

A Message from The Washington County Citizen Review Panel for Children's Services

Transforming Risk to Wellness

Our Children's and Our Community's Future Depend on YOU

Mistreatment or intentional harm of a child younger than age 18 is considered child abuse. Child abuse can be physical (injury/risk of harm), sexual (sexual activity/exploitation/exposure to porn), emotional (verbal, isolating), or neglect (unmet needs). Children can experience one or multiple forms of abuse simultaneously. A child may manifest a variety of signs and symptoms that are red flags or warning signs for abuse. Abuse is associated with impactful short-term and long-term consequences. Survivors of child abuse and neglect are at greater risk for additional problems later in life, affecting not only the victim, but also the family and society as a whole.

We believe it really does take a village to raise a child. And as such, the Washington County Citizen Review Panel for Children's Services is again requesting YOUR assistance to help protect our children. Child abuse is often identified by school staff, but many children are not currently attending in-person classes. So, we need you, the on-line teacher, neighbor, store clerk, medical professional, clergy, delivery person, postal worker, law enforcement, grandparent or other relative, etc., to be the watchful eyes protecting vulnerable children. Here's how:

- Understand the situations conducive to child abuse:
 - Parent/caregiver has experienced abuse or neglect as a child and/or lacks knowledge of child development and parenting skills
 - Physical or mental illness in the home
 - Family crisis, marital problems, single parenting
 - Child with developmental or physical disability
 - Financial issues, unemployment, or poverty
 - Substance abuse
 - Social or extended family isolation
- Recognize general indicators of possible child abuse (warning signs don't always indicate abuse is occurring):
 - Changes in behavior like withdrawal, aggression, or anger
 - Depression, anxiety, unusual fears
 - Rebellious behavior; defiant, self-harming, or suicidal
 - Lack of supervision
- Specific signs of:
 - **Physical abuse:** injuries that don't match the given explanation, such as bruises, fractures, burns
 - **Sexual abuse:** sexual behavior or knowledge inappropriate for the child's age, sexual contact with other children, pregnancy or sexually transmitted infection, bloody underwear, child saying he/she was sexually abused

- **Emotional abuse:** low self-confidence, loss of enthusiasm, depression, loss of interest in or refusing to go to school and poor academic performance, loss of previous developmental skills
- **Neglect:** Slowed growth or weight gain, poor hygiene, inadequate clothing or supplies, taking and/or hiding food or money, poor school attendance, lack of medical, dental, psychological care
- Is it really abuse? Contact Washington County and someone will help:
 - If a **child** is in **immediate danger**, or to request an immediate welfare check, call 9-1-1 or your local police department.
 - To **report** suspected **abuse** or **neglect** of a **child**, call 651-430-6457.
 - Calls during the evening, weekend or holidays to **report** suspected **abuse** or **neglect** of a **child** should be made to the **Washington County Crisis Response Unit** at 651-275-7400.

Anyone who reports child abuse or neglect in good faith is immune from civil liability.

Together, as a community, we can transform risk to wellness for our children and ensure their experiences and growth are safe and healthy. Thank you, thank you!

Before abuse happens, can YOU prevent or de-escalate it? Sometimes, YES! Watch for our next article with tips for turning risk to wellness for our children by intervening in stressful situations.

Pam Clifton, Washington County Citizen Review Panel Chair
Jan Hayne, Member and Past Chair, Washington County Citizen Review Panel

The Citizen Review Panel for Children's Services provides opportunities for members of the Washington County community to have an integral role in ensuring that Child Protection Service Systems are protecting children from abuse and neglect and are meeting the permanency needs of children.