

National Child Abuse Prevention Month

April is *National Child Abuse Prevention Month* which recognizes the importance of families and communities working together to prevent child abuse and neglect and promotes the social and emotional well-being of children and families. As a community, we need to increase awareness and provide education and support to families through resources and strategies to prevent child abuse and neglect. Our current child welfare system responds to child abuse and neglect, whereas, we need to place more focus on the prevention of child abuse and neglect. As the saying goes, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

In order to prevent child abuse and neglect, we need to identify families who are at risk for child abuse and other adverse childhood experiences. This can be accomplished by using standardized screening and assessment tools which evaluate the presence of various factors associated with increased risk for child maltreatment. Once the families are identified, it is critical that services be initiated immediately, even prenatally or at birth. These services need to be offered voluntarily and must use positive, persistent outreach efforts to build family trust. We need to emphasize supporting the parents, as well as the child, through services that cultivate the growth of nurturing, responsive parent-child relationships and which promote healthy childhood development. Depending on the family’s needs, we need to provide them with resources related to: finances, food, housing, child care, job training, substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, domestic violence counseling and other resources as needed.

In conclusion, the social and emotional well-being of children and families is rooted in the belief that early, nurturing relationships are the foundation for life-long, healthy development. Services must be designed to promote positive parent-child relationships and need to be strength-based and family centered. Providing services that are specifically designed to meet the unique needs of families and children will promote child well-being and prevent the abuse and neglect of OUR children.