

APRIL IS NATIONAL CHILD ABUSE AWARENESS MONTH

This month we will share information about how each of you has a role in helping to prevent abuse from harming a child in the Copper River Valley. Children depend on the adults around them to keep them safe and to help them when they are hurt. ALL our children need an opportunity to reach their full potential as adults by having a safe and nurturing environment with caregivers they can depend on for love, guidance and respect.

The Alaska Children's Alliance, the Copper River Basin Child Advocacy Center and the Indian Child Welfare workers for Tribes in the valley have come together to provide information and ideas about how you can prevent child abuse.

When children are nurtured, they can grow up to be happy and healthy adults. But when they lack an attachment to a caring adult, receive inconsistent nurturing, or experience harsh discipline, the consequences can affect their lifelong health, wellbeing, and relationships with others.

What is child abuse?

Child abuse or neglect often takes place in the home at the hands of a person the child knows well—a parent, relative, babysitter, or friend of the family. There are four major types of child maltreatment. Although any of the forms may be found separately, they often occur together. Each State is responsible for establishing its own definitions of child abuse and neglect that meet Federal minimum standards. Alaska law considers the following:

- Neglect is failure to provide for a child's basic needs – failing to provide good nutrition, failing to supervise a child or leaving a child to make decisions they are not old enough to handle, failing to provide medical care, failing to provide safe housing or other needs that allow a child to grow and develop normally
- Physical abuse is physical injury as a result of hitting, kicking, shaking, burning, pulling hair, choking or otherwise physically harming a child.
- Sexual abuse is any situation where a child is used for sexual gratification. This may include indecent exposure, fondling, rape, or commercial exploitation through prostitution or the production of pornographic materials.

- Emotional abuse is any pattern of behavior that impairs a child's emotional development or sense of self-worth, including constant criticism, threats, and rejection. In Alaska, children who are in homes where there is domestic violence are considered emotionally abused.

Why does child abuse occur?

Child abuse and neglect affect children of every age, race, and family income level. However, research has identified many factors relating to the child, family, community, and society that are associated with an increased risk of child abuse and neglect. Studies also have shown that when multiple risk factors are present, the risk is greater. At greater risk are young mothers and fathers unprepared for the responsibilities of raising a child; overwhelmed single parents with little support; and families placed under stress by poverty, divorce, or a child's disability. Some families are stressed by worries about housing, employment, health, substance abuse, mental health, domestic violence, or other problems. Some are simply unaware of how to care for their children's basic needs. These circumstances, combined with the inherent challenges of raising children, can result in otherwise well-intentioned parents causing their children harm or neglecting their needs.

All of our children DESERVE and NEED love and respect. IT is our job as adults to make sure our children are safe from physical and sexual abuse, that they are not exposed to violence, and expected to handle situations that are beyond their developmental ability, or are emotionally traumatized.

[INSERT SPECIAL SEGMENT INFORMATION HERE]

Closing for each Segment

If you believe a child you know has been abused call OCS at 1-800-352-8934 or Alaska State Troopers in Glenallen at 822-3263.

This message is brought to you by the Alaska Children's Alliance, funded by a grant from the US Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime. The Alaska Children's Alliance is a non-profit coalition of established and developing child advocacy centers dedicated to improving community responses to child maltreatment. Child Advocacy Center provides a child-friendly environment that allows for agencies to work together when there are allegations of child abuse.

Segment #1

Governor Parnell issued a Proclamation making April “Child Abuse Awareness Month” in Alaska

Read Governor Parnell’s Proclamation

Recorded by radio station staff.

Segment # 2 - Stay Alert for Signs of Sexual Abuse in Children

Recorded by Marce Simeon, ICWA worker for Native Village of Tazlina

Segment #3 -Teach Kids To Tell

Recorded by Ted Sandford, Cheesh’na Tribal member & Behavioral Health Aide

Segment #4 - How Are Sexual Abuse and Substance Abuse Linked?

Recorded by Michelle Bayless, Tribal Administrator for Native Village of Kluti-Kaah

Segment #1

Child Abuse Prevention and Awareness Month

Effective Date: Sunday, April 1st, 2012

WHEREAS, every child is entitled to be loved, cared for, secure, and protected from verbal, sexual, emotional, and physical abuse, exploitation, and neglect. It is the responsibility of our society to protect every child's inalienable right to life and liberty; and

WHEREAS, child abuse continues to be one of our nation's most serious public health problems. Studies have shown that victims of childhood abuse are more likely to suffer from obesity, heart disease, and engage in destructive behaviors with drugs, alcohol, and others; and

WHEREAS, social acceptance of myths about child abuse silences victims and encourages public denial about the true nature of this tragic epidemic; and

WHEREAS, 70 percent of all reported sexual crimes in the United States involve children. One in four girls and one in six boys are sexually abused before the age of 18, and one in five children is solicited sexually while on the internet; and

WHEREAS, child abuse and neglect can be reduced by making sure every family is safe, secure, and has the support needed to raise their children in a healthy environment. By providing a safe and nurturing environment for our children, free of domestic violence, abuse, and neglect, we can ensure that Alaska's children grow to their full potential as leaders, helping to secure the future of this great state and nation; and

WHEREAS, this month, we emphasize the importance of understanding the devastating problem of child abuse and neglect, and commit to learn more about the behavioral and physical signs of possible abuse.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Sean Parnell, Governor of the State of Alaska, do hereby proclaim April 2012 as:

Child Abuse Prevention and Awareness Month

in Alaska, and call upon all Alaskans to join me in dedicating their energies to cherishing and protecting Alaska's children and supporting our families, ultimately strengthening the communities in which we live.

Dated: February 14, 2012

Segment #2

Stay Alert for Possible Signs of Sexual Abuse in Children

“Sex offenders only rarely sneak into a house in the middle of the night. More often they come through the front door in the day, as friends and behaviours, priests, principals, teachers, doctors and coaches. They are invited into our homes time after time...”

Anna C. Salter, PhD, Sex Offender Specialist and Author

Child sexual abuse can include a variety of touching and non-touching behaviours. Many of these behaviours do not leave any physical signs so we cannot reliably tell when a child is being sexually abused. Some of the physical and behaviour changes listed below can be present in cases of sexual abuse. However, sexual abuse may or may not be the source of those changes. For the most part though, these changes are signs that a child or teen is under stress or has experienced some sort of trauma. In any case, when you spot any of these changes, it is a good idea to take them seriously and try to understand what is causing them.

Physical Changes

Any irritation, abrasions, swelling, skin tears, bleeding or infection of the child's private parts, or any unexplained injuries around the mouth, should be brought to the immediate attention of the child's physician. Confirmation of a sexually transmitted disease in a child is a strong sign of sexual abuse.

Headaches, stomach pain, loss of appetite, and sleeping problems are some of the ways children may respond physically to the anxiety, confusion, anger, fear and shame that can be brought on by sexual abuse. These physical symptoms, however, can also be associated with many other stresses that children experience as a result of family or school problems so don't immediately conclude that sexual abuse has occurred if you see them.

Behavior Changes

Changes in a child's or teen's behaviour can sometimes be clues that sexual abuse has occurred. However, just like physical signs, these changes can also be brought on by other stresses and events. Again, there is no foolproof checklist of signs that will flag for you whether a child has been sexually abused. Still, vigilant parents and caretakers should be aware of some of the behaviours that have been reported in children who have been previously sexually abused.

Have you seen these behaviours in children?

- Expressed unwillingness or fear to be left in the care of a particular person or to play with a particular child;
- Change in the child's behaviour when a particular person is present, e.g. a usually outgoing child becomes quiet or withdrawn or an easygoing child becomes agitated and difficult to manage;
- The use of new words to describe genitalia or sexual behaviour;

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- Child is obsessive about wanting to see or touch another child or adults private areas and is difficult to distract or re-direct to more age appropriate play;
- Attempting to engage other children in sexual behaviours or using toys or dolls to act out sexual acts or scenarios;
- Having money, new clothes, CDs or other personal items and you are unaware how the child or teen received these and from whom;
- Discomfort or reluctance in giving details about time spent with another adult or child.

If you do observe these signs and are concerned OR if you believe that your own child, or any child might have been sexually abused, please call OCS at 1-855-352-8934 or Alaska State Troopers in Glennallen at 822-3263.

You can also find information about child abuse at these web pages

www.akchildrensalliance.com

www.onewithcourage.org

<http://www.enoughabuse.org/>

Segment #3

Teach Children—It's Okay To Say 'No' And To Tell if Something Happens

- Don't force children to hug, touch, or kiss anyone if they don't want to
- Teach children that they have the right to say 'no' to any unwanted touch
- Praise children when they say what they want from others
- Praise children when they say 'no'
- Teach children to recognize their 'uh-oh' feelings
- Teach children a word or phrase they can use when they don't want touch
- Teach children the difference between good, bad, and uncomfortable touch
- Hang posters with child-friendly messages in visible places throughout the community
- Talk to children about not putting up with abuse – let them know it is not ok to be hurt or scared
- Talk with children about who they can go to if they need to tell about any kind of abuse, especially sexual abuse
- Tell children about safe and unsafe people in the community
- Teach children the difference between telling to get someone in trouble and telling to keep themselves or someone else safe
- Explain about secrets and tell children that they should always tell a safe or trusted adult if someone asks them to keep an uncomfortable secret
- Teach privacy and encourage children to use privacy when needed
- Tell children that they may like a person but not the way that person touches them. It's okay to ask or tell someone to stop touching.
- Tell children that they do not have to listen to an adult who tells them to do something that they know is wrong.

If you do observe these signs and are concerned that a child you know might have been abused, please call OCS at 1-855-352-8934 or Alaska State Troopers – Glenallen at 822-3263.

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Segment #4

How Are Child Sexual Abuse And Substance Abuse Linked?

- Abusers often use alcohol and drugs to reduce inhibitions and allow themselves to abuse, making excuses of their behavior based on the alcohol or drug use.
- Abusers often give alcohol or drugs to the children they want to abuse.
- Abusers often choose vulnerable children to abuse, including children with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders.
- Children often use alcohol and drugs to cope with feelings after they have been abused.
- People who have been abused are more likely to become dependent on alcohol and drugs than people who have not been abused.
- People who are abusing substances are more likely to be exposed to
 - additional experiences of trauma.
- Using alcohol or drugs does not make a person sexually abuse a child.
- Obtaining treatment for substance abuse problems will not stop the
 - problem of sexual abuse.
- Some abusers have Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders. This can make treatment more difficult to find, and the person who abuses more complex to help.
- People who abuse children often look for victims who are not supervised. One way that they do this is to find children whose parents have difficulties with alcohol or drug use. They may befriend the parents in order to abuse their children when the parents are intoxicated.