

# Supporting Families: Preventing Child Abuse

Most parents share a desire to provide the best for their children. But raising healthy, confident children can be difficult, especially when parents are frustrated, inexperienced, have serious mental health problems, or are facing stressful conditions such as relationship difficulties or financial crises.

## Why Support for Families Is Critical

Research has shown that parents and other caretakers who have resources and support are more likely to provide safe and healthy homes for their children. Specifically, parents need a network of supportive personal relationships and other resources for coping with stress, knowledge and understanding of critical child development issues, and financial and other concrete supports such as shelter, food, and childcare. A lack of these critical supports, on the other hand, can cause otherwise well-intentioned parents to make poor decisions that can lead to neglect or abuse. As we learn more about why child abuse and neglect occur, more organizations, agencies, and tribal communities are recognizing the best way to promote prevention is to provide parents with the skills and resources they need to understand and meet their children's emotional, physical, and developmental needs and protect their children from harm.

## How Support for Families Can Help

Parenting is one of the toughest and most important jobs in America, and we all have a stake in ensuring that parents have access to the tools and support they need to be successful. With the help of family support activities, many families are able to find the strength and resources they need to raise safe, healthy, and productive children. For example, local schools or family service centers can provide a place for parents to gather, socialize, and learn more about their children's growth and development. Faith communities offer parents additional opportunities for friendship and support. Pediatricians help parents by responding to questions, concerns, or frustrations about their children's behavior. Family support programs such as parent education, home visitation, respite care, and support groups help parents develop parenting skills, understand the benefits of positive discipline techniques, and meet their children's needs. Family support programs also offer assistance with other significant challenges facing caretakers, such as adequate housing and affordable childcare.

Through these and other family support activities, parents develop resources, knowledge, and skills to:

- ☆ Understand what is typical behavior for children at different ages
- ☆ Identify, respond to, and advocate for their children's needs
- ☆ Communicate calmly and clearly with children
- ☆ Set clear and realistic boundaries for children
- ☆ Correct and redirect children without losing control
- ☆ Handle stress in positive ways, including reaching out to friends, family, and community resources for support
- ☆ Develop positive bonds with their children and enjoy spending time together
- ☆ Have confidence in their own abilities as parents\*

\* Adapted from FRIENDS National Resource Center for CBFRS Programs, Outcome Accountability Initiative Field Test: Phase I Final Report, Attachment I: Sample "Common" Outcome Evaluation Tool. For more information, go to [www.friendsnrc.org](http://www.friendsnrc.org).

