


**Impact of COVID-19:  
Child Abuse, Exploitation and  
Family Violence**


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**Impact of COVID-19 on Families**


- Economic stress – layoffs & furloughs
- Food instabilities
- Disaster-related instability
- Intense and unrelieved contact w/ offenders
- Increased exposure to exploitative relationships
- Negative coping mechanisms
- Reduced options for support



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**Impact of COVID-19**


- Child abuse reports are down by ~50%
  - In Clark County
  - In Washington State
  - Across the nation
- CA reports made are for more serious physical injuries and sexual victimization



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**Impact of COVID-19**


- 25-30% of child abuse reports to CPS from school staff
- Approx. 25% of CA reports from mental health or medical providers
- Physical distancing results in lack of “eyes on” children
  - School staff
  - Church, club & sport leaders
  - Friends/peers & their families



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**Impact of COVID-19**


- Online exploitation more than doubled
- Increased vulnerabilities
  - Children feeling lonely, isolated, depressed
  - Abused children seeking support & understanding
  - More time online and lack of online supervision
    - Phones, computers, tablets, gaming systems, apps
- Offenders exploit youth
  - Manipulate children into sending child sexual abuse imagery



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**Impact of COVID-19**


- Increases in domestic violence (DV) calls
  - City of Vancouver:
    - 42% increase in Simple Assault
  - 21% to 35% increase in the US
  - 20-50% increase internationally (c.f., Wuhan, China saw 3x increase)
- Offenders use of containment, fear and threat of contagion as a mechanism of abuse



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### Impact of COVID-19


- Decline in child abuse reports is not indicative that child abuse has declined
- High correlation between child abuse and domestic violence



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### Co-occurrence of DV and CA


- One in six children is exposed to DV
- Child abuse is 15 times more likely to occur in households where domestic violence is present
- Between 30-60% of men who batter their female partners also abuse their children



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### Understanding the Intersection


- A study of 1,000 battered women found:
  - Perpetrators of DV abused children in 70% of the cases
  - The prevalence of child abuse increased from 51% with one child to 92% with four or more children
  - The severity of DV is predictive of severity of child abuse
- In some child assault cases, children are not the primary targets
- Child abuse does not usually occur at the same time as DV



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### Children's Exposure to Domestic Violence


Is there an impact?



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### Types of Exposure


- Hearing a violent event
  - Children's reports of witnessing violence significantly higher than parent's reports
- Direct involvement
  - Eyewitness to a violent event
  - Intervention
  - Used as part of violent event (e.g., shield)
- Experiencing aftermath of violent event



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### Examples of How Children are Exposed


- Feeling tension building in home prior to assault
- Hearing threats of physical harm
- Being hit/threatened while in victim's arms
- Being denied care because victim is injured or depressed
- Hearing/seeing assault on victim
- Seeing aftermath of violent incident



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### Examples of How Children are Exposed


- Being forced to watch or participate in violence against a parent
- Having relationship with non-violent parent undermined
- Being enlisted by violent parent to align against victim
- Being taken hostage to force victim to return home
- Experiencing the loss of a parent due to murder/suicide



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### Impact of Exposure to DV


- Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE)
- Increased risk of:
  - Experiencing emotional, physical and sexual abuse
  - Developing emotional, behavioral and social problems
    - Depression, anxiety & attachment disorders; Posttraumatic stress disorder & dissociation
    - Aggression, non-compliance, conduct disorders & delinquency
    - Triple the odds of perpetrating violence towards a partner
  - Increased exposure to the presence of other lifelong adversities



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### What CJC is Doing to Protect Children

- Dissemination of informational materials
  - Teachers
  - Essential Workers
  - General Public
- Community Education
  - Role of mandated reporters continues
  - Recognize signs & symptoms of abuse
  - How to report suspected maltreatment



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### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROTECTING CHILDREN



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### Recommendations for Protecting Children

- Support legislation that protects children
  - SB5177 Eliminating proof of nonmarriage as an element of a sex offense
    - Removes requirement that state prove the perpetrator was not married to the victim as an element of a sex crime involving a minor or vulnerable adult
  - Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Fix Act
    - Bipartisan, bicameral attempt to sustain Crime Victims Fund Act of 2021
    - This critical legislation will prevent devastating cuts to federal funding for victim service programs through the Victims of Crime Act ("VOCA")
    - Programs serving victims and survivors of child abuse, sexual assault, domestic violence, trafficking, drunk driving, assault, homicide and other crimes
- Support programs that protect children
- Raise awareness for and prevention of child maltreatment



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### April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month

- Pinwheels for Prevention  
Represent childlike whimsy and lightheartedness and our vision for a world where all children grow up happy, healthy and prepared to succeed in supportive families and communities



Email # of bags of pinwheels wanted (25 per bag) to [CJCInfo@clark.wa.gov](mailto:CJCInfo@clark.wa.gov)



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### Report Suspected Maltreatment



REPORT CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT DIRECTLY TO YOUR LOCAL REGION

**866-764-2233**  
Statewide End Harm Line 866-363-4276

REGION 6  
SOUTH WESTERN  
WASHINGTON


CLALLAM MASON  
CLARK PACIFIC  
COWLITZ SKAMANIA  
GRAYS HARBOR THURSTON  
JEFFERSON WAHAKIACUM  
LEWIS

The statewide End Harm line will continue to be available 24/7. For more information about reporting abuse or neglect, visit the DCYF website at [www.dcyf.wa.gov](http://www.dcyf.wa.gov)

WASHINGTON STATE  
Department of  
Children, Youth, and Families




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**“But what if I’m wrong?”**  
ISN'T A REASON TO STAY SILENT


**IF YOU SUSPECT ABUSE OR NEGLECT**  
please don't wait for someone else to speak up.  
Your report could save a child's life.



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### Recommendations for Protecting Children

- Engage in conversation with neighbors
- Watch for signs & symptoms of abuse in children
- If interacting w/ children virtually:
  - Maintain appropriate boundaries
  - Listen/watch for red flags in background
- Encourage children to name 5 trusted adults




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### 5 Trusted Adults




- For each finger of the hand, have your child name a trusted adult – both within and outside of the family/family home
- These are the people to whom your child can go when feeling scared, upset, angry, confused, hurt – or even happy
- Go with your child to tell these adults that they are the child's trusted adults



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### Family Safety Nights


- Home safety
  - Ask basic questions about safety in your home
  - Ask questions
    - “Where is the First Aid kit and fire extinguisher?”
    - “Where would we meet if there is severe weather?”
- Personal safety
  - Discuss everything from bike helmets to seat belts
  - Have conversations about personal body safety
  - Play “What If” games to encourage problem solving
    - “What if we were separated in a store?”
    - “What if someone asked you to keep a secret?”



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### Recommendations for Protecting Children


- Avoid “good touch / bad touch” and “stranger danger” language
- Teach children medically-accepted terms for all body parts
- Online safety
  - Make an agreement for online and cell phone use
  - Sample internet family safety plans
    - www.jwrc.org
    - www.netsmartz.org



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### Rules to Share with Children


- Check first with a caregiver before:
  - Accepting a ride
  - Accepting a gift
  - Going into a house
  - Having your photo taken
- Use the buddy system
  - Play and stay with friends
- Trust your gut
  - Pay attention to your “uh-oh” feeling



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### Rules to Share with Children


- Surprises are OK; No secrets
  - Surprises are short-term; people happy when revealed
  - Secrets never okay to share; people upset when revealed
- You are allowed to say “NO” to any person
  - OK touches keep you healthy and clean
  - Keep telling until an adult helps
  - It isn't your fault if you are tricked or forced
  - It isn't your fault if you can't say no



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### Rules to Share with Children

- Protect yourself, not your stuff
  - If you can, say “NO,” get away, and tell an adult
  - Drop anything making it hard to get away
- Yelling is different than screaming
  - Yell for help from your belly with words like, “Call 911”
- Have a family password to use in case you are in over your head
- Tell a trusted adult about attempts to break rules
- You are special and deserve to be safe!




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It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.



~Frederick Douglass



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### Questions or Comments?

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