

Children Most Vulnerable Victims Of Economic Climate

As the economy continues to take its toll on families across the country, we've heard lots of talk about big banks and major automakers. There's been concern for how shrinking resources will affect merchants who rely on the holiday shopping frenzy. Dialogue among friends turns to a comparative discussion of lost investments. But sadly, little attention is paid to the real victims of any economic struggle: the children.

The financial crisis affecting our state is challenging, if not unemploying, millions of mothers and fathers. The distress of any hardship inevitably has an effect on family dynamics, and thus, on the important relationship between a parent and a

child. Families are often left with few resources to nurture or care for children as they struggle to provide for their basic, concrete needs. In fact, during times of economic hardship and unemployment, child abuse and neglect rates often rise. The stress that flows from job loss or financial problems may push parents over the edge so their behaviors and interactions become harsh, or even abusive. Poverty is one of the strongest indicators of child maltreatment.

Raising a child is the toughest role one will ever face. It's a responsibility that often comes with no training, little preparation and limited support. It's also a job that will have a critical impact on the educational, eco-

nomical and health outcomes of a community. Especially in times of crisis, families need access to services that help them raise children who are nurtured, healthy and prepared to learn.

Child abuse CAN be prevented. Help ensure that children benefit from safe, caring homes by investing in programs that intervene with families in crisis before children are ever harmed. For more information about these services, and to learn how you can make a difference, visit www.preventchildabuse-nj.org or call 1-800-CHILDREN.

**Theresa Comprelli
McCutcheon, MSW
Prevent Child Abuse -
New Jersey, Inc.**

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