

Do your part to ensure that our kids are protected, nurtured

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For more information about the **toolkit for families** and other Yolo County Children's Alliance programs, call 530-757-5558 or go to yolokids.org.

By Jim Provenza

Child abuse is a national problem. It plagues every community in every state and crosses income, ethnic and religious categories. Our children are society's greatest assets for the future. All children deserve to be loved, encouraged and nurtured.

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month. During this time, we focus on raising awareness about the issues surrounding child abuse and identify the work we are doing here in Yolo County to address the needs of vulnerable children and their families.

Research shows that children in families with social connections, resilience, financial stability, food security, knowledge of parenting and child development, and tools to help children develop social and emotional competence are less likely to be abused and neglected and more likely to have a healthy future.

Tragically, an estimated 3 million children each year are referred to state and local agencies across the United States for instances of maltreatment — nearly six referrals per minute. During 2013, almost 50,000 California children were referred for welfare investigations, including approximately 2,000 reported cases in Yolo County.

Fortunately, a lot of good work to benefit children and families is being done in Yolo County. In addition to our local government programs, we have several organizations doing outstanding work to help parents and children, including the Yolo County Children's Alliance, Yolo County Crisis Nursery, Yolo Family Strengthening Network and First 5 Yolo.

As the Child Abuse Prevention Council for Yolo County, the Yolo County Children's Alliance serves as the coordinator for the Yolo Family Strengthening Network. More than 20 Yolo County agencies and organizations are involved in the Strengthening Families initiative; a research-based strategy to increase family strengths, enhance child development, and reduce child abuse and neglect.

The goal is to bring about fundamental change in how we serve families in Yolo County and to integrate a framework of five protective factors into our service systems countywide.

The five protective factors to promote better outcomes for families are parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, concrete support in times of need, and building the social and emotional competence of children.

The Children's Alliance also runs the highly successful Step by Step/Paso a Paso home visiting program, which improves the infant-parent relationship by enhancing skills, promoting healthy child development, and encouraging healthy parent-child bonding in a safe home environment.

From pregnancy through the child's 5th birthday, a family support worker meets with and supports the family. Family support workers provide tips for self-care during pregnancy and how to soothe a crying baby, along with information on nutrition and a safe home environment.

Together with the parents, they work on child development stages; social, emotional and cognitive development for the child; parent-defined family goals; coping skills for stressful situations; accessing health services for child and parent; and parent-child bonding and attachment.

This year, the Yolo County Children's Alliance and Child Abuse Prevention Council, in partnership with the Yolo Family Strengthening Network, has created a toolkit for families for Child Abuse Prevention Month. The theme of the toolkit and the Child Abuse Prevention Month campaign is Talk + Play = Connect, Time with Kids ... It Adds Up!

The toolkit contains information for parents about why talking to children is so important, general tips on how to talk to children, book recommendations for parents and children, information on why playing is so important, and tips and activities for parents to do with children at every stage: baby, toddler, preschooler, school-age and teenager.

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Families in Yolo County also can find resources and support through local Family Resource Centers. The centers help families access needed services; provide free fresh produce, parenting, nutrition and money management education; preschool classes; and early developmental and mental health screenings for children.

Family Resource Centers are found in Davis, Woodland, Winters, West Sacramento, Clarksburg, Esparto, Knights Landing and Yolo.

Thanks to the generous support and commitment of our community, another tremendous resource in the prevention of child abuse is the Yolo Crisis Nursery.

The nursery's overarching goal is to prevent child abuse and neglect by bridging emergency child care with a support network of resources and services to ensure that both parents and children form a healthy family. With their children in the safe hands of trained, committed staff members in a loving home environment, parents receive help from Crisis Nursery staff in resolving their crisis or hardship.

Wrap-around services and resources are provided to parents to help put the family back on track to a more stable life situation. Families stay whole and become stronger. Children are less likely to become troubled teens. The cycle of abuse is broken.

Our children are our greatest legacy. During Child Abuse Prevention Month, I invite all those with children in their lives to take a moment and reflect on what they can do to support the programs to help families, and ensure each young person in their life and our community is protected and nurtured.

— Jim Provenza, a parent and grandparent, is the District 4 Yolo County supervisor, chair of the Yolo County Children's Alliance and chair of First 5 Yolo.