

# NEWS RELEASE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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**Child Abuse and Prevention Month in the Army  
Military cases on the decline, but parents must remain vigilant  
By Lisa R. Rhodes, staff writer  
Photos by Francis Gardler**

A four-year-old girl arrives at a Child Development Center here early one morning. A program technician assistant notices red marks on her legs that the parent did not report when the child was dropped off.

A five-year-old boy is left alone in a car with the engine running in front of the Commissary. His parent is running an errand to pick up a short list of groceries.

These two examples are the most common kind of alleged child abuse or neglect reported to the social work service department at the Kimbrough Ambulatory Center, according to Patricia Youle-Schoedel, the department's acting chief and supervisory social worker.

"Typically there are minor injuries to a child from excessive physical discipline, or when a child is left alone," said Youle-Schoedel.

When an alleged case of child abuse or neglect is reported on post, a myriad of social service and law enforcement agencies work together to protect the child from further harm, investigate whether the allegation is true and provide parents or caretakers with the supports they need.

If it is determined that a crime has been committed, law enforcement ensures that the perpetrator is arrested and formally charged.

Prevention works

This month, installations Army wide are sponsoring activities to educate parents about child abuse and neglect in order to prevent children and teenagers from becoming victims. Military family advocacy and social service experts said statistics show that over the past few years these prevention efforts have proven to be successful.

Parents or caretakers who need help managing stress and anger, caring for a child, or developing nonviolent discipline methods can receive counseling or take classes here on post.

Marilyn Keel, a program analyst in the Office of the Secretary of Defense's Family Advocacy Office, said that since 1998, the total number of substantiated incidents of child abuse in the armed services worldwide that have been reported to the Department of Defense's Family Advocacy Program has declined 14.4 percent.

"The decrease in our child abuse incidents may be explained in part by the strong support military families receive and the success of our prevention efforts," said Keel.

On post, the number of investigated child abuse or neglect cases reported to the social work service department at Kimbrough Ambulatory Center has also declined. In 1999, 62 cases were reported and investigated. In 2003, the number dropped to 49.

"In some ways there are more supports there at Fort Meade than in the community at large," said David Ladd, assistant director of Child Protective Services Investigations for Anne Arundel County. "I don't see the Fort Meade community as worse than the civilian community."

The Family Advocacy Program, part of the Army Community Service here, is responsible for developing education and training programs to prevent child abuse and neglect on post. This month FAP is sponsoring two special workshops for parents and teenagers to educate them about abuse, neglect and other social ills that put children and young people at risk for harmful behaviors.

On April 10, FAP is holding a free "Bridging the Gap" workshop from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at Club Meade for all Fort Meade parents and teenagers ages 13 to 19. Experts on topics ranging from alcohol and drug addiction and teen suicide to dating violence, sexually transmitted diseases and self-esteem will share the latest research and prevention methods in these fields. All young people who attend the all-day workshop must be accompanied by a parent. They will also receive a free backpack.

On April 12 and 13, FAP is sponsoring a free two-day "VIP Points Workshop" and brown bag lunch series on childhood behaviors, such as temper tantrums, which can trigger abuse for some parents and what parents can do to keep from losing control. The series is open to parents of toddlers and children age 3 to 4.

The April 12 workshop will be held at the Child Development Center II from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. The April 13 workshop will be held at the Child Development Center I during the same time schedule. Parents who attend both workshops will receive points towards discounts on child care costs on post.

Define abuse, neglect

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, each state is responsible for determining its own definitions of child abuse and neglect. These definitions must meet the federal minimum standards in the Child Abuse and Prevention Act of 1974.

In Maryland, a child is defined as an individual younger than 18 years old. The state defines "child abuse" as the physical injury, although not necessarily visible and/or the mental injury of a child as well as the sexual abuse of a child, regardless of whether the child has physical injuries.

The state defines "child neglect" as a failure to provide proper care and attention to a child, including leaving a child unattended, as well as the mental injury or the risk of substantial mental injury of a child.

The state defines abuse or neglect as perpetrated by a parent, caretaker, household, or family member. State law also holds that child abuse or neglect can occur under circumstances that indicate that a child's health or welfare is harmed or is at a substantial risk of being harmed.

The U.S. Department of Human Services defines physical injury as any action ranging from minor bruises to severe fractures or death. This can include punching, beating, kicking, biting, shaking, throwing, choking, burning, or hitting a child with a hand, stick, strap or other object. These injuries are considered abuse regardless of whether or not the caretaker intended to hurt the child.

Sexual abuse can include a parent or caretaker's fondling of a child's genitals, penetration, incest, rape, sodomy, indecent exposure and commercial exploitation through prostitution or the production of pornographic materials.

Emotional abuse (mental injury) can include any pattern of behavior that impairs a child's emotional development or sense of self-worth. This can range from constant criticism, threats, or rejection to withholding love, support, or guidance.

Military incidents of child abuse and neglect are on the decline, but all parents must remain vigilant. The U.S. Department of Human Service reports that on average, three children die every day as a result of child abuse or neglect.

#### Stress and risk

Alleged child abuse or neglect is a serious matter and it does not occur in a vacuum. Research has found that abuse or neglect usually happens when risk factors exist in a child's family.

Karen Ganong, director of the Child Development Center I, said the stress working parents, both single and married, face is often a factor in incidents where children have been exposed to harmful behaviors.

"Little folks are completely dependent on you. You're tired, but you still have to respond," said Ganong. She said busy work schedules often add to the pressure many parents feel in trying to maintain a home.

This pressure can limit a parent's ability to properly care for a child's well-being, such as providing a clean home, healthy meals or proper personal hygiene. Parents also may not be able to respond to a child's needs in a nonviolent or nonthreatening manner.

Martila Seals, a family advocacy program specialist at ACS who organized this month's child abuse and prevention activities, agrees.

She said stress can cause parents to react inappropriately and unintentionally hurt a child. "When parents come across a stressful situation, the solution is not to hit a child," she said.

Seals said many parents are often unaware of how a child develops and what behaviors are to be expected at what age. For example, she said new parents may not know crying spells and temper tantrums are not unusual in infants and toddlers and that it is dangerous to shake young children in an effort to make them stop.

Seals said parents may also have unreasonable expectations for how their children should behave or perform in school. They may not know how to deal with their frustration about their perception of their children's abilities.

When it comes to discipline, Ganong said many parents use the same methods that their parents used. But some traditional forms of discipline are not "the most desirable for children," she said.

Youle-Schoedel said some parents may use a belt, electric cord or switch to discipline their children and they may not realize that such methods, coupled with excessive force, can result in physical injury.

She also said parents may also not know that they should not leave young children alone under any circumstances. Sometimes teenagers are still in need of supervision.

Military families, however, face particular stresses. Youle-Schoedel said deployments and the lack of family support near installations can make raising children difficult. "You have no break. You're 'on' all the time," she said.

### Quick action

The state requires every doctor, educator, child care worker, human service provider, or police officer to report suspected child abuse or neglect to the local department of social services and/or law enforcement agency.

Army Regulation 608-18 states that "every Soldier, employee and member of the military community should be encouraged to report information about known or suspected cases of spouse and child abuse."

On post, the military police are usually the first to receive a report of alleged child abuse or neglect. The response of the MPs is immediate.

The MPs contact investigators with the Directorate of Public Safety and then a chain of notification begins that includes the Criminal Investigation Division here, CPS, ACS and the social work service division at Kimbrough. These agencies work together to find out exactly what happened and what steps should be taken to protect the child from further harm.

The immediate concern of all the law enforcement and social service professionals is to ensure the safety of the child. Children who are alleged to have been abused or neglected are examined by a doctor at Kimbrough. The doctor makes a diagnosis of any injuries or maltreatment and provides a recommendation as to whether there is any medical evidence to suggest abuse or neglect.

The doctor's findings are part of the extensive investigations that are conducted. If the child is old enough, military, social work and social service investigators will question the child as well as the parents or caretakers. Depending on the allegations, other family members, neighbors or community members may be interviewed.

The Case Review Committee, a nine-member board comprised of medical, social service, legal and religious professionals here and currently led by Youle-Schoedel, determines for the military whether child abuse or neglect has in fact occurred.

If a service member is the alleged perpetrator, Youle-Schoedel said the service member's commander is notified. Chief Investigator Craig Williams of Military Police Investigations at DPS said military investigators use the doctor's recommendation to determine whether a crime has been committed. Williams said investigators do consult with the Staff Judge Advocate about the case. Williams said if the service member has committed a crime, he or she is arrested and formally charged.

Ladd said CPS determines whether child abuse or neglect has occurred for the state. Youle-Schoedel and Ladd said the military and the state may come to different conclusions, but they often work together to determine what kind of treatment is best for the child, parent or caretaker.

Youle-Schoedel said once her department receives a report of alleged child abuse or neglect, social workers develop a safety plan for the child and propose a treatment plan for the family.

The Case Review Committee then approves the treatment plan. The service member can enter treatment voluntarily or he/she can be mandated into treatment by their commander.

Williams and Ladd are quick to point out that not every report of alleged child abuse or neglect is valid. Ladd said false reports can ruin a person's reputation. The military and state both work hard to ensure that allegations are thoroughly investigated before they are substantiated.

## Helping families

The social work services department provides individual and group counseling for parents, children and teenagers in families where an incident of child abuse or neglect has occurred, or where young people are at risk for harmful behaviors.

Youle-Schoedel said counseling can include helping parents manage their anger and adopt nonviolent forms of discipline, to helping teenagers develop healthy self-esteem. Play therapy is offered to children ages 4 and up.

FAP offers stress management, child development and parenting classes. Once a month, FAP also offers Babese Boot Camp, a seminar for expectant and new parents to educate them about maternal nutrition, infant care and development and shaken baby syndrome.

The family advocacy and social service experts said the key to keeping children and youths safe is for parents to make time for themselves and forge lasting family bonds.

"I don't think we spend enough time teaching parents how important they are," said Ganong. "To take care of themselves, too, so they can be role models." Ganong said busy parents should find time to simply chill out \_ read a book, listen to music. "If the well is dry, we have nothing else to give," she said.

"Play with your child, spend time with your child ... have dinner together," said Ladd, noting that when parents establish a strong relationship with their children, children are more likely to listen and discipline issues can be more easily resolved. "A child will do almost anything to avoid losing that relationship," said Ladd.

Seals said child abuse prevention is an issue no family should avoid. "It child abuse and neglect is not a joke. It's real. It can happen to anyone regardless of rank, color, gender, or socioeconomic status," she said. "Be aware and do what you can to prevent it. That's what this month is all about."

To report all suspected child and spouse abuse to the Military Police, call 677-6622. For more details on child abuse prevention, call Army Community Services at 677-5590.

How do you know when to help?

How do you know if an adult is at risk for harming a child? How do you know if a child's welfare is in danger?

There are risk factors and warning signs for child abuse and neglect, according to Prevent Child Abuse America, a group that works to promote and implement child abuse prevention efforts at the national and local levels. If you recognize any of these signals and believe a child is in danger or a parent needs adult support, contact the Military Police at 301-677-6622/23. Your involvement can save a child's life and ensure a family's well-being.

### Parental Risk Factors

Child abuse and neglects happens in families of all socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. But children in families where parents display the following characteristics face a greater risk of being harmed.

Parents who:

- Seem to be having economic, housing or personal problems
- Are isolated from their relatives or community
- Have a hard time controlling their anger or dealing with stress
- Are dealing with physical or mental health issues
- Abuse alcohol, drugs, or both
- Appear uninterested in the care, nourishment or safety of their children.

### Child Warning Signs

Children who are abused or neglected usually display a change in behavior long before any one can see any physical signs of maltreatment. Children who display the following characteristics may need a helping hand.

Children who:

- Are nervous around adults
- Are aggressive towards adults or other children
- Are unable to stay awake or concentrate for long periods of time
- Show sudden and dramatic changes in their personality or everyday activities
- Are unnaturally interested in sex
- Have frequent and unexplained bruises or injuries

- Have low self-esteem

- Have poor hygiene

The above information was taken from the Prevent Child Abuse America Web site,  
[www.preventchildabuse.org](http://www.preventchildabuse.org).