

# Keep more families together safely.



It is within Texas' power to halve the odds that a child will ever experience child abuse or neglect and to make sure no child suffers unnecessarily the trauma of being separated from a safe family.

Recently, science has shown that a great deal of child abuse, neglect, and dysfunction doesn't have to be a fact of life. Rather, proven services that involve families make a life-altering difference: they prevent tragedy outright or address troubles to keep crises at bay. Many of these services keep children from experiencing more serious adversity by addressing whatever is the root cause of instability in a child's home. This leads more children to remain safely with their families instead of entering foster care, which improves their lives and their trajectory in the future and leads to cost-savings for society.<sup>1</sup> Children in foster care, too, are better off when the system addresses their wellbeing by improving wellbeing in their families, something that leads more kids into permanent safe homes and fewer parents to have to surrender their children to the child welfare system.<sup>2</sup>

## What to Know

- **Too many kids today are growing up experiencing trauma that's preventable.** Stress from early experiences with abuse, neglect, or dysfunction can alter the chemistry in a child's brain, leading to sometimes debilitating challenges later in life.<sup>3,4</sup>



- **There are proven ways to keep vulnerable kids from ever suffering abuse or neglect.**<sup>5</sup> In 2011, Texas confirmed nearly 66,000 cases of child abuse or neglect,<sup>6</sup> yet the state legislature that year also slashed by 44% state resources for child abuse prevention that already reached only a fraction of the families who could benefit from it.<sup>7</sup> Child abuse prevention services use proven strategies that give families the help they need to keep their kids safe. These services are shown to dramatically reduce children's chances of experiencing abuse or neglect—in some cases, cutting bad odds by as much as half.<sup>8</sup>
- **Many kids can remain safely with their families** even after being found at risk for abuse or neglect. Early interventions help put families on a better path.
- When it is safe and appropriate, **keeping families together is best for kids.** Texas law and our Department of Family and Protective Services acknowledge this, noting that *safe family reunification* is the best outcome for children.<sup>9</sup> Policies, programs, and service-delivery models within the child welfare system that involve and engage parents in a meaningful way have a proven effect: they help families identify their specific needs and strengths, as well as get access to community resources that lead them to create a safe home for their child.<sup>10</sup> Healing a child's family of origin shows support for the child when it reduces the trauma of being taken away from home in the first place.

## How to Make It Happen

- **Do what we know works early on, including prevention, early intervention, and in-home services:** These areas are often the first to be cut from our child welfare budget, despite their proven track record at keeping children safe.

- **Meaningfully engage parents involved in the child welfare system at all stages of services** (Investigations, Family-Based Safety Services, and Conservatorship). Parental engagement allows parents to recognize their own needs and strengths, and connect to resources that will support their ability to create a safe home for their child.<sup>11</sup>
- **Strengthen family reunification efforts.** Measures that make it more difficult for parents to be involved and ultimately reunify with their children don't serve the best interests of children.

For more on this strategy see: <http://txchildren.org/Report/Protection>

## Thinking About Costs

Preventing child abuse, neglect, and family disintegration makes a tremendous difference, not just for individual kids but for society as a whole. Right now, Texas spends an estimated \$5.2 billion more per year in greater correctional, health care, and workforce productivity losses that are "indirect costs" resulting from past child abuse and neglect. To put that in perspective, that's more than Texas spends on its entire prison system in a year.

## Sources

### Thinking about Costs

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