

# CHILD WELFARE POLICY BRIEF





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY


As we work together as Tennesseans to support child well-being and ensure healthy development, the lasting impact of victimization through abuse or neglect during childhood cannot be overlooked.

In 2020, in Tennessee, 6,916 children experienced abuse or neglect.<sup>1</sup> Neglect is the most common form of victimization experienced by children. The long-term impact of neglect on brain development in childhood can lead to stunted growth, challenges in self-regulation and decision making and experience an elevated stress response. Physical, sexual and emotional abuse result in similar impacts on brain development.

Although the impact of victimization can be long-lasting, when children are supported they have an enormous capacity for resilience. We can work together to increase protective factors and identify risks to mitigate or prevent child maltreatment. Children need safe and supportive relationships, yet caregivers often face financial, environmental and mental health challenges that overload support systems and increase the likelihood of abuse or neglect.

We can work together to provide support to caregivers by strengthening economic supports to families, providing quality care and education early in life, enhancing parenting skills to promote healthy child development and intervening to lessen harms and prevent future risk. If we ensure that every community has what it needs to support children who have experienced traumatic events, we make resilience a real possibility.

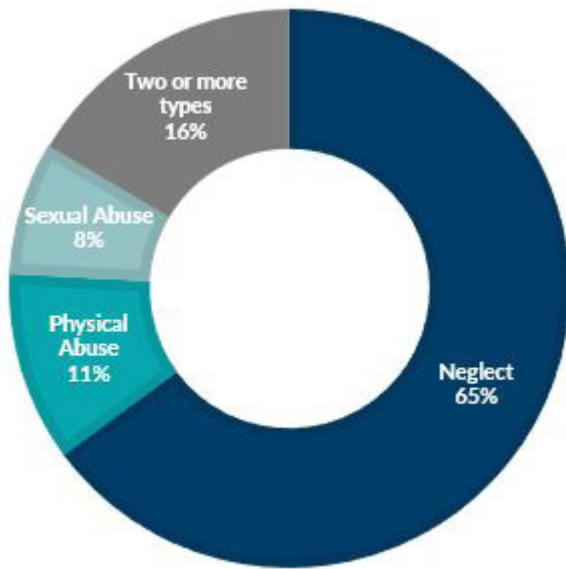




# IN 2019, APPROXIMATELY 652,000 CHILDREN WERE VICTIMS OF ABUSE OR NEGLECT IN THE UNITED STATES<sup>2</sup>

Tennessee has seen a 20% decrease in cases of child victimization since 2015 but still reported 6,916 victims of child abuse or neglect in 2020.<sup>1</sup> Children are almost always abused by someone they know and in 73% of cases in Tennessee the investigated abuser is a relative.<sup>3</sup>





# TYPES OF MALTREATMENT

## 2019

In 2019, neglect was the most common type of maltreatment. Children experiencing two or more types of abuse were 15.5% of cases. Physical abuse comprised 11% of maltreatment followed by sexual abuse at 8%.<sup>3</sup>

## RISK FACTORS

THE LIKELIHOOD OF A CHILD BEING ABUSED STRONGLY INCREASES IF THEIR CAREGIVER IS EXPERIENCING ANY OF THE FOLLOWING:<sup>4</sup>

- Alcohol abuse
- Drug abuse
- Financial problems
- Domestic violence
- Former victim of child abuse

## PROTECTIVE FACTORS

PROTECTIVE FACTORS MAY LESSEN THE LIKELIHOOD OF ABUSE OCCURRING IN A CHILD'S LIFE<sup>3</sup>:

- Caregiver employment
- Caregiver education
- Adequate housing
- Access to healthcare and social services
- Nurturing parenting
- Supportive family relationships

# CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL STRATEGIES FOR PREVENTING CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Strategies and approaches recommended by the Centers for Disease Control based on the best available evidence.<sup>5</sup>

## STRENGTHEN ECONOMIC SUPPORTS TO FAMILIES

- **Strengthen household financial security**

Increasing the Earned Income Tax Credit to \$4,000 per child regardless of tax or income status would reduce children in poverty in the US from 26.3 percent to 14.8 percent.

- **Family friendly workplaces**

Paid family leave and livable wages are associated with a reduction in child hospitalization for injuries and abusive head trauma.

## PROVIDE QUALITY CARE AND EDUCATION EARLY IN LIFE

- **Preschool enrichment with family engagement**

In a 15 year study of one preschool program, children who participated for 1 to 2 years experienced a 52% decrease in substantiated reports of abuse or neglect when relative to the comparison group.

- **Improved quality of childcare through licensing and accreditation.**

Accreditation can help insure high quality care. High quality care can help mitigate the impacts of a negative home environment.

## SUPPORTING CAREGIVERS PROTECTS CHILDREN

## ENHANCE PARENTING SKILLS TO PROMOTE HEALTHY CHILD DEVELOPMENT

- **Early childhood home visiting**

Nurse Family Partnership has been shown to reduce risk factors for abuse. Additionally, the home visiting program documented a 48% relative reduction in child abuse and neglect.

- **Parenting skill and family relationship approaches**

Parenting programs have shown reductions in harsh physical and verbal discipline, including spanking and hitting with objects, when compared to those in the control group.

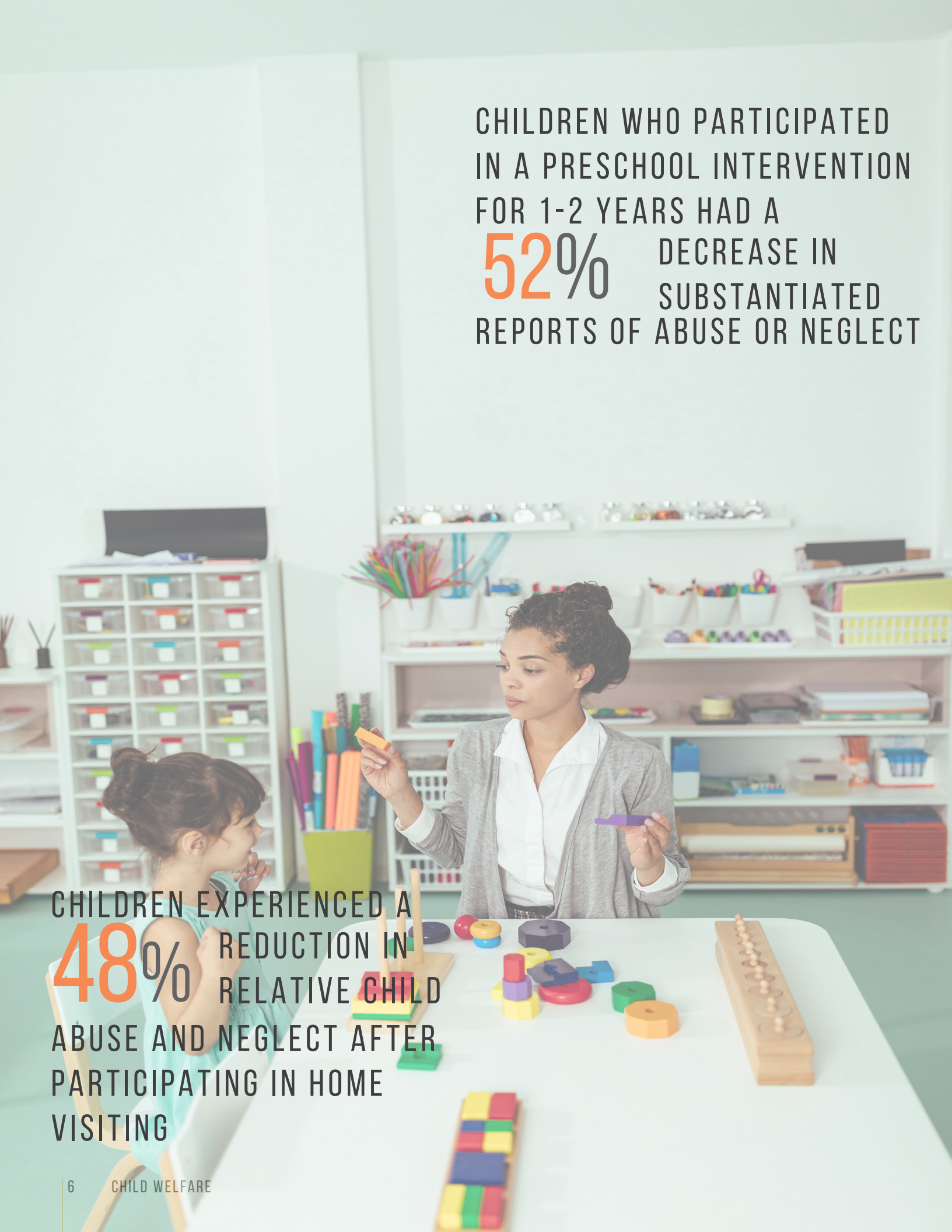
## INTERVENE TO LESSEN HARMS AND PREVENT FUTURE RISK

- **Enhanced primary care**

Primary care providers are often the first to observe risk factors for abuse and neglect.

- **Treatment to lessen harms of abuse and neglect exposure**

Providing treatment to children of all ages that have experienced victimization reduces risk of violence later on in life and can interrupt the cycle of abuse.

A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a white shirt and a grey cardigan, is sitting at a white table. She is holding a small orange block in her right hand and a purple block in her left hand, looking at them. A young girl with dark hair in a bun, wearing a light blue top, is sitting on a white chair to the left of the woman, looking at the woman. The table is covered with various colorful blocks and toys. In the background, there are white shelves filled with various supplies like markers, pencils, and containers. The overall setting is a bright, organized classroom or playroom.

CHILDREN WHO PARTICIPATED  
IN A PRESCHOOL INTERVENTION  
FOR 1-2 YEARS HAD A  
**52%** DECREASE IN  
SUBSTANTIATED  
REPORTS OF ABUSE OR NEGLECT

CHILDREN EXPERIENCED A  
**48%** REDUCTION IN  
RELATIVE CHILD  
ABUSE AND NEGLECT AFTER  
PARTICIPATING IN HOME  
VISITING



## EDUCATORS ROLE IN PREVENTING CHILD ABUSE

In 2017, 19.4% of reported cases of child abuse came from educational professionals.<sup>3</sup> Educators comprised the largest number of reporters of any profession with law enforcement close behind. Yet, in a survey conducted teachers cited a lack of knowledge on how to detect or report cases of abuse and not observing physical signs of abuse as deterrents to filing a report.<sup>4</sup>

Considering nearly three-quarters of abuse occurs by neglect cases of abuse do not always have observable physical signs.<sup>3</sup> It is important that all Tennesseans, particularly those in professions that frequently come into contact with children feel comfortable identifying signs of potential abuse. Professionals should also have a clear understanding of the reporting process and what to do in the event a child discloses abuse.

## RELATIVE CAREGIVER SUPPORT

Parents are not always able to care for their children. In such cases living with a safe and loving relative may help prevent entry, or re-entry into the state foster care system. Placement with a relative can enhance a child's sense of belonging and lessen a child's trauma. Across every generation and culture, grandparents and other relatives have stepped forward to raise children whose parents can no longer care for them. This time-honored tradition helps protect children and maintains strong family, community and cultural connections. Being part of a family is a basic human need and essential to well-being, especially for children, teenagers and young adults who are developing rapidly and transitioning to independence. When children cannot remain safely with their parents, other family can provide a sense of security, positive identify, and belonging. Children in relative caregiver placements are better able to adjust to their new environment, are less likely to experience school disruptions, are less likely to experience behavioral problems, and are more stable as they move less than children in-family foster care settings. Yet, many relative caregivers struggle with the costs of providing for the children under their care.

Providing child-care payments to eligible relative care givers has the opportunity to have a savings impact on foster care dollars and preserve the best interest of the child. By providing relative caregivers with a payment, half of what would be paid to a foster parent, doors will be opened for children to remain with loved ones and avoid the legal system. It is crucial that relative caregivers receive support to appropriately address the physical, psychological and emotional needs of their child. The lack of financial resources increases the likelihood of a relative caregiver placement failing, which subsequently results in an increased risk of a child entering state custody. By offering monetary reimbursement to relative caregivers, the financial burden of providing care would be eased and more children would be able to remain with their familial placements.

”  
PLACEMENT  
WITH A RELATIVE  
CAN ENHANCE A  
CHILD'S SENSE OF  
BELONGING AND  
LESSEN A CHILD'S  
TRAUMA.

# REFERENCES

- 1 <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/2986-substantiated-child-abuse-neglect-cases?loc=44&loct=2#detailed/2/any/false/574,1729,37,871,870,573,869,36,868,867/any/6176,13282>
- 2 <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/9903-children-who-are-confirmed-by-child-protective-services-as-victims-of-maltreatment?loc=1&loct=2#detailed/1/any/false/1729,37,871,870,573/any/19233,19234>
- 3 U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. (2021). Child Maltreatment 2019. Available from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/research-data-technology/statistics-research/child-maltreatment>.
- 4 Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2019.) Risk and protective factors. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/riskprotectivefactors.html>
- 5 Fortson, B. L., Klevens, J., Merrick, M.T., Gilbert, L. K., & Alexander, S. P. (2016). Preventing child abuse and neglect: A technical package for policy, norm, and programmatic activities.
- 6 Kenny, M. C. (2001). Child abuse reporting: Teachers' perceived deterrents. *Child abuse & neglect*, 25(1), 81-92.





TENNESSEE COMMISSION ON  
**CHILDREN & YOUTH**

Brenda Davis, Chairman  
Franklin  
Mid-Cumberland  
Appointed by Governor Bill Haslam

Ella Britt  
Murfreesboro  
Mid-Cumberland  
Appointed by Governor Bill Lee

Randy Bulter  
Dyersburg  
Northwest  
Appointed by Governor Bill Lee

Cameron Carver  
Nashville  
Mid-Cumberland  
Appointed by Governor Bill Lee

Kelly Drummond  
Knoxville  
East  
Appointed by Governor Bill Haslam

Ashley Dunkin  
Lawrenceburg  
South Central  
Appointed by Governor Bill Haslam

Judge Sharon Green  
Johnson City  
Northeast  
Appointed by Governor Bill Haslam

Jennie Harlan  
Columbia  
South Central  
Appointed by Governor Bill Haslam

Amy Jones  
Jackson  
Southwest Region  
Appointed by Governor Bill Haslam

Trey Jones  
Murfreesboro  
Mid-Cumberland  
Appointed by Governor Bill Lee

Petrina L. Jones-Jesz  
Cane Ridge  
Mid-Cumberland  
Appointed by Governor Bill Haslam

Charmaine Kromer  
Nashville  
Mid-Cumberland  
Appointed by Governor Bill Lee

Rob Mortensen  
Nashville  
Mid-Cumberland  
Appointed by Governor Bill Haslam

Steven Neely  
Franklin  
Mid-Cumberland  
Appointed by Governor Bill Haslam

Judge Robert D. Philyaw  
Chattanooga  
Southeast  
Appointed by Governor Bill Lee

Michael Rediker  
Nashville  
Mid-Cumberland  
Appointed by Governor Bill Lee

Stan Settles  
Chattanooga  
Southeast  
Appointed by Governor Bill Lee

Allan Sterbinsky  
Stanton  
Southwest  
Appointed by Governor Bill Haslam

Altha J. Stewart, M.D.  
Memphis  
Memphis-Shelby  
Appointed by Governor Bill Haslam

Glenda Terry  
Cookeville  
Upper Cumberland  
Appointed by Governor Bill Haslam

TENNESSEE COMMISSION ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

OCTOBER 2021

TN.GOV/TCCY