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Hamilton County Launches Campaign to Raise Awareness and Reporting of Child Abuse

Campaign features instructional video for mandated reporters and PSA for general public

Cincinnati (Aug. 22, 2010) Hamilton County has launched a public awareness campaign around child abuse that specifically targets those who encounter children in the course of their jobs and encourages them to report suspicions of abuse and neglect.

The “Do Ask, Do Tell” campaign goes beyond the bruises and encourages teachers, police officers, doctors, child care workers and other legally-designated “mandated reporters” to look for less obvious signs of neglect or even circumstances where children are placed into dangerous situations. The mandated reporters are to ASK themselves if they have worries about the children they encounter and to TELL Hamilton County Children’s Services when they do.

“Mandated reporters may regularly encounter children who are at risk, and they should not act as screeners themselves,” said Moira Weir, director of Hamilton County Job and Family Services, which houses the Children’s Services Division. “If your gut tells you something could be wrong, the important thing is that you alert Children’s Services. Early intervention is key.”

Nine out of 10 cases of child abuse go unreported, according to recent studies. More than 2,400 Hamilton County children were found to be victims of child abuse and neglect in 2010, so that number would skyrocket to more than 20,000 if studies hold true. One of the reasons cited: those who work with children either do not recognize the signs or do not want to report their suspicions.

Hamilton County Commission President Greg Hartmann said Weir’s department relies on the public – especially mandated reporters – to be its eyes and ears in the community when it comes to child abuse and neglect. He noted some circumstances where mandated reporters might encounter children at risk of abuse and neglect.

“Police responding to a domestic violence call or a drunken driving incident where children are on the scene....child care operators who see frequent bruises that parents always explain away.... teachers who hear stories of a child’s home life that just don’t seem right,” Commissioner Hartmann said. “If it is suspicious, report it. Call 241-KIDS.”

The “Do Ask, Do Tell” campaign features a five-minute instructional video that details the signs of abuse and explains situations that are dangerous to children. The video is targeted at mandated reporters and the hope is school districts will share it with teachers, police departments will show it at roll calls, child care operators will show it to workers, etc.

The video can be found at the campaign’s website, www.doaskdotellus.com, along with a 30-second public service announcement – aimed at raising awareness among the general public -- that airs through October to Tristate television audiences. The website also lists facts and signs of abuse.

Those interested in distributing brochures that details facts and signs of abuse and neglect can call the Department of Job and Family Services at 946-1728.

Ohio law states professionals such as physicians, therapists, child care operators, law enforcement officials, teachers and many more professionals who work with children are deemed mandated reporters and must report suspicions of abuse and neglect.

According to the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, approximately 1.5 million children were found to be victims of child maltreatment in 2009. In the most severe cases, 1,770 children died from their abuse. In Ohio, there were more than 65,000 victims, with 79 fatalities.

An even greater number of reports of abuse and neglect were received. In 2009, child welfare agencies throughout the nation received 3.3 million reports of maltreatment, involving 6 million children. So, in many reports, the worker either could not find or prove abuse or neglect.

“Abused and neglected children are more likely to become violent themselves and commit crimes, end up in prison, drop out of school, become teen parents and fall victim to other social ills,” Weir said. “These problems are costly and drain a community. Do ask, do tell. This community will be a better place to live if we reduce the amount of abuse and neglect.”

Signs of Abuse and Neglect

The child could be abused or neglected if he or she:

- Has unexplained burns, bites, bruises, broken bones or black eyes
- Shows sudden changes in behavior or school performance
- Is extremely compliant or extremely aggressive
- Acts either inappropriately adult (taking care of other children) or inappropriately infantile (rocking, thumb-sucking, tantrums).
- Seems frightened of the parents and protests or cries when it is time to go home
- Shrinks at the approach of adults
- Would rather spend time with a stranger than their parent or caregiver
- Is frequently absent from school
- Begs or steals food or money
- Lacks needed medical or dental care, immunizations, or glasses
- Is consistently dirty and has severe body odor

Hamilton County Job and Family Services

Hamilton County 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 assistance 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.