

Child Abuse Awareness Month During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Pandemic

April is Child Abuse Awareness month, even during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

Social isolation, the public health measure now in place across the world, is also a proven risk factor for child abuse. Other risks include stress, uncertain access to food and housing, and worries about making ends meet. Owing to the current COVID-19 pandemic, we recognize that parents and caregivers feel overwhelmed with these stresses. They may be experiencing job loss, childcare struggles, and schedule changes.

With schools and daycare centers closed for weeks or more, children are no longer in the watchful eyes of their community. Teachers, counselors, extended family, and friends who routinely see children are now physically separated and unable to provide the same social and emotional support. Many school or community programs that prevent child abuse are currently on hold. The vital social distancing that attempts to flatten the curve for COVID-19 hinders these prevention efforts.

Research shows that all types of child abuse increase during school holidays and summer breaks and worsen during natural disasters such as hurricanes. We expect that throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, when emotions are running high and children are more socially isolated than ever, child abuse will surge. Much of this abuse will be unreported.

While we face these challenges, parents and friends can help reduce the risk of child abuse in several ways. First, call, video chat, or email friends and family. This virtual contact and support can be a good boost for parents and gives children the opportunity to connect with someone outside of their home. Second, establish and stick to a family schedule. This provides structure and routine. Set meal times, bedtimes, schoolwork, and even play time can help with daily tasks. Starting or restarting rest time can help children and caregivers recharge. Third, find out about community resources. Many towns and cities have food banks and free meals for children and families. Some communities are creating fun ways for children to engage socially without physical contact. Chalk messages on sidewalks and teddy bear sightings in windows provide a way to connect. While small, these gestures reduce feelings of isolation. Fourth, financial stress is real. Mortgage lenders, student loan holders, and banks are taking steps to reduce, stop, or postpone penalties. Look into opportunities that may provide financial relief. Last, remember you are not alone. If you need help, you can call the National Par-

Child abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic

There is an increased risk of child abuse during a pandemic because of heightened stress and the social isolation of children and their families.

Risk factors for child abuse during social isolation

- Loss of physical connection between children and their friends, teachers, counselors, and extended family
- Increased stress on parents and caregivers
- Loss of financial or caregiving support from community and school resources
- Increased exposure of children to parents or caregivers with substance abuse disorders
- Loss of access to mental health resources for parent, caregiver, or child

Ways to reduce stress and risk of child abuse during social isolation

- Engage with friends and distant family through telephone calls, interactive video communication, and social media
- Stay up to date with changes to local and federal aid
- Maintain a normal routine for work, meals, exercise, and rest
- Take breaks from activities that lead to increased fatigue and stress
- Ask for help from family, friends, or professionals when needed

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Child abuse and neglect resources:

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/resources.html>

Coronavirus resources and tips for parents, children, and others:

<https://preventchildabuse.org/coronavirus-resources/>

National Parenting Education Network:

<https://npen.org/>

ent Helpline at 1-855-427-2736 or the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-4-A-CHILD.

In many states, all citizens serve as mandatory reporters. If someone suspects child abuse or neglect, they are required by law to report these concerns to the police or state welfare agencies. By working together to look out for children, we may be able to help prevent cases of child abuse and neglect.

Authors: Cameron M. Rosenthal, MD; Lindsay A. Thompson, MD, MS

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Author Affiliations: Department of Pediatrics, University of Florida, Gainesville (Rosenthal, Thompson); Department of Health Outcomes and Biomedical Informatics, University of Florida, Gainesville (Thompson).

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