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Note to producers and editors: The attached video of Department for Community Based Services Commissioner Adria Johnson (at <https://youtu.be/QBWL9CM4pRY>) is available for your media use.

Reduce Stress to Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect During Holidays

Report suspected abuse to 877-KYSAFE1

FRANKFORT, Ky. (Dec. 18, 2017) – Stress can increase during the holidays, even in the most loving of families. And that can put some children at risk for abuse or neglect.

With children home from school, holiday travel and seasonal shopping and associated expenses, parents can get frazzled more easily than usual. What is typically a fun and joyful time for children can become devastating when parents or caregivers cope with stress by becoming abusive or neglectful to children.

The Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS), the state agency charged with child and adult protection, reminds adults to ensure children are protected from abuse and neglect.

“Parents enjoy spending time with their children, but frustration can escalate during times of high stress,” said Adria Johnson, commissioner of the CHFS Department for Community Based Services (DCBS). “It’s never OK to hit a child.”

Johnson and Prevent Child Abuse Kentucky (PCAK), one of the cabinet’s community partners, offered these tips to keep children safer this season:

- **Count to 10.** It’s a tried and true method to diffuse high emotions and clear your head before you say or do anything.
- **Get some space.** If you are so upset that you feel like screaming -- or more -- leave the room. Say, “I’m so angry; I need a minute to think.” Then leave the room or send your child to his room so you can calm down and regroup. You’ll get yourself under control, and it’s a good example for your children.
- **Be quick.** Catch your child in the act. Delayed reactions dilute the effect of the punishment.
- **Use selectively.** Use timeout for talking back, hitting and safety-compromising problems. Don’t overuse it.



- **Keep calm.** Your anger only adds fuel to the fire and changes the focus from the behavior of the child to your anger. This prevents you from being in control.
- **Model disciplined behavior.** Ask other adults around your children – even house guests – to do the same. Children are usually better behaved when their parents and caregivers are happier and more relaxed.
- **Teach children to communicate, too.** Ask them to talk about what’s bothering them rather than reacting by hitting or yelling.
- **Talk it out.** If you’re under stress, talking to someone is an easy and effective outlet. Looking to other parents for advice helps mothers, fathers and other caregivers feel less isolated in their problems. Online communities and resource sites can offer support and solutions.
- **Stick with it.** Once you punish or say “timeout,” don’t back down or be talked out of it. If you decide to use timeout to control hitting, for example, use it every time your child hits, even if he spends most of the day in timeout. Eventually, he’ll decide that it’s more fun to play without hitting than to sit alone in his room.

View a video of Johnson offering these suggestions at <https://youtu.be/QBWL9CM4pRY>.

Johnson said staff at county DCBS offices may help parents by finding resources to deal with the problems that may cause stress, such as the loss of a job. Community resources are often available to assist families who need help with services like utilities, child care or job training.

“The local offices can assist with referrals to appropriate agencies,” Johnson said.

Log on to https://prdweb.chfs.ky.gov/Office_Phone/index.aspx to find the phone number for the DCBS office in your county.

Drug and alcohol abuse may increase during the holidays, leading to an increase of child safety risk, Johnson said. Families who need help with these issues can get information about prevention resources from the CHFS Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities’ Substance Abuse Prevention Program at <http://dbhdid.ky.gov/dbh/sa.aspx>.

Johnson said that anyone responsible for children – parents, family members, baby-sitters – should be aware, not impaired.

“Drinking and drug use impair your ability to care for a baby or a child,” she said. “Substance use impedes your judgment and behavior. We see lot of tragic incidences of caregivers’ unsafe sleep with children involving alcohol and drugs.”

Prevent Child Abuse Kentucky (PCAK is a statewide nonprofit agency whose mission is to prevent the abuse and neglect of Kentucky’s children through its outreach.

“Abuse and neglect are associated with short- and long-term consequences that affect not only the child and family, but also society as a whole,” PCAK Executive Director Jill Seyfred said. “PCAK gives parents and caregivers expert guidance on child safety. We’re proud to be one of DCBS’ partners in prevention.”

PCAK works with a statewide network of providers to offer parent education and support to help prevent child abuse.

To learn more about the self-help, parent education and support group providers serving Kentucky, contact Joel Griffith, jgriffith@pcaky.org. To learn more about PCAK’s other prevention opportunities and how you can help, call 800-CHILDREN, or visit PCAK online at www.pcaky.org.

Johnson said it takes effort from entire communities to stop abuse and neglect. Kentuckians should remember that if they even suspect child abuse or neglect, they must report it. "It's the law," she said.

In state fiscal year 2017 (July 2016-June 2017), more than 56,700 reports of abuse met criteria for investigation, and more than 16,500 of those were substantiated.

Call your local police or the cabinet's child abuse hotline at 877-KYSAFE1 – 877-597-2331 – to report suspected abuse. Hotline callers remain anonymous.

Learn more tips on safe sleep at <http://safesleepky.com/>.

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The Cabinet for Health and Family Services is home to most of the state's human services and healthcare programs, including the Department for Medicaid Services, the Department for Community Based Services the Department for Public Health, the Department for Aging and Independent Living and the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities. CHFS is one of the largest agencies in state government, with nearly 8,000 full- and part-time employees located across the Commonwealth focused on improving the lives and health of Kentuckians.