

CHILD ABUSE and NEGLECT

Child abuse and neglect have detrimental effects on the physical, psychological, cognitive and behavioral development of children. These consequences range from minor to severe and include physical injuries, brain damage, chronic low self-esteem, problems with bonding and forming relationships, developmental delays, learning disorders and aggressive behavior.



Clinical conditions associated with abuse and neglect include depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and conduct disorder. Beyond the trauma inflicted on individual children, child maltreatment also has been linked with long-term, negative societal consequences. Studies have associated child maltreatment with increased risk of low academic achievement, drug use, teen pregnancy, juvenile delinquency and adult criminality. These consequences have real cost for society by expanding the need for foster care, mental health and substance abuse treatment, police and court intervention, correctional facilities, and public assistance.

In 2006, 32 children in Louisiana died as a result of child abuse and neglect

It is estimated that every \$1.00 spent on prevention of child abuse and neglect saves \$12.00 on treatment

In 2006, there were 24,652 reported cases of child abuse and neglect in Louisiana with 12,746 confirmed, an average of 35 children per day. Experts suggest that child abuse and neglect is under-reported. The average age of the victim is 7 years with deaths mainly occurring under age 3.

All too often violence is a cycle that encompasses the entire family. Children who witness domestic violence are more likely to be abused themselves and to exhibit violent behavior as adults.

Child abuse and neglect touches the lives of everyone in society. The statistics for sexual abuse are particularly shocking:

- 1 in 4 girls is sexually abused before the age of 18
- 1 in 6 boys is sexually abused before the age of 18
- 1 in 5 children are solicited sexually while on the Internet

The cycle of child abuse and neglect must be broken. Prevention of child abuse and neglect is morally sound and economically prudent.

In 1983, Louisiana took a strong step toward preventing child abuse and neglect when it created the Louisiana Children's Trust Fund. It is the only public fund

CHILD ABUSE and NEGLECT (continued)

devoted solely to the prevention of child abuse and neglect. Public policy support and financial investment in the Children's Trust Fund must be a continued priority. Additional state general funds are needed to meet the demand for community prevention programs.

Since child maltreatment is a complex problem with a multitude of causes, an approach to prevention must respond to a range of needs. Nationally, new approaches to child abuse and neglect prevention programs are built on evidence-based protective factors for children and their families, including the following:

- parental resilience
- social connections
- knowledge of parenting and child development
- concrete support in times of need
- children's healthy social-emotional development

Programs and services that incorporate these factors build protection for children within their own homes and communities while seeking to overcome manageable individual causes of child abuse and neglect such as parental isolation, lack of knowledge of child development, and mental, physical or financial crises in the family.

Public policy in Louisiana must include programs that support these protective factors:

- expand evidence-based hospital and home visitation programs, such as the Nurse Family Partnership, that develop parental resilience and social connections
- provide evidence-based parent support and education programs, such as the Nurturing Parenting Program, that provides parenting and child development knowledge
- assure early and regular child and family screenings essential in detecting and treating health and developmental problems early in life
- fund programs that assure families the ability to access needed resources and support in times of need include telephone help-lines such as "2-1-1" and "1-800-CHILDREN"
- provide quality early child care, school-based health clinics, life skills and mentoring programs, and Internet safety programs that provide for a child's healthy social-emotional and physical development
- promote programs that provide children with age-appropriate information about sexual abuse, such as "My Body is My Own"
- expand quality therapeutic treatment of abused and neglected children such as the Independent Living Skills Programs for Foster Care Children that minimizes long-term effects and helps break the cycle of abuse and neglect

For additional information please go to www.lapartnership.org.

48% of children entering foster care are 5 years old or younger

The number of children age 5 or younger entering the foster care system annually has increased 74% since 2001