



# CHANGES FOR CHILDREN

Prevent Child Abuse Louisiana | Issue #1



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# A New Way of Thinking About Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention

by Jim Hmurovich, President & CEO, Prevent Child Abuse America

No issue is more ripe for change than the prevention of child abuse and neglect. The path to effective policy change involves a 180-degree shift in thinking, from policies that deal with abuse and neglect after they take place to policies that focus on preventing their occurrence. For our nation to embrace child abuse and neglect prevention in a more effective and meaningful manner, six steps must be taken.

**Step One:** Help the public recognize and understand the connection between child abuse and neglect and other social ills.

The public recognizes that child abuse and neglect should be prevented but there is not a consistent understanding of child abuse and neglect prevention. Clarity in message is critical to ensure we focus on the same issue consistently so we as a nation can respond effectively to the needs of children and families before abuse or neglect ever happens.

**Step Two:** Establish a national child abuse and neglect prevention policy.

Our national policy must be guided by a belief that child abuse and neglect are not only a problem but can be prevented. A prevention strategy may be actualized through individual acts of kindness to neighbors and strangers, but sustainable change cannot occur until there is a national policy and commitment to prevent child abuse and neglect. It must be the responsibility of public officials and communities to create a norm of supporting children and families.

**Step Three:** Analyze existing funding sources and develop fiscal policies to support activities that prevent child abuse and neglect.

To implement a national child abuse and neglect prevention policy, it is essential that funding streams be assessed and then realigned. In local implementation activities, policy and funding decisions would be governed by the national policy so financing decisions are made that: 1) promote the national policy, and 2) are accompanied by clearly identified, measurable and results-oriented strategies.

**Step Four:** Cultivate multiple and diverse prevention champions to rally the public support necessary to change policies to prevent child abuse and neglect.

The President of the United States and state and local government leaders should be the leading champions of children. These champions must identify other leaders who can promote the implementation and sustainability of the national policy to prevent child abuse and neglect. Prevention champions can be found in “children’s cabinets” or legislative caucuses that are bi-cameral and bi-partisan.

**Step Five:** Identify and strengthen governmental planning and quality assurance activities that support a national policy on child abuse and neglect prevention.

Many existing government efforts that benefit children can be used to promote and support a clearly stated national policy to prevent child abuse and neglect. One of the most common and perhaps underutilized strategies is the use of state plans. These are documents used by states to draw down federal matching funds such as Title IV-B (Child Welfare Services), Title IV-E (Foster Care), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) to improve family economics, Medicaid, Maternal and Child Health and the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems plan. Strong federal guidance and appropriate financial incentives should be established so states develop these plans in a manner that integrates cross-disciplinary planning and service delivery systems, and focus on nationally approved child well-being outcomes (not output indicators) that prevent child abuse and neglect.

**Step Six:** Ensure effective state and local planning and implementation of child abuse and neglect prevention strategies.

The development of a comprehensive, thoughtful national policy to prevent child abuse and neglect must be undertaken immediately. With that policy in place, real and sustainable change then can be initiated on a state-by-state basis. The focus should be on each state implementing comprehensive,

evidence based, community driven child abuse and neglect prevention strategies based upon the state’s needs. These state plans must be a methodology to view prevention services as more than a funding stream or specific program, and instead, as an entirely new way of thinking about the long-term safety, health, growth, development and well-being of our nation’s children.

Our collective failure to implement effective policies and strategies to prevent child abuse and neglect cost taxpayers \$104 billion per year and does not consider the personal toll on the victimized child.<sup>[1]</sup> Research shows that child abuse and neglect have life-long consequences, not only for the victimized child but for the nation<sup>[2]</sup> These studies show a strong correlation between child abuse and neglect and debilitating and chronic health consequences, delinquency, criminal behavior, mental health illness, drug dependency and lower academic performance. Child abuse and neglect are serious national problems affecting families regardless of wealth.

Many recent initiatives and efforts have focused on improving the child protection system. These efforts have resulted in more people looking at prevention strategies as a means to decrease the escalating need and costs incurred for services after the abuse and neglect have occurred. These efforts also provide an opportunity to view the child protection system as a part of a continuum that must include services on the front-end. The current situation can allow policy makers to move the dial closer to more universal prevention strategies. The central question policy makers must focus on is “what can be done to move policy to prevention so every child has the opportunity to grow up in healthy environments that prepare them for adulthood”?

By establishing a national policy on the prevention of child abuse and neglect, coordinated state service systems can be developed that promote healthy child and family development and ultimately a higher quality of community functioning.

#### End Notes:

[1] Wang, CT, & Holton, J (2007). Total estimated cost of child abuse and neglect in the United States. Chicago, IL: Prevent Child Abuse America. [http://www.preventchildabuse.org/about\\_us/media\\_releases/pcaa\\_pew\\_economic\\_impact\\_study\\_final.pdf](http://www.preventchildabuse.org/about_us/media_releases/pcaa_pew_economic_impact_study_final.pdf)

[2] Felitti, VJ, Anda, RF, Nordenberg, D, Williamson, DF, Spitz, AM, Edwards, V, Koss, MP, & Marks, JS. (1998). The relationship of adult health status to childhood abuse and household dysfunction. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 14, 245-258. <http://download.journals.elsevierhealth.com/pdfs/journals/07493797/PIIS0749379798000178.pdf>

# New Knowledge for a Healthier Future

## Adverse Childhood Experiences Study

by Anna Fogle, Prevent Child Abuse Louisiana President and CEO

We have known intuitively for some time that negative experiences in childhood have lasting effects. Now, however, we have research that backs this intuition. The implications of The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study<sup>[1]</sup> include not only the importance of prevention of such experiences, but also how the medical community connects with social resources and treats patients.

The following information is taken from Dr. Robert Anda's paper *The Health and Social Impact of Growing Up With Adverse Childhood Experiences: The Human and Economic Costs of the Status Quo*<sup>[2]</sup>, which can be accessed at [www.acestudy.org](http://www.acestudy.org). Prevent Child Abuse Louisiana was pleased to present Dr. Anda as a keynote speaker on March 5, 2009 at our conference. Dr. Anda was a key principal investigator in the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study. Information on the conference is available at [www.pcal.org](http://www.pcal.org).

*The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study is a decade-long and ongoing study designed to examine the childhood origins of many of our Nation's leading health and social problems. The Study represents collaboration between the Nation's leading prevention agency, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Kaiser Health Plan's Department of Preventive*

### ACEs have a strong influence on:

- adolescent health
- teen pregnancy
- smoking
- alcohol abuse
- illicit drug abuse
- sexual behavior
- mental health
- risk of re-victimization
- stability of relationships
- performance in the workforce

### ACEs increase the risk of:

- Heart disease
- Chronic Lung disease
- Liver disease
- Suicide
- Injuries
- HIV and STDs
- other risks for the leading causes of death

*Medicine in San Diego, CA.*

*The key concept underlying the Study is that stressful or traumatic childhood experiences such as abuse, neglect, witnessing domestic violence, or growing up with alcohol or other substance abuse, mental illness, parental discord, or crime in the home (which are termed adverse childhood experiences—or ACEs) are a common pathway to social, emotional, and cognitive impairments that lead to increased risk of unhealthy behaviors, risk of violence or re-victimization, disease, disability and premature mortality. We now know from breakthroughs in neurobiology that ACEs disrupt neurodevelopment and can have lasting effects on brain structure and function—the biologic pathways that likely explain the strength of the findings from the ACE Study.*

*The vast array of problems that arise from ACEs calls for an integrated, rather than a separate or categorical perspective of the origins of health and social problems throughout the lifespan. This approach to growing up with ACEs, and to the consequences of exposure to them, may unify and improve our understanding of many seemingly unrelated health and social problems that tend to be identified and treated as categorically separate issues in Western society. Development of more integrated approaches will likely contribute to more meaningful diagnoses, improved treatment of affected persons, and better integration of research priorities, preventive and social services, and legal venues.*

*The ACE Study calls for an integrated approach to intervene early on children growing up being abused, neglected, witnessing domestic violence, or with substance abusing, mentally ill, or criminal household members. All of these childhood stressors are interrelated and usually co-occur in these homes. Prevention and treatment of one ACE frequently can mean that similar efforts are needed to treat multiple persons in affected families.*

This research clearly points to the health, psychological, and economic benefits of prevention. As Louisiana and our Nation work to deal with tough economic times, neglecting the fundamental programs that support families and increase outcomes for children will result in continued failure of our institutional systems. By investing in prevention programs that end the toxic stressors of childhood, we will create the productive and healthy citizens on which our future economic prosperity depends.

#### End Notes:

[1] Vincent J. Felitti, M.D., Robert F. Anda, M.D.; *The Relationship of Adverse Childhood Experiences to Adult Health Status*; Kaiser Permanente and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control

[2] Anda, Robert F., M.D., M.S.; *The Health and Social impact of Growing Up with Adverse Childhood Experiences: The Human and Economic Costs of the Status Quo*, [http://www.acestudy.org/files/Review\\_of\\_ACE\\_Study\\_with\\_references\\_summary\\_table\\_2\\_.pdf](http://www.acestudy.org/files/Review_of_ACE_Study_with_references_summary_table_2_.pdf)

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