



**ALL CHILDREN SHOULD HAVE FREEDOM FROM
ABUSE AND NEGLECT**

Adequate family and child supports reduce risk and keep children safe from harm

Families with good formal and informal support systems, economic security, good health, and education are better able to respond to stress and threats in appropriate and healthy ways that keep children safe from harm. Socially isolated families lack important informal and formal supports. Safe communities that afford access to a full range of family supports also protect families in times of crisis and reduce the risk of child abuse and neglect.

There were fewer than 30 victims per 1,000 children in fiscal year 2004-05, a drop from 2000-01, 2001-02, and 2003-04 levels of 34.1, 33.6, and 32.3 victims per 1,000 children, respectively. Likewise, Florida has experienced modest improvements in re-abuse rates. Of children abused in 2003, 8.8% were re-abused within six months; while the comparable value for 2002 was 9.6%.ⁱ Although Florida is slowly improving child and family well-being, there remain far too many children and families at risk of and suffering from child abuse, neglect, and abandonment. Child maltreatment and re-abuse rates exceed national averages and the standard set by the federal government.

Policy discussions around child maltreatment often focus on improving the child protection system, ignoring the root causes and opportunities for prevention. Even the best prevention programs typically focus on parental behaviors without changing the social, economic, or health conditions that create or contribute to the negative behaviors.ⁱⁱ At present, the costs associated with treatment of child abuse and neglect dwarf prevention spending by 400 to 1.ⁱⁱⁱ A paradigm shift is needed from providing a "safety net" to creating a community-wide commitment to support all parents and children with a range of services from universal supports to the intensive, individualized services for those most in need.^{iv v}

Research demonstrates that children are best protected from abuse and neglect by:

- ***Income support policies that ensure livable wages.*** Financial security reduces family stress and crisis.
- ***Educational and parent skill building supports.*** Improved educational levels as well as home visiting and parent skill building programs are associated with better parenting skills.
- ***Family formation supports.*** Resources and services are needed that support health marriages and pregnancy planning, including family planning and abstinence programs to reduce teen pregnancies, lengthen inter-pregnancy intervals, and reduce unplanned pregnancies.
- ***Mental health and substance abuse prevention and treatment programs.*** Ample and effective programs are essential to keeping children safe.
- ***Economic and social policies that encourage both parents to be engaged in the care and nurturing of their children.*** Children benefit from both parents' involvement in their care and nurturing.
- ***Integrated and comprehensive family support services.*** Access to needed resources and services and thorough family assessment helps to ensure that families have adequate supports in times of crisis and stress.

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- ⁱ Department of Children and Families, 2006
ⁱⁱ University of Florida & University of South Florida, 2004
ⁱⁱⁱ Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina, 2004
^{iv} Lind, 2004
^v Whiteside, 2005