

## Child Abuse Can Be Prevented

By Debra Vizzi, MSW, LCSW

Like most New Jerseyans, I was horrified to learn of the Paterson mother who stabbed her 6 month-old infant to death. While it's unimaginable to comprehend the choice to harm a child, I found myself plagued with uneasy questions about the tragedy that came to be. Was the teen mother, pregnant at 17 while she herself was still a child overwhelmed by the baby's needs? Could post-partum depression have been a silent factor in what she was feeling? Substance abuse? Was the infant forever colicky and did she snap out of control with no one else to turn to?

While I may never know the details of the lives that ended in such violence, there are a few things I do know for sure. Taking care of a baby means devoting every bit of patience, time, emotion, and physical strength to feeding, changing, grooming, teaching and consoling another human being for all of one's breathing moments. Raising a child is the toughest job anyone will ever have. It's also a job that comes with no preparation and often, very little support. Ensuring that families can protect and nurture their children must be a priority before

it is done so parents are confident that we are raising them.

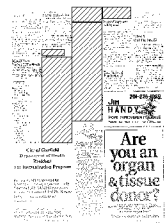
Child abuse CAN be prevented. Decades of research and experience have demonstrated home visitation programs as an

effective way to prevent child abuse and strengthen families. These programs work with parents to help them nurture their children right from the start. Home visitors reach out to families prenatally or around the time of birth to ensure that moms and dads are prepared to care for a newborn and manage the responsibilities of parenting - for the immediate and long-term future. We offer a network of home visitation services through the Healthy Families & Parents As Teachers programs across the state.

Other child abuse prevention programs, like parenting classes or parent support groups, offer education around child development while decreasing the isolation and frustration that many mothers and fathers experience. Some prevention programs target specific groups of parents - like teenage mothers - by offering life skills and child development classes while also providing child care so that the mother can finish high school while learning to be the best mom she can be for her baby. New Jersey offers a highly-recognized program, the Parent Linking Project, to offer such support in high schools around the state.

The well-being of a child is a shared responsibility. It's time we all take responsibility to recognize that not only do parents need some help - but New Jersey's children need advocates.

You can make a difference by visiting [www.preventchildabuse.nj.org](http://www.preventchildabuse.nj.org) or calling us at 1-800-CHIDREN.



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