

Chesterfield/Colonial Heights Multi-Disciplinary Team for Child Abuse Prevention
“Keeping the Promise by Keeping Our Children Safe”

What is the Multi-Disciplinary Team for Child Abuse Prevention?

The Chesterfield/Colonial Heights Multi-Disciplinary Team for Child Abuse Prevention is an organization of professionals and interested community members working together to stop the abuse and neglect of children in Chesterfield County and the city of Colonial Heights. The team’s slogan is *“Keeping the Promise by Keeping Our Children Safe.”*

The Multi-Disciplinary Team has been meeting since 1976, fostering collaboration and cooperation among professionals and other community representatives to reduce child maltreatment locally. One of the oldest child abuse multi-disciplinary teams in the state, this team initially focused on effective intervention in abuse/neglect. Over the years, it has promoted program development, sought a common definition of abuse/neglect, supported a task force and protocol for child sexual-abuse intervention, addressed the issue of latch-key children, and sponsored national speakers to educate the professional community.

In 2006, the team restructured to focus its efforts primarily on prevention of child abuse and neglect. Under the leadership of Patricia M. Cullen, M.S.N., prevention services manager, Chesterfield Mental Health Services, who chairs the team, members reflect their prevention focus in a new mission and goals:

- **Mission** To promote the safety, health and well-being of children and families through community coordination, collaboration and education
- **Goals** (1) A shared community standard for the safety, health and well-being of children and families (2) Prevent child abuse and neglect in the community

Membership: The team is comprised of professionals and community members from local government agencies, schools, hospitals, churches, nonprofit organizations and private providers. Currently, members represent:

- Chesterfield County Head Start
- Chesterfield County Police Department
- Chesterfield County Schools
- Chesterfield Health Department
- Chesterfield Mental Health Services
- Chesterfield-Colonial Heights Comprehensive Service Act
- Chesterfield-Colonial Heights Department of Social Services
- Colonial Heights Office on Youth
- Colonial Heights Police Department
- Fort Lee Army Community Service – Family Advocacy Program
- Greater Richmond SCAN (Stop Child Abuse Now)
- Southside Regional Medical Center
- St. Francis Medical Center

What constitutes “prevention”?

In the Code of Virginia (Sec. 63.2-1501), prevention refers to “efforts that (i) promote health and competence in people and (ii) create, promote and strengthen environments that nurture people in their development.” Prevention efforts directed at reducing or ending child abuse and neglect can be carried out on a continuum from primary to tertiary.

- Primary prevention consists of activities or education directed to the population at large seeking to keep maltreatment from occurring in all families.
- Secondary prevention efforts are directed to identified groups who have risk factors associated with child maltreatment, tailoring the message to keep them from engaging in abusive or neglectful behaviors.
- Tertiary prevention refers to intervention with families, where maltreatment has already occurred, to avoid continuation or recurrence of abuse or neglect.

At the team’s 2006 Annual Training Event, keynote speaker Dr. Brian Meyer, executive director of the Virginia Treatment Center for Children, addressed current trends in child abuse prevention. Describing the Gordian knot of adolescent problems, Dr. Meyer reported that 20 percent of teen mental-health issues are triggered by childhood abuse and neglect. Nationwide, one million children are maltreated annually. Effective prevention programs can prevent mental health problems as well as societal problems, such as educational failure, substance abuse, crime, employment challenges, and passing on abusive child-rearing to the next generation, among others. All levels of prevention programs are needed: primary, e.g. universal education and awareness; secondary, e.g. teaching good parenting skills to new parents; and tertiary, e.g. foster care or substance abuse treatment. Dr. Meyer emphasized that prevention programming should be community based, planned and implemented locally.

What is child abuse/neglect?

Child abuse and neglect refers to maltreatment of a child under the age of 18 committed by his or her parent or guardian or other caretaker. There are four broad categories:

- Physical abuse – a non-accidental physical injury or threat of injury, such as bruises, broken bones, burns, bites or shaking.
- Physical neglect – failure to provide for a child’s physical survival needs to the extent that there is harm or risk of harm, such as abandonment or lack of adequate food, shelter, clothing, medical or dental care, proper hygiene or supervision.
- Sexual abuse – acts of sexual assault and sexual exploitation, or any sexual behavior in violation of the law, such as incest, rape, fondling, indecent exposure, child pornography or child prostitution.
- Emotional maltreatment – a chronic pattern of behavior including verbal assault, such as screaming, intimidating, ridiculing or blaming, or failure to provide necessary support, attention and affection, such as ignoring, indifference, or intense chronic family conflict.

Legal definition According to Virginia law (Sec. 63.2-100) an abused or neglected child is any child less than 18 years of age:

1. whose parents or other person responsible for his care creates or inflicts, threatens to create or inflict, or allows to be created or inflicted upon such child a physical or mental injury by other than accidental means, or creates a substantial risk of death,

disfigurement, or impairment of bodily or mental functions, including but not limited to, a child who is with his parent or other person responsible for his care either (i) during the manufacture or attempted manufacture of a Schedule I or II controlled substance, or (ii) during the unlawful sale of such substance by that child's parents or other person responsible for his care, where such manufacture, or attempted manufacture or unlawful sale would constitute a felony violation of Sec. 18.2-248;

2. whose parents or other person responsible for his care neglects or refuses to provide care necessary for his health;
3. whose parents or other person responsible for his care abandons such child;
4. whose parents or other person responsible for his care commits or allows to be committed any act of sexual exploitation or any sexual act upon a child in violation of the law;
5. who is without parental care or guardianship caused by the unreasonable absence or the mental or physical incapacity of the child's parent, guardian, legal custodian or other person standing in loco parentis; or
6. whose parents or other person responsible for his care creates a substantial risk of physical or mental injury by knowingly leaving the child alone in the same dwelling, including an apartment as defined in Sec. 55-79.2, with a person to whom the child is not related by blood or marriage and who the parent or other person responsible for his care knows has been convicted of an offense against a minor for which registration is required as a violent sexual offender pursuant to Sec. 9.1-902.

Where can I report child abuse or neglect?

Any one who suspects that a child is abused or neglected may call toll free to **(800) 552-7096** (24 hours a day, seven days a week) or call the local department of social services. A social worker will help assess your concerns and determine whether Child Protective Services can intervene.

How many children are affected by child abuse or neglect?

The 2000 census showed there were 73,427 children under the age of 18 residing in Chesterfield County and 3,815 in Colonial Heights. In fiscal year 2006, Chesterfield-Colonial Heights Department of Social Services received 1,629 reports of suspected abuse or neglect (many reports involved more than one child). Of those, Child Protective Services intervened in 951 situations. Certain situations are investigated, and a formal finding is made. In the 175 reports investigated, a total of 109 children were determined to have been abused or neglected, and 64 of those children were deemed to be at risk of being abused again. Other situations undergo a family assessment only. Of 776 reports assessed, 775 children were determined to need further services (for the child and/or family) and 637 of those children were deemed to be at risk of being abused again. Two children died of injuries related to abuse or neglect. During fiscal year 2006, an average of 152 children were in foster care in the custody of Chesterfield-Colonial Heights Department of Social Services, most as a result of abuse or neglect.

What can I do?

In a 1999 poll conducted by Mason Dixon Polling and Research, 82 percent of respondents said preventing child abuse and neglect should be a priority *of government*. The Chesterfield/Colonial

Heights Multi-Disciplinary Team believes that prevention is a *community* responsibility with government as only one of many partners. *You* can help prevent child abuse and neglect by supporting or joining the team. Call (804)768-7212 to learn how you can help.

What is the team's next public training event?

The team's 2007 Annual Training Event continues the theme *Keeping the Promise by Keeping Our Children Safe* and kicks-off Child Abuse Prevention Month. Rebecca Dickson, Chesterfield County deputy county administrator for Human Services, will make introductory comments. John Morgan, Ph.D., senior policy analyst for Voices for Virginia's Children, will deliver the keynote address entitled *Gold into Lead: Long-term Effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences*. Dr. Morgan will discuss the Adverse Childhood Experiences study of more than 17,000 participants conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Kaiser Permanente's Health Appraisal Clinic in San Diego. The study showed that abuse, neglect and family dysfunction in childhood are major risk factors for the leading causes of poor quality of life, illness and death in adulthood.

The 2007 event will be held at the Thomas R. Fulghum Center, 4003 Cogbill Road, Chesterfield, on Friday, March 30, 8.30-11.30 a.m. There is no cost to attend, but reservations are required. Please reply to (804) 768-7212 or hamlinj@chesterfield.gov.

What prevention resources are available locally?

The Multi-Disciplinary Team surveyed organizations in Chesterfield County and the city of Colonial Heights to identify local prevention efforts. Nearly 25 organizations reported prevention programs, services or educational resources. For details about these programs, visit the Chesterfield Youth Planning and Development's online Guide to Services for Youth at chesterfield.gov. Search under **prevention** in the Service Search to view these resources.