

Preventing Child Abuse During Covid-19

The pressure is on parents now more than ever

State child protection agencies have shared that child abuse and neglect reports have decreased between 30 and 50% during the covid-19 pandemic. While this may sound like positive news, it is heart-breaking to hear. Experts believe that despite the reduction in reports, both child abuse and domestic violence have increased significantly during Covid-19 restrictions.

There is a community safety net that can identify and report child abuse. Most child abuse cases are reported by schools, daycare centers, community centers, churches, coaches, and other activity leaders. That safety net has been greatly reduced due to the pandemic. Now, child abuse is occurring, but communities and support systems are less able to identify and respond to it.

Why is Child Abuse Increasing?

It is simple to say child abuse is increasing because children are home more with their families, and there are more opportunities for it to occur. While that is true, there are also several other very important factors. Families, and parents in particular, have reported increased anxiety, depression, alcohol and substance abuse during the pandemic. Parents are less able to access their support network and professional services. Coping skills that worked before, such as going out on an activity or going to a support group or a church are less available. Families also have rules in place, such as which parent handles a problem, or a child knowing not to bother a parent when they have been out drinking. Those rules have been challenged and violated as families have had to respond to changing dynamics during the pandemic. Systems, parenting skills, and coping skills that have always worked for families are no longer working as well.

The Costs of Child Abuse and Neglect

The vast majority of parents want what is best for their children. Parents do not set out to become abusive. They turn to abusive behaviors when they do not know what else to do, when the skills they have learned are failing them, and when they are overcome by their own issues. The risks of child abuse are clear, however:

- Approximately 5 children a day die from child abuse and neglect in the United States.
- 71% of fatalities are under the age of 3.
- In one study, 80% of adults aged 21-30 that were abused as children met the criteria for at least one psychological disorder.
- Adolescents with a history of child abuse and neglect are three times more likely to abuse alcohol and drugs.
- The estimated annual cost of child abuse and neglect in the United States is 585 billion dollars.

Preventing Child Abuse

- **Know your limits-** Time outs are not just for your children. As a parent, we must be able to recognize when we can no longer safely handle a situation. When this occurs, step away, even if momentarily, and take a breath. It takes real strength as a parent to be able to know that we may react in an unsafe way, and to step away from it. Of course, young children still need to be supervised, but that does not mean you have to deal with a difficult behavior or issue in that moment.
- **Have a “tag team” system-** Have someone in your life that can step in if you are feeling overwhelmed. This can be a spouse, partner, significant other, parent, or friend. Tag teaming can mean someone steps in for a few minutes to deal with an issue, or that someone you trust and that knows your children well takes over for a while.
- **Use your support system-** A support in your life can make all the difference. Share your concerns or simply vent to a friend, family member, pastor or other support. You may need ideas or advice, or you may simply need someone to listen.
- **Be willing to seek out professional help-** As parents, we have our own issues that can interfere with our ability to be the kind of parent that we want to be. Seeking professional counseling will allow you to improve your communication and problem-solving skills, or to deal with issues such as depression or anxiety. You have an EAP that can provide individual, relationship, and family counseling services, as well as other resources. Please call 1-800-448-8326 today to find out how we can help.
- **Be a support to others in your life-** With families staying home more than ever, it is even more important that we recognize when a friend or family member in our lives may be struggling as a parent. You can be that person to listen and offer advice. If you have concerns that abuse is already occurring or is about to occur, then you can be the safety system that reports a case of abuse or neglect. In most cases, a child abuse call leads to a parent or parents receiving support and services that will help the entire family, rather than a child being removed from a home.



**Ulliance provides no cost, confidential, short term counseling
for you & your family.**

Contact us at **800.448.8326**