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Hamilton County Launches Child Abuse Campaign Aimed at Single Mothers
Rate of Abuse and Fatalities at the Hands of Mom's Partner
Higher Here than Around the Nation

Cincinnati (Feb. 1, 2010) Hamilton County's Department of Job and Family Services wants mothers throughout the county to know the warning signs when it comes to interaction between their children and their partner's – their child's life may depend on it.

The Choose Your Partner Carefully Campaign is aimed at single mothers whose partner may be a risk to their child. Far too often, a child is abused or even killed when left in the care of a mother's partner, who is not the biological father. There have been several high-profile fatalities of this nature in Hamilton County over the past few years.

"We know from unfortunate experience that just because someone loves mom, it does not mean they love the child," said Moira Weir, director of the county's Job and Family Services Department. "This campaign is focusing on a very specific, and often deadly, form of child abuse. When mothers are choosing a partner, they are not just choosing for themselves, they are choosing for their children, too. Choosing the wrong partner can be, literally, deadly."

In Hamilton County, six of 17 child abuse deaths over the past five years were at the hands of mom's partner. That 35 percent rate is higher than the national rate of 15 percent (2006), reported by the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System. The Ohio Department of Health reports that of the cases in which a child was killed due to child abuse or neglect, mother's partner was cited in 28% of them.

In Hamilton County, 13.3 percent of all substantiated abuse and neglect cases in the past year were attributed to mother's husband, boyfriend or significant other that was not the biological parent of the child.

Hamilton County's Department of Job and Family Services is charged with investigating reports of abuse and neglect. The agency receives approximately 65,000 calls a year and investigates about 10 percent of those calls. The awareness campaign will consist of education and tools for mothers encountered during investigations, as well as an advertising campaign (commercials, outdoor, brochures) to the rest of the community. A Web site, www.KnowTheWarningSigns.com has been established, with the commercial and education material displayed. The agency also plans to build upon existing relationships with community organizations that can assist mothers in abusive situations.

“If this is a problem for our children, it is a problem for our community,” Weir said. “At a time when more than half of children are now born to single mothers, we know that children living with unrelated adults are more than 50 times likely to die from abuse than children living with two biological parents.

“We cannot ignore this problem any longer. We are going to take action, and we want mothers to take action. Educate yourself about the warning signs and seek help if you need it.”

The campaign urges mothers to spend time observing their partner with the child. Make sure the child is comfortable and the interaction is appropriate.

“Ask yourself questions before leaving your child alone with someone,” Weir said. “The number one question: Is your child afraid every time you leave? Does he or she cry uncontrollably? Shake with fear?”

“And sometimes mothers in love can't see the signs. Those of us who love and support them must intervene.”

Signs for mom to know

Does your partner:

- Show anger or impatience when the child cries or throws a tantrum?
- Call your child names or put down the child?
- Think it is funny to scare your child?
- Stop you from bringing your child to his family's events?
- Make all the decisions for you and your child?
- Say you are a bad parent and not strict enough?
- Hurt your child and blame you?
- Handle guns and knives around your child?
- Call your child a nuisance?

Signs for others to know

- Is the adult irritable or short-tempered when talking to the child?
- Does the adult seem immature or have poor impulse control and need constant attention?
- Does the child seem intimidated, even scared around the adult?
- Has the child begun to exhibit new behaviors like bed-wetting, thumb-sucking, being clingy to mom, or crying uncontrollably when mom leaves the room.
- Are punishments for minor rule infractions too harsh?

About Hamilton County's Department of Job and Family Services

The Department of Job and Family Services administers federal, state and local programs for those in need. The Department helps with local child protection, elderly protection, child care, child support enforcement, workforce development, cash assistance, food stamp disbursement and Medicaid disbursement. Servicing Hamilton County since 1947, the Department helps hundreds of thousands each year and is accredited by the Council on Accreditation, an international, independent, not-for-profit child and family service accrediting organization.