

When we invest in healthy child development, we are investing in community and economic development. Unfortunately, children are sometimes exposed to extreme and sustained stress like child abuse and neglect, which can undermine a child's development.

Prevent Child Abuse America focuses on public policies that prioritize prevention from the start to make sure child abuse and neglect never occur. Child physical abuse is a form of trauma that impacts a child's cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development. Its effects on physical and mental health are far-reaching and often last a lifetime.

Children who are physically abused are more likely to have mental health issues, such as suicidal thoughts or a poor self image. Adults who were physically abused as children often have problems establishing intimate personal relationships and are at higher risk for mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. Furthermore, adults abused as children are more likely to be arrested for a violent crime and may continue the cycle of abuse by abusing their own children. The mental and physical consequences of physical abuse that an individual faces and the societal costs support the need for successful prevention.

Prevent Child Abuse America advocates for:¹

1. Increasing funding for effective family support services such as home visiting, parent support groups, and parent education classes.

Services such as home visiting, family support services, crisis nurseries, and parent education classes provide emotional support, parenting tools, increased knowledge of child development, and respite from the daily struggles of parenting. Currently, such programs do not reach all families who need them, thus funding sources are necessary to increase program availability.

2. Allocating increased resources to initiatives that address the co-occurrence of child physical abuse and domestic violence.

Child physical abuse is highly correlated with domestic violence. Therefore, initiatives such as multidisciplinary family violence response teams and cross training of professionals from the domestic violence and child abuse prevention fields should be implemented in all communities.

3. Increasing research to build an evidence base for specific prevention strategies and to enhance the effectiveness of existing prevention programs.

Evaluation would clarify the essential components needed for an effective prevention program. Areas that require further investigation include: the impact of prevention on family functioning; the effectiveness of various forms of prevention services offered; and the aspects of a program that are essential for achieving positive outcomes.

4. Making mental health services available to all those affected by children's physical abuse.

Mental health services, especially if timely, can help erase some of the long term consequences of child physical abuse and may also stop the intergenerational transmission of it. Mental health services to those engaging in abusive behavior can help them address stressors that often lead to physical abuse, helping end such abuse.

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¹ For more information, see Prevent Child Abuse America's Position Statement *Preventing Child Physical Abuse*, available online at: http://www.preventchildabuse.org/advocacy/position_statements.shtml.

