

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month

April was first declared “Child Abuse Prevention Month” by Presidential proclamation in 1985. Since then, organizations who are dedicated to protecting children have used this special time of year to acknowledge the importance of families and communities working together to prevent child abuse in all its forms.

The following ideas for organizations considering CAP Month activities include

- Guidelines for Talking About Child Abuse and Neglect
- Effective Prevention Strategies
- General Media Tips, with Sample Language
- Sample Child Abuse Prevention Month Proclamation
- Community Campaign: Blue Ribbon
- Community Campaign: Promises for Parents

Copy-ready materials for community use during Child Abuse Prevention Month are available on the Children’s Bureau website.

Guidelines for Talking About Child Abuse and Neglect

Thanks to Prevent Child Abuse America’s work with FrameWorks Institute, we know that a major barrier to talking about prevention in a meaningful way is the public’s current understanding of child abuse as extreme, dramatic, intentional and criminal. In this scenario, there is little room for many of the preventive programs and services for which we seek support. Thus, here are some general guidelines to consider in communicating about child abuse prevention -- particularly during Child Abuse Prevention (CAP) Month. We hope to slowly turn public understanding away from believing that child abuse can only be solved by reporting it and punishing those responsible.

Spell out your preventive solutions at the top of the communication. The public often believes the only solutions to child abuse lie within the legal system. To make a case for prevention – a vague word on its own – we need to *describe* actual prevention activities and explain why they are successful. It is up to us to connect the dots for people so that prevention programs make sense to them.

Include a clear definition of the problem, its causes and solutions while making your case for prevention. This should be careful not to focus on *people* in the abusive situation, but rather on the predictable *situations* in which abusive behavior happens: poverty, divorce, addiction, drug abuse, stress, limited education, job loss, isolation, etc. Language is important here. Instead of referencing parents, talk about the families that children live in and the pressures surrounding them. Prevention programs work to connect families to needed resources, and to ensure healthy development for children. Such programs are likely to pique public interest and support more than those perceived to help “bad” parents.

Avoid vivid, dramatic details and the focus on the worst cases, as well as on sexual abuse as the dominant form of abuse, as these only serve to reinforce people’s understanding of abuse as

specifically a criminal issue. When exposed primarily to dramatic cases (which the media favor), people tend to conclude that abuse is inevitable because it involves bad people who are bad parents. The solution that makes sense to them, then, is to remove children from danger and punish those responsible.

Wherever possible, tell stories of efficacy – demonstrate how programs and policies have worked for the benefit of children by predicting and addressing abusive situations before they happened. Doing so increases the idea of situations, not people, as the appropriate focus for child abuse interventions.

Forget the numbers for explaining the prevalence of abuse. People believe it is a big problem and they tend to overstate it numerically. It is not a good idea to pair prevention activities and announcements with the release of your state’s annual child abuse statistics. Remember that if you give these numbers to the media, the story will almost certainly lead with them.

Stop fighting the fight we’ve won: people understand the seriousness of child abuse. It is time to shift to deepening citizens’ understanding of the problem and its solutions. We believe child abuse prevention is not receiving adequate public support not because people aren’t outraged by the issue, but because they stop at outrage and lack credible solutions beyond reporting.

Try to get multiple actors into the picture and avoid communications that imply that abuse is only a family issue, solved by outsiders who “save” or “punish.” Try to broaden the discussion to the larger community.

Don’t issue confusing or conflicting calls to action such as asking outsiders to both befriend and report troubled families. The message should either be about prevention – family support, parent education, family-friendly policies, child development initiatives – or reporting. Addressing both at the same time is confusing. Promoting support asks the reader for empathy, while issuing calls for people to report asks for vigilance and judgment.

Effective Prevention Strategies

When relating stories of successful prevention strategies, it is important to connect the dots from the program to the prevention of child abuse. Given the public’s overwhelming tendency to think about child abuse in its worst forms, the term “child abuse prevention” holds little meaning to them outside of reporting. Thus, describing a parent support program as an example of child abuse prevention will not make sense to them without some explanation.

The Children’s Bureau connects these dots well in its 2006 Child Abuse Prevention Month Packet. The following is adapted from it:

Researchers, practitioners, and policymakers are increasingly thinking about personal, family, and environmental factors that strengthen families and reduce the risk of abuse and neglect within families. Research shows that while certain risk factors have detrimental effects on children and families, other “protective” factors can mitigate those effects and provide benefits, resulting in greater resilience for parents and children. Successful family support activities and child abuse prevention programs are designed to promote these protective factors. A body of research has identified protective factors known to be correlated with reductions in child abuse and neglect:

- Parental resilience
- Nurturing and attachment
- Social connections
- Knowledge of parenting and child development
- Effective problem solving and communication skills
- Concrete support in times of need
- Social and emotional competence of children
- Healthy marriages

Research has found that the following are effective strategies that family support and child abuse prevention programs can use to bolster these protective factors:

- **Facilitate friendships and support.** Offer opportunities for parents in the neighborhood to get to know each other, develop support systems, and take leadership roles. Strategies may include sports teams, potlucks, classes, advisory groups, board leadership and volunteer opportunities.
- **Strengthen parenting.** Develop ways for parents to get support on parenting issues when they need it. Possibilities include classes, support groups, home visits, tip sheets in pediatricians' offices and resource libraries.
- **Respond to family crises.** Offer extra support to families when they need it, as in times of illness, job loss, housing problems and other stressors.
- **Link families to services and opportunities.** Provide referrals for job training, education, health care, mental health and other essential services in the community.
- **Support children's social and emotional development.** Some programs specifically focus on helping children articulate their feelings and get along with others. When children bring home what they learn in the classroom, parents benefit as well.

Adapted from Building on Strengths: Enhancing Protective Factors for Children and Families National Clearinghouse of Child Abuse and Neglect Information http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/topics/prevention/what_works/building.cfm

General Media Tips

Stay on message. Narrow your message to one or two central points that you want to get across and stick to them. You do not have to explicitly answer every question a reporter poses. Answer every question in such a way that it reflects your key message. Do not repeat something a reporter says that is not part of your point, even to disagree with it. For instance, by saying “child abuse is not just dramatic cases of parents killing their children,” you remind your audience of parents killing children.

Emphasize that April is about solutions to child abuse. It's about prevention, but don't leave the word “prevention” unexplained. Describe the solutions. Keep in mind that reporters will usually try to move you back to drama and tragedy, but you can stress that child abuse is a problem with solutions that don't receive the attention they should. Explain that the American public cares deeply about child abuse, but doesn't know what can be done about it.

Reporters will want statistics. Instead of supplying them with the traditional child abuse statistics on reports, substantiations and deaths, give them stats on efficacy. What works? How many people do you reach with services? What has been the impact of such services?

Letters to the editor are a great way to reach a general audience. Keep them short and focused and be sure to include a call to action whether it is to support specific legislation or to learn more about a program.

Sample Language

Here is some general language about Child Abuse Prevention Month that could be adapted for press releases announcing events, letters to the editor, or website announcements.

The month of April is devoted to celebrating everything we can do to transform our community into a place that cares about – and actively supports -- families and children. By ensuring that all parents in our community have access to quality childcare, affordable health services, parenting education resources, and substance abuse and mental health programs, we make progress toward what the month stands for: April is Child Abuse Prevention Month.

The majority of child abuse cases stem from situations and conditions that are entirely preventable in an engaged and supportive community. A community that cares about early childhood development, parent support and maternal mental health, for instance, is more likely to see families nurturing children who are born healthy and enter school ready to learn. Cities and towns that work to create good school systems and who come together to ensure that affordable housing is available in good, safe neighborhoods are less likely to see stressed, isolated families who don't know where to turn.

Child Abuse Prevention Month is about connecting all of these dots so that the solutions to child abuse receive the attention the public craves. In a recent poll, 89% of Americans reported that child abuse was a “very important” moral issue to them. But it's not enough to care about the problem and address its consequences. We have to pay attention to the kinds of efforts that will prevent it from happening in the first place. So this April, learn more about what you and your community can do to support child abuse prevention. It's a shared responsibility and we're stronger together.

Find out more about child abuse prevention in your community [add contact information here].

Sample Child Abuse Prevention Month Proclamation

This example is based on the guidelines described in the preceding sections.

Whereas, the public cares deeply about child abuse, and a majority report that child abuse is a very important moral issue to them;

Whereas, preventing child abuse and neglect is a community problem that depends on involvement among people throughout the community;

Whereas, child abuse and neglect not only directly harm children, but also increase the likelihood of long-term health and mental problems, alcohol and substance abuse, continued family violence, and criminal behavior;

Whereas, child maltreatment occurs when people find themselves in stressful situations, without community resources, and don't know how to cope;

Whereas, the majority of child abuse cases stem from situations and conditions that are preventable in an engaged and supportive community.

Whereas, child abuse and neglect can be reduced by making sure each family has the support they need to raise their children in a healthy environment;

Whereas, all citizens should become involved in supporting families in raising their children in a safe, nurturing environment;

Whereas, effective child abuse prevention programs succeed because of partnerships created among social service agencies, schools, faith communities, civic organizations, law enforcement agencies, and the business community;

Therefore, I do hereby proclaim

April as Child Abuse Prevention Month in and call upon all citizens, community agencies, faith groups, medical facilities, and businesses to increase their participation in our efforts to support families, thereby preventing child abuse and strengthening the communities in which we live.

Community Campaigns: Blue Ribbon

The Blue Ribbon idea is quite simple. Wear or display a blue ribbon to tell your friends, neighbors and community members that you want to prevent child abuse and neglect.

History of the Blue Ribbon Campaign Bonnie Finney of Portsmouth, Virginia, started a personal battle to combat child abuse after the death of her grandson. She tied a blue ribbon around her van's antenna in memory of her grandson Michael "Bubba" Dickinson, whose battered body had been found at the bottom of a canal. Her hope was, "Even if we change one child's life, it would be worth it. I don't want other parents or grandparents to go through what we're going through." That single blue ribbon in memory of a grandson has led to a flurry of other in the national effort to stop child abuse.

Over the past years, Prevent Child Abuse America chapters and other groups have organized Blue Ribbon Campaigns to promote ways of preventing child abuse and neglect. As an awareness strategy for Child Abuse Prevention Month, the idea has picked up momentum. The flexibility of the program offers numerous opportunities to be creative and to create partnerships with the business and professional communities.

Steps to a Successful Blue Ribbon Campaign The Blue Ribbon Campaign works best at the local level. Here's how you can get a campaign going.

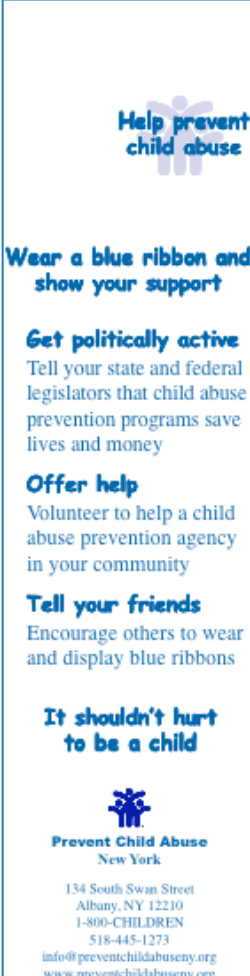
1. **Pull together a committee and identify the resources you will need.** Consider joining forces with other community groups. Be sure to determine your needs in five areas: money, materials, manpower, time and authority (leadership and decision making).
2. **An obvious need is blue ribbon.** Consider what size ribbon you want to use. Many people use a narrow ribbon, 3 inches long, folded and pinned on their lapel or blouse. Some people put a wider ribbon on their car antenna, or in a prominent place at home or work. Large ribbons

can send a strong message when they are displayed on buildings by businesses, public agencies and schools.

- A local florist, especially a floral shop where you have been a regular customer, may provide ribbon for you to use.
 - Tell the manager who you are and how the Blue Ribbon Campaign began; ask if the shop will donate the ribbon or give a discount to your organization; find out when you can pick it up. Allow time to cut, fold, etc. before your launch date.
 - Many florists carry an inexpensive 100 percent acetate ribbon in widths from 1/2 to 5/8 inches, on 100 yard rolls. By cutting the ribbon into 9 inch lengths, you can make 400 ribbons to attach to a bookmark handout or just give out.
 - One inexpensive source of pre-cut blue ribbons attached to pins is AA Awareness Ribbons (<http://www.awarenessribbons.com>)
 - Enamel blue ribbon lapel pins (1 inch high) are available from Prevent Child Abuse New York for \$2.50 each; reduced prices for bulk orders. For more information call 518-445-1273.
3. **Display the ribbons.** How do you give out the ribbons so that people know what it is all about? They can be attached to bookmarks or business-size cards that explain how the blue ribbons show support for child abuse prevention. Some ideas:
- Distribute the ribbons at Child Abuse Prevention Month events.
 - Arrange for places of worship to distribute Blue Ribbons and information.
 - Ask local businesses to display the cards and ribbons for their customers to take.
 - Distribute the ribbons to all those who are working as professionals or volunteers for child abuse prevention, to child advocates, medical professionals, law officers, and civic leaders.
 - Encourage business, educational, civic and religious communities to hold family events where blue ribbons and positive parenting information are distributed.
 - Suggest that ribbons be tied to car antennas.
 - Distribute to the media with a news release.
4. **Get as much media attention as possible.** Contact community newspapers, radio and TV stations. Make sure the members of the media all get Blue Ribbons when you bring them a news release announcing your campaign. Keep track of how many ribbons go out, and report the results to the press.
- Set up meetings with reporters and editors and share the Blue Ribbon Campaign history.
 - Ask papers to run a donated space featuring the Blue Ribbon information.
 - Ask radio and TV people to feature the Blue Ribbon Campaign – or at least share information about the campaign.
 - Kick-off your Blue Ribbon Campaign with a Blue Ribbon pinning with the mayor, county executive, or other local celebrities. Invite the media.
 - Be sure to tell the public that any piece of blue ribbon will do to convey the message, but if they want one of yours, tell them where to find it.

There are limitless possibilities: Blue Ribbons

- tied to all the cars in a dealer's lot.
- included with the handouts in church in synagogue.
- in report cards.
- printed on grocery store bags.
- distributed by volunteers at shopping centers.
- tied to ski poles or tennis rackets.
- pinned to bookmarks (example at right).



Help prevent child abuse

Wear a blue ribbon and show your support

Get politically active
Tell your state and federal legislators that child abuse prevention programs save lives and money

Offer help
Volunteer to help a child abuse prevention agency in your community

Tell your friends
Encourage others to wear and display blue ribbons

It shouldn't hurt to be a child



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Community Campaigns: Promises for Parents

Promises for parents is a pledge campaign that does not solicit money. Rather, it solicits promises, asking individuals to pledge to do something tangible to help, support or ease the job of parents. It encourage everyone in our communities to take responsibility for providing the support and assistance that *all* parents need. It is a strategy for the primary prevention of child abuse and neglect.

The goal of primary prevention is to stop child abuse and neglect from ever happening. Primary prevention strategies create supportive environments that empower parents and help them access the tools they need to raise their children in safe, loving, and nurturing homes. Primary prevention efforts are often found in places where families gather: neighborhoods, workplaces, shopping centers, libraries, religious settings, schools, and clubs. Promises for Parents campaigns accomplish primary prevention by raising awareness of one of the solutions to the problem of child abuse (supporting parents) and by mobilizing citizens to engage in that solution.

How does the campaign work? As with other pledge campaigns, individuals complete pledge cards indicating what their commitment will be. Pledge cards can be distributed in several ways: at speakers' presentations, at informal gatherings of parents and friends, at community meetings, at public display sites, or through the print media. Pledge cards can be used as an educational hand-out or pledges can be returned to a Promises for Parents campaign leader for counting and publicizing.

Example pledges

- *Bake cookies once a month for the Mom next door.*
- *Provide amusement for children in a waiting area.*
- *Offer to baby-sit free of charge, so parents can get a break.*
- *Arrange an on-going bi-weekly meeting with other mothers so that mothers can talk over experiences or problems, while children play together.*
- *If you are a grandparent, take care of a different grandchild each week to relieve tensions on their parents.*
- *If you are a supervisor, support flex and comp-time arrangements so parents may deal with day-to-day situations and emergencies without the added stress of repercussions at work.*
- *When you see a stressed parent with a child at the supermarket, smile, acknowledge "it's tough" and comment on how well they're doing (in spite!).*
- *If you are a preschool teacher, establish informal monthly meetings for parents of young children to provide information on parenting and schooling.*
- *Be a good listener for the parents you know. Let them talk about their trials and triumphs.*
- *If you are a parent, take time to have a cup of tea and read an article from a magazine.*
- *If you work at a doctor's office, locate and distribute literature on children's health and activities.*
- *Work with the PTO to bring a parenting class to school – offer babysitting for parents who may otherwise be unable to attend.*
- *Offer rides to neighborhood children's activities.*
- *Volunteer as a big brother or club leader to help out kids and allow parents some free time.*

Mobilizing a Promises for Parents campaign in your community You may decide on a simple campaign, distributing pledge cards at events or community locations, or you may initiate a major community project. Here are some ideas to help you get started:

1 Enlist volunteers and sponsors

- Recruit service organizations such as Kiwanis and Junior League, and sororities such as Kappa Delta or Sigma Delta Tau, whose charitable focus often includes children.

- Seek campaign funds from banks, businesses, or civic organizations.
- Ask members of civic organizations to volunteer their time stuffing envelopes, distributing collection boxes, or tallying promises.
- Use volunteers and interns to make presentations at colleges and other places where people gather.

2 Publicize your campaign

- Make a plan for raising awareness of your campaign. In all of your media coverage be sure to include information about how people can make a pledge.
- If you have the resources, develop a public service announcement for radio, television, or newspapers. Pitch stories about the campaign to local reporters. Try to land media interviews with your campaign leaders. Don't forget organization and company newsletters; these are important print media too.
- Create a public display of the promises that have been made. This will create a strong visual for television and photograph cameras.
- Persuade your local paper to print pledge forms and the promises that your campaign has solicited

3 Give presentations wherever community members are gathered

- Contact the people planning the meetings or gatherings and ask if you can make a 15-20 minute presentation that will include explaining the campaign and collecting pledges.
- Make it known that you are available to speak.
- Think of the possibilities: training workshops, staff meetings, youth groups, mother-daughter functions, church activities, local government meetings, and organizations' programs.

4 Utilize events to collect promises

- Set up displays at health fairs and family days. Display promises as they are collected so people can see their variety and number.
- Ask your county executive or mayor to declare a Promises Day and stage collection points at city hall. Invite the media.
- Create a Wall of Promises at your local shopping center.
- Set up collection boxes at local stores where promises can be collected at registers.
- Wave a Promises for Parents banner at a parade.
- Distribute and collect pledge forms at kids' sporting events.

5 Involve local businesses

- Arrange to have campaign information printed on restaurant placemats or take-out menus.
- Design a grocery bag that includes a clip-out pledge card or provide bag stuffers to supermarkets.

6 Enlist corporations as partners

- Ask corporations to distribute campaign information in their mailings.
- Seek in-kind assistance. Maybe a corporation will pay for the printing of brochures or pledge cards.
- Encourage corporations to adopt family-friendly policies for the workplace as *their* promise to parents. Examples include instituting flex time or comp time. These practices give parents the freedom to spend time with their kids when their kids need them, for example, dance recitals, soccer games, or family emergencies.

7 Create a reward for people who make a promise and keep it

- Design a button that says "I did it!" and a special day when everyone wears theirs.
- Give blue ribbons, the symbol of child abuse prevention, to people who fulfill their promises

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