps ensure that service

providers are working in true partnership with families. Parents are more likely to make lasting changes when they are empowered to identify solutions that make sense for them.

Another key to success is providing prevention services that are evidence based. This means that rather than relying on assumptions or “common sense,” research has been conducted to demonstrate that a particular service improves outcomes for children and families. This helps service providers feel confident in what they are doing. It can also help justify a program’s continued funding when resources are scarce.

## Protective Factors

Prevention programs have long focused on reducing particular risk factors, or conditions that have been found through research to be associated with child abuse and neglect in families. Increasingly, prevention services are also recognizing the importance of promoting protective factors, conditions in families and communities that research has shown to 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 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 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 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.

## How You Can Help

Parenting is one of the toughest and most important jobs in America, 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, whether it comes from a parent or a passing stranger.
- **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.

#### RESOURCES ON THE CHILD WELFARE INFORMATION GATEWAY WEBSITE

##### **Child Abuse and Neglect**

[www.childwelfare.gov/can/index.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/can/index.cfm)

##### **Identifying Child Abuse and Neglect**

[www.childwelfare.gov/can/identifying/](http://www.childwelfare.gov/can/identifying/)

##### **Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect**

[www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/](http://www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/)

##### **Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect**

[www.childwelfare.gov/responding/reporting.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/responding/reporting.cfm)