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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April – National Child Abuse Prevention Month
What we can do during COVID-19

Healthy families are the foundation of healthy communities and ultimately, a healthy nation. For children, the family unit is the most essential breeding ground for their health and well-being, particularly, during adolescence. As such, it is one of the Florida Department of Health in Charlotte County's (DOH-Charlotte) top priorities to ensure that all children in this community are provided with a stable, nurturing, and wholesome childhood; one void of abuse, neglect, and toxic stress.

Charlotte County, FL ranks third in the state for children 5-11 experiencing child abuse and 27th for children 5-11 experiencing sexual violence.¹ The reality of these statistics cannot remain unchallenged in our community.

Though our daily lives and routines have been disrupted by a global pandemic, it is still our duty and responsibility to remain vigilant and sensitive to the needs of those around us; especially, to the most vulnerable among us. One of the ways we can all help during this month of National Child Abuse Prevention is by actively promoting the 5 protective factors² against child abuse and neglect (CAN):

1. **Parental Resilience** – As a parent, finding positive ways to manage your personal stress will make certain that you remain available both physically and emotionally for your children.
2. **Healthy Social Connections** – Social networks impact family outcomes. Be intentional about maintaining consistent, diverse and healthy friendships outside of your immediate family.
3. **Concrete Support in Times of Need** – In addition to building and maintaining healthy community friendships, make sure you know where to access support services for your family's specific needs. This will help minimize stress and increase family resiliency.
4. **Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development** – When we understand how children are supposed to develop; healthy milestones and appropriate age-specific behavior, as adults, we can better enable or discourage certain behaviors and utilize the appropriate positive parenting techniques for each situation. This protects against child maltreatment in that parents will be able to meet their child's need at every developmental stage.
5. **Social & Emotional Competence of Children** – If you are a parent, caregiver, or an important adult figure in a child's life such as an educator, enable them to develop social and emotional skills including impulse control, self-regulation, and strong communication skills; developed in childhood, these skills become vital in adulthood.

If you are in quarantine or isolation as a result of COVID-19, online collaborative learning and video platforms are excellent tools for maintaining your social circles without breaking any local quarantine mandates. Additionally, this unprecedented moment in our nation and the world calls for each of us to become much more attentive to our community's health and well-being. A recent article from USATODAY highlighted one of the potential unfortunate consequences of our nation's current response to the Coronavirus epidemic in noting that "*Hundreds of thousands of vulnerable U.S. children could face a heightened risk of abuse and neglect as coronavirus-related school closures keep them at home and away from the nation's biggest group of hotline tipsters: educators.*" Therefore, "*as children's social circles contract to just family members,*" the risk of them not only suffering prolonged abuse or neglect increases, but also the risk of it going unreported increases, as well.³

¹ Florida Department of Health, Division of Public Health Statistics & Performance Management.

² Center for the Study of Social Policy, Ideas into Action: Protective Factors Framework.

³ USATODAY, "Children more at risk for abuse and neglect amid coronavirus pandemic, experts say." Accessed: March 25, 2020.

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/investigations/2020/03/21/coronavirus-pandemic-could-become-child-abuse-pandemic-experts-warn/2892923001/>.

Charlotte County's health initiative through to 2026 is Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES), which include CAN and all forms of toxic stress from childhood adversity. Healthy Charlotte, made up of community residents and local agency representatives from all sectors of our county, in partnership with DOH-Charlotte, is the community organization leading the county's efforts against ACEs and all forms of child abuse. For this year's National Child Abuse Prevention month, we ask that all Charlotte County residents take time to invest in the lives of the children around them, whether that takes the form of volunteering your time and expertise to organizations on the frontlines of our county's growing health concern or if that involves your direct and committed engagement in their lives.

Together, we can eradicate child abuse and neglect in all forms and build a community culture within Charlotte County where prevention and protection are the central theme rather than treatment.



For more information on the work Healthy Charlotte is doing or if you would like to join (free and open to any Charlotte County resident), please email us at: HealthyCharlotte@flhealth.gov or call us at: 941-624-7200. You may also visit our website at HealthyCharlotteCounty.org and like us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/CharlotteCountyCHIP>.