



DEPARTMENT of CHILDREN and FAMILIES

Making a Difference for Children, Families and Communities



Joette Katz
Commissioner

Dannel P. Malloy
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Connecticut Taking Multi-Pronged Approach To Preventing Child Abuse
*National Child Abuse Prevention Month Brings Focus To Very Young Children,
“Safe Sleep” Public Health Campaign and Enhanced Use of Data*

HARTFORD – During Child Abuse Prevention Month, Connecticut will highlight a multi-faceted approach to preventing child abuse. Its focus is on the most vulnerable very young children through stronger inter-agency collaborations, a public health campaign around key issues, and the enhanced use of data to identify families most at risk.

Department of Children and Families (DCF) Commissioner Joette Katz and the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) Commissioner Myra Jones-Taylor announced the comprehensive effort at a Head Start program operated by the Connecticut Renewal Team in Hartford today.

Governor Dannel P. Malloy said preventing child abuse is a community-wide responsibility that requires private providers and professionals in education, medicine, and law enforcement to work together.

“Challenging problems often require simple, elegant strategies to achieve solutions, and that’s why we believe so strongly in collaboration and partnerships. We all have the responsibility to make our families stronger and more capable of caring for their children,” Governor Malloy said.

Commissioner Katz said the Department is improving its response to families with children under the age of five through implementation of the nation’s most comprehensive “Early Childhood Practice Guide” for social workers. The guide will help social workers develop specialized assessments and services targeted to the heightened vulnerabilities of these very young children. National and local research demonstrates that children under the age of three and, in particular, infants six month old or younger, are the most likely to die as a result of abuse or neglect. The guide’s implementation will increase awareness of risks of abuse and neglect on this most vulnerable population. The guide was developed by local subject matter experts from DCF and the Office of Early Childhood (OEC), and a number of other early childhood partners.

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“Research in the field of brain development has confirmed that experiences of young children, whether very good or very bad, have profound consequences for mental and physical health, and overall well-being,” Commissioner Katz said. “We must apply a special lens to families with children zero to five years of age because of their extreme vulnerability and the consequences of exposure to adverse childhood experiences.”

OEC Commissioner Jones-Taylor said the Early Childhood Practice Guide is one of several partnerships underway to improve Connecticut’s prevention efforts. Commissioner Jones-Taylor pointed to an ongoing public health campaign to educate parents about maintaining a safe sleep environment. This campaign is the product of a collaborative work group including representatives from several state agencies including DCF, OEC, and the Office of the Child Advocate, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, as well as the Connecticut Hospital Association, and member hospitals.

“Unsafe sleep environments are present in tragic child deaths more than any other factor.” Commissioner Jones-Taylor said. “The partnership between state agencies and hospitals to educate new parents on keeping their babies safe is a strategic way to prevent child fatalities.” Materials developed by this public health campaign are provided parents of newborns in all the state’s hospitals. A second phase of the public health campaign is being planned to educate caregivers on abusive head trauma, which is another major cause of child fatalities.

More Information about the early Childhood Practice Guide

The Early Childhood Practice Guide includes chapters on why the focus on very young children is critical for child welfare agencies, attachment, trauma, child development, social and emotional health and milestones, assessing safety and risk, education and care, and many other topics.

Nationally, almost 200,000 children under the age of three come into contact with the child welfare system every year. Because the brain is so sensitive during this early stage, extremely stressful or traumatic experiences have powerful repercussions. For young children, the threat of abuse and neglect arises at a crucial time in life, when early experiences are shaping the brain’s architecture into a foundation for learning, health, and future success. This population also has the highest rate of child fatalities due to extreme vulnerability, inability to verbally share information, and because very young children are generally less visible in the community, including the schools.

The guide also covers working with parents with specialized needs, disabilities and cognitive limitations, as well as parents with their own histories of trauma, such as exposure to their own abuse or neglect as a child. Chapters on visitation, foster care, case supervision, expert consults, and teaming also were developed to guide our work with very young children.

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In its introduction, the guide emphasizes that work with “very young children can be especially challenging since they often have not yet developed the skills to tell you what has happened to them, what they are feeling or what they need. An important part of your role as a protective services worker is to learn to interpret children’s expressions, body language, behavior and emotions so that you can make sure they get the help and support they need to thrive.” Follow this link to view the new Early Childhood Practice Guide for Children Aged Zero to Five: <http://www.ct.gov/dcf/lib/dcf/cccsd/pdf/ecpg-wappendix.pdf>

Additional Prevention Activities

A report issued in March by the Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities, which was established through the Protect Our Kids Act of 2012 to devise a national strategy to prevent such tragedies, recommends several of the prevention activities that already are underway in Connecticut, including using data to identify children and families most at risk of a maltreatment fatality. Last year, DCF released a study of child fatalities occurring over a 10-year period that showed several factors correlated with increased risk to children, including being under 6 months of age, the sleep environment, and parental mental health. The safe sleep public health campaign as well as new requirements for social workers to educate parents with children under age 1 during home visits emanated from that study. The Department’s Office of Research and Evaluation, which conducted this study, also has and continues to produce a multitude of data reports to improve child protection work and has published much of this data on a Department webpage called “DCF Data Connect” available here: <http://www.ct.gov/dcf/cwp/view.asp?a=4799&Q=573032>

In addition, DCF is nearing completion of an agreement with Eckerd, a national social services agency, to utilize specific data, demographics and other information regarding families to assess safety and risk. Data analysis will trigger effective interventions with children whose families have characteristics that pose the greatest risk of a child fatality or significant injury. This “Rapid Safety Feedback” system has proven effective in other jurisdictions in identifying cases at high risk for serious maltreatment and fatalities.

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