



# 5 SIMPLE WAYS to keep Charlottesville-area kids safe

In 2020, over 4,000 children in the Charlottesville area were reported to local Child Protective Services for child abuse or neglect. It's easy to assume that the responsibility of preventing the pain in these children's lives lies with their parents or child protection social workers. However, social science research shows that parents and social workers are often the last line of support for kids in dire circumstances.

Prevention of child abuse – not recognition or treatment of it after the fact – starts in communities. It starts with city and county leaders, school boards, faith leaders, youth sports coaches, day care providers, and thoughtful neighbors like you.

**April is Child Abuse Prevention Month**, an opportunity to highlight the role we all can play to support parents and families. This month—and throughout the year as we consider child abuse prevention—our attention is best focused on prevention efforts that create healthier environments for children and foster confident, positive parenting.

## 1. Support Parental Resilience

All parents experience stress from time to time – whether it be from persistent poverty or a difficult-to-soothe baby. How parents respond to the stressor is much more important than the stressor itself. Successful parents are the ones who even in the midst of high stress experiences are able to call on inner reserves of hope and patience to respond to their kids in appropriate ways. This is called resilience. You can help build parental resilience by writing a note or a text to a parent, letting them know you think they're doing a great job despite the tough circumstances of a pandemic year.

**Write a note to a parent, letting them know you see how hard they are working to support their kids!**



## 2. Socially Connect with a Parent

**Invite a parent on a socially-distanced walk to offer emotional support.**

People need people. Parents need people who support them and their children. Several research studies have demonstrated that high levels of emotional, informational, or spiritual support is associated with better parenting. Most importantly, parents who feel connected to others have more positive moods, are more responsive to one's children, report higher parental satisfaction, and have lower levels of anger, anxiety and depression. You can let a parent know you are there for them by offering to take them out on a socially distanced walk. Be a good listener as they talk about what struggles they are facing.

## 3. Provide Concrete Support to a Parent

Families do better when they live in communities that help them succeed. Partnering with parents to identify and access resources in the community may help prevent the stress that precipitates child maltreatment. Likewise, providing concrete supports may also help prevent the unintended neglect that occurs when parents are unable to provide for their children.



**Give a gift card to a restaurant or bring over a kid-friendly meal to give them a night off.**

## 4. Model Good Parenting Behavior

**Engage a child in an age-appropriate conversation either in person or over Zoom.**

After a year of pandemic lock-down, parents are exhausted of being the only source of support for kids. Modeling good parenting is the reminder all parents need from adults who aren't burned out. Whether it's a niece or nephew, or a child from your faith community – get down on their level, look them in the eye and have a conversation. Or, if a boundary needs to be set, do it calmly and gently – “no, you may not color on the walls with that crayon. I'm going to take the crayon now.”

## 5. Promote the social and emotional development of kids

Children who feel loved and like they belong, are children who have a healthy bond with their parent or caregiver. One of the best things we can do for children is offer skills to express emotions in a healthy way. Research shows that early and appropriate interventions that focus on social-emotional development can help to mitigate the effects of negative experiences such as abuse and neglect. If you are a community group, faith community, or school – consider hosting a parenting discussion group.

**Host a parenting discussion group in your faith community or neighborhood.**