

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. 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. Child neglect can harm children's physical and mental health as well as their social and cognitive development in many different ways and is the leading cause of child abuse and neglect fatalities.

**Prevent Child Abuse America advocates for:**<sup>1</sup>

- 1. Increasing services such as home visiting, early childhood education, and parent education.**  
Services such as home visiting, early childhood education, and parent education provide emotional support, knowledge, and guidance on how to provide a nurturing environment for children.
- 2. Providing mental health services to parents and neglected children and youth.**  
Mental health services can assist parents who are emotionally unstable or depressed. If these mental health services are available in a timely manner, they can mitigate the long term consequences of neglect and help ensure that neglect is not transmitted to the next generation.
- 3. Ensuring access for all children to affordable, quality health care, including prenatal, dental, and mental health services.**  
Access to health care is critical for family well being. Without health insurance, families are less likely to seek preventative health care in a timely manner and when they do, the costs add to the family's economic uncertainty. With affordable health care, children's health care providers will be more accessible, offering advice about the developmental needs of the child. Furthermore, they can help identify community resources for parents and decrease the occurrence of neglect.
- 4. Increasing efforts to address social problems such as poverty, substance abuse, and family violence which contribute to neglect.**  
Neglect is often intertwined with social problems, such as poverty, substance abuse, and family violence. It is crucial that greater resources be allocated to reduce these major problems that contribute to neglect. Such efforts must include the prevention of child neglect as an explicit goal.
- 5. 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.**  
Children interact with an array of people in the community who play a vital role in their development. An informed and engaged public can help advocate for and support the policies and programs needed to enhance children's development, health and safety, and help prevent neglect.
- 6. 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.**  
A better understanding of child neglect is essential to policymakers and practitioners in creating and developing effective programs and policies that combat child neglect. Careful evaluation is needed to identify what programs and policies are most effective and to create new programs and policies that effectively address child neglect.

**Contact:** Bridget Gavaghan, Senior Director of Public Policy, Prevent Child Abuse America, 312-663-3520, ext. 819, [bgavaghan@preventchildabuse.org](mailto:bgavaghan@preventchildabuse.org).

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, see Prevent Child Abuse America's Position Statement *Preventing Child Neglect*, available online at: [http://www.preventchildabuse.org/advocacy/position\\_statements.shtml](http://www.preventchildabuse.org/advocacy/position_statements.shtml).

