

Always help protect kids

April is Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Month, which was designated in 1983. Annually, communities across our country focus their attention on the problem of child abuse and neglect, encouraging all citizens to continue our collective commitment to children's safety, permanence and well-being by supporting services that strengthen children and families, becoming involved in your community as a mentor, youth leader, tutor or other volunteer and learning more about the role of children services agencies including how to report suspected maltreatment of children.

Last year, Lorain County Children Services (LCCS) received 4,424 referrals from residents who were concerned about a child's situation. After careful screening, and understanding that some calls are duplicate calls, Children Services social workers assessed/investigated 2,465 situations, many involving a sibling group. Child abuse and neglect may only affect 4 percent of our county's families, however, that 4 percent depends on the other 96 percent to make our community one that reduces risk to children, increases access to services and collaborates fully to reduce conditions that may lead to abuse or neglect.

There are several events to mark the month.

April 11 is Annual Wear Blue Day. People can wear blue, take group photos and post/share on social media to help spread the work that child abuse is unacceptable.

April 29 is Blue Sunday, which features special speakers and sermons at local places of worship.

May 5 is the Rally for Kids, which is an exciting annual event at Midway Mall sponsored in part by LCCS. Dozens of



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local nonprofits and youth groups will be hosting activity tables. Children will love the activities and crafts offered at each table, giving parents time to learn more about each organization and ask questions.

Everyone can contribute to children's safety, permanency and well-being. Here are a few easy steps you can take to help prevent child abuse and neglect:

- Talk seriously about child abuse and don't make a joke about it. Immediately report suspected maltreatment to your county's child protective services agency. If you are not sure if you should call, please err on the side of caution and call anyway. Our highly trained staff will gather as much information as possible and make an informed decision regarding the intervention into a family's life. In Lorain County, please call (440) 329-5340 to report suspected child maltreatment. Elsewhere, you can call Ohio's toll free hotline at (800) 422-4453 which will link you with the appropriate agency to make your report.

- Practice positive parenting styles. Reinforce nonviolent problem-solving, compassion and self-control. Avoid corporal punishment. Ask yourself what's the message a child receives when physically struck for doing something wrong?

- Question the glorification of violence in sports, media and entertainment.

- If you have trouble providing basic food, clothing or shelter, please seek

assistance from community agencies.

- Break the cycle of violence in your own life. If child abuse has been a part of your history, seek professional counseling. Remember, we generally parent the way we were parented.

- Be active in your community. Please consider volunteering and/or contributing to community organizations that protect children and promote family well-being. Here in Lorain County, there is a vibrant safety net with many partners that would welcome your time and energy.

- Be an example in your neighborhood. Instill compassion and humane values in children and teens by showing you value people, animals and the environment.

- Use your voice. Speak out or vote on issues that improve the quality of life for children and families. Advocate for the restoration of funding levels for your community safety net services. Those services include behavioral health, home visitation, parenting programs, drug/alcohol assessment and counseling, support groups, etc.

- Simply, care. Make sure you know where your child is at all times. Ensure that he or she attends school regularly and receives proper medical attention.

- Remember: Vigilance against child abuse and neglect should never end on April 30.

We are committed to improving the lives of our young people. We know that with the right expertise, experience and energy, we can fulfill our promise to our children that they will be safe, with loving families, in stable communities. Child abuse is preventable.

Scott Ferris is the executive director of Lorain County Children Services.