

Letter to the editor

Contact:
Julie Rowe
Marketing & Communications
312.663.3520 ext. 141

What Does Child Abuse Prevention Really Mean?

To the Editor:

As the leading child abuse prevention organization working at the national, state and local level, we at Prevent Child Abuse America were encouraged to read "Easing foster care's pain unites disparate politicians" (02/26/03) by Senator Hillary Clinton and Representative Tom DeLay. While Senator Clinton and Congressman DeLay focus primarily on foster care reform, they also touch on the need for preventive resources to keep children out of foster care in the first place.

We couldn't agree more on this point. Preventing child abuse and neglect by strengthening and protecting families should be a core strategy of any child welfare proposal. Reacting to horrifying headlines after the fact can and must lead to the provision of much-needed care for victims. But simply reacting does not prevent the abuse of children who are at-risk.

While the public generally agrees that preventing child abuse is a good idea, there is some confusion as to what it means on a practical level. Yet, your readers need only look around their communities for examples of child abuse prevention. In social service agencies and community centers, they will find parent support programs offering resources to better equip parents for the challenges of raising children. In schools and religious centers they will find after-school programs that relieve the stress of finding activities for children and locating appropriate childcare. In neighborhoods, they will find concerned individuals offering to watch children when emergencies arise, or lending emotional support to a family under stress.

Often, the events that lead a family to the point of needing foster care or other intervention begin small but, unchecked, can escalate to dangerous proportions. Prevention, too, begins small and moves along as a family needs it, diminishing the risk of harm to the child and strengthening the family bond along the way. Some parents just need a little information about child development to better understand and deal with often frustrating situations such as the constant



crying of an infant, or potty training a toddler. Other families need access to substance abuse programs to manage problems that, if ignored, can lead to child abuse and neglect.

This web of support – the continuum of services that we as communities put in place to support families – is what child abuse prevention is all about.

Senator Clinton and Representative DeLay underscore the importance of valuing and protecting children by coming together from different sides of the political spectrum to spotlight child welfare reform. As communities, we must also recognize how child abuse can be prevented – not just the harm it causes – and come together to protect children and support families in the same spirit of cooperation and hope.

For more information on prevention programs in their communities, we invite readers to our website at www.preventchildabuse.org or to call 1-800-CHILDREN.

Sincerely,

A. Sidney Johnson III
President and CEO
Prevent Child Abuse America
200 S. Michigan Avenue, 17th Floor
Chicago, IL 60604

-###-

