



News Release

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Preventing Child Abuse, Raising Awareness During COVID-19

WILMINGTON – During this COVID-19 public health emergency, when there are changes to families’ support systems and an increased risk of isolation, the Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families (DSCYF), is raising awareness of how to prevent, recognize and report child abuse and neglect.

Historically, April is recognized as Child Abuse Prevention Month and this year our mission is even more critical to protect and support strong, safe and resilient families.

“Families are under immense pressure and stress at this time. In addition to trying to protect their family during an unprecedented public health emergency, they have financial, educational and emotional issues to navigate that have been exacerbated by this pandemic. It’s on all of us to make sure they have the resources they need to weather this very trying time,” said **Josette Manning, Secretary of the Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families**. “I’m proud of the work of our Department and their dedication to Delaware families. They are working tirelessly – and creatively – to find ways to connect with families and make sure that they are supported and safe, and feel empowered. We can prevent child abuse and neglect by ensuring families have what they need to be successful. Anyone can call our child abuse and neglect hotline at 1-800-292-9582 or report online at iseethesigns.org 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We are here to provide support when families need it.”

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](http://CentersforDiseaseControlandPrevention) estimates that at least 1 in 7 children have experienced child abuse or neglect in the past year. During crisis situations such as this one, which has upended routines, reduced our physical connections, closed schools and workplaces, and halted activities, [experts say](#) it is important to foster support for families and encourage stress-reducing behaviors.

"The month of April marks Child Abuse Prevention Month, and serves as a reminder that every Delawarean has a role in preventing child abuse," said **Governor John Carney**. "While we are socially distancing and staying in our homes, it's important for us to recognize that there are many children in our state who don't feel comfortable in theirs. Please remember there is always a support network just one call or e-mail away, and share resources with those who may need them during this uncertain time. Thank you to all of the professionals who work tirelessly on this issue this month, and every month, in order to keep our children safe."

DSCYF, commonly known as the Delaware Children's Department, has made key changes to adapt to the COVID-19 crisis and continue to support the resiliency of families. To that end, DSCYF's **Division of Family Services** continues to meet with families and make connections, but now they utilize technology to do more virtual check-ins. They continue to make necessary home visits, but do so while taking precautions to protect themselves and the families we serve.

A key to preventing child abuse is ensuring that families feel empowered and supported. DSCYF's **Division of Prevention and Behavioral Health Services**, is also creatively connecting families to needed services during this time. For example, Family Crisis Therapists (FCTs) are utilizing virtual check-ins, connecting parents to resources like how to find rental assistance and unemployment benefits, making referrals to health services and delivering meals and other supplies. Our contracted Behavioral Health Consultant Program is coordinating wellness checks, participating in online school meetings and classes and providing prevention, early intervention, and therapeutic services for students and families.

Additional initiatives include the Promoting Safe and Stable Family Program, contracted in the community statewide, which is working to address long-term needs beyond the pandemic by helping families address some of the root causes of family stress, like financial trouble. The Fatherhood Initiative has provided virtual parenting education sessions and meetings, and is looking to provide and support virtual family game, meal and movie nights to foster connections. Another needed resource, Delaware Project LAUNCH – supporting families in the city of Wilmington – has initiated Connections Cafés utilizing Zoom to provide support, effective coping techniques, self-care tips and hands-on activities for both caregivers and their young children to address issues related to anxiety, stress, social isolation and relationship building.

"During Child Abuse Prevention Month, it is important to remember that we all have a role to play in keeping children safe. While maintaining a safe physical distance is critical right now, providing social support and maintaining connections with family and friends virtually is a great way to reduce stress and feelings of isolation that can lead to child maltreatment," said **Karen DeRasmo, Executive Director of Prevent Child Abuse Delaware**.

Delawareans can utilize DSCYF's online portal – iseethesigns.org – to submit online reports of suspected child abuse and neglect. Reporting online is simple: individuals can access iseethesigns.org on any mobile device or desktop computer. Individuals can always call the child abuse and neglect hotline **1-800-292-9582** to make a report of child abuse or neglect. These services are available 24/7, and reporters can choose to remain anonymous.

Together, we can make a difference in a child's life.

Additional Resources for Families

[Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting](#) – call **1-800-292-9582** or go to iseethesigns.org

Child Response Priority Hotline (mental health crisis help): **1-800-969-4357**

Crisis Text Line for Youth: **Text DE to 741-741**

[Prevent Child Abuse Delaware](#)

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