


**Effective Prevention Strategies for
Child Abuse and Neglect**
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Key Concepts

- Review the causes, scope and consequences of child maltreatment
- Review the different frameworks that have shaped child abuse prevention planning
- Identify promising prevention strategies and program characteristics
- Outline strategies for moving from supporting effective services to crafting effective systems




Common Causal Theories of Abuse

- Parents lack knowledge or experience
- Parents suffer psychosocial stress
- Parents lack sufficient material resources to provide for their children
- Parents live in communities that provide little if any support for the care of children




2004 Reported Cases

- 1.8 million referrals involving 3 million children were filed with child welfare agencies
- 869,000 or 12.3 per 1,000 children substantiated
- Type of maltreatment
 - 60% neglect
 - 20% physical abuse
 - 10% sexual abuse
 - 7% emotional maltreatment




Initial Consequences of Maltreatment

- Physical impacts ranging from minor injuries to death
 - 1,500 child abuse fatalities in 2004
- Temporary and permanent developmental delays
- Poor self-concept/psychological functioning
- Aggressive and violent behaviors
- Poor social interactions and peer relationships
- Poor school performance



Prevention's Evolution in the US

- Wave 1: Raising Awareness (1962-1980)
- Wave 2: Building Service Continuums (1980's)
- Wave 3: Crafting Integrated Systems (1990's)



Wave 1: Raising Awareness

- Objective: Public education/awareness
- Message: Look and you will find
- Typical service response:
 - Reporting laws
 - Professional education
 - Public awareness efforts
 - Sporadic education and support services



Wave 1 Lessons

- Abuse is complex, difficult to define
- More abuse cases than first anticipated
- Abuse is difficult to detect in less extreme forms



Wave 2: Building Service Continuums

- Objective: Establish many services
- Message: Let a 1,000 flowers bloom
- Typical service response:
 - Emergency outreach
 - Parent education and self-help groups
 - Child assault prevention programs
 - Family resource centers



Wave 2 Lessons

- Change is possible but not universal—many high risk children are left behind
- Child abuse in only one of many problems children face
- Not all programs should be replicated – selection must be strategic and based on evidence



Converging Themes Shaping Policy

- Dissatisfaction with existing prevention efforts
- Brain research reinforcing the importance of the first few years of life
- Programmatic evidence supporting home visitation services
- Political interest in addressing a set of related outcomes well suited to early intervention




Wave 3: Crafting Integrated Systems

- Objective: Bring prevention “to scale”
- Message: Begin at birth and change both parents and context
- Typical service response:
 - Intensive home visitation services
 - Service integration
 - Community capacity/normative change
 - Outcome-based performance




Prevention's Current Framework

Horizontal Image	→	Vertical Image
Multiple age cohorts	→	Birth to Five
Universal OR Targeted	→	Targeted & Universal
Replicating Models	→	Replicating Best Practices
Change Individuals	→	Change individuals & Context




Common Prevention Strategies

- Public Awareness Campaigns
- Child Assault Prevention Programs
- Family Resource Centers
- Group-based parenting education programs
- Home visitation services




Public Awareness Campaigns

- Strengths
 - Capacity to focus public attention on issue
 - Ability to alter perceptions and, in some cases, change behaviors
- Limitations
 - Minimal impacts on those engaged in serious violence or who face strong counter message




Child Assault Prevention Programs

- Strengths
 - Effectively conveys key safety concepts to potential victims
 - Reduces levels of school violence/bullying and, possibly, sexual abuse
- Limitations
 - Many core concepts are not well received
 - Competing cultural messages minimize sustained impacts




Family Resource Centers

- Strengths
 - Creates community sense of parenting
 - Fosters greater service integration and improves service access
 - Provides parents choice of service options
- Limitations
 - No evidence of consistent use among those most challenged



Group-Based Educational Services

- Strengths
 - Improves parenting knowledge and skills, particularly among teen parents
 - Creates opportunities for social networking
- Limitations
 - High risk parents less likely to participate in groups on an ongoing basis
 - Services are not individualized



Growing support for home visitation

- Recommendation from the U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect
- Success of the Nurse Family Partnership and other home visitation efforts in achieving positive outcomes
- Hawaii's statewide expansion of Healthy Start
- Established a promising pathway for reaching the most challenged families



What are the early outcomes?

New Parents

- Better birth outcomes
- Enhanced parent-child interactions
- More efficient use of health care services
- Enhanced child development and early detection of developmental delays

Toddlers

- Early literacy skills
- Social competence
- Parent involvement in learning



What are the longer-term outcomes?

New Parents

- Reduced welfare dependency
- Higher school completion and job retention
- Reduction in the frequency and severity of maltreatment

Toddlers

- Stronger school performance
- Fewer behavior problems
- Higher high school graduation rates



Promising service characteristics

- Solid internal consistency linking program elements to desired outcomes
- Forming established relationship with family and sustain it long enough to achieve outcomes
- Provide direct assessment and services to children
- Solid organizational capacity
- Build strong linkages among local providers



Promising staffing patterns

- Prevention is about building relationships not delivering a product – hire relationship builders
- For the most intensive services, maintain low caseloads (15 per worker)
- Provide staff comprehensive initial and in-service training opportunities
- Provide staff multiple opportunities for individual and group supervision



What elements remain unclear?

- The appropriate target population
- The importance of curriculum consistency
- The optimal service duration and intensity
- The critical qualifications for home visitors
- The appropriate locus of administrative control



Building Effective Systems

- Establish your vision – form follows substance
- Identify resources – human, fiscal and cultural
- Build in stages – self-sufficient components that can link to other options as they emerge
- Secure public buy-in – raise the issue's profile
- All service is local – quality is critical so insure local providers "own" the product



"Evidence-Based" Decision Making

- Carefully review research findings in light of your theoretical assumptions and participant needs
- Focus on the outcomes you want for families and children and seek research that informs these outcomes, whatever the source
- Be as critical of potentially positive findings as you are of negative findings
- Accept the fact that not all things can be "proven"



Today's Prevention Context

- Strong undercurrents fueled by competing policy agendas and program models
- Larger and more complex policy and service networks
- Fiscal uncertainty at the National and State level
- Fear and a loss of collective optimism



The Public Policy Challenge in Prevention

- Building broad collaborations to share collective responsibility for promoting child well-being and healthy child development.
- Sustaining a unique platform for addressing the reality and needs of abused children and their families.
- Building community systems that foster personal responsibility for child protection.



Using Context to Prevent Abuse

- **Technical solutions**
 - Creating programs and supportive services for new parents
- **Adaptive challenges**
 - Creating a culture which validates seeking help and giving help
 - Altering institutional structures and openness to collaboration and shared responsibility for common objectives
 - Altering the political process to embrace investment in young children



Creating Capital to Expand Prevention

- Be open to change and continuous program improvement – promise progress not the ultimate solution
- Encourage state agencies to focus more on collaboration and less on competition
- Promote strategies that build local capacity to meet local needs
- Engage the public in supporting prevention system at the level needed to prevent child abuse



Staying the Course

The Great Society asks not how much, but how good; not only how to create wealth but how to use it; not only how fast we are going, but where we are headed.

It proposes as the first test for a nation: the quality of its people.

This kind of society will not flower spontaneously from swelling riches and surging power.

It will not be the gift of government or the creation of presidents. It will require of every American, for many generations, both faith in the destination and the fortitude to make the journey.

And like freedom itself, it will always be challenge and not fulfillment.

LBJ (1965)

