

18) HEALTHY LIVING

The five factors for strengthening families

Child abuse and neglect is an ugly thing that everyone agrees cannot be tolerated by our society. When we examine the issue at first glance, we can easily agree that parents and guardians are on the front lines for preventing child abuse.

The Bad News About Child Abuse & Neglect
Here are some disturbing statistics about child abuse in America.

Reports and Victims

Nationwide in 2006, an estimated 3.6 million children were accepted by state and local authorities as alleged victims of child maltreatment for investigation or assessment, a rate of 47.8 per 1,000 children in the U.S. and Puerto Rico population.

In 2006, an estimated 905,000 children were substantiated as victims of child maltreatment, a rate of 12.1 per 1,000 children in the U.S. and Puerto Rico population.

In 2006, 64.1 percent of substantiated cases were victims of neglect, while approximately 16 percent suffered from physical abuse, and 8.8 percent were sexually abused. Emotional or psychological maltreatment represented 6.6 percent and medical neglect accounted for 2.2 percent. Additionally, 15.1 percent of the children were reported to be victims of "other" types of maltreatment, including abandonment, threats of harm, and congenital drug addiction. The maltreat-

ment percentage totals more than 100 percent because many children were victims of more than one type of maltreatment and counted more than once.

Child Fatalities

In 2006, an estimated 1,530 children died as a result of child maltreatment in the U.S. an average of four children every day. The estimated rate of deaths in the U.S. and Puerto Rico population is 2.04 per 100,000 children.

Children 0-3 years of age accounted for 78 percent of child fatalities.

We know that our youngest children are most at risk, with children under 1 year of age accounting 44.2 percent of child fatalities!

The Good News about Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention

Parenting, even in the best of times, is one tough job. In tough times like these, we are all more at risk of neglecting and/or abusing our children. The good news is that we know there are five protective factors that help prevent child abuse and neglect. And all of us can help families (other's and our own families) strengthen these factors to help keep our kids safe and healthy. The factors are:

Parental Resilience — This means that parents

can "bounce back" after a challenge or set back. For example, if a parent gets a reduction in hours at work or is laid off completely, they can approach their unemployment with a plan and can seek out help to get a new job. In other words, they won't view the layoff as the end of the world, but rather as a life challenge (and we get them all the time) that needs to be faced.



Social Connections

— This means that parents have friends and family who are a positive support system for them. For example, when a parent has been trying to toilet train a 3-year-old for several months without "success," there are friends who can empathize. They can laugh together about the accidents and wet beds. Or better yet, the friend is there to help do a load of laundry for the parent when a child has wet the sheets, comforter, mattress pad, stuffed animals and pillow! Parents need a support system to help get through the challenging times and the times of feeling overwhelmed by your child's needs.

Knowledge of Parenting and Development — This means that parents know how children grow and develop. They have knowledge of how their infant's brain develops and how nutrition, play

and reading help to foster that growth. It means that parents understand age-appropriate developmental milestones for their child and they play/teach their child with this development in mind. An example of this would be a parent understanding that 6-month-old babies are not walking yet. So this parent would not be trying to encourage the child to walk and feeling discouraged because they aren't. But rather, most 6-month-olds are learning to roll over and scoop things up with their hands. Parents of teenagers know that rebellion is natural and they learn strategies for effective parenting that teach rather than shame or abuse the teen.

Concrete Support in Times of Need — This means that parents know where to turn

when they need help. For example, if a parent has lost a job, they know there is help at the Departments of Labor, Health and Welfare, local School District, their place of worship, local non-profit agencies, etc.

Social and Emotional Competence of Children — This means that children have been taught social skills like how to share and be respectful of others. It means they have also been taught emotional skills like

how to appropriately ex-

press their feelings. In other words, a 9-year-old knows how to tell a friend that something has made them angry rather than kicking or hitting their friend.

When these five protective factors are present in families, the risk of child abuse and neglect is dramatically reduced. In Southeast Idaho, we can help strengthen these factors in all our families so that our children are safe and healthy.

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