
T H E M I N N E S O T A
C O U N T Y A T T O R N E Y S
A S S O C I A T I O N

April is recognized in the United States as National Child Abuse Prevention Month. Across the country, media outlets regularly report on situations of horrific abuse or neglect of children. Unfortunately, as we've become accustomed to sensationalism in our news, it has become all too easy to gloss over these stories and headlines. We don't want to be reminded that every day, local County and Tribal Agencies must respond to reports of maltreatment of children in our own communities.

In 2010, 4,668 children were victims of abuse or neglect in Minnesota. **14 children in Minnesota died as a result of their abuse or neglect that year.** Of those several thousand children victimized, 72.2% were neglected, 20.4% were physically abused, and 18.5% were sexually abused.¹

Nationally, a report of child abuse is made very ten seconds. In 2011, statistics show that at least five children died *every* day as a result of child abuse in America.² The problem isn't limited to the immediate, horrible abuse and neglect of the child; consequences of abuse can continue the remainder of a child's life. Of children that survive abuse and neglect, 59% are more likely to be arrested as a juvenile, 28% are more likely to be arrested as an adult, and 30% are more likely to commit violent crime.³

Let's use National Child Abuse Prevention Month to raise awareness of the ongoing problems of child abuse and neglect, and educate ourselves, family and friends, on prevention.

First of all, acknowledge what child abuse is. It is any maltreatment of a child that results in harm or injury. Examples include:

- PHYSICAL abuse – hurting a child by hitting, burning, biting, or shaking. These injuries are not accidental.
- SEXUAL abuse – any sexual contact with a child, including exhibitionism, photographs or films, or prostitution.
- NEGLECT – failing to give a child food, clothing, medical care, shelter, or supervision.

¹ Source: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/child-maltreatment-2010>.

² Source: <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d11599.pdf>.

³ Source: http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/long_term_consequences.cfm.

- EMOTIONAL abuse and neglect – severely criticizing a child; scaring a child with threats of abandonment; failing to spend time with a child, or not showing a child affection.

Next, pay attention to the children you know and meet. Recognize signs of abuse or neglect. Unexplained injuries are a more obvious sign of possible abuse. But, children may also show behavioral signs of abuse. Depression, fear of a certain adult, difficulty trusting others or making friends, sudden changes in eating or sleeping patterns, inappropriate sexual behavior, poor hygiene, secrecy, and hostility can be indicators a child is being neglected or physically, sexually, or emotionally abused.

Please do not be afraid to act on what you observe. You may be a child's only lifeline to safety. Child abuse is everyone's business.

Suspected abuse should be reported to your local county child protection services office. Or call local law enforcement if necessary. Social Workers and Officers in these agencies will appropriately investigate reports; they want to protect the children in our communities. Families may also receive services to hopefully end abusive behaviors, or assistance in finding resources to provide for their children's needs.

Intervention and prevention are critical. 30% of abused and neglected children will later abuse their own children, thus continuing the destructive cycle of abuse. The annual cost of child abuse and neglect in our country is estimated in the billions of dollars.

At a minimum this April – in observance of Child Abuse Prevention Month – we can each practice one very practical tip with our own children. Discipline them thoughtfully. Do not discipline your child when you are upset. Calm down. Words and actions can inflict deep and lasting wounds. The goal of discipline is to guide and teach, not to punish. The word discipline is derived from the Latin "disciplina," meaning teaching and learning.

Life and work can be stressful for adults, and parenting is hard. National Child Abuse Prevention Month can be a time for us all to remember that, "Might does not make right." Abuse of a child is never right.

Prepared by Paul Beaumaster, Rice County Attorney