



1616 N. Arlington Heights Rd. Arlington Heights, IL 60004  
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**24-Hour Referral Line: 847.255.8060**

## Child Abuse Prevention Month (April) MEDIA FACT SHEET

### *Protecting Children, Strengthening Families, Building Safe Communities*

April is recognized nationally as **Child Abuse Prevention Month**, an observance first proclaimed in 1983 to raise awareness and encourage collective action to ensure children grow up in safe, stable, and nurturing environments.

Communities across Chicago and the U.S. participate by hosting educational events, planting symbolic pinwheel gardens, sharing resources, and promoting positive parenting strategies. The pinwheel symbolizes the hope that every child can experience a happy, healthy childhood. Preventing child abuse is a shared responsibility. Research consistently shows that early support for families, strong social networks, and access to services significantly reduce the risk of abuse and neglect.

#### **KEY FACTS ABOUT CHILD ABUSE**

Child abuse and neglect affect children of all ages, backgrounds, and communities. One in four children experience abuse or neglect.

#### Forms of child abuse include:

- Physical abuse – non-accidental injury such as hitting, burning, or shaking
- Emotional abuse – patterns of criticism, rejection, or withholding love
- Sexual abuse – exploitation or sexual activity involving a child
- Neglect – failure to provide basic physical, emotional, educational, or medical needs

Most children are harmed by someone they know and trust, including parents, relatives, or caregivers. Each year, millions of reports of suspected abuse are made in the United States, though experts believe many cases go unreported.

#### Chicago & Illinois Statistics

Child abuse affects thousands of families across the Chicago region.

- In Illinois, there were over 96,000 child abuse and neglect investigations involving more than 147,000 children in 2024.
- The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) serves thousands of families annually through prevention, protection, and reunification programs
- The majority of families investigated remain together and receive support services, rather than entering foster care.
- Children under three face the highest risk of fatal abuse.
- Abuse and neglect are more prevalent in communities facing economic stress, though they occur across all demographics.
- Child abuse is widespread, but also preventable when families receive timely support.

#### **RECOGNIZING WARNING SIGNS OF CHILD ABUSE**

Children experiencing abuse or neglect may show behavioral, emotional, or physical indicators.



Shelter Youth & Family Services is committed to providing safe, inclusive, and supportive resources for youth and families from all backgrounds and identities.



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#### Signs of physical abuse:

- Unexplained bruises, burns, or injuries
- Injuries inconsistent with explanations
- Fear of certain adults
- Frequent or repeated injuries

#### Signs of emotional abuse:

- Extreme behavior changes
- Developmental delays
- Anxiety, withdrawal, or depression
- Lack of attachment to caregivers

#### Signs of neglect:

- Poor hygiene or untreated medical needs
- Frequent absence from school
- Lack of supervision
- Consistent hunger or fatigue

#### Signs of sexual abuse:

- Age-inappropriate sexual knowledge
- Difficulty walking or sitting
- Sudden behavioral or emotional changes

These warning signs do not always confirm abuse, but they indicate a child or family may need help or intervention.

### **HOW INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES CAN HELP PREVENT CHILD ABUSE**

Prevention is possible, and effective, when communities support families early.

#### The Six Protective Factors for healthy families:

1. Parental resilience
2. Social connections
3. Knowledge of parenting and child development
4. Concrete support in times of need
5. Children's social and emotional competence
6. Nurturing and attachment between parent and child

#### Practical actions individuals can take:

- Offer support to parents and caregivers
- Learn to recognize and report signs of abuse
- Volunteer or partner with local organizations
- Promote positive parenting strategies
- Advocate for policies and programs that support families

- **Call 911 if a child is in immediate danger.**
- **Reported suspected abuse confidentially to the Illinois DCFS hotline: 1-800-25-ABUSE.**
- **Learn more via the:** [Prevent Child Abuse America](#) organization, [National Child Abuse Hotline](#) and [Shelter Youth & Family Services](#).

### **ABOUT SHELTER YOUTH & FAMILY SERVICES**

Founded in 1975, **Shelter Youth & Family Services** is a leading Chicagoland nonprofit that works on the front lines of prevention and recovery – helping children move from crisis to stability and long-term success. The organization is dedicated to ending the cycle of child abuse and neglect by providing a comprehensive network of support to children, their families and the community. It strives to create safe, healthy and nurturing homes providing comprehensive, trauma-informed care to children and families.



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Key services include:

- Emergency housing and crisis assistance
- Transitional living programs for youth aging out of foster care
- Foster care and emergency foster care placement and support
- Family home visiting and parent education
- Clinical counseling and trauma-informed care
- Long-term “recovery residence” for survivors of human-trafficking

*“Every child deserves to feel safe and supported. Prevention starts by ensuring families have the resources they need before a crisis occurs.”*

— Carina H. Santa Maria, MSW, LCSW – Chief Executive Officer, Shelter Youth & Family Services

**MEDIA RESOURCES:**

Expert interview sources from Shelter Youth & Family Services:

- Carina H. Santa Maria, MSW, LCSW – Chief Executive Officer, Shelter Youth & Family Services.
  - Expertise: trauma-informed care, child welfare systems, prevention strategies, legislation
- Clinical directors and program leaders.
  - Expertise: mental health treatment, family stabilization, youth development

Additional expert perspectives:

- Illinois Department of Children and Family Services leadership
- Prevent Child Abuse Illinois representatives
- Academic researchers
- Trauma-informed therapists and child psychologists
- Foster care and youth services specialists

Media contact & resources:

For interviews, data, or local stories, media are encouraged to contact:

- Jason Sherman: 773-960-8351, [jason@shermancm.com](mailto:jason@shermancm.com)
- Christine Roerig (Shelter CMCO): 847-595-0131, [croerig@shelter-inc.org](mailto:croerig@shelter-inc.org)

Interview topics:

- Child abuse prevention strategies
- Trauma-informed care
- Foster care and youth housing
- Family support and early intervention
- Anti-trafficking and prevention
- Local Chicago-area impact and success stories

Story angles:

- Local impact of child abuse in Chicago communities
- Importance of early intervention and prevention programs
- The role of nonprofits like Shelter Youth & Family Services in crisis response



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- Trauma-informed care and long-term recovery
- Foster care and youth housing challenges
- The connection between poverty, stress, and abuse risk
- Human trafficking prevention and survivor support programs

Key messages for coverage:

- Child abuse is preventable with early intervention and community support.
- Most families benefit from services – not separation.
- Awareness helps identify children who might otherwise suffer in silence.
- Prevention reduces long-term social, economic, and health costs.
- Every child deserves a safe, stable, and nurturing childhood.



**Healthy Families  
Illinois™**

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