

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month and we are calling on parents, community members, service providers and policymakers to renew our unwavering commitment to protecting our children by responding to child abuse and strengthening Kern County families.

Between 2009 and 2018, 46 Kern County children died of abuse – all under the age of five. Many others suffered severe or near-fatal injuries at abuser's hands. Even more disturbing is the 2,934 substantiated cases of child abuse in 2018, that is an average of eight children each day. Kern County citizens will not tolerate child abuse.

Numerous cases involving severe child abuse or death by parent or adult caregiver highlight a serious problem in our community. These cases involve children under five receiving intentional burns, sexual abuse, broken limbs and significant head or abdominal trauma from prolonged beatings – some suffering hours or days with their injuries. While many perpetrators serve lengthy or lifetime prison sentences, nothing erases the needless suffering our young victims endured at the hands of those responsible for their care and nurturing.

Enough is enough.

We ask that *you* recognize child abuse and the warning signs. Physical and sexual abuse clearly constitute maltreatment – but so does neglect and failure to provide essential food, clothing and healthcare. Children sustain emotional abuse from rejection, intimidation, isolation or exposure to violence. Depression, fear of certain people, difficulty trusting others or making friends, sudden changes in sleep or eating patterns, inappropriate sexual behavior, poor hygiene, secrecy and hostility often suggest underlying issues. They indicate a child in distress that may be being physically, sexually or emotionally abused and/or neglected.

Child abuse and neglect causes short-term harm and increases future crime. Survivors of abuse or neglect carry trauma for life, resulting in a 30% increased likelihood of arrest for violent crimes. One-third of these adults continue the cycle of abuse with their own children.

Investing in high-quality programs designed to prevent child abuse has a powerful impact in reducing potential crime. Differential Response (DR) is an alternative solution to reports of suspected child abuse or neglect. The DR program allows Child Protective Services to respond at the first signs of trouble, reducing the number of substantiated child abuse cases for nine consecutive years in Kern.

Child abuse is a serious public safety concern. Kern County is calling on our prevention workers, social workers, law enforcement leaders, crime survivors, and you to prevent child abuse. Despite the availability of DR, families do not always proactively seek out services in time. Our County is dedicated to protecting children, but we need to know about families in distress and help them understand the benefits of our services. Child Protective Services intervene as necessary and work tirelessly to protect our children. Law enforcement is committed to putting the child's abuser in custody giving the child a chance. Our District Attorney's Office prosecutes offenders to the full extent of the law preventing repeat offenders.

These children need *your* help.

We urge you, Kern County, to stand up for public safety by reporting suspected child abuse or neglect, to support effective prevention practices and a reduction in violent crime by stopping the

cycle of child abuse and neglect. If you witness or suspect child abuse, or if a child confides in you, call the CPS hotline 661-631-6011 or 9-1-1.

If you know a family struggling with stress and needing food, financial aid, utility assistance, housing, counseling, parent education, childcare, clothing or more, refer them to 2-1-1. Kern's 2-1-1 line provides comprehensive information and referrals to service providers and agencies.

By volunteering with organizations and agencies, you can make a difference in the lives of Kern County children. Become a mentor, baby cuddler, foster parent – donate needed items to children and families.

We can and must do more to prevent child abuse and neglect. We have an obligation to invest in protecting our children from the harm of child abuse and neglect. To learn more about making a difference in our community, visit www.kcnc.org.

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