

Child Abuse Prevention: How Faith Communities Can Make a Difference

The well-being of every community is dependent upon the contributions of its citizens working independently and together. Important partners in strengthening communities are local congregations that bring people together for worship and community engagement. Faith communities are an important source of social support and can often connect members in need with concrete supports in the community. Stepping outside their congregations, faith-based organizations have the capacity to develop and implement programs whose effectiveness is extended by the trust they have already earned in their own neighborhoods.



Below are concrete suggestions congregations can use to address the five factors that promote healthy families.

Nurturing and Attachment

- Sponsor a workshop on playing with infants and young children
- Provide quiet, private places for mothers to breastfeed and tend to their babies' needs
- Organize a weekend play group for dads
- Recognize local businesses with family-friendly policies, such as flexible work schedules and maternity/paternity leave, that give parents time to bond with their children

Knowledge of parenting and of child and youth development

- Suggest parents speak to their children's doctor about any concerns, frustrations, or questions regarding behavior or development
- Sponsor classes and support programs for new parents or ask your local school district to do so
- Organize a parenting club to discuss parenting books, websites, and other resources
- Educate childcare providers and teachers about key aspects of child development and the relationship between effective parenting and brain development

Parental resilience

- Organize a neighborhood group that will rotate cooking a meal or performing light housework for new parents and other families under stress
- Start a neighborhood "work out" group, where families can exercise and have fun together
- Teach a communication class for couples
- Provide brochures and other resources for teachers and childcare providers to share with parents who are under significant stress

Social connections

- Sponsor multigenerational activities like picnics and street fairs that reflect the community's culture through music, food, and games. Involve parents in organizing these events.
- Help recruit volunteers for mentoring programs such as Big Brothers Big Sisters, Befriend-a-Child, or Family to Family.
- Provide venues for young families to meet and socialize

Concrete supports for parents

- Provide information on how to access housing, health care, or employment assistance
- Educate candidates and elected officials about issues in your community and the need for services and programs that support healthy and safe children and families
- Encourage service providers to collaborate, leverage funding, and share resources to address specific needs

Other ideas for local faith communities

- Organize a parenting fair to educate parents about support services in the community
- Hold a Family Fun Day or Parent's Night out
- Host a parent education or self-help group
- Provide a series of workshops on each of the protective factors and how they promote healthy families
- Establish a resource library focusing on parenting issues
- Create bulletin or newsletter inserts to highlight the five protective factors and suggest how members can promote them

Anything you do to support kids and parents in your community helps reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect. Thank you for focusing your attention on prevention efforts that support parents and create healthier communities for children.

Next Week: Children & Violent Video Games.

