

Activities for Individuals to Help Build a Shared Responsibility

We all have a role to play in building strong communities where individuals, families, and children are valued and supported. All families want the same things for their children—a safe home, a good education, and a chance to succeed. Here are some things you can do as both a concerned individual and an involved community member.

Build a support network by getting involved in your neighborhood.

There are many ways to create, improve, and maintain a healthy and supportive community. This can be as simple as getting to know your neighbors or as considerable as working on a community enhancement project. Some examples include:

- ☆ **Get to know your neighbors.** Develop friendly relationships with your neighbors and their children and grandchildren. Make your neighborhood your extended family. People feel better and safer, and problems seem less overwhelming, when support is nearby. It is easier to share your joys and your worries if you know your neighbors.
- ☆ **Help a family under stress.** If a family you know seems to be in crisis or under stress, offer to help – offer to babysit, help with chores and errands, or suggest resources in the community that can help the family such as faith community leaders, teachers, and doctors.
- ☆ **Reach out to children in your community.** A smile or word of encouragement can mean a lot, whether it comes from a parent or a passing stranger.
- ☆ **Get involved in a local school.** Join the parent-teacher organization and attend school events. Even if you don't have school-aged children, you can mentor a child at your local school or become a Big Brother or Big Sister.
- ☆ **Keep your neighborhood safe.** Start a Neighborhood Watch and plan a local "National Night Out" community event that brings together neighbors, local businesses, firefighters, police, and others. You can get to know each other by holding special events, and help keep your neighborhood and children safe. Visit www.nationaltownwatch.org/nno.

Learn how your community supports children and families, and be an active community member.

Part of building a strong community is participating in the programs that support community members. Find ways to volunteer at local schools, tribal communities, community- or faith-based organizations, health-care clinics or children's hospitals, childcare centers, or social service agencies. You can help by starting one of the programs listed below, teaching children, or helping to publicize these and other community programs and activities:

- ☆ Education programs help teach employment, budgeting, or parenting skills.
- ☆ Seminars on strengthening marriages can help promote the importance of healthy marriages in the community.
- ☆ Fatherhood programs can strengthen the roles of fathers by helping them learn parenting skills and how to become more active in their children's lives.
- ☆ Substance abuse treatment programs can help parents overcome problems with alcohol or other drugs.



- ☆ Homeless shelters can provide not only meals and beds for children and their families, but also employment training, education, childcare, and mental health services.
- ☆ Local recreation centers give children a safe place to play, as well as provide sports, classes, after-school activities, and other activities for the whole community.
- ☆ Well-baby programs provide health and education services to new parents.
- ☆ Childcare programs provide a safe place for children so their parents can maintain jobs or stay in school.
- ☆ Respite care provides relief to families during stressful times or for those with a child or other family member who is ill or has a disability.
- ☆ Advocacy centers for victims of domestic violence raise public awareness of the issue and provide services and shelter to family members affected by violence.
- ☆ Parent support groups offer a place for parents to meet and discuss parenting issues, exchange ideas, and offer support. Parent support groups provide an opportunity for parents to support each other in managing the challenges of raising children and youth.
- ☆ Tribal communities often provide family support activities through cultural events and community gatherings. Please refer to your local tribe for inclusion on their events mailing list.
- ☆ Family resource centers provide an array of preventive support services, including many of those listed above, as well as referral to other community services.

Prevent child abuse and neglect.

Remember that anything you do to support kids and parents in your family, neighborhood, and community helps strengthen families and reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect. You also can work in more specific ways to prevent child maltreatment.

- ☆ Help local organizations or tribal communities distribute educational materials on parenting and child abuse prevention.
- ☆ Mentor parents in programs that match experienced, stable parents with parents at risk for abuse. Mentors provide support and model positive parenting skills.
- ☆ Provide friendship and guidance to parents and children who need your help by volunteering for programs such as Befriend-a-Child or Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA).
- ☆ Contact your elected officials and ask them to support funding for programs and policies that support children and families.
- ☆ Make a donation to an organization that works to prevent child abuse. You can donate or give clothing, food, or toys to a social service agency that helps families in your community.
- ☆ Volunteer or join a community coalition to prevent child abuse and neglect.
- ☆ Learn how to recognize and report signs of child maltreatment.

