

April 2005 Health Bulletin

This publication compiled and edited by the H.E.E.L. Program
(Health Education through Extension Leadership) Staff



National Child Abuse Prevention Month

How can you tell if a child is being abused?*

Children who are physically abused may:

- Be nervous around adults.
- Be watchful, as though preparing for something bad to happen.
- Have difficulty playing.
- Act aggressively towards adults and other children.
- Suddenly underachieve – or overachieve – at school.
- Find it difficult to trust other people and make friends.
- Arrive at school too early, or leave after the other children.

Children who are sexually abused may:

- Behave differently when the abuse starts.
- Care less about their appearance, or their health.
- Talk or act sexually at too early of an age.
- Be secretive and stop talking about home-life.
- Start soiling themselves.
- Be unable to sleep.
- Suddenly find physical contact frightening.
- Run away from home.

Children who are neglected or emotionally abused may:

- Have difficulty learning to talk.
- Find it hard to develop close relationships.
- Be overly-friendly with strangers.
- Think badly of themselves.
- Underachieve at school.

None of these signs prove that child abuse is present, since any of them may be noticeable at one time or another. But, when they occur repeatedly or in combination with one another, the child may be suffering abuse.

*Used with permission. Prevent Child Abuse of Kentucky (2001), Lexington, Kentucky. pcaky@pcaky.org

April is the month for every adult to question their own efforts at promoting child well being. If **everyone** focuses on making sure that all children are safe, secure, and supported, the number of children being abused (non-accidental physical, emotional or sexual harm or neglect) can be decreased.

Everyone wants the children living in their community to grow up healthy, safe, well-adjusted, capable of caring for themselves and others, and to be able to make contributions to the community. Therefore, **everyone** must share responsibility toward each child in the community. The family, alone, cannot assure the well-being of children. Children are exposed daily to influences far beyond the control of the family.

Everyone benefits when community members take their role in promoting child well-being to heart. Find your role(s) and start making a difference **today**. The smallest things can make a **big** difference in the life of a child.

Following are some examples of ways **everyone** can promote child well-being and perhaps repair damage done by other adults:

- Give a verbal compliment
- Show a simple smile or nod
- Give recognition, speak to children directly
- Listen, really listen
- Learn and call children by their name
- Point out something interesting to a child
- Celebrate accomplishments. Make it a big deal that a child is starting to talk, walk, share with others, ride a bike, roller skate, play a musical instrument, can produce a piece of art, hold an office in a club, volunteer in the community, help out at church, graduates, passes their driving test, etc. *"I am so proud of you."* *"You are the best."*
- Express concern when a child is having a tough time
- Extend a hand to help
- Empathize with a frustrated parent: *"Kids can sure be a handful, can't they."* *"Hang in there, parenting is a struggle for everyone."* *"Wouldn't it be good if they came with an instruction booklet."*

"If everyone focuses on making sure that all children are safe, secure, and supported, the number of children being abused can be decreased."



As helpful as it is to have adults take leadership roles in organized activities for children, it is the everyday interaction with adults that give children their grounding in trust and respect. This requires so little from adults and means so much to children.



- Children love positive adult attention (even if they act like they don't). It gives them fuel and speaks volumes to them about their importance and value.
- Children love structure from adults (even if they seem to hate it). It gives them and sense of safety and security.
- Children love to "belong", be a part of something and be involved with others (even if they resist).
- Children, generally, love to help (even though they complain) AND children love to receive recognition for their help (even if they seem to shrug it off).

When adults include children in everyday activities, children gain a sense of pride and responsibility, become dependable, learn the value of sharing, and take an interest in the welfare of others. These are all qualities of good citizenship. Below are some everyday examples you can use with children you encounter in your community:

"Children love....

...positive adult attention...

...structure from adults....

...to 'belong' and be involved with others....

...to help and to receive recognition for their help."



- ⊕ *Jimmy, will you please hold the door for Mr. Sizemore?*
- ⊕ *Alice, can you give me a hand with this stack of papers?*
- ⊕ *Sam, will you help me sweep the gym?*
- ⊕ *Johnny, would you help me get breakfast together? I would appreciate it if you would set the table.*
- ⊕ *Sandy, do you want to help me hang this poster?*
- ⊕ *Joey, please help me find a pair of socks for Keith.*
- ⊕ *Paul, would you help me make PB & J's for the younger children?*
- ⊕ *Tony, would you help me organize these CD's?*
- ⊕ *Diane, would you help me water the plants?*



Unfortunately, children are most often abused by their own families. Being hurt or neglected by the people who are supposed to love you the most makes it twice as hard for children to understand. These experiences affect children for a lifetime. You can be the one person to give a child hope and assurance that will build resilience and allow them to grow and love in the face of exceptionally dreadful situations.

If you know of a child who seems to be experiencing abuse, neglect or exploitation by adults, you have a responsibility by state law, to report your concerns to Children's Protective Services. You do not have to be familiar with all the signs and symptoms of abuse.

**If you "suspect" child abuse or neglect call:
1-800-752-6200**

or your county office of the Department for Community Based Services



Sources:

- Prevent Child Abuse of Kentucky. Lexington, Kentucky. pcaky@pcaky.org
- Doug Burnham, Extension Health Specialist, Health Education through Extension Leadership.

Get Moving Kentucky! Monthly Health Tip

Doing physical activity as a family is a great way to spend time together while being healthy at the same time. Enjoy a walk together after dinner, play a family game of tag or basketball, or plan a physically active trip to a local park or zoo.

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For more information on health issues in Kentucky, contact your local county Extension agent or visit the HEEL website at:

www.ca.uky.edu/HEEL