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Contact: Deborah Lopez
Illinois DCFS
312-937-0050

Illinois DCFS to youth: You are Not Alone!

New campaign aims to keep children safe during coronavirus pandemic

(CHICAGO) – During the coronavirus pandemic when families are secluded at home, calls to report suspected child abuse and neglect have decreased significantly across the country, and by 57% in Illinois compared to the same time last year.

According to the department:

- One in five children is abused or neglected before they turn 18;
- 70% of child abuse goes unreported; and
- Children tell an average of seven adults they are being mistreated before it is reported to authorities.



To ensure that children know that it is never okay for anyone to hurt or neglect them, the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services is launching the “You are Not Alone” campaign with the simple message: if someone is hurting you, we can help.

“A decline in calls to our abuse and neglect hotline does not mean that child abuse and neglect has decreased – in fact, with this pandemic many families are suffering from extreme stress.” said Illinois DCFS Acting Director Marc D. Smith. “During this time when youth are at home – potentially with an abusive parent – and they don't have a teacher, coach or other trusted adult to turn to for help, we want them to know they are not alone. If a child is being hurt or neglected, he

or she can call us at 1-800-25-ABUSE and we will help. It is our responsibility to protect children who are reported to be abused or neglected.”

“Kids are smart and they see things adults don't,” said DCFS Medical Director Doctor Margaret Scotellaro. “My advice to them is to protect your siblings, your friends and yourself. If you or someone you know is hurt or in danger, make the call. Help is here.”

DCFS is partnering with the Illinois Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) to distribute posters in English and Spanish to pediatrician’s offices and IDPH health care facilities across the state and place the poster at children’s eye level.

“Sadly, about five children die every day in America from abuse and neglect,” said Robert Sege, MD, PhD, FAAP, a child abuse pediatrician and member of the AAP Council on Child Abuse and Neglect. “No doubt, we are worried about the financial and emotional stress this pandemic is placing on families, especially the most vulnerable. Call your pediatrician. Call your close friend, relative or faith leader. Call someone if you fear snapping.”

“No child should have to endure abuse or neglect, and during these unprecedented times children may think that there’s nowhere to turn for help if they are in an unsafe situation at home,” said Illinois Department of Public Health Director Dr. Ngozi O. Ezike. “We are pleased to partner with DCFS and the American Academy of Pediatrics on this most important initiative to let children know that help is just a phone call away.”

Anyone concerned about the health or safety of a child should call the Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline at 1-800-25-ABUSE (252-2873).

About the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Founded in 1964, DCFS is responsible for protecting children from abuse or neglect by responding to calls received on the Child Abuse Hotline, 1-800-25-ABUSE (1-800-252-2873). With the goal of keeping children safe, DCFS strengthens and supports families with a wide range of services. When keeping a child safe means removing them from the home, DCFS makes every effort to reunite them with their family. When the best interest of the child makes this impossible, DCFS is committed to pursuing adoption by loving families to provide children with a safe and permanent home. DCFS is also responsible for licensing and monitoring of all Illinois child welfare agencies.

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