

# FAMILY ADVOCACY GUIDE



**Prevent Child Abuse**  
Florida™





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# DEAR ADVOCATE

**T**he future success of our state depends on our ability to nurture the healthy development of our children-the next generation of leaders, teachers, employees and parents. Research tells us that what children learn through their early interactions with parents and caregivers becomes the foundation for all future development. While safe and nurturing relationships and stimulating and stable environments improve brain development and child well-being; neglectful or abusive experiences and unstable or stressful environments increase the odds of poor outcomes and cost our state thousands of dollars in lost productivity, healthcare expenses and wasted lives in prison.

Parents and caregivers who have a social network and concrete support in times of need are better able to provide safe environments and nurturing experiences for their children. **All families need a helping hand at some point.** Our Pinwheels for Prevention campaign promotes individual and community involvement in activities that build on family and community strengths. It is our mission to prevent child abuse and neglect by promoting a better understanding of child

development, providing tools for positive parenting, and prompting community action.

**This advocate booklet provides information on what you can do to contribute to the healthy development of children and families in your community. By learning more about how communities shape children's lives, you are helping ensure our children have the foundation they need to become tomorrow's leaders.**

This campaign would not be possible without the support and dedication of our partners. We thank the Florida Department of Children and Families and our community partners throughout Florida for making this campaign possible.







# INTRODUCTION

## Promoting the Protective Factors that are Linked to Healthy Child Development and Strong Families

W

e know that child development is largely influenced by early interactions with parents and caregivers; however, the community also plays a role in healthy child development. Access to quality healthcare, safe and affordable housing, quality early learning, afterschool programs and enriching

educational, cultural and spiritual experiences help promote healthy child development and improve every child's chances to have a healthy, happy childhood. Research shows certain "protective factors" are crucial for parents to keep their families strong. These qualities serve as safeguards by helping parents find solutions to family and life challenges. These protective factors are:

### #1 Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

**Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development (Being a great parent is part genetic and part learned):** There is extensive research linking effective parenting to healthy child development. Children thrive when parents provide affection, respectful communication, consistent rules and expectations, and safe learning opportunities that promote independence. Successful parenting fosters positive psychological adjustment, helps children succeed in school, encourages curiosity about the world and motivates children to achieve. See our Positive Parenting Guide for tips on effective parenting.

### #2 Nurturing and Attachment

**Nurturing and Attachment (A close bond helps parents understand, respond to, and communicate with their children):** A child's early experience of being nurtured and developing a bond with a caring adult affects all aspects of behavior and development. When parents and children have strong, warm feelings for one another, children develop trust that their parents will provide what they need to thrive, including love, acceptance, positive guidance and protection. See our brochure titled "Creating a Loving Bond with your Baby" for tips on how to form a healthy bond with your baby.



### Parental Resilience

#### **Parental Resilience (Being strong and flexible):**

Parents who can cope with the stress of everyday life, as well as an occasional crisis, have resilience; they have the flexibility and inner strength necessary to bounce back when things are not going well. Multiple stressors such as poor health, marital conflict, domestic or community violence, unemployment, poverty and homelessness may reduce a parent's capacity to cope effectively with the typical day-to-day stress of raising children. Have you heard about our "Resilience - The Biology of Stress and the Science of Hope" film screenings? Visit [Ounce.org/resilience.html](http://Ounce.org/resilience.html) for more info.

### Concrete Support in Times of Need

#### **Concrete Support in Times of Need (We all need help sometimes):**

Partnering with parents to identify and access resources in the community may help prevent the stress that sometimes leads to child maltreatment. Providing concrete support may also help prevent the unintended neglect that sometimes occurs when parents are unable to provide for their children's basic needs. 211 can help with resources and referrals.

### Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

#### **Social Connections (Parents need friends):**

Parents with a social network of emotionally supportive friends, family members and neighbors often find that it is easier to care for their children and themselves. Most parents need people they can call on at times when they need a sympathetic listener, advice or concrete support. Research has shown that parents who are isolated, with few social connections, are at higher risk for abusive and neglectful behavior. Consider starting or joining one of our Circle of Parents groups. These groups offer peer support in a friendly and welcoming environment.

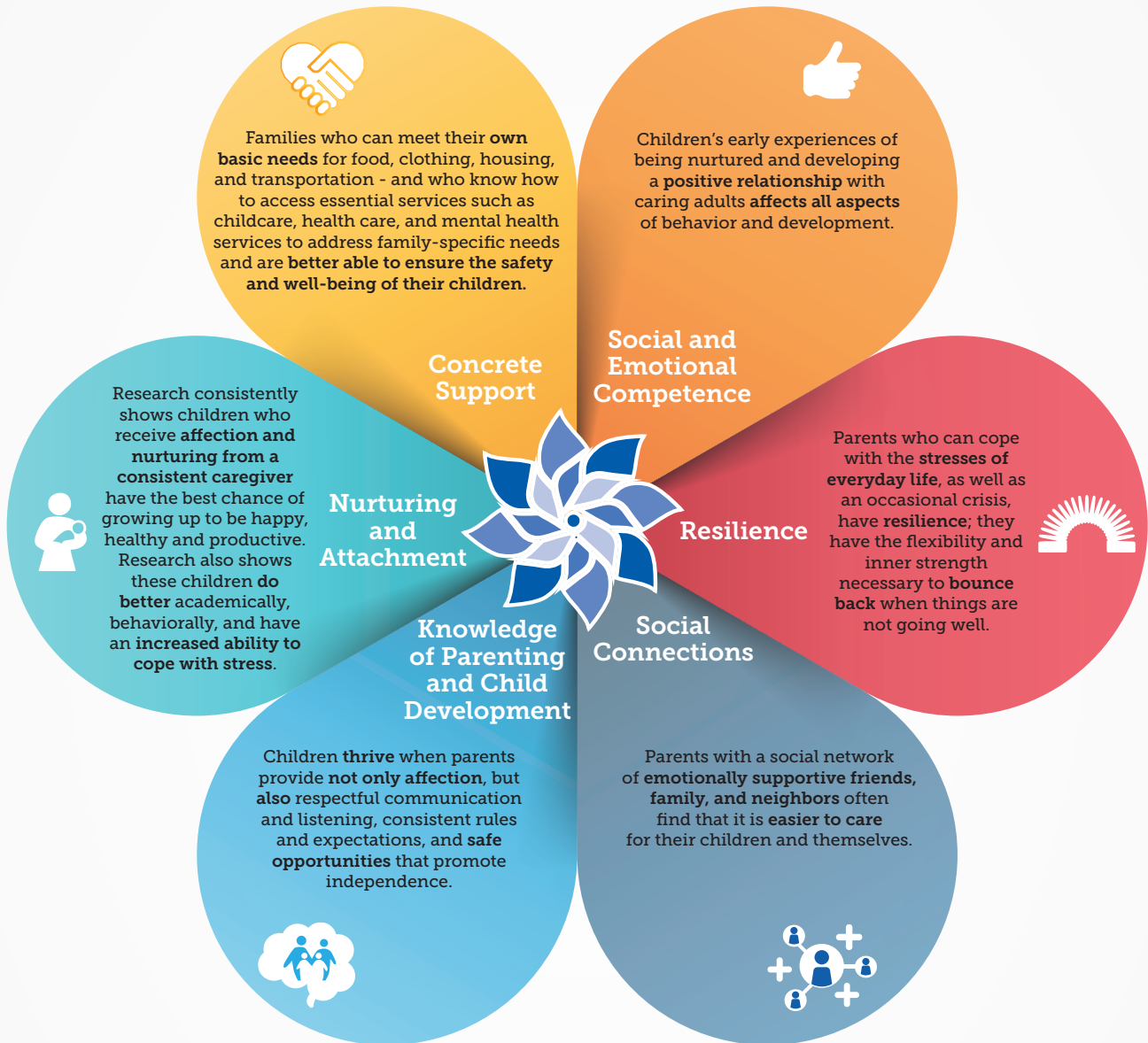
### Social and Emotional Competence of Children

#### **Social and Emotional Competence of Children**

**(Healthy child development):** Children's emerging ability to interact positively with others, self-regulate their behavior, and effectively communicate their feelings has a positive impact on their relationships with their family, other adults, and peers. Parents and caregivers grow more responsive to their children's needs over time—and are less likely to feel stressed or frustrated—as children learn to verbalize what they need and how parental actions make them feel, rather than "acting out" difficult feelings.

There are a number of ways you can help build these protective factors for children and families in your community. Some detailed strategies are discussed in the following pages of this booklet. We hope you will use these suggestions to become an active advocate on behalf of children and families. You can also contact local schools and social service programs for more ideas on how to support children and families in your area.

# SIX PROTECTIVE FACTORS



**ACEs can have devastating impacts on long-term health.**  
When a child experiences adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), it can have life-long consequences for physical and mental health. But, one caring adult can make a difference. That's why we know building protective factors in parents, communities and businesses is important.





# ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACES) AND THE EFFECTS OF CHILD ABUSE

## ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

Childhood experiences, both positive and negative, have a tremendous impact on children's developing brains. Research has identified these negative experiences such as divorce, living with a person who abuses substances, not having enough to eat or being abused or neglected as having a particularly negative effect on future violence victimization, perpetration and lifelong health and opportunity. As such, early experiences are an important public health issue. Much of the foundational research in this area has been referred to as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

The good news is ACEs can be prevented. Prevent Child Abuse Florida is pleased to offer workshops on this subject through the use of a documentary film called "Resilience – The Biology of Stress and the Science of Hope." Learn more about preventing ACEs in your community by visiting our website at [www.preventchildabusefl.org](http://www.preventchildabusefl.org) and clicking on the RESILIENCE link.

## Effects of child abuse

Child abuse can produce dire consequences during the victim's childhood and adulthood. Some effects of child abuse are obvious: a child is malnourished or has a cast on her arm; a very young child develops a sexually transmitted disease. But some physiological effects of child abuse, such as cognitive difficulties or lingering health problems, may not show up for some time or be clearly linked to abuse. Other effects of child abuse are invisible or go off like time bombs later in life.

## Emotional Effects of Child Abuse

Just as all types of child abuse have an emotional component; all affect the emotions of the victims. These effects include:

- Low self-esteem
- Depression and anxiety
- Aggressive behavior/anger issues
- Relationship difficulties
- Alienation and withdrawal
- Personality disorders
- Clinginess, neediness
- Flashbacks and nightmares

Many adults who were abused as children find it difficult to trust other people, endure physical closeness, and establish intimate relationships.

## Behavioral Effects of Child Abuse

Children who suffer abuse have a much greater chance of being arrested later as juveniles and as adults. Significant percentages of inmates in U.S. prisons were abused as children. One of every three abused or neglected children will grow up to become an abusive parent. Other behavioral effects include:

- Problems in school and work
- Prostitution
- Teen pregnancy
- Suicide attempts
- Criminal or antisocial behavior
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Eating disorders
- Spousal abuse





# RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT



## Physical child abuse: types and warning signs

**Physical child abuse** is an adult's physical act of aggression directed at a child that causes injury, **even if the adult didn't intend to injure the child.** Such

acts of aggression include striking a child with the hand, fist, or foot or with an object; burning the child with a hot object; shaking, pushing, or throwing a child; pinching or biting the child; pulling a child's hair; cutting off a child's breathing.

Physically abusive parents often have issues of anger, excessive need for control, or immaturity that make them unable or unwilling to see their level of aggression as inappropriate.

Sometimes the very youngest children, even babies not yet born, suffer physical abuse. Because many chemicals pass easily from a pregnant woman's system to that of a fetus, a mother's use of drugs or alcohol during pregnancy can cause serious neurological and physiological damage to the unborn child, such as the effects of fetal alcohol syndrome. Mothers can also pass on drugs or alcohol to babies through breast milk.

Another form of child abuse involving babies is **Shaken Baby Syndrome**, in which a frustrated caregiver shakes a baby to make the baby stop crying. The baby's neck muscles can't support the baby's head and the brain

bounces around inside the skull, causing brain damage that often leads to severe neurological problems and even death. While the person shaking the baby may not intend physical harm, shaking a baby in a way that can cause injury is a form of child abuse.

An odd form of physical child abuse is Munchausen's syndrome by proxy, in which a parent causes a child to become ill and rushes the child to the hospital or convinces doctors that the child is sick. It's a way for the parent to gain attention and sympathy, and its dangers to the child constitute child abuse.

## Is corporal punishment the same as physical abuse?

**Corporal punishment**, the use of physical force with the intent of inflicting bodily pain without injury for the purpose of correction or control, used to be a very common form of discipline. Most of us know it as spanking or paddling.

Most childcare experts have come to agree that corporal punishment sends the message to children that physical force is an appropriate response to problems or opposition. The level of force used by an angry or frustrated parent can easily get out of hand and lead to injury. Even if it doesn't, what a child learns from being hit as a punishment is to hide bad behavior out of fear of being hit.

In 2018, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) issued a policy statement urging parents and other

adult caregivers to use effective discipline strategies for children that do not involve spanking, other forms of corporal punishment or verbal shaming.

The purpose of discipline is to teach children good behavior and support normal child development. Effective discipline does so without the use of corporal punishment or verbal shaming. The change in guidance is brought about by an increasing awareness of the risks of corporal punishment for normal child development. Corporal punishment can bring on a vicious cycle of escalating poor behavior and more severe punishment.

Children who experience repeated use of corporal punishment tend to develop more aggressive behaviors, increased aggression in school, and an increased risk of mental health disorders and cognitive problems. In cases where warm parenting practices occurred alongside corporal punishment, the link between harsh discipline and adolescent conduct disorder and depression remained.

For more information on the AAP's policy change, visit <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/Disciplining-Your-Child.aspx>.

If you ask a child about how he or she got hurt and the child talks vaguely or evasively, or if they express a reluctance to go home, think hard before you accept the child's story at face value.

Unexplained injuries aren't the only signs of abuse. Children suffering abuse may exhibit fear of a certain adult and have difficulty trusting others or making friends. Sudden changes in eating or sleeping patterns, inappropriate sexual behavior, poor hygiene, secrecy or hostility can also be indicators of possible abuse and neglect.

#### **SOME SIGNS OF PHYSICAL CHILD ABUSE:**

- Frequent absense from school
- Faded bruises or healing injuries after missing school days
- Unexplained burns, bruises, cuts, welts or other injuries
- Apparent fear of a parent or caretaker
- Difficulty walking or sitting
- Extreme changes in behavior
- Delays in physical or emotional development
- Lack of emotional attachment to the parent
- Obvious need for medical or dental care
- Strong body odor or unusually dirty appearance
- Attempted suicide

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## Sexual abuse in children: types and warning signs

Sexual abuse is any sexual act between an adult and a child. Such acts include:

- **Behavior involving penetration**—Vaginal or anal intercourse and oral sex.
- **Fondling**—Touching or kissing a child's genitals, making a child fondle and adult's genitals or touching a child's body in an inappropriate way.
- **Violations of privacy**—Forcing a child to undress, spying on a child in the bathroom or bedroom.
- **Exposing children to adult sexuality**—Performing sexual acts in front of a child, exposing genitals, telling "dirty" stories, showing pornography to a child.
- **Exploitation**—Receiving money, drugs or other benefits in exchange for a child's participation as a prostitute or a performer in pornography.

The adult who sexually abuses a child or adolescent is usually someone the child knows and is supposed to trust: a relative, childcare provider, family friend, neighbor, teacher, coach or clergy member. More than 80 percent of sex offenders are people the child or adolescent victims know. It's important to understand that no matter what the adult says in defense of his or her actions, children lack the emotional and psychological maturity to consent and the adult's behavior is wrong. **Sexual abuse is never the child's fault.**

Children are psychologically unable to handle sexual stimulation. Even toddlers, who haven't formulated the idea that the sexual abuse is wrong, will develop problems resulting from the over stimulation. Older children who know their abusers know that the sexual behavior is wrong, but they may feel trapped by feelings of loyalty and affection. Abusers warn their victims not to tell, threatening children with violence or banishment, and the shame associated with the sexual activity makes the child especially reluctant to tell. When sexual abuse occurs within the family, children may worry that other family members won't believe them and will be angry with them if they tell—as is often the case. The layer of shame that accompanies sexual abuse makes the behavior doubly traumatizing.

### SOME SIGNS OF SEXUAL CHILD ABUSE:

Often children who have suffered sexual abuse show no physical signs, and the abuse goes undetected unless a physician spots evidence of forced sexual activity. However, there are behavioral clues to sexual abuse, including:

- Recreating the act with dolls or other children
- Inappropriate interest in or knowledge of sexual acts
- Seductive behavior
- Reluctance or refusal to undress in front of others
- Extra aggression or, at the other end of the spectrum, extra compliance
- Fear of a particular person or family member

Children who use the Internet are also vulnerable to adults online. Among the warning signs of online sexual child abuse are these:

- Your child spends large amounts of time online, especially at night
- You find pornography on your child's computer
- Your child receives phone calls from people you don't know, or makes calls, sometimes long distance, to numbers you don't recognize
- Your child receives mail, gifts, or packages from someone you don't know
- Your child turns the computer monitor off or quickly changes the screen on the monitor when you come into the room
- Your child becomes withdrawn from the family
- Your child is using an online account belonging to someone else

## Emotional child abuse: types and warning signs

Emotional child abuse, also known as mental injury, involves behavior that interferes with a child's mental health or social development. Such abuse can range from verbal insults to acts of terror, and it's almost always embedded in the other three categories of abuse.

### Examples of emotional child abuse include:

#### Verbal abuse

- Belittling or shaming the child: name-calling, making negative comparisons to others, telling the child he or she is "no good," "worthless," "a mistake"
- Habitual blaming: telling the child that everything is his or her fault

#### Withholding affection

- Ignoring or disregarding the child
- Lack of affection and warmth: Failure to hug, praise, express love for the child

#### Extreme or bizarre punishment

- These are actions that are meant to isolate and terrorize a child, such as tying the child to a fixture or piece of furniture or locking a child in a closet or dark room

#### Corruption

- This involves causing a child to witness or participate in inappropriate behavior, such as criminal activities, drug or alcohol abuse, or acts of violence.



## Contributing factors in cases of child abuse

Why would someone abuse a child? Several factors in a person's life may contribute to abuse:

- **Stress**, including the stress of caring for children or the stress of caring for a child with a disability, special needs, or difficult behaviors
- **Lack of nurturing qualities** necessary for raising or caring for a child
- **Immaturity**: a disproportionate number of parents who abuse their children are teenagers
- **Difficulty controlling anger**
- **Personal history of being abused** (ACEs)
- **Isolation** from the family or community
- **Physical or mental health problems**, such as depression and anxiety
- **Alcohol or drug abuse**
- **Personal problems** such as marital conflict, unemployment, or financial difficulties

No one has been able to predict which of these factors will cause someone to abuse a child. A significant factor is that abuse tends to be **intergenerational** - those who were abused as children are less likely to possess the necessary coping mechanisms to allow them to control their emotions, especially in times of stress. In addition, many forms of child abuse arise from ignorance or lack of knowledge. Prevent Child Abuse Florida offers free parenting guides to equip parents with additional tips and tools for positive parenting.

### An abusive adult may...

- Seem unconcerned about the child's welfare
- See the child as worthless or a burden
- Avoid discussing the child's injuries
- Show signs of alcohol or drug abuse
- Use harsh physical discipline or ask other caretakers to use it
- Seem indifferent to the child
- Seem secretive or try to isolate the child
- Frequently blame, belittle or insult the child

## Child neglect: types and warning signs

### Physical Neglect

1. Failure to provide adequate food, clothing or hygiene
2. Reckless disregard for the child's safety, such as inattention to hazards in the home or leaving the baby or young child unattended.
3. Refusal to provide, or delay in providing, necessary health care for the child.
4. Abandoning children without providing for their care or expelling children from the home without arranging for their care.
5. Permitting a child to drink alcohol or use recreational drugs.

### Emotional Neglect

1. Inadequate nurturing or affection.
2. Exposure of the child to spousal abuse.
3. Refusal of, or delay in providing, necessary psychological care.
4. Spurning or rejecting the child.
5. Directing humiliation or degrading remarks at the child.
6. Threatening to harm the child or making threats to allow the child or the child's possessions to be destroyed or damaged, including threats to harm or kill pets.

### SOME SIGNS OF CHILD NEGLECT:

- Clothes that are dirty, ill-fitting, ragged, and/or not suitable for the weather
- Unkempt appearance; offensive body odor
- Indicators of hunger: asking for or stealing food, going through trash for food, eating too fast or too much when food is provided for a group
- Apparent lack of supervision: wandering alone, home alone, left in a car
- Colds, fevers, or rashes left untreated; infected cuts; chronic tiredness
- In school-aged children, frequent absence or lateness; troublesome, disruptive behavior or its opposite, withdrawal
- In babies, failure to thrive; to gain weight, reach developmental milestones for infants or the lack of attachment and bonding behaviors

A single occurrence of one of these indicators doesn't necessarily equal child neglect, but a pattern of behaviors may demonstrate a lack of care that constitutes neglect.

# REPORT ABUSE, IT'S THE LAW

## 3 WAYS TO REPORT ABUSE

**Call**  
1-800-962-2873  
(1-800-96-ABUSE)  
TTY: 1-800-453-5145

**Fax**  
1-800-914-0004  
**Online at**  
<http://reportabuse.dcf.state.fl.us>

Florida Statute, Chapter 39.201 states that “Any person who knows, or has reasonable cause to suspect, that a child is abused, abandoned, or neglected by a parent, legal custodian, caregiver, or other person responsible for the child’s welfare... shall report such knowledge or suspicion to the department...” through Florida’s child abuse hotline (800-96-ABUSE).

### WHO IS A “MANDATED REPORTER”?

Everyone has a responsibility to report suspected child abuse, neglect and abandonment. Only those in certain occupations designated by law as professionally mandated reporters are required to provide their names when making a report to the Abuse Hotline. Mandated reporters’ names are entered into the record of the report, but remain confidential. Mandated reporters include those in the following occupations:

- Chiropractor/chiropractor physician
- Day care center worker
- Foster care worker
- Hospital personnel engaged in the admission, examination, care or treatment of children
- Health professional
- Home visitor
- Institutional worker
- Judge
- Law enforcement officer
- Medical examiner
- Mental health professional
- Nurse
- Osteopath/osteopathic physician
- Physician
- Practitioner who relies solely on spiritual means for healing
- Professional childcare worker
- Residential care worker
- School teacher
- School official or other school personnel
- Social worker

Failure to report known or suspected child abuse, neglect or abandonment is now a third-degree felony punishable by up to five years in prison, five years probation, and a \$5,000 fine.

College and university law enforcement and administrators are now required to report known or suspected child abuse occurring on campuses or at events sponsored by their institutions. Failure to report may subject the institution to a fine.

### INFORMATION NEEDED

Details about the abuse or neglect you know or suspect is happening, including who is involved, what happened, when and where it happened, why it happened, the extent of any injuries, what the victim(s) said happened, and any other related details are very important. Information callers should have ready includes:

- Name, date of birth (or approximate age), race, and gender, for all adults and children involved
- Addresses for all subjects, including current location
- Relationship of the alleged perpetrator to the victim(s)

Other relevant information that would expedite an investigation, such as directions to the victim (especially in rural areas) and potential risks to the investigator, should be given to the abuse hotline counselor.

### WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

Keep reporting abuse until the situation is resolved. You may not have the legal right to know what steps are being taken to protect the child in question as a result of your report; however, you can help the child in other ways:

- Be a good listener—show that you understand and believe what the child tells you
- Be kind and supportive of the child
- Talk to the child’s teacher, school counselor, or minister—they may be in a position to reach out to the family
- If appropriate, you can support the family by offering to help with childcare, chores, errands, etc.

# ADVOCATING FOR CHILDREN

Advocacy is speaking out in favor of a cause or proposal. Anyone who cares about an issue and is willing to speak out to promote what works and challenge what doesn't can be an advocate. We advocate for our children, ourselves and our community through simple things we do each day, such as voting to fund improvements to the school system, negotiating time off from work, or attending a city council meeting to voice opinions on a development proposal.

Children and families are in need of advocates to generate community support for resources and services. Child advocates speak out in a variety of ways, based on their personality, skills and interests, to ensure families' needs are recognized and met.

Here are some ways you can be an advocate for children in your community:

**REGISTER TO VOTE AND VOTE!** This is your most basic right. Elected officials help determine the priorities that shape our community. Learn about candidates and their voting history; help

**FOCUS ON YES.** Remember the difference between lobbying and advocacy. Lobbyists make it hard for elected officials to say "No." Advocates make it easy for them to say "Yes." Advocates do not need to be partisan and never resort to threats or retribution. Advocacy is the art of communicating a positive message for good causes.

**USE THE MEDIA TO SEND YOUR MESSAGE FAR AND WIDE.** Write letters to the editor, submit a guest editorial, and encourage allies to do the same. Public officials closely monitor opinion pages in their local newspapers. You can go a long way toward getting their attention if your case is made in print.

**ENLIST YOUR FRIENDS.** Invite your allies to join your advocacy efforts, especially those from law enforcement, education, business and the faith community. While there's strength in diversity, there's power in unity. Bring as many diverse voices to your cause as possible, but agree on the important unifying goals and success will be achieved.

For additional information on effective advocacy, visit [www.successby6.fl.org](http://www.successby6.fl.org) and click on "Communicating with Policy Makers: A Toolkit."

elect representatives who believe in preventing child abuse by investing in prevention programs that support families.

**GET TO KNOW YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS AND THEIR STAFF.** They depend on you to communicate concerns in the community, so call or write your representatives and encourage them to vote for legislation supporting child abuse prevention efforts. The most persuasive messages come from familiar faces. Know them by name, and make sure they know you by name.

## SAY "THANK YOU" BEFORE YOU SAY "PLEASE."

A well-written, brief thank-you note is always appreciated. Even if you disagree with your elected officials' positions on some issues, they are more likely to listen to you if you've found some way to compliment them. If nothing else, thank them for being a public servant.

**BE CONCISE AND TO THE POINT.** The history of your issue or program needs to be a paragraph or a two-minute presentation. The key to effective communication is not volume, but precision. Elected officials need to know they can trust you as an expert source of information.





## SUPPORTING FAMILIES IN YOUR COMMUNITY



ocial relationships influence every area of our daily life, from our personal health, to the safety of our neighborhood, to the development of our children. Getting to know your neighbors makes your community safer and provides individuals and families with support. Yet a recent study found that Americans' social networks are shrinking dramatically and nearly 25 percent of Americans say they have no one to talk to about important matters or personal problems.

Ties to communities and neighborhoods have withered and people have fewer family confidants as well. Causes for this social shift have not been determined, but may reasonably include:

- The more transient nature of families today and decreased likelihood that grown children will live near their parents in the communities in which they grew up
- Increased reliance on communicating through technology (cell phones, e-mail) promotes the development of a wider, less-localized network of weak ties rather than the stronger ties built by face-to-face interaction that can offer real support every day and in times of crisis
- The hectic pace of daily life, especially for dual income and single parent families, which limits the time available to invest in new relationships

So how do we reverse this social shift and reconnect individuals and families to the community?

On the next page are some simple ways to build a strong neighborhood that will allow children to grow into healthy, productive citizens who will in turn give back to communities.

**GETTING TO KNOW YOUR NEIGHBORS MAKES YOUR COMMUNITY SAFER AND PROVIDES INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES WITH SUPPORT.**





**Know your neighbors.** Introduce yourself and your family to your neighbors. Know their names and the names of their children. Families feel safer and less stressed when they know support is nearby. Offer to be that support for your neighbor.

**Reach out to those in your community.** A wave, a smile or a kind word can make a passerby's day a bit brighter.

**Keep your neighborhood safe.** Offer to pick up your neighbor's mail when they are out of town and let them know you can keep an eye on their home. When street lights burn out, report the outage to the city to avoid dark places in your neighborhood. If you see something, say something.

**Mentor a new parent in your neighborhood.** Sometimes families go from receiving a lot of support when the baby first arrives to little support a few months later, which can leave a new parent feeling overwhelmed. Check in often with a new parent. Sometimes just holding or changing the baby will allow the new mom or dad to shower or fold laundry.

**Offer support to families.** Instead of telling a parent to call you if they need anything, offer to make dinner, help with chores or baby-sit their children on a specific day. A little extra help from a neighbor can ease the demands of parenting.

**Be a good role model.** Parents are always looking for new parenting techniques and you can help provide them by setting a good example.

**Celebrate children.** Smile at children and praise them for doing something well. It helps children and parents feel good about themselves and will also reinforce positive behavior.

**Congratulate parents on doing a good job.** Let parents know their child is a reflection of good parenting. Praising parents can raise their self-esteem and make them feel good about their parenting skills.

**Be active in your community.** Developing playgroups for new families at community centers, libraries or schools ultimately

contributes to the well-being of children.

**Volunteer your time.** Start a Circle of Parents® support group, spend time mentoring a child, or start a family program of your own.

**Distribute parenting materials,** such as the Positive Parenting Guide offered through Prevent Child Abuse Florida, in your community. This valuable resource can be ordered at no cost at [PreventChildAbuseFL.org](http://PreventChildAbuseFL.org)

**Remember, anything you do to support children and parents in your community helps strengthen families and reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect.**



## LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS

Join or support local organizations that promote community involvement:

- Homeowners Associations
- Junior Leagues
- Girl Scouts/Boy Scouts
- Places of Worship
- Senior Centers
- Library-based Adult Literacy Programs
- Professional Associations
- Chambers of Commerce
- Salvation Army, Red Cross, Goodwill
- Big Brothers/ Big Sisters
- School-based Mentoring or Tutoring Programs
- Social Clubs
- United Way
- Sporting Events (football, basketball, etc.)





## ADVOCATING FOR FOSTER/ADOPTIVE PARENTS

**I**n many ways, foster and adoptive parents are no different from other parents; yet, they often face additional parenting challenges. Foster parents often receive very little information or notice prior to a child being placed in their care and children frequently arrive with only the clothes on their backs. This can present immediate challenges for the foster parents who may or may not have planned on accepting a child of a certain age, gender or physical size. Community members can assist foster and adoptive parents by:

- Donating to local foster parent support groups (new or slightly used clothing items, diapers, beds, suitcases, backpacks, school supplies, toys, cash, etc.)
- Mentoring a teenager in foster care
- Offering to help with grocery shopping or babysitting so the parent can shop
- Getting your civic group, church, mosque, or synagogue class together to provide childcare while foster parents meet for training or support group meetings
- Helping with recruitment and retention activities (contact your local foster parent agency to find out more)
- Sponsoring a "Parents Night Out"





## OFFERING SUPPORT IN PUBLIC PLACES

**P**arenting can be most stressful when running errands with a small child, or a few children, in tow. Sometimes parents don't choose the best parenting techniques when their child is difficult to handle in public.

Parents become focused on what needs to be done, such as the grocery shopping or the doctor visit, and can feel embarrassed that their child is acting out. Any assistance you can offer a parent will help them take a few seconds to take a deep breath and deal with the situation calmly.

- **Praise the parent or child at the first opportunity.** Think of something positive to say and say it! It helps to hear others are supportive of you.
- **Identify with the parent.** You can let them know you've been there by saying, "My kids used to do the same thing when they were that age. Is there anything I can do to help?"
- **Blame the environment.** "This is such a bright and colorful place and filled with things for children to want to touch. I think the supermarkets have really done a great job creating a place where children just want to run around."

- **Offer assistance.** "You seem to really have your hands full. Can I help you?" Or, "Can I find someone to come and help you with something?"
- **Empathize with the child.** "You don't feel like sitting in that stroller anymore, do you? Well just a little longer and Mommy/Daddy will be all done and you can get out."
- **If you are concerned about the physical safety of the child,** offer assistance. For example, if a child is left unattended, stand by the child until the parent returns.

“**ANY ASSISTANCE YOU CAN  
OFFER A PARENT WILL HELP  
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CALMLY.**”



# MENTORING YOUTH, COUPLES AND PARENTS



**mentor: a trusted counselor, guide, teacher or coach**

Mentors build trusting relationships

with younger, less experienced individuals, provide positive role models and allow others to benefit from their experience and learn from their mistakes. While mentoring is typically associated with children and young adults, mentoring newlywed couples and new mothers is a growing practice in communities and congregations. By providing support, guidance and social interaction, mentors can help build self-confidence, provide direction and help others reach their goals and achieve their full potential.

## MENTORING YOUTH

Kids with mentors know they have someone who cares about them and what they do. Research has shown mentoring has many benefits for children and young adults including improved school attendance and academic achievement, improved

behavior and reduced delinquency, greater self-esteem and more positive life outcomes. Mentors help support education, day-to-day living and career goals. Mentors provide youth with new experiences and an outside perspective. A mentor reinforces positive values and is part of a team including parents, coaches and teachers. The role of the mentor may be to help with a school project, practice an extracurricular activity or simply enjoy an activity like fishing or drawing.

### *How to become a youth mentor:*

Youth mentors should be able to dedicate at least four hours a month to mentoring. Many communities, schools and religious organizations have organized youth mentoring programs. There are also local, regional and national programs dedicated to connecting youth with mentors. Big Brothers/Big Sisters or Mentoring.org have well-known and trusted youth mentoring programs that connect youth and mentors and provide information and training for mentors.

## MENTORING NEWLYWED COUPLES

The first few years of marriage can be an exciting, as well as demanding, time for couples. Similar to youth and new mothers, newlywed couples may need to enlist the help of marriage mentors. Mentors for couples differ from other mentors because they are usually a married couple or a member of a religious organization. Mentors for newlyweds are experienced and have been down the same path as the newly married couples. Sometimes, newly married couples are not prepared for the day-to-day challenges that are a part of the transition from being single to sharing their life with another person. Mentors for couples listen to both individuals in the marriage and offer advice, scenarios and solutions. Couples mentoring newlyweds offer both a male and female perspective.

### *How to become a mentor:*

Many newlyweds check with their church, religious institution or community centers when trying to find a mentor couple. Some newlyweds may approach a couple whose marriage they admire. Either

way, the relationship between mentors and newlyweds is a strong and personal one. The decision to choose a mentor couple, or professional, should be discussed and well thought through by both the newlyweds and mentors.

### **MENTORING NEW MOTHERS**

While there is not a lot of research on the benefits of mentoring new mothers, the practice is growing. A variety of organizations claim positive results including improved knowledge of child development and appropriate discipline and guidance techniques, greater self-confidence

as a parent, and greater awareness of community resources for families. Like youth mentors, new mother mentors are experienced adults who want to provide support for new mothers. Mentors have been mothers themselves and understand the physical and emotional exhaustion after the birth of a child. They provide advice on how to find a balance between motherhood and other commitments.

*How to become a new mother mentor:* Check with your local hospital, community center, high school or religious organization. There are also many local and regional organizations that connect mentors with new mothers. Many of these programs are faith based and provide information as well as guides for new mother mentors.

*For more information, check out some of these websites.*

### **Youth Mentors**

[www.mentoring.org](http://www.mentoring.org)

MENTOR is a resource for the expansion of mentoring initiatives nationwide. The site provides information on mentoring opportunities, how to start mentoring programs, and other mentoring resources. MENTOR works with a strong network of state and local mentoring partnerships to leverage resources and provide the support and tools that mentoring organizations need to effectively serve young people in their communities.

### **New Mother Mentors**

[www.americanmothers.org](http://www.americanmothers.org)

The Gentle Art of Mother Mentoring program pairs experienced mothers with those mothers who desire assistance with their responsibilities. Mentors help new mothers with the uncertainties of child growth, behavior, development and discipline.



“

**KIDS WITH MENTORS  
KNOW THEY HAVE  
SOMEONE WHO CARES  
ABOUT THEM AND WHAT  
THEY DO.**

”





Circle of Parents® is a mutual support and self-help program that promotes positive parenting and helps prevent child abuse and neglect in communities. Circle of Parents provides social support, reduces isolation and builds parents' self-esteem. It's a place where parents and caregivers can openly discuss the successes and challenges of raising children. The groups are free, confidential and non-judgmental.

Prevent Child Abuse Florida provides free training and on-going technical assistance for Circle of Parents programs. To learn more about Circle of Parents or to find a program in your area, visit [www.PreventChildAbuseFL.org](http://www.PreventChildAbuseFL.org).





# PARENT LEADERSHIP

## What is Parent Leadership?

Parent leadership is parents participating in the development of local programs by providing insight from their own experiences and feedback to decision makers to help shape the direction of their services and communities. Parent leadership recognizes that parents are the experts when it comes to their families and their communities and that family support programs benefit when parents are empowered. Parent leaders share responsibility, provide their local expertise and take an active role in making needed changes in their communities. Parent leaders are most successful when supported by local organizations who work together to eliminate barriers to active parent participation.

## Who can be a parent leader?

Anyone! Parent leaders are made, not born. Parent leaders are simply parents who have made the decision to get involved. They receive training and support to help address the many challenges of parenting and provide valuable insight to help shape the direction of family support programs in their communities. Parent leaders can be parents, grandparents, foster and adoptive parents, or others serving in a caregiver role.

## Parent Involvement and Empowerment

Parent involvement begins when a parent enrolls in a program. From there, parents find themselves at different stages of involvement while they work to strengthen their own families and become more competent in their parenting roles. As parents learn new skills and develop confidence, they often feel “empowered” to help others learn new skills as well.

## Shared Leadership

Shared leadership simply means a true partnership between parents and the staff members of local agencies and organizations. Parents and staff share responsibility for the process and the results of the entire team. While specific leadership roles may be carried out by different members of the team, these roles can shift among team members over time. The principles of “shared leadership” are:

- Parents and staff members are equal partners
- No one person or group has all the answers
- Members must demonstrate mutual respect, trust and open-mindedness
- Action must be based on consensus and shared vision, ownership of the process and accountability

## Benefits of Using Parent Leaders within a Shared Leadership Model

### *Benefits to parents and families:*

- Builds knowledge and skill among leaders
- Increases sense of personal achievement
- Opens doors to future employment opportunities
- Offers role models for other families
- Models community involvement and empowerment for leader's family
- Increases “buy-in” from other families to decrease child abuse/neglect

### *Benefits to providers:*

- Enhances relationships with families and builds trust
- Increases appreciation of various cultures and values
- Improves the quality of programs and services
- Helps develop a realistic perspective on how services should be delivered

## Parent Involvement and Leadership at all Levels

As mentioned earlier, roles of leaders can change and evolve depending on the needs of the group. Leadership roles may begin within an agency or program, such as a parent support group; but, with training and support, leadership roles can transfer to the community at large. Parent leadership may also mean some parents assume

the role of advocates for systemic change while others fill leadership roles the role of advocates for systemic change while others fill leadership roles in the support group such as:

- **New Member Liaison.** These leaders welcome new members to the group, provide them with information about the program by phone, email or text and connect them with local resources they may need.
- **Meeting Coordinator.** These leaders identify and confirm meeting locations, ensure the space is set-up and resource materials are available for the meetings, and may also organize the group to clean up afterwards.
- **Welcome Wagon Members.** These leaders greet members as they arrive to make sure they feel welcome and they can also start the meeting by welcoming everyone and providing information about the facility, like where the bathrooms are located.
- **Transportation Coordinator.** These leaders play a critical role in the success of the group by ensuring that members have transportation to the meeting and back home afterward.
- **Secretary.** These leaders record attendance and take notes, or minutes, for each meeting. They may also assist with the children's program.

**Other leadership roles may include:**

- Reviewing and providing feedback for the development of materials
- Assisting with the training other leaders or children's program staff
- Helping with local events and fundraisers
- Mentoring other families
- Serving as advisory council, workgroup or board members

- Generating public awareness by writing letters or submitting opinion editorials to local newspapers on local family support efforts
- Advocating for family support programs and prevention services

**How do you identify a parent leader for the group, program or agency?**

Many parents have a strong desire to help other parents overcome challenges they themselves have faced; but, they may not see themselves as a leader until someone else points out their potential to them. Potential parent leaders often see volunteering as a way to give back to a program or agency that supported them in their time of need. Ask for volunteers to take on certain roles (like those listed above) which will allow them to develop their skills in order to fill a larger role later.

Sometimes the group may elect a leader and sometimes parents may be asked to become leaders depending on the philosophy and organizational structure of the agency or group. Some signs a person might be a good leader are:

- Asks for help or clarification
- Volunteers to take on a task or responsibility
- Voices another parent's concerns or questions
- Encourages others
- Shares ideas
- Shares information or resources
- Is a good role model
- Has been a leader in other roles in the community

To learn more about beginning a Circle of Parents support group in your community, contact 850-921-4494, ext. 202.







# HELPING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES DURING TIMES OF CRISIS AND DISASTER

**B**ig changes in everyday family life can be difficult—for both adults and children. Natural disasters, layoffs, serious accidents and other conditions beyond their control can leave families feeling powerless. The deprivation and stress children experience during a crisis can also affect their growth and development.

Nurturing childhood experiences, positive parent-child interaction and family supports can help children overcome challenges and develop to their full potential. Below are some tips for building resiliency in parents and children to help them bounce back from adversity stronger than ever.

## TIPS FOR WORKING WITH PARENTS IN CRISIS

- Use active listening and empathy.
- Relate to parents as partners who are experts on their lives and on

their children's lives. They can share that expertise with you. You can share your knowledge of child development, human behavior and resources with them.

- When you don't know an answer, you can say so. Offer to find out the needed information, and then follow up.
- Be nonjudgmental and accepting, even when you don't agree. Share ideas, information and beliefs from your own perspective and listen to what parents have to say.
- Find out about parents' hopes, values and goals for themselves and their children.
- Help parents find resources that address unmet concrete needs.
- Comment on positive behaviors. A positive behavior can be arriving on time for an appointment, or reading to, feeding or playing with a baby.
- Admire parents' resourcefulness in getting their families' needs met.

- Thank a parent for responding to a request you made.
- Notice parents' skills or abilities and ask them to teach skills to you or to other parents.
- Ask a parent if you can offer some referral resources to meet a need or address an issue that you have noticed.
- Ask parents what they feel they do best as parents.
- Ask parents to list what they most enjoy about their child.

*Online resources used in developing this tip sheet:*  
[www.resiliency.com/free-articles-resources](http://www.resiliency.com/free-articles-resources)

Preparing for, witnessing or experiencing a crisis or disaster can trigger a range of emotions and fears in children. Use these tips to help children process their emotions and fears during times of uncertainty.

### Children's Questions

- Answer questions at a level the child can understand. Answer questions honestly but don't dwell on details. Do not give more information than your child asks for.
- Do not be afraid to admit that you cannot answer all of their questions.
- Don't force discussion on children; instead, follow their lead.
- Be available. Provide ongoing chances for children to talk. They probably will have more questions as time goes on.

### Dealing with Feelings

- Teach kids that all emotions are okay. A range of feelings is normal. Feelings can be very strong.
- Help your children voice their feelings and pay attention to what they say.
- Allow children to discuss other fears and concerns about unrelated issues. This is a good chance to explore these issues also.
- Give lots of physical reassurance like hugs and cuddles.
- Keep your normal daily routine as best you can.
- Explain that the chance of a disaster happening to your child is very small.



**CHILDREN REACT TO  
CRISIS AND DISASTER IN  
DIFFERENT WAYS AND SOME  
ARE AT HIGHER RISK FOR  
DIFFICULTIES IN COPING.**

### Handling TV News

- Limit children's exposure to news coverage, when possible. Don't let kids watch news footage repeatedly. This can make them more stressed and fearful or dull their feelings about the event.
- Even if you limit the news at home, do not assume your child has not heard about or seen the news elsewhere.
- Provide children with opportunities to talk and ask questions about what they have seen or learned about a crisis or disaster. Make sure they are not keeping fearful feelings to themselves.

### Find the Positive and Take Action

- Make or review your family emergency plan so your children know you are prepared.
- Find ways to show care for those impacted in a crisis or disaster, especially other children.
- Help children find the good things within the tragedy.
- Show children how governments, organizations and individuals work together to help individuals and communities recover from crisis and disasters.

### Take Care of Yourself

- Be aware of your own feelings. Adults, too, can suffer in times of crisis and disaster.
- If you are having trouble coping, find support and/or consult a mental health professional.

Children react to crisis and disaster in different ways and some are at higher risk for difficulties in coping. Certain children may display signs of stress right away and others may react weeks or months later. A child's resilience in these situations can be influenced by age, risk factors, personality and temperament. To determine if a child needs extra help coping with crisis or disaster, watch for warning signs like these:

- Refusal to return to school and "clinging" behavior
- Continuing fears about the event (such as fears about being permanently separated from parents)
- Sleep disturbances (such as nightmares, screaming during sleep or bedwetting) persisting more than several days after the event
- Loss of concentration and irritability
- Jumpiness or being startled easily
- Behavior problems that are not usual for the child
- Physical complaints (stomachaches, headaches, dizziness) for which a physical cause cannot be found
- Withdrawal from family and friends, sadness, listlessness, decreased activity, and preoccupation with the events of the disaster

Mental health treatment for children affected by a crisis disaster can help prevent or minimize post-traumatic stress. Parents who are concerned about their children should ask their pediatrician or family doctor to refer them to a child and adolescent mental health professional for an evaluation. Sometimes counseling for the whole family is a good idea.





# PINWHEELS FOR PREVENTION®



## More than a reminder— it's a movement

In 2008, Prevent Child Abuse America® launched the Pinwheels for Prevention® campaign as a grassroots effort for individuals and organizations across the U.S. to take action. The campaign promotes healthy child development while raising awareness to prevent child abuse and neglect—before it ever happens.

## Why pinwheels?

### An expression of #GreatChildhoods

Prevent Child Abuse America introduced the blue pinwheel as the nationally recognized symbol for prevention because it represents the great childhoods all children deserve and the prevention efforts that help them happen. Today, it inspires all of us to play a role in providing the best possible environment for every child to flourish and thrive.





# JOIN US!



## Looking for pinwheels?

Visit [www.PreventChildAbuseFL.org](http://www.PreventChildAbuseFL.org) to purchase pinwheels and learn more about getting involved in local initiatives.



## Put prevention in motion with a pinwheel campaign:

- Organize a pinwheel coloring contest
- Plant a pinwheel garden
- Display pinwheels in store windows and local businesses
- Host a pinwheel craft class/activity for kids at a local library
- Place pinwheels around your office or home to show your support
- Create pinwheel “bouquets” to help raise awareness

## Pinwheel tips:

### Encourage others to participate!

You'll be surprised how quickly community buzz will spread when you tell friends, neighbors and family members about pinwheels—and their significance.

### Remember to have fun!

As they say, many hands make light work. The Pinwheels for Prevention campaign is ideal for school service projects, scout outings, club get-togethers, Greek philanthropy and special volunteer days.

### Emphasize the positive!

Use pinwheels to call out the positives in your community—for instance, the number of children enrolled in an early Head Start program, or of local volunteers dedicated to helping great childhoods happen. The pinwheel represents happy, healthy childhoods, so please do not use pinwheels to represent negative statistics.





# Great childhoods begin at home.

## Promoting positive parent-child relationships

Healthy Families Florida is a home visiting program for expectant parents and parents of newborns experiencing stressful life situations. The program empowers parents through education and community support. Parents voluntarily participate in Healthy Families so they can learn how to recognize and respond to their babies' changing developmental needs, use positive discipline techniques, cope with the day-to-day stress of parenting in healthy ways, and set and achieve short- and long-term goals.



[www.HealthyFamiliesFla.org/families.html](http://www.HealthyFamiliesFla.org/families.html)



# How you can help prevent child abuse and neglect



## Be a good neighbor

BEING A PARENT ISN'T EASY. OFFER TO BABYSIT SO PARENT(S) CAN RUN ERRANDS, TAKE A TIME-OUT OR SIMPLY SPEND TIME TOGETHER.



## Learn the signs of abuse and neglect.



ENCOURAGE LOCAL SCHOOLS OR COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS TO OFFER parenting education.



## Start a parent support group

SOMETIMES IT HELPS TO HAVE SOMEONE TO TALK TO WHO HAS BEEN THERE BEFORE.



## Take care of yourself

WHEN BIG AND LITTLE PROBLEMS BECOME TOO MUCH, TAKE A TIME OUT! DON'T TAKE IT OUT ON YOUR CHILD.



## Know the risk factors.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE  
SOCIAL ISOLATION  
STRESS  
ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

ALL INCREASE THE LIKELIHOOD OF ABUSE OR NEGLECT.

## Learn how to cope with crying.

CRYING IS NATURAL FOR BABIES BUT IT CAN BE VERY FRUSTRATING WHEN YOUR BABY WON'T STOP!



LEARN WHAT SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT PARENTS IN YOUR COMMUNITY AND SHARE THE INFORMATION WITH YOUR NEIGHBORS AND FRIENDS.



## Volunteer in your community.

FIND OUT ABOUT OPPORTUNITIES TO BE INVOLVED WITH PREVENTION PROGRAMS, CONTACT YOUR

LOCAL CHILD ADVOCACY CENTER, BECOME A GUARDIAN AD LITEM OR USE YOUR VOICE TO ADVOCATE FOR FAMILY FRIENDLY PROGRAMS AND SERVICES.

## Help distribute parent education materials.



## Make a donation

TO AN ORGANIZATION THAT WORKS TO PREVENT ABUSE.

DONATE YOUR TIME, MONEY OR OTHER RESOURCES TO SOCIAL SERVICES AGENCIES IN YOUR COMMUNITY THAT SUPPORT PARENTS.

## Promote Respect



TREAT CHILDREN THE WAY YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE TREATED. THIS WILL SERVE AS A MODEL TO EVERYONE WHO SEES YOU.



## Mentor a new parent

CHILDREN DON'T COME WITH INSTRUCTION MANUALS.



## Report

SUSPECTED ABUSE OR NEGLECT.

## Adopt a family.

FAMILIES NEED HELP WITH LOTS OF DIFFERENT ISSUES. BUSINESSES AND INDIVIDUALS CAN HELP GET FAMILIES THROUGH STRESSFUL TIMES.







# DIAL 2-1-1. FIND HOPE. CONNECT TO HELP.

Florida 2-1-1 Network is your community help line.

**2-1-1 connects you to information about:**

Alcohol/Drug Abuse

Child Development

Crisis Intervention

Disability/Special Needs

Domestic Violence

Elder Needs/Daily Calls

Employment

Family Counseling

Food/Clothing/Shelter

Foreclosure/Mortgage

Health Insurance/Clinics

Mental Health Concerns

Problems at School

Caregiver/Support Groups

Veterans Affairs

**FREE, CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION 24/7**



Each April, the Pinwheels for Prevention campaign highlights programs and activities that promote healthy child development and creates awareness of the proven idea that child abuse can be prevented.

All families deserve to live in communities that have adequate resources to support families and provide opportunities for healthy growth and developmental experiences for children. Through the use of pinwheel displays, each community, business or organization can demonstrate its commitment to help Florida children live healthy, happy lives.

Learn more about Pinwheels for Prevention and order pinwheels at [www.preventchildabusefl.org](http://www.preventchildabusefl.org).





# TEN REASONS TO STAND UP FOR CHILDREN



- #1** Children are the heart of our future **#2** Everyone can make a difference in a child's life. **#3** It's easier to build strong children than to repair broken adults. **#4** All children are special. **#5** There's no excuse for child abuse. **#6** Children thrive when adults care. **#7** Protecting children is everyone's job. **#8** Each child deserves to be cherished. **#9** Children are our most valuable natural resource. **#10** Because children can't always stand up for themselves.

[www.PreventChildAbuseFL.org](http://www.PreventChildAbuseFL.org)

**Prevent Child Abuse  
Florida™**

