Child Abuse Prevention, Awareness During COVID-19

WILMINGTON – To begin Child Abuse Prevention Month, the Delaware Children's Department, Prevent Child Abuse Delaware, and other stakeholders are raising awareness of how to nurture resilient families and prevent, recognize, and report child abuse and neglect.

April is traditionally recognized as Child Abuse Prevention Month. This year's awareness campaign, "Growing a Better Tomorrow for All Children, Together," brings together communities and resources to protect and support strong, safe, and resilient families.

"Growing a better tomorrow for our children takes action, today. In order to prevent child abuse and neglect, we must recognize past trauma, support caregivers, and come together as a community to provide the resources necessary for families to thrive. Each one of us has the ability to change the future – one child at a time," said **Josette Manning, Secretary of the Delaware Children's Department also known as the Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families**.

Families continue to face stressors brought on or exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and we know they will have to grapple with the collateral consequences of the coronavirus – loss of employment, housing, food security and so much more – as our state recovers. In these times of extreme stress and uncertainty, we cannot ignore the risk of children experiencing abuse and neglect. That's why experts say it is important to foster support for families and encourage stress-reducing behaviors.

"During Child Abuse Prevention Month, we are reminded of how we all play a role in creating positive childhood experiences so children can thrive. Too often, our society thinks of raising healthy children as a parent or caregiver's responsibility alone," said **Karen DeRasmo, Executive Director of Prevent Child Abuse Delaware**. "In reality we all benefit when groups of people work together to collectively care for children, who grow up to become successful, contributing adults."

Prevention professionals are still working to understand the pandemic's repercussions for incidents of child abuse and neglect, but we do know calls to the hotline are lower than normal. For example, in 2020 from the beginning of the school closures across Delaware until the end of the traditional school year in June, the Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline experienced a 30 to 40% reduction in call volume. This awareness month acts as a call-to-action to help a family in need.

Here is how to raise awareness and educate during Child Abuse Prevention Month:

- **Nurture protective factors for parents and caregivers.** Research shows that protective factors support children and families having positive outcomes and a decreased risk for neglect and abuse. Protective factors include:
    - Nurturing and attachment
    - Knowledge of parenting and of child and youth development
    - Parental resilience
    - Social connections
    - Concrete supports for parents
    - Social and emotional developmental well-being
- **Share resources that build resiliency.** Connecting families to resources that meet their basic needs like employment, housing, and food, can help alleviate stressors.

- **Educate yourself on the signs of child abuse or neglect.** In virtual settings especially, ask questions and notice a child's surroundings.
- **Learn how to report alleged child abuse or neglect.** Call **1-800-292-9582** to make a report of child abuse or neglect. Use the online portal **iseethesigns.org** to submit reports via any mobile device or desktop computer. These services are available 24/7, and reporters can choose to remain anonymous.
- **Wear blue on April 1!** Wear Blue Day shows support for children and families. Post a photo or video on social media and include the #WearBlueDay2021 hashtag.

Together, we can make a difference in the life of a child.

Additional Resources for Families

Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting – call 1-800-292-9582 or go to iseethesigns.org

Child Priority Response Hotline (mental health crisis help): 1-800-969-4357

Crisis Text Line for Youth: Text DE to 741-741

Prevent Child Abuse Delaware

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Office of the Child Advocate

Children and Families First