

Preventing Abuse

Child abuse prevention cannot be accomplished by any one agency or even by all agencies collectively. While agencies are necessary--there must be leaders to professionally coordinate services for families--they cannot do the work alone.

If our society is to really impact abuse and neglect, it will only be with the support of individuals and families within the community. It will only occur because of you. You know your neighborhood and the people in it. You know the individuals in your church, school, or club and are familiar with the joys and challenges they face. You are real to the families in your neighborhood, church, school and club. You are not an agency but a real live human being—just like them. Because you know so much and are so approachable, you are a vital resource. So, how do you prevent child abuse as an individual? There are several things you can do:

*Get to know your neighbors. Our society today tends to be more transient in nature and many families feel alone. In fact, many are without support systems. Pay attention to your neighborhood. Is there a young family or single parent that has moved in? They may be feeling isolated. If you are nervous about the prospect of introducing yourself, remember that there is nothing like a plate of cookies for easing introductions. Deliver the cookies, introduce yourself and chat for a little bit. Just listen and get to know them. Once you know their names, it's easier to say hello when you pass on the street. Over time, it will be easier to get involved when you sense that some trouble has come to the family (and trouble usually visits all of us at some point).

*Be willing to get involved. If you notice a family having challenges, help them as much as you can. Sometimes, people just need a helping hand to make it over a rough spot. The act of reaching out to help when the going is tough can make all the difference in the world to a family in trouble.

*Volunteer your time with an agency. We have many agencies in our communities that work with children and families. All of these agencies need your help. Visit <http://preventchildabuse.com/CenterDirectoryMain.shtml> to find an Exchange Child

Abuse Prevention Center in your area. Perhaps you volunteer in the office or work one on one as a Parent Aide. If an Exchange Club Center is not in your area, contact your local United Way for a list of agencies that reach out to families.

*Give generously to organizations devoted to working with families and children. It takes money to offer one on one and tangible help to families in trouble. Give what you can—even if the amount is small. Not only does your donation help the organizations better do their work, you also feel good in the process.

Only by working together can we give all children healthy and safe childhoods!