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It takes a valley to protect a child

By Sammi Rader and Pamela Kestner
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In Virginia, every 84 minutes a child is abused or neglected and every eight days a child dies from abuse or neglect. Child abuse and neglect has a ripple effect in our community — impacting success in school, higher health care costs, costs related to removing children from homes. But, of course, the most significant cost is the cost to our children — losing their innocence, losing a sense of security and warmth and, at times, losing their lives.

Many agencies and organizations in our community are striving to eradicate child abuse and neglect through education, training and awareness. But the responsibility does not stop there.

We all must play a role in protecting the lives of children. Anyone concerned for a child can report abuse or neglect. However, there continues to be questions and confusion within the general public about what to do if someone suspects child abuse or neglect in his or her family, neighborhood, school, congregation, etc.

The first step in helping children is learning to recognize the symptoms of child abuse and neglect. Although child abuse is divided into four types — physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse and emotional maltreatment — the types are more typically found in combination than alone.

Child abuse and neglect happens within all economic, racial, social, ethnic and religious groups. Abusive parents can be friends, neighbors, colleagues or relatives.

By educating yourself and others, you can help your community prevent child abuse and neglect. Anything you do to support children and parents can help reduce the stress that often leads to abuse and neglect.

The Family Violence Coordinating Council, a standing committee of the Council of Community Services, invites the community — local residents, clergy, school personnel, business leaders, child care providers, etc. — to become better educated about child protection by attending "It Takes a Valley: A Community Forum on Child Protection" on Tuesday, Feb.21, 2012, from 6 to 8 p.m., at Patrick Henry High School's auditorium.

Co-sponsored by the Jefferson College of Health Sciences, this free event is being held for the general public to increase education and awareness about child protection and how we as a caring community can come together and make a difference in our children's lives.

The forum will include presentations by a local department of social services, child serving agencies, court personnel, law enforcement personnel and a pediatrician. A moderated question-and-answer session will follow the presentations.

It is vital that you attend this important forum because "it takes a valley" to make a difference in our children's lives.

For more information about the community forum, please contact the Council of Community Services by calling 540-985-0131. No pre-registration is required.
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