Child abuse and neglect prevention: Promoting well-being for Minnesota families

Minnesota enhances families’ strengths and resiliency to prevent child abuse and neglect through programs and supports that:

- Reduce or mediate known risk factors and promote protective factors.
- Acknowledge the complex interactions of individual, family, and community or environmental factors.
- Recognize the impact of individual and historical trauma on family and community health.

The Minnesota Department of Human Services is working with community partners, parents, local governments, other state agencies, community agencies and tribes to reduce the risk of child abuse and neglect by promoting family and community health and well-being across the state.

Preventing child maltreatment

Abuse and neglect affects children of every age, race and socioeconomic background and is often associated with factors and conditions causing families to experience toxic levels of stress. These include: lack of access to basic resources, housing instability, poverty, parental chemical dependency, mental health issues and social isolation. Prevention requires a focus on reducing risk factors and promoting strong communities and families.

Children who grow up in families where they are nurtured and in safe, stable households are more likely to become happier, healthier adults, and strong evidence exists to indicate positive outcomes across a broad array of economic, social and health outcomes. The department supports efforts to promote the social, physical, and emotional well-being of children by strengthening families and communities.

Strengthening families and communities

Specific research-informed strategies that contribute to strong families and communities include:

- **High-quality early education and child care.** Access to affordable, high-quality child care reduces parental stress, and contributes to cognitive development and pro-social skills and behaviors in children.
- **Parenting skills and awareness of healthy child development.** Parents who receive support in understanding the importance of the parent-child relationship to healthy development and the role that trauma can play in family relationships, and learn positive parenting skills, are better able to support their children’s healthy development.
- **Concrete economic and social supports for parents.** Access to financial, housing and other concrete resources and services can help meet parents’ basic needs and support their roles as parents, reducing the effect of common risk factors for child abuse and neglect.

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• **Promotion of supportive relationships.** A diverse and stable social support network promotes healing from trauma, mitigates risk factors for maltreatment, and promotes safe, stable, nurturing relationships.

### Providing supports

The department facilitates several programs and services that provide support to families and communities.

- **Parent Leadership for Child Safety and Permanency** is a partnership among the department, Minnesota Communities Caring for Children, and parents that promotes parent involvement and shared leadership.
- **Parent Support Outreach Program** is a voluntary program of short-term services that addresses risk factors for future child maltreatment. It offers support by connecting parents to community resources and information in all 87 counties, and the Leech Lake and White Earth bands of Ojibwe.
- **Regional prevention coordinators** support communities in preventing dependency on alcohol, tobacco and other drugs among youth. Prevention coordinators work in seven regions to prevent future substance use.
- **Help Me Grow** improves the awareness of, access to, and coordination of a broad range of services and resources. Early childhood partners and state agencies are working to expand Minnesota’s Help Me Grow system to help families access physical and mental health services as well as early care and education.
- **Early Childhood Systems Reform project** aims to improve access to high-quality, affordable child care and early childhood education, often cited is a significant protective factor. Birth to age 5 is a known critical period for cognitive and social-emotional development. The project is an interagency initiative that is reviewing early childhood services and programs, and co-constructing innovative solutions to improve outcomes.
- **Minnesota 2-Generation Network** is an interagency initiative collaborating with local agencies and community organizations. It is designing service integration and innovative supports centered on family well-being through health, economic assets, social capital, career development and positive learning environments.
- **Whole Family Systems disparity grants** address racial, geographic and economic inequities in accessing state services and supports that promote child and family well-being. The department is combining efforts across multiple programs to create grants to develop or expand on whole family (child and caregiver) approaches to uncover and address systemic influences to inequities, and support coordination across systems.
- **Prevention grants** reduce out-of-home placement of children and address the disproportionate representation of marginalized communities in Minnesota’s child welfare system.
- **Results First** is an interagency project in which analysis uses national benchmarks and evidence from child welfare programs and services to inform recommendations on innovative and equitable interventions to prevent child maltreatment in Minnesota.

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