

Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect

Despite the statistics, 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.

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.

This factsheet provides information on how communities, community leaders, and individual citizens can strengthen families, protect children, and prevent child abuse and neglect.

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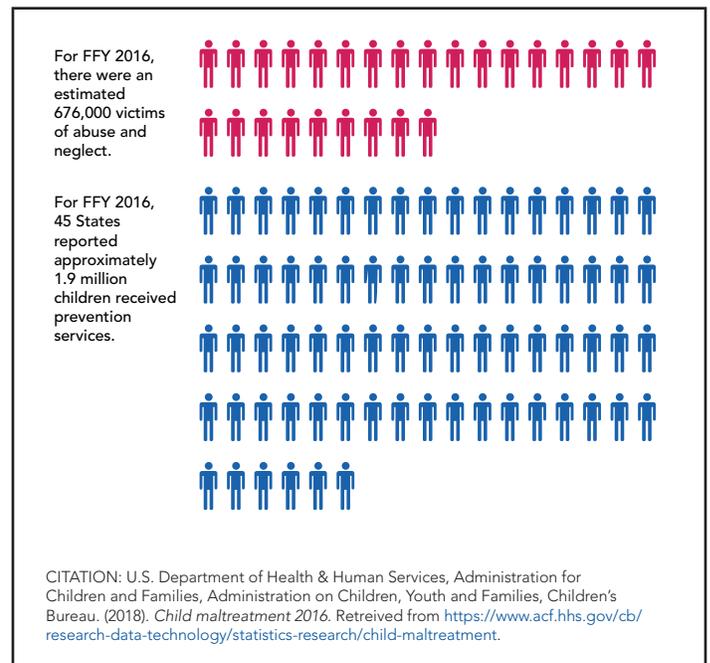
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Protective Factors

Protective factors are assets in families and communities that increase the health and well-being of children and families. Protective factors help parents who might be at greater risk of abusing or neglecting their children to use resources, supports, or coping strategies that allow them to parent effectively, even under stress. Focusing on family strengths allows parents to build resilience, develop parental skills, and gain knowledge of resources that can decrease exposure to risks.

The following six protective factors can lower the risk of child abuse and neglect:

- **Nurturing and attachment.** When parents and children feel compassion and warmth for each other, parents are better able to provide positive parenting, as well as support the healthy physical, social, and emotional development of their children. (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing/promoting/protectfactors/nurture-attach/>)
- **Knowledge of parenting and of child and youth development.** Parents who understand developmental milestones and how children grow can provide an environment where children can live up to their potential. (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing/promoting/protectfactors/knowledge/>)
- **Parental resilience.** Parents who are emotionally resilient have a positive attitude, are creative problem solvers, effectively address challenges, and less often direct anger and frustration toward their children. (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing/promoting/protectfactors/resilience/>)
- **Social connections.** Trusted and caring family friends provide emotional support to parents by offering them encouragement and assistance as they face the daily challenges of raising a family. (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing/promoting/protectfactors/social-connect/>)
- **Concrete supports for parents.** Parents who can provide basic resources, such as food, clothing, housing, transportation, and access to essential services like child care and physical and mental health care, are better able to ensure the health and well-being of their children. (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing/promoting/protectfactors/concrete-supports/>)
- **Social and emotional competence of children.** Parents who instill in their children the ability to positively interact with others, control their behaviors, and communicate their feelings are more likely to raise children who have positive relationships with family, friends, and peers. Children without these skills may be at greater risk for abuse. (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing/promoting/protectfactors/competence/>)



The *Prevention Resource Guide*, produced as part of the Children's Bureau's National Child Abuse Prevention Month efforts, supports service providers in their work with parents, caregivers, and children to strengthen families and prevent child abuse and neglect. While this resource is aimed at child welfare professionals, service providers, and community partners, 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 at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing/preventionmonth/resources/resource-guide>.

For more about protective factors, visit Information Gateway's Protective Factors Framework webpage at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing/promoting/protectfactors/protective-factors>.

Community-Based Primary Prevention Programs and Services

To effectively stop child abuse and neglect before it occurs, communities need to be engaged in efforts to address family needs, and families need to be able to access supports and resources where they live, work, and worship—leveraging relationships already in place. The following are examples of community-based primary prevention programs, including two Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) programs funded by the Children's Bureau—Bring Up Nebraska and Hope Center for Children—that focus on strengthening families. (More information on CBCAP is included in the National Prevention Efforts section of this factsheet.)

Bring Up Nebraska: Connects diverse individuals and organizations and State and local strategies to enhance collaboration to help communities coordinate resources to improve child and family well-being. (<http://www.bringupnebraska.org/>)

Hope Center for Children: Provides a holistic continuum of care to meet the immediate and long-term needs of children and families through individualized support and empowerment. (<http://www.hopecfc.org/about.php>)

Live Well San Diego: Brings together individuals, community organizations, and government to improve the health of families and cultivate opportunities for communities to grow. (<http://www.livewellsd.org/>)

Harlem Children's Zone: Provides families in the community with support and services in a safe place where they can learn, play, and become more stable. (<https://hcz.org/>)

Center for Family Life: Partners with community-based family organizations to provide access to resources and opportunities that strengthen families. (<http://sco.org/programs/center-for-family-life/about/>)

National Prevention Efforts

Through its CBCAP grants, the Children's Bureau funds 50 State lead agencies (SLAs); Washington, DC; Puerto Rico; and three set-aside Tribal and migrant organizations. The 50 SLAs; Washington, DC; and Puerto Rico use a majority of their grant funds to support community organizations in the provision of services to families and communities. You can learn more about CBCAP, including its funding and approach to prevention, at <https://friendsnrc.org/prevention>.

The FRIENDS National Center for CBCAP is a service of the Children's Bureau that provides training and technical assistance to SLAs and set-aside grantees. Prevention resources developed by FRIENDS are available through its website. FRIENDS also has an Online Learning Center that offers free trainings available to anyone, with courses ranging from CBCAP 101 to Protective Factors and Implementation Science. To take a course (free registration required), visit the FRIENDS Online Learning Center at <https://friendsnrcelearning.remote-learner.net/>.

State children's trust and prevention funds distribute more than \$100 million in funding each year to support evidence-based and innovative statewide and community-based prevention strategies. You can find your local children's trust and prevention fund on the website of the National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds (the Alliance) at <https://ctfalliance.org/>. The Alliance

supports these State prevention strategies with training, technical assistance, and resources, most of which are available on the Alliance website.

Prevent Child Abuse America's 50 chapters nationwide sponsor a number of evidence-based, State-specific programs designed to prevent child maltreatment. Community members and individuals can make a difference through mentoring, becoming an advocate, and other forms of outreach. Use Prevent Child Abuse America's map to find your State's chapter and website at <http://preventchildabuse.org/get-involved>.

Stop It Now! is a national organization focused on preventing sexual abuse that offers information, support, and resources for prevention. Some of its materials aimed at parents and community members include tip sheets on prevention and warning signs of abuse. The Help and Guidance section offers resources on how to speak up about your concerns and take the next steps. Learn more at <http://www.stopitnow.org/help-guidance>.

Parent Leadership and Engagement

Prevention is most effective when parents are engaged in all aspects of programs, services, implementation, and evaluation. If parents feel isolated, they may make poor decisions that can lead to abuse or neglect. When parents and caregivers are supported by families, friends, neighbors, and communities, they are less likely to experience stress from routine parenting duties and are able to focus more easily on providing safe and healthy homes for their children.

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://circleofparents.org>.

The FRIENDS National Center for CBCAP website offers education and support programs designed to give parents the tools they need to become more confident and build relationships with other parents. Resources are available at <https://friendsnrc.org/parent-leadership>.

How You Can Help

Parenting is one of the toughest and most important jobs. Individuals and communities play a role in helping families to raise safe, healthy, and productive children and in promoting healthy relationships.

Individual Actions

- **Learn how to recognize signs of child abuse and neglect.** The first step in helping children who have been abused or neglected is learning to recognize the signs of child abuse and neglect. For more information, see Information Gateway's factsheet, *What Is Child Abuse and Neglect? Recognizing the Signs and Symptoms*, at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/whatiscan>.
- **Report your concerns.** If you suspect a child is being abused or neglected, reporting your concerns may protect that child and get help for a family who needs it. For more information on reporting, visit https://www.childwelfare.gov/organizations/?CWIGFunctionsaction=rols:main.dspList&rolType=Custom&RS_ID=%205.
- **Help a family under stress.** Offer to babysit, help with chores and errands, or suggest resources in the community. Consider some simple ways to help a neighbor at <https://familyreviewguide.com/5-simple-ways-to-help-your-neighbor>. You may visit <http://www.211.org> or dial 2-1-1 to learn about community organizations and programs that support parents and families in your area.
- **Be an active community member.** Lend a hand at local schools, community- or faith-based organizations, children's hospitals, social services agencies, or other places where families and children are supported. Learn how you (and your children) can get involved at <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/volunteer.html>.
- **Keep your neighborhood safe.** Start a Neighborhood Watch or plan a local "National Night Out" policing-awareness community event. You will get to know your neighbors while helping to keep your neighborhood and children safe. Learn how to start a neighborhood watch at <https://www.nnw.org/register-watch>.

Community Organization Actions

- **Engage communities.** Promote community engagement to show support for families in your community. Access resources on engaging communities to support children and families by visiting Information Gateway's Engaging Communities to Support Families webpage at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/famcentered/communities>.
- **Spark conversations with potential community partners.** Watch "Building Community, Building Hope," a film series produced by the National Child Abuse and Neglect Technical Assistance and Strategic Dissemination Center, a service of the Children's Bureau, to learn how to form partnerships to ensure the safety and well-being of children and families. Access the series, which comes with discussion toolkits and other resources, at <https://candas.acf.hhs.gov/bcbh>.

Healthy Relationship Resources for Individuals and Communities

Safe, stable, and nurturing relationships are paramount to healthy child development and in 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. The guide is available at <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childmaltreatment/essentials.html>.

Child Welfare Information Gateway Resources

To learn more about preventing child abuse and neglect, refer to the following resources:

- Prevention Programs [webpage]: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing/prevention-programs/>
- Parenting Resources [webpage]: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing/promoting/parenting/>
- Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect [webpage]: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing/>

Conclusion

True prevention of child abuse and neglect requires a full-scale, all-hands-on-deck commitment from every facet of the community. Individuals, neighborhood groups, and local organizations must work together to know the signs of abuse and neglect and raise awareness of protective factors that strengthen families and mitigate the effects of maltreatment. Everyone has a role to play, and every role is important.

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