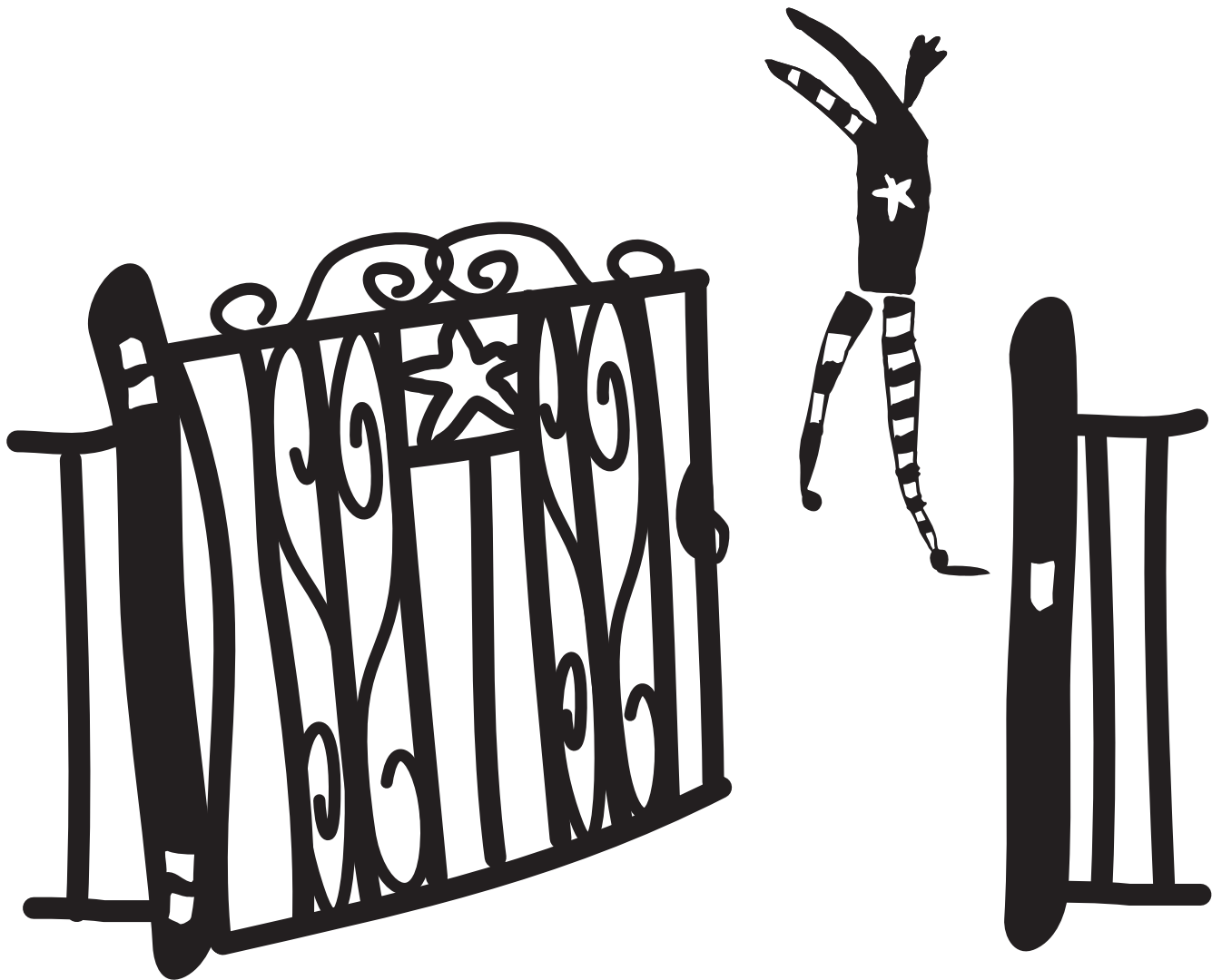


Child Abuse Prevention: An Overview



Child Abuse and Neglect: The National Scope of the Problem

IMPACT:

**In the year 2000,
an average of
2,400 children
were found
to be victims
of child abuse
each day.**

The impact of abuse is far greater than its immediate, visible effects. Abuse and neglect are associated with short- and long-term consequences that may include brain damage, developmental delays, learning disorders, problems forming relationships, aggressive behavior, and depression.

Survivors of child abuse and neglect may be at greater risk for problems later in life—such as low academic achievement, drug use, teen pregnancy, and criminal behavior—that affect not just the child and family, but society as a whole.

NUMBERS:

**Each week,
child protective
services (CPS)
agencies
throughout the
United States
receive more than
50,000 reports of
suspected child
abuse or neglect.**

In 2000, nearly three million reports concerning five million children were made.

In almost two-thirds (62 percent) of these cases, the information provided in the report was sufficient to prompt an investigation. As a result of these investigations, approximately 879,000 children were found to have been victims of abuse or neglect.

Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of victims experienced neglect, meaning a caretaker failed to provide for the child's basic needs. Fewer victims were found to have been physically abused (19 percent) or sexually abused (10 percent), though these cases are often more likely to be publicized. The smallest number (8 percent) were found to be victims of emotional abuse, which includes criticizing, rejecting, or refusing to nurture a child.

Tragically, an average of three children die every day as a result of child abuse or neglect.



CHILDREN:

No group of children is immune.

Boys and girls are almost equally likely to experience neglect and physical abuse. However, girls are four times more likely to experience sexual abuse.

Children of all races and ethnicities experience child abuse. In 2000, more than one-half of all reported victims were White (51 percent); one-quarter (25 percent) were African American; and 14 percent were Hispanic. American Indian/Alaska Natives accounted for two percent of victims, and Asian/Pacific Islanders accounted for one percent of victims.

Children of all ages experience abuse, but the youngest children are most vulnerable. Children younger than one year old accounted for nearly one-half (44 percent) of child abuse and neglect deaths reported in 2000; 85 percent of the children who died were younger than six years of age.

PERPETRATORS:

At least 4 out of 5 victims are abused by at least one parent.

By definition, perpetrators of child abuse and neglect are the very people responsible for the child's safety and well-being (including parents, other relatives, and babysitters).

The most common group of people found to be responsible for neglect and physical abuse were mothers acting alone (47 percent and 32 percent of victims, respectively). In cases of sexual abuse, non-relatives and fathers acting alone are more likely to be responsible (29 percent and 22 percent of victims, respectively).



Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau (2002). *Child Maltreatment 2000*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Available online at www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/cm00 or by calling the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information at 1-800-FYI-3366. Statistics in *Child Maltreatment 2000* refer to cases of harm to a child caused by parents or other caretakers; they do not include harm caused by other people, such as acquaintances or strangers.

What Is Child Abuse?

There are four major types of child maltreatment: neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse. Although any of the forms may be found separately, they often occur together.

Each State is responsible for providing its own definitions of child abuse and neglect that meet Federal minimum standards found in the Child Abuse and Prevention Treatment Act (CAPTA). Most include the following:

Neglect is failure to provide for a child's basic needs. Neglect may be:

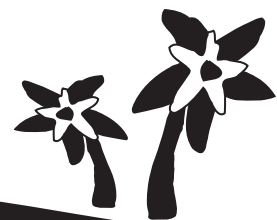
- ✦ Physical (e.g., lack of appropriate supervision or failure to provide necessary food, shelter, or medical care).
- ✦ Educational (e.g., failure to educate a child or attend to special education needs).
- ✦ Emotional (e.g., inattention to a child's emotional needs or exposure to domestic violence).

These situations do not always mean that a child is neglected. Sometimes cultural values, the standards of care in the community, and poverty may be contributing factors, indicating that the family is in need of information or assistance. When a family fails to use information and resources, and the child's needs continue to be unmet, then further child welfare professional intervention may be required.

Physical Abuse is physical injury (ranging from minor bruises to severe fractures or death) as a result of punching, beating, kicking, biting, shaking, throwing, stabbing, choking, hitting (with a hand, stick, strap, or other object), burning, or otherwise harming a child. Such injury is considered abuse regardless of whether the caretaker intended to hurt the child.

Sexual Abuse includes activities by a parent or caretaker such as fondling a child's genitals, penetration, incest, rape, sodomy, indecent exposure, and commercial exploitation through prostitution or the production of pornographic materials.

Emotional Abuse is any pattern of behavior that impairs a child's emotional development or sense of self-worth. This may include constant criticism, threats, or rejection, as well as withholding love, support, or guidance.



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, 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.

