



Saint Louis County

Public Health and Human Service Department
320 West Second Street, Room 605 • Duluth, MN 55802
Phone: (218) 726-2096 • Fax: (218) 726-2093 • www.stlouiscountymn.gov

Ann Busche
Director

NEWS RELEASE

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CONTACT: Paula Stocke, Supervisor
Initial Intervention Unit
(218) 749-7178

Year-round efforts to protect kids highlighted during April - Child Abuse Prevention Month

Child abuse – unfortunately – can occur in a variety of forms: physical, sexual and emotional. Too often, abuse and neglect goes unreported, and the resulting trauma to its young victims carries over to future generations. Stopping this cycle of violence and the secrecy that allows it to occur requires awareness and participation from the greater community.

Protecting our youngest citizens is something the St. Louis County Public Health and Human Services Department and the County Board take very seriously. Commissioners will show their commitment by issuing a proclamation, recognizing April as Child Abuse Prevention Month, at their Board meeting in Duluth on April 1 at 9:30 a.m.

County child protection social workers continue to initiate new approaches to help families and ensure child safety. The new Parent Support Outreach Program (PSOP) aims to help at risk families before they reach the level of requiring a child protection intervention. Child Protection Services often receives reports of child maltreatment that do not meet screening criteria for investigation or assessment. For those families, as well as other families that show a need for or interest in assistance, PSOP, a voluntary program, is available. Through PSOP, families can receive various supports to help prevent child maltreatment and to raise healthy kids. This can include assistance with basic housing, food, clothing and transportation needs; parenting education and information; and connections to a range of community resources.

St. Louis County social workers utilize safety-organized intervention, which focuses on identifying key concerns as well as family strengths in hopes of increasing child safety and preventing situations that lead to a child being removed from the home. This approach involves the

extended family, informal supports and formal supports in developing individualized solutions. By building partnerships with families, children and extended families, social workers can better assess risk factors and existing strengths to focus on ways to protect children, strengthen parenting skills and create healthier families.

The sad reality is that child abuse and neglect remain serious issues in St. Louis County. Last year, county child protection social workers responded to 1,321 cases that met child maltreatment state screening guidelines; this was down slightly from last year, but is still a significant number. Additionally, last year Public Health and Human Services provided prevention services to 1,528 families.

Warning signs of child maltreatment can include changes in behavior, school performance, eating or sleeping; unexplained injuries, regression in development, fear of going home, and risk-taking behaviors. Anyone who suspects a child is being abused or neglected is encouraged to contact St. Louis County's Initial Intervention Unit. In southern St. Louis County, the phone number is 218-726-2012. In northern St. Louis County, call 218-749-7128. If calling after hours, leave a message and it will be returned the next business day. In emergency situations, call 9-1-1. Voluntary reports can remain anonymous.

Child protective services are mandated by state and federal law. The Minnesota Department of Human Services defines the purpose of the child protection system as to help protect children from physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect, and to help families get the services they need to end abusive behavior and/or provide for their children's needs.

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