

# **Child Abuse Prevention Month**

## **Family Advocacy Program**

**April 2025 FAP/chat**

### **Protecting Our Future**

Every April, communities across the nation come together to recognize Child Abuse Prevention Month, a time dedicated to raising awareness about child abuse and neglect while promoting strategies to support and strengthen families. The Family Advocacy Program (FAP) is committed to advocating for the safety and well-being of children, reinforcing the message that preventing child abuse is a shared responsibility.

### **Understanding the Importance of Prevention**

Child abuse and neglect can have long-lasting effects on a child's development, emotional health, and future success. Prevention begins with education, community support, and equipping families with the resources they need to create safe and nurturing environments for their children. By fostering strong family connections, promoting positive parenting strategies, and ensuring access to support services, we can make a significant impact in protecting our most vulnerable members.

According to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, nearly 3 million cases of child abuse and neglect are reported each year. However, many more cases go unreported. These statistics highlight the urgent need for awareness and action in every community.

### **The History of Child Abuse Prevention Month and Its Impact on Law Changes**

Child Abuse Prevention Month traces its roots back to 1983, when President Ronald Reagan officially designated April as a time to raise national awareness about child abuse and neglect. The initiative was established to encourage individuals, families, and communities to work together in promoting the safety and well-being of children. Over the years, this observance has grown into a nationwide movement, marked by educational campaigns, advocacy efforts, and policy initiatives aimed at reducing child abuse and strengthening family support systems.

One of the most recognizable symbols of this movement is the blue ribbon, which originated in the late 1980s when a Virginia grandmother tied a blue ribbon to her car antenna in memory of her grandson, who died as a result of child abuse. This powerful symbol has since been embraced across the country to represent child abuse prevention efforts.

The growing awareness generated by Child Abuse Prevention Month has played a key role in shaping policies and legislation at the federal, state, and local levels. The passage of the **Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) in 1974** laid the foundation for national child

protection laws, providing funding to states for prevention programs, reporting systems, and intervention services. In subsequent years, CAPTA has been amended multiple times to strengthen child welfare protections, including requirements for mandatory reporting and expanded support for families at risk.

### **Child Abuse Prevention in the Military and the Role of FAP**

Child abuse and neglect have also been areas of concern within military families. Due to the unique stressors faced by military personnel, including deployments, frequent relocations, and high-pressure work environments, military families can sometimes experience additional risk factors for child maltreatment.

Historically, reports of child abuse within the military gained national attention in the 1990s, leading the Department of Defense (DoD) to strengthen its approach to family violence prevention. In response, the **Family Advocacy Program (FAP)** was created to address issues of child and domestic abuse within military communities. FAP provides prevention, education, and intervention services to service members and their families, ensuring they receive the necessary support to create safe home environments.

According to data from the DoD, military child abuse and neglect cases are reported at rates similar to the civilian populations. However, due to the mobility of military families, some incidents may go unreported or become difficult to track across different duty stations. The DoD has implemented stricter reporting requirements and mandatory training to ensure that service members, commanders, and military-affiliated professionals are equipped to recognize and respond to signs of abuse.

FAP plays a crucial role by:

- Offering confidential counseling and intervention services for families struggling with stress, parenting challenges, or family violence.
- Providing educational workshops to help service members develop positive parenting techniques and stress management skills.
- Collaborating with military leadership and law enforcement to ensure child abuse cases are properly reported and handled.
- Conducting home visits and risk assessments to identify families in need of additional support before issues escalate.

The presence of FAP in military communities underscores the commitment of the armed forces to protect service members and their families. By focusing on prevention and early intervention, FAP helps ensure that children in military families grow up in safe, nurturing environments.

### **Legislation in Pennsylvania**

In Pennsylvania, significant legal reforms have been enacted in response to growing awareness of child abuse prevention. One of the most notable changes occurred in the wake of a child abuse

scandal at Penn State University, which led to a sweeping overhaul of the state's child protection laws in 2014.

These reforms included:

- **Expanded Mandatory Reporting Laws:** Pennsylvania broadened the list of individuals required to report suspected child abuse, including school personnel, medical professionals, clergy, and volunteers who work with children.
- **Stronger Background Check Requirements:** Individuals working with children in schools, daycare centers, and other organizations must now undergo more rigorous background checks.
- **Revised Definitions of Child Abuse and Perpetrators:** The state updated its legal definitions to close loopholes and ensure that more instances of abuse and neglect are recognized under the law.
- **Improved Information Sharing Between Agencies:** Increased coordination between child welfare agencies, law enforcement, and schools to enhance the protection of at-risk children.
- **Harsher Penalties for Failure to Report:** Legal consequences for failing to report suspected child abuse have been strengthened to ensure accountability among professionals and caregivers.

### **The Role of PA ChildLine**

Pennsylvania operates ChildLine, a confidential reporting system that serves as the state's 24/7 hotline for reporting suspected child abuse or neglect. Established under the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, ChildLine is a vital resource for concerned individuals, mandated reporters, and professionals working with children.

ChildLine provides the following services:

- **24/7 Abuse Reporting:** Anyone can call **1-800-932-0313** to report suspected child abuse or neglect. Reports can also be submitted online by mandated reporters.
- **Assessment and Referral:** ChildLine specialists assess each report and refer cases to the appropriate county child protective services or law enforcement agencies for investigation.
- **Tracking and Documentation:** ChildLine maintains records of reports to ensure follow-up and prevent repeated abuse.
- **Support for Mandated Reporters:** The service provides training and guidance for professionals required by law to report child abuse, helping them navigate legal responsibilities and reporting procedures.

By utilizing ChildLine, Pennsylvania residents play an active role in protecting children from abuse and ensuring swift intervention when necessary.

## **A Call to Action**

Child abuse prevention requires a collective effort. Every individual, family, and organization can play a role in creating a safe and nurturing environment for children. By standing together, we can build stronger communities and a brighter future for all children.

If you suspect child abuse or neglect, report it immediately to PA ChildLine at 1-800-932-0313, The Family Advocacy Program at 717-770-7066 or the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453). You can also contact local authorities for immediate intervention. For more information about Child Abuse Prevention Month resources, contact the Family Advocacy Program at 717-770-7066.