

Preventing Physical Child Abuse and Neglect: Overview

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Quietly but steadily, child abuse prevention efforts are growing throughout hundreds of communities across the United States. These activities range from the establishment of local home visitation programs, mutual aid support groups, and center-based programs, to larger public education, research, and state and national-level advocacy initiatives—all sharing the goal of stopping physical child abuse and neglect before they ever start. Although efforts to prevent child abuse have not yet garnered the same degree of public attention as intervention in cases where child abuse has already occurred, the goal of prevention is no less compelling: If this goal is achieved, children, families, and the professionals who work with them can not only avoid the traumata associated with child maltreatment, but can also steer clear of some of the wrenching challenges accompanying child protective intervention, which aims at either preserving families in a high state of risk or placing maltreated children away from home and in situations fraught with their own risks.

The recent rapid advancement of physical abuse and neglect prevention activities has been propelled forward by several highly promising research studies suggesting that, if carefully targeted and delivered, child abuse prevention services *can* reduce the risk for child abuse and neglect before it ever occurs. Perhaps because the aims of prevention are to avert maltreatment that has not yet occurred—and therefore is not easy to “see”—prevention efforts have been particularly reliant on research that sheds light on appropriate targets for prevention, optimal intervention strategies and models, and the limitations and future directions for prevention efforts.

Given the rapid set of developments occurring in child abuse prevention practices and research, we thought it timely to organize a special issue of the *APSAC Advisor* to highlight trends and issues in this dynamic field. We are privileged to include contributions by a number of outstanding experts, such as Deborah Daro, one of the early scholars and architects of the field. She provides us with an overarching perspective on prevention issues, the state of the field now, and the likely challenges to moving forward. Howard Dubowitz, who has importantly drawn the field’s attention to the most prevalent form of child maltreatment, namely, child neglect, takes on prevention efforts specifically addressing this concern.

There is an overrepresentation in the child welfare system of families of color as well as what initially appears to be a favorable responsiveness to prevention services by such families when compared with white families. Therefore, we have organized a Forum of three interrelated articles addressing the issues of race, class, and child abuse prevention, authored by Dennette Derezotes, Sandra Chipungu, Samuel Myers, and Tricia Bent-Goodley.

Finally, because child abuse and neglect prevention appears poised to take on the form of a national movement, we have asked some of the key players at national agencies to introduce us to their agendas and activities: Sidney Johnson at Prevent Child Abuse America, Rodney Hammond at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Cheryl Boyce at the National Institute of Mental Health.

Here we want to acknowledge especially the generous support provided by Prevent Child Abuse America, which has underwritten this special issue devoted to the prevention of physical child abuse and neglect. We hope you find this information of value, and we welcome your thoughts and input.