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The CAPC Connection

A publication of the Child Abuse Prevention Council of Santa Barbara County — because their world depends on us!
Member of the Coastal Tri-Counties Child Abuse Prevention Council

The Face of Neglect

As adults we all share the responsibility of ensuring that children in our communities grow up in the most loving and supported of environments. While the majority of parents and caregivers are able to take care of their families with the resources that are available to them, there are those who struggle to provide their children with the necessary care or emotional support and are unable or unwilling to reach out for help.

WHAT IS NEGLECT?

Neglect of a child most often occurs in families that are struggling with other issues that affect a parent's ability to take care of a child. Parental substance abuse or mental health problems, such as depression are common in families that are reported for child neglect.

Neglect of any type is particularly serious with small children who rely on a parents' love and care for their healthy development and who are also most likely to die due to neglect. However, chronic neglect also has severe consequences for school-age children, affecting physical, emotional, and cognitive development.

Neglect towards a child can be:

- ◆ Physical, when a parent fails to provide a child with adequate clothes, food or shelter, but can also refer to inadequate supervision or a failure to keep a child safe;
- ◆ Educational, when a parent or caregiver does not ensure that a school-age child is getting appropriate schooling;
- ◆ Emotional, meaning the parent or caregiver does not respond to the child's need for stimulation, encouragement and affection; and



- ◆ Medical, such as a parent failing to take a child to the doctor or dentist when needed.

POVERTY AND NEGLECT

In the case of neglect, Mandated Reporters often ask for help about how to respond in cases of financial hardship or poverty that makes it difficult for a family to meet their children's needs. Sometimes neglect is due to a failure of the caregiver to access supportive services and sometimes it is caused by an inability to provide food, shelter or medical care due to circumstances. While there is no easy answer, and each report is considered carefully by a social worker on a case by case basis, there are some points that are important to consider for the Mandated Reporter.

No matter the cause for the neglect, a Mandated Reporters' concern should never be to judge a parent, but to provide help for the child and other family members.

In many cases it may be advisable to connect a family to resources, such as a Family Resource Center that is present on school sites or in the community. However, an

inability of the parent or caregiver to connect to available resources for low-income families, such as the Free and Reduced Lunch program, Community Health Clinics or local food banks often indicates that there are other difficulties present in the family.

The most important concern for all parties, including Child Welfare Services receiving a report, is always to ensure that a child is safe, healthy and taken care of. Thus a possible outcome of your report may be that an isolated family is connected to community resources that help provide food, shelter or access to medical care for the child.

Homelessness is not reportable **if there are no other signs of child abuse and neglect present.** Homeless families should be connected to the school's homeless liaison.

Finally, neglect refers to a "minimum, sufficient standard of care," which distinguishes for example between health and safety hazards that are present for a child, such as exposed electrical wiring or extreme, unsanitary conditions

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DEFINITIONS

As indicated in **Penal Code 11165.2**, neglect includes both acts and omissions on the part of the responsible person and is defined as follows:

General neglect is the negligent failure of a person having the care or custody of a child to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or supervision where no physical injury to the child has occurred.

Severe neglect is the negligent failure of a person having the care or custody of a child to protect the child from severe malnutrition or medically diagnosed nonorganic failure to thrive. *Severe neglect* also means those situations of neglect where any person having the care or custody of a child willfully causes or permits the person or health of the child to be placed in a situation such that his or her person or health is endangered, including the intentional failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, or medical care.

STATISTICS

Neglect is by far the most common type of abuse, nationally, state-wide and locally. In 2008 in Santa Barbara County, 53.8% of all substantiated cases were due to general neglect. In comparison, physical abuse and sexual abuse were substantiated for 9.8% and 7.1% of cases respectively.

Source: www.kidsdata.org/sbc

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and poor housekeeping or parenting that many of us may find objectionable, but is legally not considered neglect.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

As an educator, you are able to observe children in your class or on the school site every day, and you will come across children and families that are in need of support. In our April 2009 issue, we explained the importance of the five protective factors for families and how professionals working with children and their families should make it a point to familiarize themselves with available community resources that help families to take care of their children. The 2-1-1 number as well as the [online YEP Pages](#) are easy ways to find out about resources for a particular need. For those school sites that have a family resource center on campus or nearby, teachers should reach out and get to know the family advocates.

In addition it is important to know about the signs that may

point to neglect. Consider the possibility of neglect when you notice a child:

- ◆ is frequently absent from school
- ◆ begs or steals food or money
- ◆ lacks needed medical or dental care, immunizations or glasses
- ◆ is consistently dirty and has severe body odor
- ◆ lacks sufficient clothing for the weather
- ◆ abuses alcohol or other drugs
- ◆ states that there is no one at home to provide care

Finally, don't hesitate to call the hotline at **1-800-367-0166** for any questions or concerns. Remember the ultimate outcome everyone is working toward is making sure families are strong and able to access the supports and services that allow them to take care of their children's needs.

RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

Child Welfare Information Gateway, Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect: Signs and Symptoms; in English and Spanish

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/signs.cfm>

The Role of Educators in Preventing and Responding to Child Abuse and Neglect: User Manual Series 2003
Office on Child Abuse and Neglect., Caliber Associates. Crosson-Tower

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/educator/index.cfm>

Fact Sheet: The Relationship Between Parental Alcohol or Other Drug

http://member.preventchildabuse.org/site/DocServer/parental_alcohol.pdf?docID=125

Protecting Children: A Professional Publication of American Humane. 24:1; Child Welfare Information Gateway: Neglect

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/can/types/childneglect/>

The Office for Victims of Crime: Child Abuse <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/help/ca.htm>

Chronic Neglect <http://www.americanhumane.org/protecting-children/programs/chronic-neglect/>

American Humane Society, Fact Sheet: Child Neglect <http://www.americanhumane.org/about-us/newsroom/fact-sheets/child-neglect.html>

Members Corner

As a CAPC we are busy in our communities working with parents and children. From time to time CAPC members will contribute stories related to what their organizations are doing and how you can utilize them as a resource. The following was written by CAPC Chair Barb Finch and highlights the St. Vincent's PATHS program.

Great Things Are Happening in the St. Vincent's PATHS Program

St. Vincent's is Santa Barbara's oldest continuously operating social service agency. Founded in 1858 by the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent De Paul, its history of service to the community started when the Sisters opened a school to teach English to local ranchers' daughters. Subsequent programs have included an orphanage, an infirmary and childcare center, a residential program for children with developmental disabilities and a program for adolescent girls who were wards of the court through juvenile probation.

Since 1997, St. Vincent's has been meeting the needs of single mothers and their children through its Program of Affordable Transitional Housing and Services. PATHS is a two year residential program that focuses on breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty and abuse. The program specifically targets households led by single, low-income women whose life circumstances place their families at risk for ongoing struggles. Many families carry multiple risk factors including economic stress, intergenerational patterns of child abuse and neglect, incidents of domestic violence, chemical dependency, maternal depression, lack of knowledge about parenting, and a lack of awareness about community resources. PATHS provides services and support in a safe and nurturing environment to help women create lasting change.

Key elements of the program are affordable housing, case management, counseling, educational classes and Vincent's Heart, a small donation center. Residents pay a monthly program fee that helps to cover the costs of housing and services. Each of the five cottages has a designated case manager who meets weekly with individual mothers to set goals, identify challenges and create action plans.

Women also meet weekly with a licensed therapist, and they attend weekly educational classes in parenting and life skills. Families with young children have access to childcare and tuition subsidies through St. Vincent's Casa Alegria Children's Center. All services are campus-based.



Evidence-based research has shown that 5 protective factors help reduce the risk of child abuse and neglect. Building these skills has always been a part of the PATHS program. Affordable housing promotes nurturing and attachment with children by allowing mothers to spend less time at work and more time with their children. Parenting classes boost parents' working knowledge of child development. Additionally, case managers provide in-home instruction and support on a day-to-day basis as needs arise. Life skills classes, case management and individual therapy build parental resiliency so that families are better able to cope with challenges. Communal living, parent leadership opportunities and community participation help women develop social networks. In addition to low-cost housing, other concrete supports such as food, clothing and household supplies are available as needed through Vincent's Heart. Partnerships with public and community-based organizations help case managers address any unmet needs. In this way PATHS is a model program for family strengthening.

To be eligible for PATHS, women must be over 18 years old with 1-2 children, ages 10 and under. Participants come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and traditions. There is no religious requirement. Above all, women must be committed to making changes, following program rules and participating fully in services offered. Women are held to a high standard of accountability, with an emphasis on independence and self-responsibility. They are supported by a dedicated team of professional staff who work cooperatively to promote success. Our hope is that PATHS participants will become educators and role models for their children, and that their successes will allow the next generation to grow up happier, healthier and better-equipped to handle life's challenges.



The Difference of Differential Response

Santa Barbara County, like many other counties in California, has implemented a new approach to responding to hotline calls that are not legally considered abuse or neglect. When the child's safety is not threatened, but the family clearly needs help, through Differential Response social workers have the option of referring them to community resources.

Differential Response, or the "Front Porch" program as it is called in our County, connects families early with resources and supports in the community. When a call is assessed to meet the criteria for Front Porch, information about the family is passed on to the Community Action Commission (North and Mid-County Regions) or CALM (South County Region), the two community-based agencies working with Child Welfare Services to provide Differential Response services. If the family primarily requires access to basic services, such as food, clothing or medical services, the agencies refer them further to a local Family Resource Center. If the family requires more intensive help, such as with parenting or child development issues, a case worker at CALM or CAC helps the family access therapy, substance abuse services, parenting classes or any other type support needed. A family's participation in any of these services is voluntary and all confidentiality laws are being observed among participating partners.

Partnerships with the community, such as the Front Porch program, allow Child Welfare Services to respond much more pro-actively to families' that are at-risk for child abuse and neglect. A program such as Front Porch also gives you, as a Mandated Reporter, the confidence to know that your call is helping a family connect to resources that will help them and their children remain safe and healthy.



Additional Reading on Differential Response:

Understanding the Child Welfare System in California

<http://www.ccrwf.org/2009/07/understanding-the-child-welfare-system-in-california-a-primer-for-service-providers-and-policy-makers/>

<http://www.americanhumane.org/protecting-children/programs/differential-response/>

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF DIFFERENTIAL RESPONSE

- ◆ Children are safer and families are stronger when communities work together.
- ◆ Identifying family issues and stepping in early leads to better results than waiting until a family is in real crisis.
- ◆ Families can more successfully resolve issues when they voluntarily engage in solutions, services, and supports.

Source: Improving the Lives of California's Children and Families, 2005

Reporting Child Abuse or Neglect

If you are a Santa Barbara County mandated reporter and you suspect child abuse or neglect, YOU MUST ADHERE TO THE FOLLOWING PROCEDURES:

1. Immediately call Child Welfare Services at:
800.367.0166 Santa Barbara County Hotline
805.683.2724 After Hours
 In the case of an emergency, please call 911.
2. Complete and file a Suspected Child Abuse Report, Form #SS8572 (www.CTC-CAPC.org/SCAR)
3. Retain a legible copy of the SCAR Report.
4. YOU are responsible for making this report. DO NOT ALLOW your supervisor/principal to make the report for you or assume because another co-worker has some of the same information that they will make the report.
5. Do not attempt to investigate, conduct interviews or interfere with the information you hold.
6. Remember that you are to report SUSPECTED abuse—you are not required to have witnessed or have complete proof of the incident. You are obligated by law to report what you observe or what you are told that caused suspicion the child is being physically, sexually or emotionally abused or neglected. When in doubt, call CWS or law enforcement and get their input about the scope of your report.

The Santa Barbara County Child Abuse Prevention Council welcomes your feedback, ideas and requests for training and resources.

Email us at:

capc.newsletter@gmail.com

The CAPC meets the third Thursday of every month (except August and December) from 10:30-12:30 at the Santa Ines Mission. All meetings are open to the public. To receive agendas or more information, call the KIDS Network at 346.8222, or email j.thomas@sbcsocialserv.org.

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