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PREVENTING CHILD ABUSE: EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY

State law requires certain professionals – such as teachers, lawyers and health care practitioners – to report suspected cases of child abuse. All adults, however, have a role in reporting and preventing child abuse, says Stacy Cox, Children Services supervisor of the Champaign County Department of Job and Family Services (CCDJFS).

“During Child Abuse Prevention Month in April—and throughout the year—we encourage people to report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect when they encounter them,” Cox said. “As individuals and a community we have a responsibility to provide a safe environment for children to grow and mature. If we all do this, we can end the cycle of abuse that is passed from generation to generation.”

Children Services can be contacted 24 hours a day, seven days a week at 484-1500 or 1-800-837-4290, she said.

The greater the detail a person can provide regarding a suspected case the better in helping Children Services investigate. This is especially true due to a new interpretation of Ohio laws that emphasizes the rights and privacy of families under the Fourth and Fourteenth Amendments, explained Susan Bailey, social service administrator with CCDJFS.

The interpretation requires social services workers to more thoroughly examine allegations of child abuse and neglect before initiating an investigation, she said. “Members of the public can assist us by providing as detailed and specific of information as possible to help us determine whether there is sufficient merit to investigate. When allegations are vague, our ability to investigate is limited.”

Children Services will accept anonymous reports, but prefers that callers give their names. Cox added that the identity of a reporter will be kept confidential and will not be shared with the person allegedly harming a child or the child's family.

State law protects reporters of alleged child abuse or neglect from awards or decisions that might result from an allegation that cannot be substantiated—provided the reporter of the allegation acted in good faith and did not knowingly make a false claim.

The new statewide automated child welfare information system (SACWIS) will help children service caseworkers across the state investigate reported cases, Cox said. Expected to be in place in all 88 Ohio counties by the end of the year, SACWIS establishes a uniform reporting system that will allow caseworkers to determine if alleged abusers have a history, or pattern of abuse, in other counties.

Children Services investigates the following types of cases:

- **Abuse** – physical abuse, the non-accidental injury of a child; sexual abuse, which can involve the perpetrator or anyone who allowed or encouraged the act; and chronic emotional abuse
- **Neglect** – physical neglect, the failure to provide a child proper supervision, housing clothing, medical attention, nutrition and support, or emotional neglect, the failure to provide support or affection that contribute to a child's psychological and social development
- **Dependency** – cases in which a child is deprived of physical or emotional support due to a mental or physical condition of the child's parents, guardian or custodian. This also pertains to a child who is at risk, living in a household where abuse, neglect or dependency has already been substantiated in court regarding another child.

In investigating reports, Children Services caseworkers are aided by Ohio's new comprehensive assessment and planning model – interim solution (CAPMIS). This structured decision-making tool helps caseworkers evaluate safety threats, a child's vulnerability and the family's ability to protect the child from abuse, neglect or dependency.

Locally, the process of resolving child abuse, neglect and dependency cases is further aided by the Child Abuse Response Team (CART). CART is composed of Children Services staff, the county prosecutor, the Champaign County Sheriff's office, the Urbana and St. Paris police departments, Champaign County Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities and the Mercy Well Child Pediatrics clinic. The team meets regularly to review pending cases and brainstorm strategies for addressing them through law enforcement and the courts, medical care, social services, or a combination, all toward the goal of assuring children's safety and well-being.

Children Services offers training on child abuse and neglect reporting for community professionals. To schedule training or for information on child abuse, neglect and dependency, call Children Services at 484-1500.

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