

## What Has CDC Been Doing and What Is CDC Interested in Doing to Address the Prevention of Child Maltreatment?

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CDC recognizes child maltreatment as a serious public health problem with extensive short- and long-term effects. In addition to the immediate physical and emotional outcomes of maltreatment, children who have experienced abuse and neglect are at increased risk of adverse health effects and risky health behaviors in adulthood. Child maltreatment has been linked to higher rates of alcoholism, drug abuse, depression, smoking, sexual promiscuity, suicide, violence, and chronic disease.

To address child maltreatment, CDC emphasizes empirical research with direct implications for prevention. CDC is also interested in studying the links between child maltreatment and other forms of violence, such as youth violence, suicide, intimate partner violence, and sexual assault.

CDC is working to improve systems that acquire and track information about child maltreatment and child fatalities. Current data systems only capture information about child maltreatment that is severe enough to come to the attention of the child protective services system. As a result, many cases of child abuse are believed to go unreported and unnoticed. CDC is also developing the National Violent Death Reporting System to gather accurate data from states and communities on deaths from violence and to assist policy makers and community leaders in making educated decisions about strategies and programs to prevent violence.

The lack of common, consistently applied definitions also complicates efforts to monitor and track the scope of the problem. CDC is developing and testing common definitions so that states can accurately and consistently record information about child deaths. Developing common definitions is the first step in assessing the true magnitude of the problem of child maltreatment in the United States.

Further, the CDC is interested in preventing child maltreatment through programs that promote positive parent-child interactions and improve parenting skills. Such programs and policies may provide perpetrators and potential perpetrators with skills to better manage behavior *before* violence can occur. We are currently implementing and evaluating the effectiveness of an innovative parenting program that uses multiple levels of intervention tailored for parents with differing skill sets and needs.

Even the most effective parenting programs will have limited influence on preventing child maltreatment if parents do not attend programs or do not endorse the need to learn and use alternative parenting skills. CDC is funding a 4-year project that is testing the efficacy of various enhancements or service delivery methods for reducing attrition and enhancing parental compliance and engagement in effective parenting programs. Researchers are examining the impact of the strategies on parental attendance, attrition rates, compliance, readiness to change parenting behaviors, parent and child outcomes, and incidents of child maltreatment.

Many communities want to implement prevention programs for child maltreatment. However, few programs have been rigorously evaluated to determine if they are effective. CDC is systematically reviewing prevention programs and creating a database of promising

programs and interventions. When completed, the database will include information about target populations, location, activities, evaluation methods, outcomes, and other details to help communities replicate successful programs. The database will be an essential tool in identifying and replicating promising programs for preventing child maltreatment.

### **What Kinds of Prevention Activities Would CDC Encourage?**

Within the field of child maltreatment prevention there is a great need for primary prevention to stop initial occur-

rences of child maltreatment. CDC encourages researchers and practitioners to explore prevention approaches directed at perpetrators and potential perpetrators. Research to support the development of effective perpetrator prevention programs is essential. CDC encourages collaboration with other organizations to study child maltreatment and apply research findings to practice.

### **What Future Efforts Are Being Considered to Support the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect?**

CDC recently developed and published the *Injury Research Agenda* to identify and articulate the highest priorities for injury and violence prevention at CDC. The agenda strategically guides key decisions about prevention resources and research to help bridge identified gaps. Research priorities identified for preventing child maltreatment include emphasizing primary prevention by focusing on perpetration research, developing and evaluating programs, and disseminating programs that have proven to be effective.

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