

# What Is Child Abuse Prevention?

The goal of child abuse prevention is simple—to stop child abuse and neglect from happening in the first place, sparing children and families emotional and physical trauma and decreasing the need for costly intervention and treatment services.

The best way to prevent child abuse and neglect is to support families and provide parents with the skills and resources they need.

## Why Does Child Abuse Occur?

Although all the causes of child abuse and neglect are not known, a significant body of research has identified several risk factors and protective factors associated with child abuse. Studies also have shown that when there are multiple risk factors present, the risk is greater. For example, lack of preparation or knowledge of critical issues surrounding parenting, financial or other environmental stressors, difficulty in relationships, stress of single parenting, and depression or other mental health problems can all lead to abusive or neglectful behavior.

Parents may lack an understanding of their children's developmental stages and hold unreasonable expectations for their abilities. They also may be unaware of alternatives to corporal punishment or how to discipline their children most effectively at each age. Parents also may lack knowledge of the health, hygiene, and nutritional needs of their children.

These circumstances, combined with the inherent challenges of raising children, can result in otherwise well-intentioned parents causing their children harm or neglecting their needs.

## How Is Child Abuse Prevented?

Prevention efforts build on family strengths. Through prevention activities such as parent education, home visitation, and parent support groups, many families are able to find the support they need to stay together and care for their children in their homes and communities. Prevention efforts help parents develop their parenting skills, understand the benefits of nonviolent discipline techniques, and understand and meet their child's emotional, physical, and developmental needs. Prevention programs also can help parents identify other needs they may have and offer assistance in getting that additional support.

Child Abuse Prevention Month is an opportunity to highlight the role we all can play to support parents and families. This month—and throughout the year as we consider child abuse prevention—our attention is best focused on prevention efforts that create healthier environments for children and foster confident, positive parenting.

