

CHILD, *Continued from Page B1*

resources to parents to allow them to be better for themselves and for their children.”

Arterburn explained that whenever a child is removed from a home, it is always the goal to ultimately return the child to the parents after rehabilitation of some kind, in order to provide a better home for the child, with social services providing every resource possible to achieve that goal.

“(Child abuse in Allen County is) a much bigger issue than the layperson would think,” Arterburn said. “We’re not just talking about physical abuse here, we’re also talking about mental abuse and emotional abuse. Most people think of emotional abuse as a parent being derogatory to a child, yelling at a child, calling the child names, exposing children to things like domestic violence between the parents.”

According to the Lexington Court Appointed Special Advocates, or CASA, utilizing data from the 2020 census, 2021 saw a state average of 15 cases of child abuse per 1,000 children.

During this study, CASA determined that Barren County saw 288 cases of neglect and abuse among 4,735 children, with a rate of 27.9.

For comparison, Allen County saw 132 cases of neglect and abuse among 10,454 children, with a rate of 27.5, Butler County saw 65 cases of neglect and abuse among 2,808 children, with a rate of 23.1, Cumber-

land County saw 29 cases of neglect and abuse among 1,236 children, with a rate of 23.5.

Furthermore, Edmonson County saw 59 cases of neglect and abuse among 2,158 children, with a rate of 27.3, Hart County saw 93 cases of neglect and abuse among 4,745 children, with a rate of 19.6, Metcalfe County saw 77 cases of neglect and abuse among 2,407 children, with a rate of 32.0, and Russell County saw 71 cases of neglect and abuse among 4,084 children, with a rate of 17.4.

Arterburn added that, for her, a great deal of the mental and emotional abuse comes from unclean homes, with children not receiving the proper hygiene, or coming from homes infested with bugs or vermin, with them being isolated from their peers at school because of poor hygiene.

“If something looks bad, tell somebody,” Arterburn said. “Like when you walk into an airport, if something looks suspicious, go get TSA. If you see a child that has bruising, and you see a child that comes to school every day with matted hair, dirty clothes, very unkempt and things aren't changing and you're seeing a cycle, tell somebody.”

Arterburn explained that if a child knows that they are being abused, they should speak with people that they trust, like teachers or any other staff at the school.

“It’s hard for a child

when they’re in an abusive family situation, because at the end of the day, they love their parents,” Arterburn expressed. “Their parents may not be their safe space, but they’re supposed to be their safe space, and they don’t want to get their parents in trouble. It’s very hard for children a lot of times to come out and say, ‘my parents are doing something wrong.’”

In the state of Kentucky, there are mandatory reporting laws, in which if a child reports they are being abused, those informed are mandated to report it to law enforcement.

In terms of reducing parental stressors, several organizations can help with doing so, such as social services groups.

Holly Francis, the office supervisor at Allen County Social Services, which investigates child abuse and neglect, and conducts investigations to determine whether services are needed for the family, works with children in the home or children in foster care.

“With regards to what services we offer, (connecting to reduce parental stress) provides information to parents,” Francis said. “I know that the state does that, and in Child Abuse Prevention Month, they filter some of that information out online, but also, there’s other methods as far as depending on what the family’s needs are, and where that stress is coming from.”

Francis explained that some stressors that contribute include financial struggles, finding ways to parent a child with autism, issues with discipline or technology, and any other stressor that comes from raising a child.

“Parental stress would be related to the child, and parenting the child, whereas regular stress could be work-related stress, or things of that nature,” Francis clarified.

Francis explained that finding the root cause of the stress and tackling the issue on a case-by-case basis is the best way to reduce these stresses.

“(Too much of this stress) can lead to a breakdown of families in regards to communication,” Francis said. “Sometimes it can lead to issues with the children behaviorally, emotionally, and ultimately, sometimes it can lead to abuse or neglect.”

Francis explained that if there is abuse or neglect going on, reports can be made to the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services and law enforcement, and if it meets the accepted criteria, their organization will investigate to make that determination.

If you suspect a child is being abused or neglected, please contact the statewide Child Abuse Hotline toll free at (877) 597-2331 to make a report.



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Ten Things You Can Do to Prevent Child Abuse

- Volunteer your time. Get involved with other parents in your community. Help vulnerable children and their families. Start a playgroup.
- Discipline your children thoughtfully. Never discipline your child when you are upset. Give yourself time to calm down. Remember that discipline is a way to teach your child. Use privileges to encourage good behavior and timeouts to help your child regain control.
- Examine your behavior. Abuse is not just physical. Both words and actions can inflict deep, lasting wounds. Be a nurturing parent. Use your actions to show children and other adults that conflicts can be settled without hitting or yelling.
- Educate yourself and others. Simple support for children and parents can be the best way to prevent child abuse. After-school activities, parent education classes, mentoring programs, and respite care are

- some of the many ways to keep children safe from harm. Be a voice in support of these efforts in your community.
- Teach children their rights. When children are taught they are special and have the right to be safe, they are less likely to think abuse is their fault, and more likely to report an offender.
- Support prevention programs. Too often, intervention occurs only after abuse is reported. Greater investments are needed in programs that have been proven to stop the abuse before it occurs - such as family counseling and home visits by nurses who provide assistance for newborns and their parents.
- Know what child abuse is. Physical and sexual abuse clearly constitute maltreatment, but so does neglect, or the failure of parents or other caregivers to provide a child with needed food, clothing, and care. Children can also be emotionally abused

- when they are rejected, berated, or continuously isolated.
- Know the signs. Unexplained injuries aren't the only signs of abuse. Depression, fear of a certain adult, difficulty trusting others or making friends, sudden changes in eating or sleeping patterns, inappropriate sexual behavior, poor hygiene, secrecy, and hostility are often signs of family problems and may indicate a child is being neglected or physically, sexually, or emotionally abused.
- Report abuse. If you witness a child being harmed or see evidence of abuse, make a report to your state's child protective services department or local police. When talking to a child about abuse, listen carefully, assure the child that he or she did the right thing by telling an adult, and affirm that he or she is not responsible for what happened.
- Invest in kids. Encourage leaders in the

community to be supportive of children and families. Ask employers to provide family-friendly work environments. Ask your local and national lawmakers to support legislation to better protect our children and to improve their lives.



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