

You have the power to prevent child abuse and neglect

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The Iowa Department of Human Services confirmed that approximately 14,500 children suffered abuse in 2004. This is just three percent lower than the record high Iowa experienced in 2003. Iowa's rate of child abuse is higher than the national average and most surrounding states.

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month. Here are some ways you, as an individual and a community member, can contribute your ounce of effort to prevention.

Understand the causes

Most parents don't hurt or neglect their children intentionally. Many were abused or neglected themselves. Very young or inexperienced parents might not know how to take care of their babies or what they can reasonably expect from children at different stages of development. Circumstances that place families under extraordinary stress – poverty, divorce, sickness, disability – sometimes take their toll in child maltreatment. Parents who abuse alcohol or other drugs are more likely to abuse or neglect their children.

Support programs that help families

Parent education, community centers, respite care services, and substance abuse treatment programs help to protect children by addressing circumstances that place families at risk for child abuse and neglect. Donate your time or money if you can.

Report suspected abuse and neglect

In Iowa, members of certain professions are required to report suspected abuse. But whether or not you are mandated by law to report child abuse and neglect, doing so may save a child and a family. If you suspect a child is being abused or neglected, call (800) 362-2178.

Spread the word

Help educate others in your community about child abuse and neglect. Prevent Child Abuse Iowa has created media packets and other materials on ways to prevent abuse and become better parents. You can find these materials at http://pcaiowa.org/pub_awareness.html.

Strengthen the fabric of your community

Know your neighbors' names and the names of their children, and make sure they know yours. Give stressed parents a break by offering to watch their children. All activities that strengthen communities such as service to civic clubs and participation on boards and committees ultimately contribute to the well-being of children.

Extension programs are available to all without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, or disability.