

What is Child Abuse Prevention?

ANYTHING that strengthens families and helps children thrive!

The prevention of child abuse and neglect cannot be achieved with one program or one strategy. Programs that only target caregivers are shown to improve parent-child interactions, but don't account for other root causes of maltreatment such as social isolation, poverty, community violence, and other stressors. It requires a comprehensive approach with strategies at many different levels and with multiple sectors working together.

There are several ways to think about and group strategies.

WHO	Everyone, those at risk, or those who have you are looking to influence already experienced abuse
WHEN	Before abuse/neglect occurs (Primary/Secondary), will your strategy occur or after it has occurred (Tertiary)
WHAT	Individuals, families, communities, or society level will the strategy address

Types of Prevention

PRIMARY

Primary prevention activities are directed at the general population and attempt to stop maltreatment before it occurs. All members of the community have access to and may benefit from these services. Primary prevention activities with a universal focus seek to raise the awareness of the general public, service providers, and decision-makers about the scope and problems associated with child maltreatment. Universal approaches to primary prevention might include:

- Public service announcements that encourage positive parenting
- Parent education programs and support groups that focus on child development, age-appropriate expectations, and the roles and responsibilities of parenting
- Family support and family strengthening programs that enhance the ability of families to access existing services, and resources to support positive interactions among family members
- Public awareness campaigns that provide information on how and where to report suspected child abuse and neglect

SECONDARY

Secondary prevention activities with a high-risk focus are offered to populations that have one or more risk factors associated with child maltreatment, such as poverty, parental substance abuse, young parental age, parental mental health concerns, and parental or child disabilities. Programs may target services for communities or neighborhoods that have a high incidence of any or all of these risk factors. Approaches to prevention programs that focus on high-risk populations might include:

- Parent education programs located in high schools, focusing on teen parents, or those within substance abuse treatment programs for mothers and families with young children
- Parent support groups that help parents deal with their everyday stresses and meet the challenges and responsibilities of parenting
- Home visiting programs that provide support and assistance to expecting and new mothers in their homes
- Respite care for families that have children with special needs
- Family resource centers that offer information and referral services to families living in low-income neighborhoods

TERTIARY

Tertiary prevention activities focus on families where maltreatment has already occurred (indicated) and seek to reduce the negative consequences of the maltreatment and to prevent its recurrence. These prevention programs may include services such as:

- Intensive family preservation services with trained mental health counselors that are available to families 24 hours per day for a short period of time (e.g., 6 to 8 weeks)
- Parent mentor programs with stable, nonabusive families acting as "role models" and providing support to families in crisis
- Parent support groups that help parents transform negative practices and beliefs into positive parenting behaviors and attitudes
- Mental health services for children and families affected by maltreatment to improve family communication and functioning