

For Immediate Release

Supporting Caregivers is Key in Preventing Child Abuse

Buncombe County, N.C. – April is Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention month. Children are the most vulnerable members of our community and our future depends on their wellbeing and safety. However, in 2017, Buncombe County Health and Human Services (BCHHS) received over 4,477 reports of suspected child abuse or neglect. In Buncombe County, we want every child to have the opportunity to meet their full potential and to be connected with a loving family and strong community.

Preventing child abuse and neglect means helping all parents to gain the knowledge, skills, resources and social support that they need to provide the safe, stable, nurturing environments all children need to thrive. Child abuse and neglect and other adverse experiences during childhood can damage the architecture of the developing brain. This can result in poor outcomes for children and communities – from academic failure to violence to chronic health issues.

Simple steps to grow family resiliency and to prevent child abuse or neglect include:

- Surrounding children with trusted friends and family who have the skills and patience to care for a fussy baby or roaming toddler.
- Engaging children in healthy and fun ways that are age appropriate is key to building resiliency in children. This can be as simple as going to the park and playing in the sand box or reading a book. Children thrive when parents provide not only affection, but also respectful communication and listening, consistent rules and expectations, and safe opportunities that promote independence.
- Ensuring that caregivers are substance free while they are caring for a child and that children do not have access or exposure to prescription or illicit drugs.
- Sharing resources available to assist parents who may need a little extra help due to financial issues, isolation, or relationship struggles.

“At Health and Human Services, many of the children our social workers encounter have experienced or are at high risk of experiencing child maltreatment. Our role is to reduce the risk of further maltreatment while building on the strengths that already exist in all families to increase protective factors such as social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, and access to mental health or substance use disorder services,” says BCHHS Social Work Director Rebecca Smith. “Although we have entered a challenging time sparked by our community’s opioid epidemic, I am constantly inspired by the commitment of our staff, our community partners and by the formal and informal support networks who surround children and their families during times of crisis to build hope and resilience in all involved.”

As a resident of North Carolina, you are a mandated reporter of child abuse and neglect. If you have concerns regarding child abuse or neglect, we rely on you to make a report. For some children in our community, especially those too young to talk, you are the voice for these children. If you have a concern, you have a mandated responsibility to call. Your information is confidential. The number is 250-5900.

BCHHS joins the Mountain Child Advocacy Center in inviting the public to the Pinwheel Garden on April 10th at 10:30 a.m. at 200 College Street by the Energy Loop. At this event, the Children's Champion Award will be given to a person who has gone above and beyond to keep children safe. Later in the day, the Buncombe County Commissioners will issue a proclamation during their regular meeting. We hope that child welfare advocates and the public will join us for both events as we raise awareness of child abuse in our community.

BCHHS has also partnered with Buncombe County Library Branches and Buncombe County Park locations to host pinwheel gardens throughout the county to raise awareness. The pinwheel is a symbol of the whimsical childhood that all children deserve. For more information on the events surrounding Child Abuse Awareness Month, visit the Mountain Child Advocacy Center's website at www.mtncac.org.

To report suspected child abuse or neglect, contact Buncombe County Child Protective Services at (828) 250-5900. More information on Child Protective Services can be found at www.buncombecounty.org/dss.

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