

Child Abuse in the Time of COVID-19

This is a stressful time for everyone, but children are particularly vulnerable during this crisis.

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- Child Abuse in the Time of COVID-19

Right now, we're undergoing a once-in-a-century (for most of us, a once-in-a-lifetime) pandemic, an international health crisis that has caused unprecedented fear and pain for many people and nations, has upended our norms, and is restructuring our current reality. In such uncertain times, it's imperative to listen to the experts and follow their instructions to ensure that we emerge safe, healthy, and alive—with our loved ones just as intact. Above all, it's important to face uncertainty and fear with the only thing that is guaranteed to make today and tomorrow better: loving kindness toward ourselves, our loved ones, and society as a whole.



This three-article series—examining Child Abuse, Suicide, and Domestic Violence— shares the expert insight of mental health professional Dr. Linda Miles, with content primarily drawn from an interview conducted by Francine Bianco Tax. These articles are directed to anyone who is struggling with issues that were initiated or amplified by COVID-19—though they aren't exclusive to this pandemic. These articles are meant to raise awareness and to provide resources, hope, and guidance toward overcoming these dangers.

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Dr. Linda Miles

There is always a way out. There is always the possibility of

a better future. Look and reach for a helping hand. Help is only a phone call away.

Child Abuse Hotline (FL): 1-800-962-4453

Child Abuse Hotline (National): 1-800-4-A-CHILD (4-22-4453)

How can we protect children from abuse, sexual slavery, and domestic violence when they and we are sequestered at home?

Today we're experiencing a unique crisis: a once-in-a-century pandemic which—in just a handful of months—has killed hundreds of thousands of people worldwide, brought the global economy to its knees, and made the future a bit more uncertain.

It's also altered family dynamics in many households.

Beneath the dark cloud of COVID-19 that has encircled the world, there's an underlying crisis that is more quiet yet just as bleak and heartbreaking: child maltreatment. Child welfare organizations warn that lockdown measures will increase cases of sexual, physical, and emotional abuse against children. The world's lockdown measures, while essential for (and successful in) curbing the rapid spread of the virus, are revealing some unfortunate "side effect" consequences.

Stay-at-home policies and lockdown orders can result in happy memories and family-bonding opportunities for healthy families. However, in dysfunctional households, these same policies and orders can translate into a nightmare. If a family member or home perpetrator is abusive toward a child, the child is now stuck at home with an abuser. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children received 4.2 million reports of child abuse in April 2020 (an increase in 3 million compared to April 2019).

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Teachers, therapists, guidance counselors, and medical encounters (from dentist appointments to ER visits) provide mandatory reporting: they can notice and report if a child is injured or malnourished. With schools and nurseries shut down in most states, children now lack this extremely vital support system. With doctor or dentist visits postponed, another source of reporting is also lost. Caring individuals who may have been able to otherwise comfort, support, or provide help are unable to witness the child's current situation. There are children in America

who live in a constant state of fear; today, it is harder than ever for them to gain help or relief by being around (or confiding in) peers and safe adults.

Unemployment—another repercussion of the pandemic—can cause great stress, toxic thoughts and behaviors, and economic strain. Economic hardship is considered a strong predictor of child abuse and neglect. One 2018 study showed that a 1% increase in unemployment leads to a 20% increase in child neglect (failure to provide for a child's basic health and wellbeing needs), along with a decrease in basic goods (e.g. grocery) expenses. Dysfunctional parents (e.g. who prioritize drinking, doing drugs, or pursuing other vices) won't really care about attaining food for their kids—and they probably won't get in a car, drive, and wait in a line to bring home the bread.

Some children only get to eat one substantial meal per day, and that breakfast or lunch is provided by their school or local community center. With these caretaking systems currently closed, these children risk going hungry. Malnutrition significantly affects the development of a child's brain, and can actually stunt his or her emotional, physical, and mental growth with long-term consequences. And if that isn't bad enough, child traffickers and online predators appear to be shifting their business models to evolve with the current situation. And given that forensic labs are all but shut down in some states, child exploitation stories are taking a backseat to murder and shooting cases.

So what can be done?

If you're a victim of abuse, contact a hotline and you will receive immediate help. Do not stay quarantined with your abuser. The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN) reports that, of the young people who reached out in March 2020, 67% identified their perpetrator as a family member and 79% were in lockdown with that person. In 1 out of 5 cases where the minor lived with the abuser, RAINN helped the minor to immediately contact the police.

Do not hesitate to reach out if you or someone else is being abused or neglected.

Since regular channels of reporting (like schools and doctor visits) have been disrupted, it's essential to remember that there are other channels, including confidential hotlines and virtual outreach centers. Do not hesitate to reach out if you or someone else is being abused or neglected. If you discern abuse, step in and take responsibility for reporting it.

Here are some valuable resources:

Child Abuse Hotline (FL): 1-800-962-4453

Child Abuse Hotline (National): 1-800-4-A-CHILD (4-22-4453)

Child Helpline International

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children Hotline and Resources. Phone Number: 1-800-843-5678

Create a safety plan on LevelsRespect.org

Child Protection Resources from the International Center for Missing & Exploited Children

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