



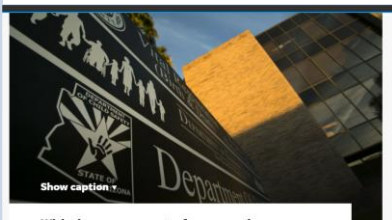
Lean On Me AZ: Becoming a Mandated Supporter

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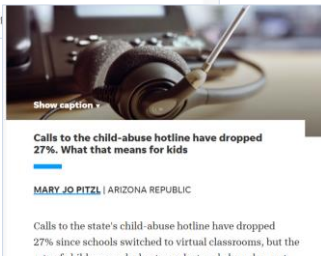


the pandemic & child abuse



With classrooms empty, fewer people are watching for signs of child abuse

MARY JO PITZL | ARIZONA REPUBLIC



Calls to the child-abuse hotline have dropped 27%. What that means for kids

MARY JO PITZL | ARIZONA REPUBLIC

Calls to the state's child-abuse hotline have dropped 27% since schools switched to virtual classrooms, but the state of child removals due to neglect and abuse has not.

We know how to report child abuse.

Do we know how to *prevent* it?

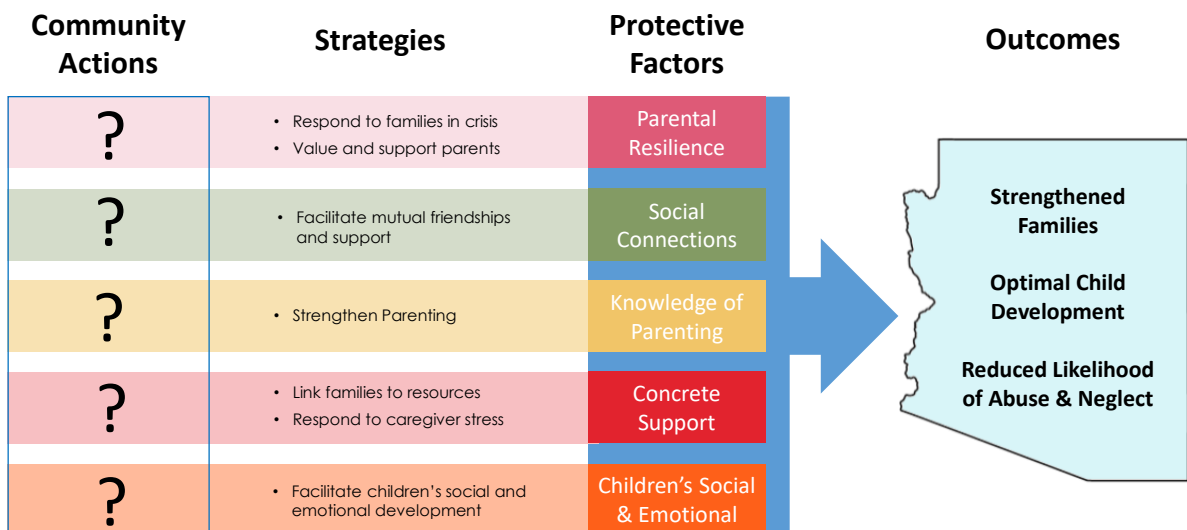
Can we be not just mandated reporters,
but ***mandated supporters***?



Lean On Me AZ

Goal: empower communities to *prevent child maltreatment before it ever happens* by supporting and strengthening families through everyday actions

Culture of surveillance → Culture of support



- What can members of this community do to **value and support parents**?
- What can members of this community do to **respond when they observe parent stress**?
- What can members of this community do to help **build social and emotional skills in children**?
- What can members of this community do to **respond to families in times of crisis**?
- What can members of this community do to **strengthen parenting**?
- What can members of this community do to facilitate **connection and mutual support with families**?
- What can members of this community do to **connect families to available resources**?



"I had a neighbor call the cops on me. My daughter had just come back from foster care, and the transition was hard for her. She was having a meltdown. I explained this to the cop. He said, 'I understand. You're doing a good job.' And he left. I went to my neighbor and explained the situation to her, too. She apologized. I asked her to please ask me if I needed help before calling the authorities on me again."

"In Somerton, a member of the town council holds an 'exercise boot camp' for families. It's a way for them to engage and stay healthy. Through the program, you can see children improve behaviorally and physically."

"When I became a teacher, I realized that some teachers judge parents a lot. I'm a mother of a special needs child, and when I heard other teachers making judgments on things like dirty shirts, I wondered what teachers had been saying about my child and my parenting. Instead of judging, we should be asking ourselves how you can help."

"Listening is one of the best gifts we can provide to anyone. I've noticed, during the pandemic, that we're going through situations that we've never gone through before. Make sure they feel like they aren't the only ones. I tell them: you aren't the first one who doesn't know how to get through this."

"I met a family who yelled whenever they talked to each other. At first glance, I was concerned, but through further observation, I recognized that there was love and safety in this family. They were loud, but the yelling was not abusive- it was cultural. Through a parenting class, the grandmother learned tools to use a gentler approach, if she wished."

"Once, an older couple walked up to me while my four-year old son was melting down, and said 'you're doing great.' I felt so supported, I was walking on air."



Lean On Me AZ Toolkit

Why

- “The children can’t survive if the parents aren’t surviving. For parents to survive, the community needs to support them, and we’re all part of that community.”

What

- Lens-shift: uplift and support parents

How (tips and tools)

- **Listening. Empathy. Affirmation. Non-Judgement.**



Offer help proactively and specifically



It is hard to ask for help, but everyone needs it in varying degrees. Create an environment in which asking for it is normal. Offer to be helpful before the family needs help. Tell them what kind of help you want to offer.



Making help available could be as simple as conspicuously placing pamphlets about resources and programs where moms, dads, and other caregivers of children can see them.




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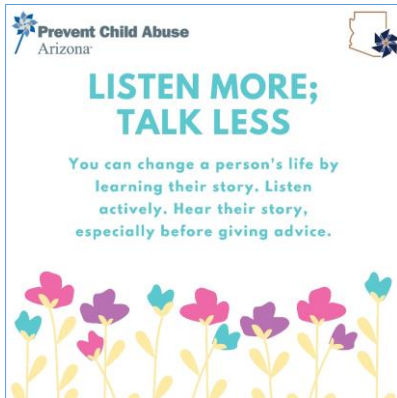
Check your bias

The idealized "normal" American family bears a distinctly white, middle-class standard. It's rational to have a bias based on our own standards and experiences but keep in mind that we are a multicultural society with a shrinking middle class.

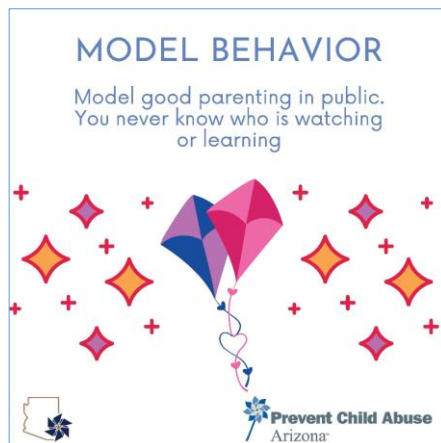


Our communities are full of loving families across the full range of cultural, race, and income classifications. Check your biases and perceptions to be able to meet families where they are and approach who they are.

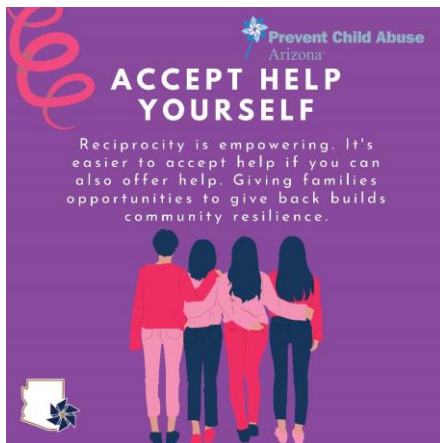




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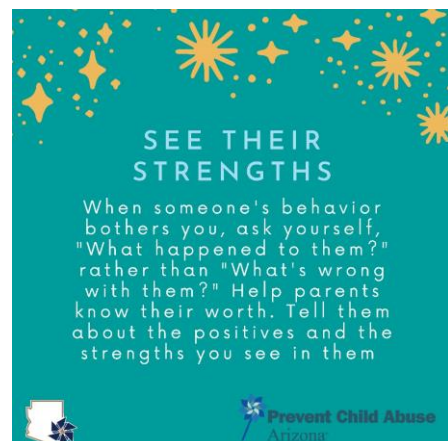


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EDUCATE RATHER THAN DENIGRATE

Shame is not a good learning tool. Assume parents are trying their best. They may not have the time capacity or desire to attend a parenting class or group.

Start education efforts where parents are, like children's sports events. That's where natural connections develop. Educate and communicate without expectation. Don't be offended if they don't follow advice.

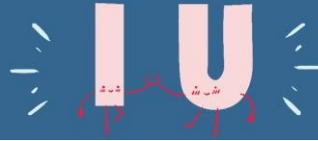


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DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY

Stressed parents may find it hard to accept help, especially if they find it hard to trust people because of their past experiences. In a crisis situation, you can say, "You don't have a reason to trust me, but I'm on your team"



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BE A CALMING PRESENCE

Only through calm can you create calm. Children learn calm from their parents, but it can be difficult to be a calm parent. When you observe parent stress, stay calm. Being a calm community member can help parents stay calm

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BE A PARENT ALLY

Consider yourself an ambassador to the success of parents and families. Allies can assume the roles of middlemen, culture guiders, and advocates. Tap the power of elders, who can assume the roles of grandparents and mentors

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STORYTIME FOR GROWN-UPS



Put observations in a third person. Tell a story about another person when you offer suggestions. "My friend did this and it worked." Speak about the times that you've received help. It takes leaders to normalize help-seeking

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watch your language



Catch yourself when you negatively talk about people receiving government assistance, or other forms of concrete help. Instead, you can change social norms to normalize help-seeking by saying something like, "I'm glad they're getting what they need. We all need help sometimes."

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Treasure Children

Be kind whenever you're in the presence of a child. Strike a positive conversation with children. Talk to children to make them feel like they're part of the community.



Acknowledge their strengths, effort, and feelings. Help build children's social skills by modeling humility, character, courtesy, and kindness.



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Convene. Show up



Host events that offer parents a break and childcare. Give parents the opportunity to focus on self-care on a regular basis. Social media groups can be a great way to find others with common interests, who share your challenges, or are in similar phases of life

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Say the magic words



Acknowledge your desire to help with the right words. "I want to help you. What can I do to help you?" If you hear others saying something judgemental or negative to a parent in a stressful situation, run interference. Get closer and say something like, "It looks like she's trying her best."



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Normalize Stress



Every parent experiences stress. It's not a weak or a failure to feel it. It's normal. We don't learn self-regulation and healthy coping if we don't first recognize we are stressed. Look for signs of stress in parents and do what you can do to relieve it. Acts of kindness and caring de-escalate stressful situations.



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Honor Bravery

It's not easy for parents to ask for help, and it shouldn't hurt to ask. If parents seek assistance, offer encouragement that they did the right thing.



Tell them, "You're not the first one or the last one to need help." It takes leaders to normalize help-seeking. Speak about the times that you've received help.



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Be the village

Start connecting with people around you-or your block, or in your apartment complex. Bring back "welcome wagons"-introduce yourself to new neighbors. Create or show up at community events.



Organize potlucks for parents that could include clothing swaps. Go beyond asking about the children; asks parents how they are doing. Really listen.



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Breakout session questions

- What message or messages stood out to you? Why?
- What could you do to create a culture of parent support in Georgia?



Thank you!

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