

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month

Tips & Activities for Faith Communities

Some of a community's most influential organizations are its religious institutions. Churches, temples, synagogues, mosques, and other faith-based groups play an important role in reaching out to and helping families and children at risk. Spiritual leaders can use their religious messages as a positive force in supporting child abuse and neglect prevention. Faith organizations are in a unique position to fill in the gaps of their individual communities' needs. Prevention activities for faith communities may include:

- Acknowledge child abuse and neglect as a major concern for the faith community, and affirm that religious and lay leaders are dedicated to the concern.
- Raise awareness of child abuse and neglect by setting aside a day in April to observe Child Abuse Prevention Month and celebrate your community's commitment to children and families.
- Train religious and lay leaders to recognize the signs and symptoms of abuse and neglect, to work with victims and their families, and to make appropriate referrals.
- Participate in interfaith/interagency groups developing community prevention programs and services. These programs support families, especially those in crisis, BEFORE harm ever comes to a child.
- Host self-help or parent education and support groups at your faith community's facilities and stay informed about where and how to locate local resource and referral services available to families.
- Share information on how to report suspected child abuse or neglect, publish the toll-free abuse "reporting hotline" (1-877-NJ ABUSE), and promote prevention resources (www.preventchildabuse.nj.org), in bulletins and newsletters.
- Sponsor on-site after-school programs and safety training for children whose caregivers work during the hours after the school day ends.
- Share information on child development, parental stress, and local community resources and supports for parents during counseling sessions with your members.
- Establish a mentoring program to work one-on-one with children in families under stress.
- Offer respite care to congregation and community members in need of short-term relief from care-giving responsibilities.
- Organize a "Baby Supplies" drive to collect diapers, formula, car seats, and other supplies for new parents families in need.
- Establish a program that pairs pregnant teens with older women in the congregation who are willing to serve as partners through the pregnancy and childbirth.

