

HEALTHCARE



Orange County's Child Abuse Epidemic

There is nothing more tragic than the loss of a child, no matter what the circumstances. But when a child is abused or killed at the very hands of their parents or caregivers, the horror and realization sets in that someone could have, and should have, done something to protect that child.

We are not living in gentle times. Recent stories of child abuse in the news underscore the need to reach more children and families at risk for potential abuse. Too many families are riddled with violence, poverty, as well as substance and child abuse. With sickening persistence, reports of child abuse and neglect continue to pour in.

Did you know that more than 37,500 child abuse cases were reported to Orange County authorities in 2008? That's 102 children per day! This may come as a shock, given that Orange County is one of the most educated and affluent counties in the United States, but the statistics tell the true story.

Prevention is the key. At the Child Abuse Prevention Center, we support families at risk for abuse with programs aimed at improving their coping skills and parenting skills. By providing simple basic needs such as clothing, food, and even diapers, families will be better equipped to handle their children's emotional, physical and developmental needs. Since our inception in 1983, we've been able to serve over 200,000 children and families in need.

However, we need your help. Recognizing a child in trouble and in need of protection often goes beyond words. Though the signs of abuse are often visual, there may also be a feeling that something isn't quite right. Child abuse can be hard to distinguish, but we hope that everyone takes the responsibility to pay attention to the children in their community and look out for their best interest.

Every child has a story to tell. It may be about their trip to the zoo, or the antics of their new puppy. Often, the most important stories are the ones children don't share. If you suspect that a child is in trouble, please help by calling Child Protective Services at (714) 940-1000 or (800) 422-4453. You can choose to remain anonymous if you prefer.

Some possible signs of child abuse and neglect are:

- Unexplained bruises and welts
- Behavioral extremes
- Unbelievable or inconsistent explanations for injuries
- Unusual shyness or wariness of physical contact
- Cruel behavior

Currently, there are waiting lists for our programs, and additional funding is necessary to meet the demand. Prevention costs pennies on the dollar compared to the cost of intervention. As a community and as responsible citizens, we need to make children our biggest priority. It's not enough simply to be outraged ...in the end, the only way to ensure that more children won't be abused is to give their parents the tools and resources they need before it's too late, and that takes action on all our parts.

The devastating effects of child abuse are life-long and have generational consequences. Providing parents with the necessary tools and support to be successful parents will prevent future child abuse. By supporting the Child Abuse Prevention Center through financial and volunteer contributions, many more families will be able to find the strength and resources they need to raise safe, healthy, and productive children. Come join us and be a part of the solution.

For more information about the Child Abuse Prevention Center and how you can help end the cycle of child abuse in Orange County, please contact us at (714) 543-4333 or visit us online at www.BrightFutures4Kids.org.

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