

New Hope for Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect:

Proven solutions to save lives and prevent crime

This brief is based on a report by FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS, an anti-crime group of over 2,000 police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors, victims of violence, and youth violence experts nationwide. The full report and citations for this brief are available at www.fightcrime.org.

FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS has taken a hard-nosed look at what works—and what doesn't work—to cut crime and violence. Exciting new research, combined with prior evidence, shows that most abuse and neglect in high-risk families can now be prevented. Doing so will protect millions of children and save thousands of lives, while saving billions of dollars, and greatly reducing the number of children who grow up to be violent criminals.

The Annual Toll: Over 2,000 deaths The Future Toll: 35,000 Violent Criminals

Official figures show that there are 900,000 cases of verified child abuse or neglect every year in America, and 1,300 deaths. Of these 1,300 children, 40 percent are killed before their first birthday. However, even those tragic numbers may mask the real toll of child abuse and neglect in America. The best estimate of the number of children abused or neglected is closer to 2.7 million a year. Furthermore, the Justice Department released a report saying deaths from abuse and neglect likely exceed 2,000 a year, instead of the 1,300 officially reported.

While most victimized children never become violent criminals, being severely abused or neglected can lead to permanent changes in children's brains. Some children have trouble learning empathy, while others develop a predisposition for misinterpreting actions as threatening and reacting violently. This sharply increases the risk that these children will grow up to be arrested for a violent crime. The best available research indicates that, of the 900,000 children who were

confirmed victims of abuse or neglect in one year, an additional 35,000 violent criminals and more than 250 murderers will emerge as adults who would never have become violent criminals if not for the abuse and neglect they endured as children.

Most Abuse and Neglect in High-risk Families Can Be Prevented

To protect all Americans from crime, the more than 2,000 police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors, and crime victims who are members of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS call on state and federal governments to:

- **Offer coaching in parenting skills to all at-risk parents.** When the Nurse Family Partnership Program randomly assigned at-risk mothers to receive home visits by nurses providing coaching in parenting and other skills, children whose mothers were left out of the program were five times more likely to be abused or neglected than the children whose moms received parent coaching. Children of mothers left out of the program had twice as many arrests later in life as

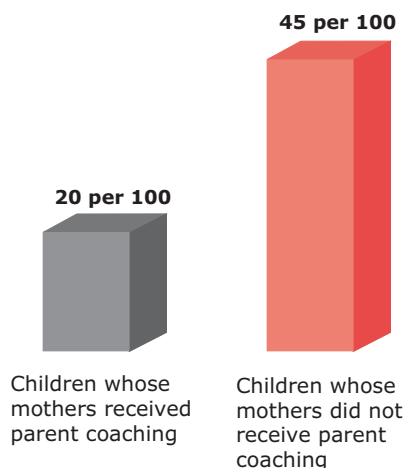
the children of mothers who received home visits. Similarly, the Healthy Start program in Hawaii showed that high-risk families who did not receive parent coaching were six times more likely to have a child hospitalized for abuse or neglect than similarly high-risk families who were coached.

- **Offer quality pre-kindergarten programs with parent-training for at-risk children.** The Chicago Child-Parent Center preschool program in low-income neighborhoods cut the abuse and neglect of children in the

Parent Coaching Cuts Children's Arrests in Half

Results from the study of the Nurse Family Partnership program.

Total arrests per 100 youths by age 15



program in half, compared to similar children not in the program. Youngsters left out of the program were 70 percent more likely to have been arrested for a violent crime by age 18 than those enrolled.

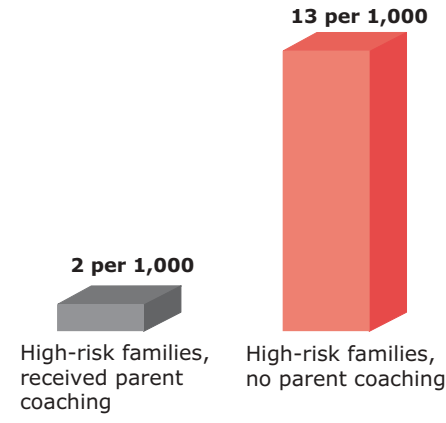
- **Ensure that pregnant women who are addicted have access to drug and alcohol treatment programs.** Maternal drug use during pregnancy can lead to brain damage in the child. Further, fetal alcohol syndrome is the leading cause of preventable mental retardation. The interaction of neurological damage at birth with deficient parenting multiplies the risk of criminality later in life. Research shows that an effective drug and alcohol treatment program in Baltimore for pregnant women dramatically reduced the number of premature babies born at risk of suffering permanent brain damage that can lead to later criminality.
- **Provide mental health services for depressed or mentally ill parents.** People who grew up with a household member who was depressed, mentally ill, or who attempted suicide were twice as likely to have been physically abused than those who did not grow up in such a household. Just like other ill parents, depressed or mentally ill parents can effectively raise children if they receive treatment. Yet studies show only 25 percent of individuals suffering from depression receive adequate care for their illness.

Saving Lives, Preventing Crime and Saving Money

Child abuse and neglect cost America upwards of \$80 billion a year. Two-thirds of that is crime costs. Preventing child abuse and neglect will save lives, reduce crime and save taxpayers money. For

Children of High-Risk Parents Not Receiving Hawaii Healthy Start's Parenting Coaching Were Six Times More Likely to be Hospitalized for Abuse and Neglect

Children Hospitalized for Abuse or Neglect per 1,000 families



example, the RAND Corporation found that nurse home visitation programs saved taxpayers four dollars for each dollar invested. The Chicago Child-Parent Center program saved taxpayers, victims, and participants over seven dollars for every dollar invested (of which taxpayers alone save almost three dollars). The Baltimore drug treatment program for pregnant women paid for itself before the children left the neo-natal intensive care unit.

Law Enforcement Leaders are United

Law enforcement leaders and crime victims are united in calling for investments to protect children from abuse and neglect, save taxpayers' dollars, and make all Americans safer.

This call has been endorsed by the 2,000 members of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS and by leading national and state law enforcement and anti-crime organizations including: the Major Cities Chiefs' Organization, the Fraternal Order of Police, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the National District Attorneys' Association and the National Organization for Victim Assistance.

The evidence is in. America can save billions while preventing child abuse and neglect.

A Wise Investment

One dollar spent on the Nurse Family Partnership program...



...produced \$4 in savings for taxpayers.

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Source citation and other research are available at www.fightcrime.org

Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2000 P St., NW, Ste 240, Washington D.C., 20036, 202-776-0027.

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