



Kentucky can...

Strengthen Kentucky's efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unique stress to families with children – juggling child care, helping students manage online learning, fewer options for obtaining social support, and many facing lost income to cover basic expenses. Kentucky has made strides in recent years to improve the foster care system for children who have experienced abuse or neglect, **yet more can be done to prevent maltreatment and strengthen families, especially when considering a strong, equitable recovery that reaches all Kentuckians.**

When children have experienced — or are at risk of experiencing — abuse or neglect, investing in programs that target prevention or family preservation can serve as a catalyst to safely keep families together or reunite families.

Kentucky can continue to invest in the following programs to keep kids safe:

- **Kentucky Strengthening Ties and Empowering Parents (K-STEP) and the Sobriety Treatment and Recovery Team (START) programs.** Substance abuse is a major factor for over half of children removed from their homes by child protective services due to abuse or neglect, especially infants and toddlers. K-STEP and START are proven to help parents achieve sobriety while safely caring for their children.
- **Home visitation programs.** Parenting is tough, and the lack of knowledge of how to handle typical child behaviors can make it more stressful. When parents enter evidence-informed home visitation programs, like the Health Access Nurturing Development Services (HANDS) program, early in the pregnancy, the effects are dramatic—increases in adequate prenatal care, lower rates of preterm birth and low birth weight, and lowered incidence of child abuse. Continued supports for the HANDS in-home visitation program ensures this critical service is available to new parents across Kentucky.
- **Forensic services for children who experience maltreatment.** When child abuse or neglect occurs, children need access to the best care in order to recover and heal and for their case to be investigated. The forensic pediatric teams based out of Kentucky's medical schools, as well as the 15 child advocacy centers across the commonwealth, rely on state funding to provide critical services for all children who have experienced maltreatment. An increase in funding to support these programs will allow for our most vulnerable children to get access to the services they need.
- **Safety net programs to meet families' basic needs.** Ensure that safety net programs, including financial assistance for basic needs, such as food and health care, are not modified in ways that keep children in need of these supports from receiving them.

Quick facts about child abuse and neglect in Kentucky:

- Due to fewer interactions of children with adults outside of the home during the pandemic, reports of suspected child abuse or neglect dropped substantially compared to the previous year
- All Kentucky adults are mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect
- While family stressors are a risk factor for child abuse and neglect, supportive social networks and community services for parents work to protect kids

For every **\$1** spent on the START program, Kentucky avoids **\$2.22** in out-of-home care costs

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Child abuse and neglect is a community issue, and we all can play a role in prevention.

Too many Kentucky children are victims of child abuse or neglect each year. Many policy and practice changes are needed to prevent child maltreatment.

Among the many commonsense policy changes that Kentucky can make, the **Blueprint for Kentucky's Children** advocates for the following:

- **Modify mandated reporting law to disallow “chain of command” procedures** within public and private agencies. Keeping children safe is an adult responsibility. If maltreatment occurs, it must be reported accurately and in a timely manner directly to the proper authorities.
- **Remove the clergy-penitent privilege exemption** in the child maltreatment reporting law to ensure that if abuse is disclosed or suspected by any adult, that abuse is reported to the proper authorities.

Suspected child abuse and neglect should be reported to the Cabinet for Health and Family Services, local law enforcement, the Kentucky State Police, or the County or Commonwealth Attorney's Office.

Call 1-877-KY-SAFE-1

Only **38%** of children who have experienced sexual abuse disclose that abuse.



- **Strengthen the current statute of limitations timeframes** for misdemeanor physical and sexual abuse offenses to accommodate for delayed abuse disclosure. If a child experiences abuse, research shows that many wait years, some well into adulthood, to disclose their abuse.

Blueprint for Kentucky's Children Solution:

Strengthen Kentucky's efforts in child abuse and neglect prevention by investing in programs that keep kids safe and families together and making commonsense changes to state law that would protect kids and help kids who have experienced maltreatment heal.