

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.

Early childhood abusive or neglectful experiences can be long-lasting and can increase the lifelong probability of poor developmental outcomes, such as learning, behavior, physical and mental health problems for children. Prevent Child Abuse America focuses on public policies that prioritize prevention from the start to make sure child abuse and neglect never occur. As a society, we have a collective responsibility to prevent child abuse and neglect. To accomplish this, we must initiate and support services and policies that enhance children's development, health and safety and we must advocate for policies and programs to help meet the basic needs of children and families.

Prevent Child Abuse America has five position statements that formalize the organization's viewpoint on public policies pertaining to the prevention of child abuse and neglect.¹

1. Promoting Child Development by Supporting Families:

Effective parenting and nurturing familial relationships lay the foundation for children's healthy development and for a stable and productive society. Healthy family environments can be the product of: 1) parents that feel comfortable seeking assistance or advice with regard to their parenting and do not feel that asking for help promotes a poor reflection on their parenting abilities; 2) parents that understand children's developmental stages and hold reasonable, age-appropriate expectations of their children's abilities; and/or 3) communities that have a range of support and services available to families and children.

Prevent Child Abuse America advocates for...

- ❑ Increasing funding for evidence-based family support services and other necessary resources so that they can be established in all communities and made available to all families. Such services include evidence-based home visiting services, services to address the basic needs of a developing child, and services to address key risk factors.
- ❑ Promoting the notion of a shared societal responsibility for investing in the healthy development of children and providing all families with the support and resources they need and deserve.
- ❑ Conducting research to understand the best ways to reach parents and the public with messages underscoring the importance of supporting families effectively.

2. Preventing Child Physical Abuse:

Child physical abuse is a form of trauma that impacts a child's cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development.

Prevent Child Abuse America advocates for...

- ❑ Increasing funding for effective family support services such as home visiting, parent support groups, and parent education classes.
- ❑ Allocating increased resources to initiatives that address the co-occurrence of child physical abuse and domestic violence.
- ❑ Increasing research to build an evidence base for specific prevention strategies and to enhance the effectiveness of existing prevention programs.
- ❑ Making mental health services available to all those affected by child physical abuse.

¹ Prevent Child Abuse America's five Position Statements are available online at:
http://www.preventchildabuse.org/advocacy/position_statements.shtml.



Public Policy Position Statements

3. Preventing Child Neglect:

Child neglect is the most common form of maltreatment and, although pervasive and sometimes life threatening, is often difficult to identify. It occurs when children's basic needs are not adequately met, resulting in actual or potential harm.

Prevent Child Abuse America advocates for...

- ❑ Increasing services to families such as home visiting, early childhood education, and parent education.
- ❑ Providing mental health services to parents and all those affected by child neglect.
- ❑ Ensuring access for all children to affordable, quality health care, including prenatal, dental, and mental health services.
- ❑ Increasing efforts to address social problems that contribute to neglect, such as poverty, substance abuse, and family violence.
- ❑ Increasing public awareness efforts to educate the public about child neglect, its seriousness, and how they can help prevent it, as well as foster a shared sense of societal responsibility.
- ❑ Increasing research efforts to improve our understanding of child neglect – its nature, extent, causes, and consequences, as well as what helps prevent and address it.

4. Preventing Child Sexual Abuse:

Child sexual abuse exploits and degrades children and can cause serious damage to the cognitive, social, and emotional development of a child. Child sexual abuse occurs in all populations. It happens to children in all socioeconomic and educational levels, across all racial and cultural groups, and in rural, suburban, and urban areas.

Prevent Child Abuse America advocates for...

- ❑ Raising awareness of the unacceptability of child sexual abuse and promoting the notion that stopping child sexual abuse is everyone's responsibility.
- ❑ Educating the public and policymakers about the true nature of child sexual abuse.
- ❑ Rigorously evaluating and strengthening existing child sexual abuse prevention programs.
- ❑ Shifting the responsibility of preventing child sexual abuse from children to adults.
- ❑ Exploring, evaluating, and strengthening new approaches to child sexual abuse.
- ❑ Making mental health services available to all those affected by child sexual abuse.

5. Preventing Child Emotional Abuse:

Child emotional abuse is an often misunderstood form of trauma that can cause damage to a child's developing brain, leading to long-term learning difficulties, problematic behaviors, and increased incidences of physical and mental health issues.

Prevent Child Abuse America advocates for...

- ❑ Raising public awareness of the seriousness and signs of child emotional abuse.
- ❑ Making mental health services available to all citizens, and especially to all those affected by child emotional abuse.
- ❑ Increasing research efforts to improve our understanding of child emotional abuse - its nature, extent, causes, and consequences, as well as what helps prevent it.

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