

# Preventing Child Abuse & Neglect

## What are child abuse and neglect?

Child abuse and neglect are serious public health problems and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). They can have long-term impacts on health, opportunity, and wellbeing. This issue includes 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 a religious leader, a coach, a teacher) that results in harm, the potential for harm, or threat of harm to a child. There are four common types of child abuse and neglect:

- **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.<sup>1</sup>
- **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.<sup>1</sup>
- **Emotional abuse** refers to behaviors that harm a child's self-worth or emotional well-being. Examples include name calling, shaming, rejecting, withholding love, and threatening.<sup>1</sup>
- **Neglect** is the failure to meet a child's basic physical and emotional needs. These needs include housing, food, clothing, education, access to medical care, and feelings validated and appropriately responded to.<sup>1,2</sup>

## How big is the problem?

**Child abuse and neglect are common.** At least 1 in 7 children have experienced child abuse or neglect in the past year in the United States.<sup>3</sup> This is likely an underestimate because many cases are unreported. In 2020, 1,750 children died of abuse and neglect in the United States.<sup>4</sup>

**Children living in poverty experience more abuse and neglect.** Experiencing poverty can place a lot of stress on families, which may increase the risk for child abuse and neglect. Rates of child abuse and neglect are 5 times higher for children in families with low socio-economic status.<sup>1</sup>

**Child maltreatment is costly.** In the United States, the total lifetime economic burden associated with child abuse and neglect was about \$592 billion in 2018.<sup>5</sup> This economic burden rivals the cost of other high profile public health problems, such as heart disease and diabetes.<sup>6</sup>

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



## Estimated Cost of Child Abuse and Neglect



\*total lifetime economic burden of child abuse and neglect in 2018

## What are the consequences?

Children who are abused or neglected may suffer immediate physical injuries such as cuts, bruises, or broken bones. They may also have emotional and psychological problems, such as anxiety or post-traumatic stress.<sup>1</sup>

Over the long term, children who are abused or neglected are also at increased risk for experiencing future violence victimization and perpetration, substance abuse, sexually transmitted infections, delayed brain development, lower educational attainment, and limited employment opportunities.<sup>1</sup>

Chronic abuse may result in toxic stress, which can change brain development and increase the risk for problems like post-traumatic stress disorder and learning, attention, and memory difficulties.<sup>7</sup>

## How can we prevent child abuse and neglect?

Child abuse and neglect are preventable. Certain factors may increase or decrease the risk of perpetrating or experiencing child abuse and neglect. To prevent child abuse and neglect, we must understand and address the factors that put people at risk for or protect them from violence.<sup>9</sup> Everyone benefits when children have safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments. CDC developed *Preventing Child Abuse & Neglect: A Technical Package for Policy, Norm, and Programmatic Activities* to help communities use the best available evidence to prevent child abuse and neglect. This resource is available in English and Spanish and can impact individual behaviors and relationships, family, community, and societal factors that influence risk and protective factors for child abuse and neglect.

Different types of violence are connected and often share root causes. Child abuse and neglect are linked to other forms of violence through shared risk and protective factors. Addressing and preventing one form of violence may have an impact on preventing other forms of violence.<sup>8</sup>



### 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 child care quality through licensing and accreditation



### Enhance parenting skills to promote healthy child development

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

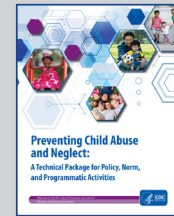


### Intervene to lessen harms and prevent future risk

- 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 is also included.



## References

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