

Preventing Child Abuse & Neglect

What are child abuse and neglect?

These important public health problems include all types of abuse and neglect of a child under the age of 18 by a parent, caregiver, or another person in a custodial role (such as clergy, a coach, a teacher) that results in harm, potential for harm, or threat of harm to a child. There are four common types of abuse and neglect, collectively referred to as child maltreatment:¹

- **Physical abuse** is the intentional use of physical force that can result in physical harm. Examples include hitting, kicking, shaking, burning, or other shows of force against a child.
- **Sexual abuse** involves pressuring or forcing a child to engage in sexual acts. It includes behaviors such as fondling, penetration, and exposing a child to other sexual activities.
- **Emotional abuse** refers to behaviors that harm a child's self-worth or emotional well-being. Examples include name calling, shaming, rejection, withholding love, and threatening.
- **Neglect** is the failure to meet a child's basic physical and emotional needs. These needs include housing, food, clothing, education, and access to medical care.

Child abuse and neglect result from the interaction of a number of individual, family, and environmental factors. Child abuse and neglect are not inevitable—safe, stable and nurturing relationships and environments are key for prevention.¹ Preventing child abuse and neglect can also prevent other forms of violence, as various types of violence are interrelated and share many risk and protective factors, consequences, and effective prevention tactics.² Using a public health approach, we can prevent child maltreatment before it starts.

How big is the problem?

Child abuse and neglect are common. At least 1 in 7 children have experienced child abuse and/or neglect in the past year, and this is likely an underestimate.¹

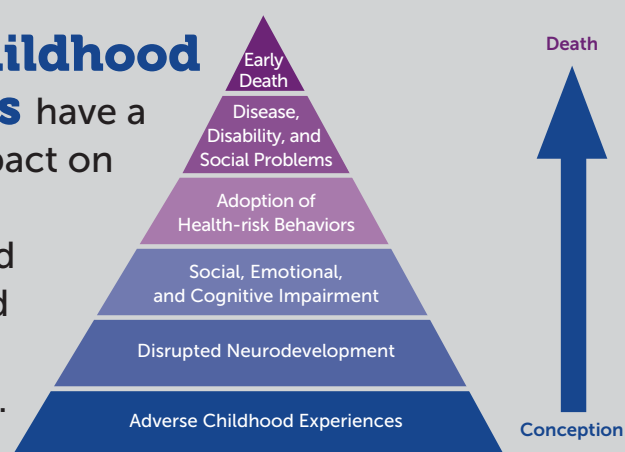
Children living in poverty experience more abuse and neglect. Rates of child abuse and neglect are 5 times higher for children in families with low socio-economic status compared to children in families with higher socio-economic status.¹

Child maltreatment is costly. In the United States, the total lifetime economic burden associated with child abuse and neglect was approximately \$124 billion in 2008.¹ This economic burden rivals the cost of other high profile public health problems, such as stroke and type 2 diabetes.

About **1 in 7** children experienced child abuse and neglect in the last year.



Adverse Childhood Experiences have a tremendous impact on future violence victimization and perpetration and lifelong health and opportunity.



What are the consequences?

Children who are abused and neglected may suffer immediate physical injuries such as cuts, bruises, or broken bones, as well as emotional and psychological problems, such as impaired socio-emotional skills or anxiety.¹

Child abuse and neglect and other adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) can also have a tremendous impact on broader lifelong health and wellbeing outcomes if left untreated. For example, exposure to violence in childhood increases the risks of injury, future violence victimization and perpetration, substance abuse, sexually transmitted infections, delayed brain development, reproductive health problems, involvement in sex trafficking, non-communicable diseases, lower educational attainment, and limited employment opportunities.¹

Chronic abuse may result in toxic stress and make victims more vulnerable to problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder, conduct disorder, and learning, attention, and memory difficulties.¹

How can we prevent child abuse and neglect?

Child abuse and neglect are serious public health issues with far-reaching consequences for the youngest and most vulnerable members of society. Every child is better when he/she and his/her peers have safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments. CDC has developed a technical package to help communities take advantage of the best available evidence to prevent child abuse and neglect. The strategies and approaches in the technical package represent different levels of the social ecology with efforts intended to impact individual behaviors as well as the relationship, family, school, community, and societal factors that influence risk and protective factors for child abuse and neglect. They are intended to work together and to be used in combination in a multi-level, multi-sector effort to prevent violence.



Strengthen economic supports to families

- Strengthening household financial security
- Family-friendly work policies



Change social norms to support parents and positive parenting

- Public engagement and enhancement campaigns
- Legislative approaches to reduce corporal punishment



Provide quality care and education early in life

- Preschool enrichment with family engagement
- Improved quality of child care through licensing and accreditation



Enhance parenting skills to promote healthy child development

- Early childhood home visitation
- Parenting skill and family relationship approaches

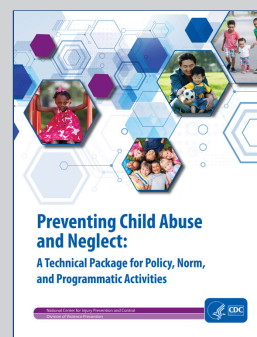


Intervene to lessen harms and prevent future risk

- Enhanced primary care
- Behavioral parent training programs
- Treatment to lessen harms of abuse and neglect exposure
- Treatment to prevent problem behavior and later involvement in violence

Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect: A Technical Package for Policy, Norm, and Programmatic Activities

A **technical package** is a collection of strategies based on the best available evidence to prevent or reduce public health problems. The **strategy** lays out the direction and actions to prevent child abuse and neglect. The **approach** includes the specific ways to advance the strategy through programs, policies and practices. The **evidence** for each of the approaches in preventing child abuse and neglect and associated risk factors.



References

1. Fortson B, Klevens J, Merrick M, Gilbert L, Alexander S. (2016). Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect: A Technical Package for Policy, Norm, and Programmatic Activities. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
2. Preventing Multiple Forms of Violence: A Strategic Vision for Connecting the Dots. (2016). Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.