



## *Child Abuse Prevention Council of San Benito County*

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### **The Story of the Blue Ribbon**

The Blue Ribbon Child Abuse Prevention Campaign had its early beginnings following the death of a very young child. In 1989, a Virginia grandmother received the devastating news that her grandson had died of injuries inflicted by his parents. In an expression of grief and outrage, this grandmother did something that has given us a symbol. She tied a blue ribbon to the antenna of her van as a way to remember "the bruised and battered body of her grandson" and to alert her community to the tragedy of child abuse. Her simple idea, to wear or display a blue ribbon for child abuse prevention was picked up by grassroots organizations across the county. In her own words:

*"NO! It isn't true! It simply cannot be true! They are telling me that my grandson is dead ... they are wrong! There must be some mistake ... Michael is fine ... but deep in my heart, I knew it was true for I have not seen him in weeks. It's been so long since I sat by his side in the hospital. Of course I knew something was wrong as I sat there. I saw fear on his face, the bruises on his body, and the healing cigarette burns on his hands. His doctor did not believe my daughter's story ... "he fell in slippery water in the bathtub" ... I felt sick ... I didn't understand ... Are my granddaughters all right, was all I thought. Where are they?*

*I only had one child. She was a beautiful little girl. She was the light of our eyes. We knew she had entered into a stormy marriage, for we brought her home several times in the five years the marriage lasted. We suspected heavy use of drugs ... BUT ... in those five years, three beautiful, healthy children had been born. I loved them dearly, and they loved me. The children were 16 months, 3 years and 4 years old.*

*After the ordeal at the hospital, my grandson was placed in foster care for three weeks. He cried when they came to take him back to his mother. He told his foster mother, "my momma doesn't love me," and he begged to stay. I ached for his dilemma. I was not physically able to care for him. The courts seemed to believe that home was the best place for him ... but I knew better and I told ... no, begged them not to return him to his mother. But I was overruled. My instinct as a grandmother did not count.*

*I never saw Michael again. My 16 month old granddaughter was hospitalized after being beaten severely her leg was broken in four places, and her hand burned from the tip of her little fingers to her wrist. It was only then that the "search was on" for Michael. We learned that he had been killed, wrapped in a sheet, stuffed in a tool box and dumped in to a dismal swamp three months earlier.*

*My grandchildren had suffered and battled so much throughout their young lives that it sickened me. My life was turned into physical and mental chaos. My efforts to understand became a plea to stop abusing children. I tied a blue ribbon on my van antenna to make people wonder. It caught on locally with restaurants, businesses, the police department and radio and television stations. They all started supporting me in my efforts to make a real awareness campaign. Why the color blue? I never intend to forget the battered, bruised bodies of my grandchildren. Bruises are black, then eventually blue. Therefore, blue serves as a constant reminder to me to fight for our children. Join with me. We must protect our most precious gift of all ... our children. Please wear a blue ribbon. Put one on your car. Give one to your friends. Tell them what it means. You may be saving a child's life! If you suspect anything is happening to your children ... your grandchildren ... the child next door ... PLEASE ACT!"*

*Bonnie Finney, Norfolk, VA.*

#### **For more information, contact:**

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# INFORMATION ABOUT CHILD ABUSE AND PREVENTION

**Each and every one of us has a role to play in protecting children from abuse and neglect. To help keep children safe, the following is information you should be aware of:**

- understanding the definitions of child abuse and neglect,
- recognize the warning signs of child maltreatment,
- report suspected child abuse and neglect, and
- reach out to children and parents in your community.

## DEFINITIONS AND RECOGNIZING CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

### DEFINITIONS OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

- Child abuse is any act that endangers a child's physical or emotional health and development.
- Child abuse and neglect often take place in the home. The child often knows the abuser well – a parent, relative, babysitter, or friend of the family.
- Child abuse and neglect cross all ethnic, racial, social, and economic lines.

### THERE ARE FOUR TYPES OF CHILD MALTREATMENT.

- Neglect is failure to provide for a child's basic needs, including physical, educational, and emotional needs.
- Physical abuse is physical injury as a result of hitting, kicking, shaking, burning, or otherwise harming a child.
- Sexual abuse may include indecent exposure, fondling, rape, or commercial exploitation through prostitution or the production of pornographic materials.
- Emotional abuse is any pattern of behavior that impairs a child's emotional development or sense of self-worth, including constant criticism, threats, and rejection.

Many children experience more than one type of maltreatment. For instance, a physically abused child is often emotionally abused as well.

### RECOGNIZING SIGNS OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Although children react differently to abuse and neglect, there are common signs of child maltreatment. One sign alone might not indicate child abuse or neglect, but when the signs appear repeatedly or in combination, there should be greater scrutiny of the situation. The following may signal the presence of child abuse or neglect:

#### **Indicators in the child:**

- Shows sudden changes in behavior or school performance
- Is fearful, especially of parents
- Has not received help for physical or medical problems brought to the parents' attention
- Is always watchful, as though preparing for something to happen
- Lacks adult supervision
- Is overly compliant, passive, or withdrawn
- Comes to school or other activities early, stays late, and does not want to go home

- Is wary of adult contact or typical family affection
- Considers relationship with parent(s) entirely negative

#### **Indicators in the parent:**

- Shows little concern for the child
- Mentions homicidal thoughts/feelings toward the child
- Talks about extensive disciplining of the child and asks others to use harsh discipline if the child misbehaves
- Has unrealistic expectations of the child
- Sees the child as bad, worthless, or out of control
- Is unable/unwilling to meet the child's basic needs and provide a safe environment
- Considers relationship with the child entirely negative

## **REPORTING AND PREVENTION IN YOUR COMMUNITY**

Usually, children will not talk directly about abuse or neglect. Children may:

- be afraid they or someone they love will suffer harm if the maltreatment is disclosed,
- have promised not to tell,
- be embarrassed or ashamed, or
- not have the necessary vocabulary to explain the events.

Instead of talking specifically about abuse or neglect, children may disclose maltreatment through indirect hints or by mentioning someone they know who has been hurt or has caused harm. If a child discloses abuse or neglect, it is important to:

- LISTEN to the child without giving your opinion or asking leading questions;
- Tell the child that you believe him/her and are happy that he/she told you;
- Reassure the child that he/she did not do anything wrong;
- Tell the child that you will do your best to keep him/her safe;
- Give yourself time to think, and seek help from professionals; and
- Take any disclosure of abuse seriously, and report it. In San Benito County 831-636-4190.

#### **Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect**

Reporting suspected abuse and neglect is critical to protecting children and getting their families help. Although it may feel difficult, frightening, or uncomfortable to make a report, doing so could save a child's life, stop physical injury, prevent further abuse or neglect, or allow families to receive resources or services they need.

You do not need evidence or actual knowledge of child maltreatment to make a report, but instead, need to have a reasonable suspicion of abuse or neglect. Once there is a report, child welfare professionals commence an investigation and support the child and family.

If you suspect that a child is being abused or neglected, contact your local child welfare agency. **In San Benito County, you may make a confidential report anytime by calling the hotline at: 831-636-4190.**