



Promising Practices

There are a number of programs that are viewed by social service and health professionals as promising practices to strengthen and support family and community safety.

Effective child abuse prevention strategies include home visitation, crisis nurseries, family preservation programs, parent education, and prenatal care.

- Several states and counties have highly successful home visiting programs where public health nurses and community representatives provide outreach to newborns and their families.
- Home visits provide new parents with instructions in new baby care, and families are also assessed for risk factors for child abuse.
- Provide more intensive home visiting services to families identified with high risk factors for child abuse, including a history of the parent having been abused or parental drug and alcohol abuse.

Crisis nurseries are another prevention strategy for child abuse. Crisis nurseries are child care centers that operate 24 hours and are available for families in emergencies.

- Ensure that crisis nursery staff are also trained to offer education and resources to families to address emergencies.

It is important to develop a coordinated approach between child welfare services, domestic violence advocacy groups, social services, law enforcement and the courts.

Research shows that the problem of co-occurrence of child abuse and domestic violence is widespread; domestic violence and child maltreatment often occur in the same family.

- Institute policies and procedures that identify the co-occurrence of child abuse and domestic violence. Law enforcement, for example, can identify whether children were living in the home or present in the home during a domestic violence incident.

- Police may also forward their police reports in cases of domestic violence to Child Protective Services for investigation for child abuse and maltreatment.
- Provide education about co-occurrence to domestic violence victims, perpetrators, children who are impacted by domestic violence, social service providers, health care workers, teachers, law enforcement and the courts.

Parental substance abuse is one of the most common risk factors for child abuse.

- Communities must identify substance abuse problems and offer appropriate treatment for parents who abuse drugs and alcohol and are at risk of abusing their children.

To reduce unintentional injuries, it is valuable to provide parent education about safety measures.

- Successful safety measures include child-proofing the home, safe storage of firearms, child safety seats, pool fencing, bike helmets and smoke detectors.

■ Communities can also work to provide safety devices to families that cannot afford them.

- Provide mental health services for children and teens that include screening, assessment, and diagnosis, especially for those with social or learning difficulties, and those who are in the child welfare system, or juvenile justice system.
- Ensure that mental health programs have adequate case management, and are coordinated with the child's physicians, child care providers, and educators.
- Parents, teachers and other adults in teens' lives should look for signs of mental health problems, depression, and a tendency towards suicide. The American Academy of Pediatrics offers suggestions for prevention at its website: www.aap.org/advocacy/childhealthmonth/prevtteensuicide.htm.

