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**Child Abuse Prevention Month Recognizes
*Every Adult is Essential to Creating Better Tomorrows for All Children***

(Jefferson City, Missouri, April 1, 2021) — Missouri Kids First, the Prevent Child Abuse Missouri chapter recognizes the importance of community-based support for all children and families during National Child Abuse Prevention (CAP) Month in April. The theme of this year’s awareness and impact campaign is “Every Adult is Essential to Creating Better Tomorrows for All Children”

“We can build healthier, safer, and thriving communities if we work together and support families,” said David Chayer, Executive Director, Missouri KidsFirst. “Too often, our society thinks of raising healthy children as a parent or caregiver’s responsibility alone. In reality, we all benefit when groups of people work together to collectively care for children, who grow up to become successful, contributing adults.”

“Research shows that positive childhood experiences in nurturing environments provide a solid foundation for physical and mental health, learning, and social skills.” explained Dr. Melissa Merrick, President and CEO of Prevent Child Abuse America. “By preventing child abuse and neglect we aim to holistically improve the lives of all families and the communities they live in.”

This is the second year that CAP Month has taken place during the COVID-19 pandemic. The coronavirus outbreak and its subsequent losses have changed the world permanently, and prevention professionals are still working to understand the pandemic’s repercussions for incidents of child abuse and neglect.

The risk to Missouri’s children for experiencing child abuse and neglect in times of extreme stress and uncertainty is quite high. COVID-19 has added stressors to the lives of parents and caregivers, such as loss of employment, loss of income due to lack of paid leave, school and business closings that necessitate new childcare and homeschool arrangements, and food insecurity. The social connections and community services and activities that serve as protective factors against child abuse and neglect may not exist in this extraordinary time of physical distancing.

Missouri KidsFirst, and its statewide network of Child Advocacy Centers encourages Missouri adults to learn how they are essential in creating better tomorrows for all children!

Learn the facts: In Missouri, over 55,000 incidents of abuse and neglect, impacting over 78,000 children were reported in 2020. Fewer reports were made in 2020 compared to 2019. Children were isolated from mandated reporters who traditionally seek help and services for children and families. Learn more about the risk factors, protective factors, and signs of abuse and neglect.

Support Families: Help parents and caregivers build resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, and provide concrete support in times of need. Support expanding family-friendly policies, like paid sick and family leave, to help reduce stress on parents and caregivers.

Respond Responsibly as a Safe Adult: Be a protective adult who a child can trust and speak freely with, who will take action on behalf of a child’s safety, who does not cross boundaries, and who does not encourage a child to cross boundaries. If you suspect child abuse or neglect, learn how to responsibly report it.

Talk about prevention in your community: Ask your local schools and youth serving organizations about their child protection policies and codes of conduct. If they do not have these tools to protect children, connect them to resources and support them in creating new policies and codes.

Missouri KidsFirst, recommends the following ways that people everywhere can help raise awareness and impact virtually during this year's CAP Month:

- Wear blue on Thursday, April 1, Wear Blue Day, to show support for children and families. Post a photo or video on social media and include the #WearBlueDay2021 hashtag.
- Participate in Prevent Child Abuse America's nationwide [Digital Advocacy Day](#), on Wednesday, April 21. Contact legislators to let them know that you and your community support family-friendly policies, such as paid sick and family leave, that help reduce stress on parents and caregivers.
- Follow Missouri KidsFirst on social media and share our posts throughout the month of April. Encourage friends and family to do the same. Use the hashtags #Essential 4Kids #GrowingBetterTogether and #CAPMonth to signify your commitment to helping children, families, and entire communities to thrive.
- Make a tax-deductible donation to Missouri KidsFirst.
- Join us at the annual Standing with Children Awards VIRTUALLY on Monday, April 26, 2020 at 12:00 pm. Learn about the work of Missouri KidsFirst and hear from Missouri's most dedicated child advocates. Visit our website for more information and to register for this free online event!

For more ways to get involved in CAP Month, please visit missourikidsfirst.org and preventchildabuse.org/GrowingBetterTogether2021.

About Prevent Missouri KidsFirst

Missouri KidsFirst ("MKF") empowers adults to protect children from abuse and neglect through community education, professional training, and child advocacy. Our vision is for all children to be treated with kindness, dignity and respect. MKF leads statewide child abuse prevention efforts as the head of the Network of the Missouri Child Advocacy Centers and the Missouri Chapter of Prevent Child Abuse America. Since 2012, MKF has led and staffed the Missouri Task Force on the Prevention of Sexual Abuse of Children. Visit missourikidsfirst.org to learn more.

About Prevent Child Abuse America

Prevent Child Abuse America is a leading champion for all children in the United States. Our success is founded on a nationwide network of state chapters and nearly 600 Healthy Families America home visiting sites, which directly provide parents and caregivers a wide variety of services and resources that help children grow up to be productive, contributing members of their communities and society. Our comprehensive approach is informed by science—we translate and disseminate innovative research to promote proven solutions that our vast network then puts into action. And we raise public awareness and advocate for family friendly policies at the national, state, and local levels to support transformative programs and promote the conditions and contexts that help children, families, and communities across the country thrive. Visit preventchildabuse.org to learn more.