



## **A Guide to Getting Involved and Speaking Out on the Issue of Child Abuse Prevention**

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### **What is advocacy?**

Advocacy is as basic as speaking on behalf of oneself or others to get something done. For example, as child advocates we seek to ensure that the children in our community have a voice and that their needs are met. This can mean speaking on behalf of children and families to your local community officials, your state-level elected officials, or your federal policy-makers.

### **Why should you be an advocate?**

The most obvious reason to be a child and family advocate is that you care. You care about the children in our country and want them to be safe, healthy, and happy. It follows that you want to help ensure that local, state and federal policy-makers adopt, implement, and maintain important policies and programs that support children families. In order to ensure that these policies and programs are maintained, it is critical to have a sustained vocal and noticeable presence at all levels of policy-making. You can be part of that presence and, therefore, you can be part of the effort to protect our nation's children and families.

### **What can you do as an advocate?**

- **Register to vote and participate in elections.** Take an active role in the process of electing policy-makers. By voting you are exercising your most basic right as a citizen and an advocate!
- **Get to know your elected officials.** Whether your local city council, your state legislators, or your federal Congresspersons, these are the people elected to serve you. Your elected officials depend on you (their constituents) to communicate concerns in the community. Right now is a great time to meet your newly elected officials – they are very tuned - into their constituents following an election. There are three primary ways that you can contact your policy-makers and communicate your support for policies helping children and families:
  1. Meet face-to-face with officials. This is a great way to introduce yourself and begin to develop relationships with your officials.
  2. Write your policy-makers. In a brief, concise letter to your elected official, explain why you support or oppose a current policy proposal or program.
  3. Call your elected officials. Even if you get an answering machine, this is fine. Just leave a message with your name and address, and whether you support or oppose a current proposal. Every call counts!

Keep in mind that it's just as important (if not more) to thank elected officials when they have supported a program or policy benefiting children and families as it is to request something or complain.

- **Join a children's coalition.** By teaming up with a group of organizations and individuals who share your concern for children and families, you strengthen your position as an advocate. Being part of a coalition will keep you informed of the current policy and program issues in your community and offer you new ways to get involved in the process. One way to get involved is to contact your nearest Prevent Child Abuse America chapter. Visit [www.preventchildabuse.org](http://www.preventchildabuse.org) for a list of chapters.

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