

Poverty and Child Neglect

Poverty is the single best predictor of child abuse and neglect.¹ This is not to say that all poor parents abuse or neglect their children, and certainly not that only poor parents abuse or neglect their children. It is simply to say that the connection between poverty and what is labeled neglect has not gotten enough attention.²

Poverty contributes to maltreatment and maltreatment to poverty

Rutledge Hutson of the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) describes three basic ways of looking at the complex relationship between poverty and neglect.

“Children cannot prosper unless their parents do.”

— *Douglas W. Nelson*
Annie E. Casey Foundation

1. Poverty and the lack of resources associated with it may prevent parents from adequately caring for their children. They may have the desire, but not the means, to provide sufficient supervision, child care or basic needs, and must therefore make difficult decisions between competing needs.
2. The stress of poverty may serve as the straw that broke the camels' back. Anxious or stressed parents may have a harder time coping with their children's needs or behavior, sometimes lashing out in response.
3. Underlying conditions such as substance abuse, mental health issues or domestic violence, may interfere with a parent's ability to hold down a job and to care for children. Picture the mother who was exposed to violence at an early age and is now in an unhealthy relationship of her own. She uses drugs or alcohol to help her cope. These factors prevent her from reliably attending work, making her unable to care for her children physically, and hindering her desire and ability to care for them emotionally.

Poverty and the neglected child

Poverty affects the child who is neglected in educational, emotional, psychological and physical ways. Children living

in poverty may exhibit very visible signs of neglect. They may have poor hygiene, poor health or clothing that does not fit well or protect them from the elements. They may have a high rate of absenteeism from school, or may

have parents who fail to pick them on time or show interest in their educational needs.

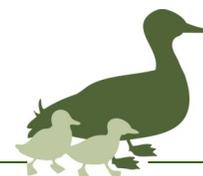
Other signs of neglect may be more subtle or harder to define as symptoms.

Children who

are neglected at home may not receive the guidance and instruction that other children receive. This can manifest itself in a lack of manners or a lack of understanding of basic behavioral expectations. They model the behaviors they have learned at home, or they learn the hard way—through criticism or teasing from others for not knowing things that are commonly understood for their age group. If they do not find acceptance with their peers, they may surround themselves with people who will accept them, even when these people are not the best influences.

Most importantly, children who are neglected often do not receive the attention, love, respect and guidance that all children need. The lack of nurturing and acceptance, more than the lack of resources, can contribute to a child's poor sense of self worth.³ This in turn contributes to a host of lifelong challenges, including their own future health, well-being and poverty.

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PROGRAM NEWS

CTF Participates in National Programs

Prevent Child Abuse America

The Arkansas Children's Trust Fund has been designated a provisional chapter of Prevent Child Abuse America.

Prevent Child Abuse America is a national organization dedicated to the prevention of child abuse and neglect. As such, they develop consistent messaging about the prevention of child maltreatment, provide national leadership on the development of evidence-based public policy on children and families, and promote actions that empower individuals and groups to become involved in individual and systemic change. In addition to working at the national level, PCAA works with a network of state chapters to share their message and influence change.

As a member of the PCAA network, the Children's Trust Fund will have access to many helpful resources, which can in turn be shared with local organizations and individuals around the state. Many of these resources are available on the PCAA website at www.preventchildabuse.org.



Healthy Families America

The Children's Trust Fund is currently working toward multi-site accreditation with Healthy Families America, or HFA. HFA is a nationally recognized evidence-based home visiting program model. The model ensures that best practice standards are used to provide what are considered the "critical elements", while allowing programs the flexibility to develop and deliver services that best meet the needs of their communities.

Upon completing the accreditation process, programs funded by the Children's Trust Fund will have the confidence that they are implementing the critical elements of an effective home visiting program. They will also become part of a national network of quality programs, where they will have access to training and technical assistance and joint grant and research opportunities.



APEN Announces 2012 Conference Dates

The Arkansas Parenting Education Network has announced that its next conference will be held September 24-26, 2012 in Hot Springs, Arkansas.

The event will be called the 14th Annual Arkansas Conference for Parenting Education and Home Visitation. The name change reflects an increased focus on home visitation as a delivery strategy for parenting education.

The change is also reflective of a change in how the conference will be funded. The previous focus on parental involvement was supported through funding from the US and

Arkansas Departments of Education. Those funds have been replaced by a federal grant to expand home visiting in Arkansas.

Topics of interest to parental involvement personnel will still be offered if suggested. To suggest a topic or presenter for the conference, or to submit a workshop proposal of your own, please watch your mail and email, as well as our website, for the Call for Presentations.

The APEN website is best accessed from a link on the Children's Trust Fund website at www.arkansasctf.org.

Winter-tainment for Young Children

Maybe your child is already tired of her Christmas gifts, or maybe you're just counting the days until she can play outside. The good news is that there are plenty of simple, inexpensive activities for parents of young children to combat boredom during long days spent inside. A few favorite suggestions:

1. Gather up old magazines and catalogs. Preschoolers can practice cutting out favorite pictures and gluing them onto scrap paper or other pages. Younger children can tear the pictures and practice gluing as well.
2. Provide pasta shapes, cut up straws, buttons, etc. and yarn or string for making bracelets and necklaces.
3. Put pictures your child has colored in an envelope and mail them. If you can't think of anyone who would be delighted to receive your child's artwork, address the envelope to your child. In a few days, he will receive his own surprise in the mail.
4. Squirt a bit of dish soap in a large pot or basin of hot water. Give kids a small cloth or an old toothbrush and as many small plastic toys and figures as you can find. Children who are old enough to know not to put things in their mouths can also be given the job of "polishing pennies".
5. Let kids sort, mix, match and stack your plastic storage and microwave containers. They are casually exposed to

basic math concepts, and you hopefully end up with an organized cabinet where all of the containers have a corresponding lid!

6. Collect empty cereal boxes, paper tubes and plastic containers. They can be used as blocks for building kid-size forts and towers before recycling.
7. Clean out your closet. Let your kids play dress up before you pack everything off to the donation center.
8. Make a Job Jar using small strips of paper and a colorfully decorated can or jar. On each strip of paper, write a simple job that your child is capable of doing. When your child needs a distraction, er job, have him select from the jar. Strips can be returned and used again and again.

Job Jar Ideas

Clean the refrigerator or dishwasher door with a wet wipe
Fold washcloths or match sock pairs
Stack books to be put on shelves
Use a basket or bucket to gather up (whatever toy seems to get scattered around the most)
Take care of a pet
Water plants with a spray bottle

And for Infants

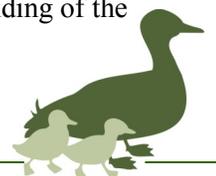
Have you ever considered how much of your baby's time is directed by you, and how much is left to him or her?

Babies are hard-wired to absorb all sorts of information. Would it surprise you to know that much of this time should be solitary, because figuring out the world is not something that can easily be done when distracted by others' agendas.

The benefits of stimulation on infant development are often taught and discussed. The importance of private time for parents is also well understood. The importance of private time for baby, however, is often overlooked in the eagerness of adults to entertain or teach.

This is not to say that baby should be left alone all day to care for herself. Of course your baby's safety and well-being are always a priority. It is simply to say that you do not have to make it your business to continually entertain or stimulate your baby.

Instead, concentrate on creating a stimulating *environment* for your baby. Placed in a safe spot and left to explore their own bodies or the objects around them, or to observe conversations and actions while you go about your own business, your baby will engage in the kind of solitary exploration that is so important to his developing understanding of the world around him, and his place in it.



RESOURCES

NOTABLE DATES

Fun and interesting dates to plan a parent group meeting or family activity around:

February 26	Tell a Fairy Tale Day
February 29	Leap Day
March 9	Popcorn Lover's Day
March 12	Plant a Flower Day
March 15	Incredible Kid Day
March 22	Goof Off Day
March 28	Something on a Stick Day
April 2	Peanut Butter and Jelly Day
April 14	Look Up at the Sky Day
April 23	Take a Chance Day
May 8	No Socks Day

Scholastic Book Grants

The Scholastic Book Grants Program is a corporate in-kind giving initiative that provides high-quality reading materials to children in need. Small-scale (unsolicited) donations of 500-1,000 books are awarded to 501c3 or 170c literacy organizations. To read the policies and procedures for unsolicited donations, and to download a donation application, visit <http://bit.ly/uktlhz>.

Fathering Profile

The fathering profile is a self-assessment tool for dads to get and give feedback about their role as fathers. The survey takes less than 10 minutes to complete, and is designed for dads who may or may not be in a relationship with their child's mother. Upon completion of the survey, participants will receive feedback on their assessment, as well as resources to help them focus and strengthen their commitment to being a good father. The profile can be found under "programs" at www.fathering.com.

Poverty, cont...

Reducing poverty/redefining neglect

Child protective cases often originate with reports of neglect. It is important then to understand whether a finding of abuse is warranted, as in a case of intentional maltreatment, or if the problems are poverty-related. If neglect is the result of a lack of resources, removal of the child is not a solution that benefits the child or helps the family.² What has been shown to reduce the number of cases is access to concrete support services to address the underlying needs of the family. Better yet, access to support before they are in crisis is considered best for families and children.

Child welfare advocates and policy experts agree that a continuum of services for children and families is needed.¹ While development of such a system is generally considered the responsibility of state and local organizations, the importance of providing support to families before they are in crisis can not be overstated.^{1,2}

1. Hutson, Rutledge. "Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity." *Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity*. Exclusive Commentary, 26 May 2012. <<http://spotlightonpoverty.org>>.

Home Visiting Families in Poverty

The examples of families in crisis described on page one are representative of families participating in the THRIVE home visiting program and other community-based programs. These programs often play an important role in helping families find the kind of support that reduces both poverty and neglect.

THRIVE home visitors work to help families with both short-term needs and long-term goals. Referring them to services such as income supports, quality child care, food assistance, housing assistance, and health care can mitigate the present hardship of poverty. Planning for education and job training can provide a way out for both parents and later, their children. At the same time, parents are learning skills and strategies that increase their ability to cope with stress and gaining appropriate and effective parenting skills.

This strategy of increasing parents' capacity to care for of their children's needs, whether material or emotional and psychological, can reduce both poverty and neglect, resulting in a better quality of life for all families.

2. "Answering Fundamental Questions: The Connections and Myths of Poverty and Child Neglect." *Voice Magazine* Winter 2008: 5-6. Print.
3. Lytle, Carmen. "Poverty and the Neglected Child." *Examiner.com*. Relationships, 2 Sept. 2009. <<http://examiner.com>>.

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