



Child Abuse and Neglect

Head Start Heals - Frequently Asked Questions

Q. How can you help prevent child abuse and neglect during COVID-19?

We know that times of crisis put families under great stress and can lead to significant increases in the risk of child maltreatment. There is higher risk of domestic violence and child abuse and neglect cases as families are socially isolated and the unemployment rate skyrockets. For those lucky enough to still have jobs, parents struggle to balance three distinctly different roles: working from home, parenting, and supporting their children's learning. In this environment, any family may be at risk. Teachers and family support staff can help prevent child abuse and neglect by:

- **Stay Connected** - While we can't see each other in person, we can reach out to the families we serve with "check in calls", texts, voicemails, or emails. These methods can help us assess how families are doing and what needs they may have. We can support families in creating social connections and networks by hosting virtual caregiver coffee hours or support groups. These spaces may allow families the ability to connect with one another. Families have come up with creative solutions to support one another. For example, one family with older children offered to host a virtual playdate for their younger siblings and the young children of another family. This supported both families in being able to get household items done, reducing stress for the caregivers.
- **Face to Face** - Interacting with children over FaceTime or video calls can support caregivers by giving them a brief break or time to get other household items done. Offering these check-ins for families who are over stressed can provide some relief. Apps such as Facebook Messenger have built in games that can be played with children. Encouraging children to share their favorite toys, books, or activities that they do at home with us can also be places of connection. Serving as a supportive adult, we can help reduce the stress children and families may be experiencing.
- **Empathize** - Connect and communicate with families that this is a hard time for all families. Sharing experiences while respecting confidentiality may normalize that many families are utilizing food banks, seeking financial assistance, or needing crucial supplies. Families may feel more comfortable sharing what resources they need. This is also a time to find out if a family member is sick or needing assistance. Offering resources and coordinating grocery or pharmacy delivery for families can be another huge support.
- **Community** - We can also suggest that neighboring families, or other parents within centers, create a group chats to ensure everyone's in decent shape, share information or even jokes, and stay connected with people who could be a crucial lifeline if someone is really struggling.
- **Active Listener** - Most importantly, we can be there for the families we serve to listen and witness people's grief and stress. This is one of the most supportive things we can all do to reduce risk. Right now, we are experiencing collective trauma, and the best way to heal is through connection.

We all know that we need to be physically distanced, but socially closer than ever. If we're going to help families who find themselves on the verge of a crisis, with risk factors for abuse increasing, we need to be as connected as possible, always taking care of ourselves first.

Additional Resources:

Prevent Child Abuse America

<https://preventchildabuse.org/>

COVID-19 Response and Resources

<https://www.preventchildabusenc.org/prevent-child-abuse-ncs-covid-19-response-resources/>

Webinar - Risk for Abuse and Neglect During COVID-19

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3400-home-visitors-attending-to-risks-for-abuse-and-neglect-during-covid-19-a-guided-reflection>

Prevention Resource Guide

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing/preventionmonth/resources/resource-guide/>

Engaging Families When There is Child Welfare Involvement

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/engaging-families-when-there-child-welfare-involvement>

Head Start Programs and Child Welfare Partnerships

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/community-engagement/article/head-start-programs-child-welfare-partnerships>

Strategies to Support Families Who May Be Experiencing Domestic Violence

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/strategies-support-families-who-may-be-experiencing-domestic-violence>