



CDSS

WILL LIGHTBOURNE
DIRECTOR

STATE OF CALIFORNIA—HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

744 P Street • Sacramento, CA 95814 • www.cdss.ca.gov



EDMUND G. BROWN JR.
GOVERNOR

July 13, 2016

ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE NO. I-51-16

TO: ALL COUNTY CHILD WELFARE
DIRECTORS

SUBJECT: RESPITE CARE AS CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT PREVENTION
STRATEGY

REASON FOR THIS TRANSMITTAL

- ☐ State Law Change
- ☐ Federal Law or Regulation Change
- ☐ Court Order
- ☐ Clarification Requested by One or More Counties
- ☒ Initiated by CDSS

The purpose of this All County Information Notice (ACIN) is to inform county child welfare agencies about the use of respite care as a child abuse and neglect prevention strategy, and to encourage county agencies to provide referrals to respite programs and respite related resources to at risk families seeking support. Respite care is a temporary care situation provided by a third party, allowing a resting period for family caregivers seeking to reduce parental stress. Respite care is defined as short term care services, including the services of crisis nurseries, provided in the temporary absence of the regular caregiver to children who are in danger of child abuse or neglect; have experienced child abuse or neglect; or have disabilities or chronic or terminal illnesses.¹ The Office of Child Abuse Prevention (OCAP) funding sources that are allowable for use to support respite care services include Community Based Child Abuse Prevention, Child Abuse Prevention Intervention and Treatment and Promoting Safe and Stable Families. The following counties currently report using the Office of Child Abuse Prevention funds to support respite care services: Alameda, Lake, Lassen, Orange, San Benito, Santa Barbara and Tehama.

The use of respite care allows family caregivers relief from the physical and mental stress of parenting so that they may address their own personal needs, such as counseling or substance abuse treatment. The lack of support for parents to tend to their own needs can exacerbate parenting stress, which is a common factor contributing to child maltreatment and can stem from illness, work-related problems, marital discord, poor housing conditions or death of a family member, among other conditions. Research has shown an increased likelihood of child abuse when parents are under high stress combined with one of the following mediating variables: socialization of violence, legitimacy of family violence, marital dissatisfaction, socioeconomic status, marital power, or social integration and isolation.²

¹ 42 U.S.C. 5116h (Section 208 of Title II of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act).

² Melton, G. B. (2014). Strong Communities for Children: A community-wide approach

Respite care provides families in crisis an opportunity to deal with current barriers that may be causes of stress and reduces the risk of further crises, such as joblessness and medical emergencies. Respite care provides a healthy separation between a child and parent at times when parents may be experiencing high stress levels and the child may be at increased risk of maltreatment. Respite care strengthens families by helping them maintain balance between the needs of the caregiver and the children. Respite care also provides safe, temporary care for children and provides an opportunity to link families to other comprehensive support services. The amount of time that a child is in respite care can vary based on the family's particular situation. For example, some circumstances may require as little as a few hours and others may warrant a longer stay, such as several weeks or months. Some respite programs may offer care for a few hours each week so parents experiencing caregiver stress will have a predictable time each week for self-care.

Respite care enhances the protective factors for parental resilience, concrete support in time of need, and children's social and emotional development. It promotes parental resilience because it gives parents the resources they need to overcome obstacles, which empowers parents to handle life's difficult challenges. Respite care supports children's social and emotional development by offering caring and nurturing environments for children during times of parental stress. It supports children's emotional development by temporarily removing children from situations that could potentially lead to adverse childhood experiences or maltreatment.

Respite care has also shown to be a useful resource for families of children with disabilities. The roles and responsibilities of parenting become even more difficult and complex when caring for children with disabilities. Research shows that children with disabilities are maltreated at a rate of 1.7 times higher than other children.³ Children with disabilities are a vulnerable population due to the additional stress factors that may be affecting their families, such as feeling unprepared to care for a disabled child, financial strain to provide adequate medical or emotional care and lack of an understanding support system. Respite care gives these families relief from those daily stressors by offering a safe and caring environment that caters specifically to the needs of disabled children.

The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) and the OCAP encourage counties to use respite care as part of their child abuse and neglect prevention service array. Counties can explore building networks and collaborations with existing organizations already offering these services such as private and faith based groups. The CDSS and the OCAP do not endorse the following programs; however, programs listed below may serve as examples of what respite care programs may look like.

for prevention of child maltreatment. In J. E. Korbin & R. D. Krugman (Eds.), *Handbook of child maltreatment* (pp. 329-339). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.

³<http://www.helpmegrow.ohio.gov/Resources/Abuse%20Prevention/Maltreatment%20of%20Children%20with%20Disabilities.aspx>

Strong Communities for Children is an organization in Colorado that supports building networks within communities and promotes respite care to at-risk families as a prevention measure for child abuse and neglect. The program theory is based on forming a strong community that promotes the protective factors of social connectedness and concrete support in order to strengthen families. This is a volunteer-based community support network in which volunteers create new Family Activity Centers within existing community facilities with universally available parents' nights out, play groups, family activities, financial counseling, chats with family advocates, and respite care. Reports of the program's success show that maltreatment cases of children age four and under had decreased by 41 percent in the area it served. Injuries related to child maltreatment for the same age group also saw a 38 percent decrease.⁴ This program is rated by the California Evidence Based Clearing House⁵ as a three and is considered a promising practice. For more information about the programs and services of Strong Communities for Children, visit <http://www.cebc4cw.org/program/strong-communities-for-children/>.

Respite care for the developmentally disabled can also provide relief for families. There are many respite care options providing quality services for families who are caring for a child with disabilities. California has 21 regional centers with over 40 offices throughout the state offering services to individuals with disabilities and their families. Those seeking these services can receive information about the providers in their area. For more information about these services, visit <http://www.dds.ca.gov/RC/RCList.cfm>.

Crisis nurseries are a similar alternative to respite care. A crisis nursery offers emergency out of home care for children of families in stressful situations. Like many respite care programs, the age of children and duration of stay varies depending on the organization's policies. The goal of the crisis nursery is to offer a safe environment for children to be cared for and to give parents the support they need to resolve their stressful situation.

Crisis nursery services are offered in the following areas: Sacramento County, Yolo County, Bay Area, Nevada County, San Diego County, Los Angeles County and San Joaquin County. The majority of crisis nursery programs in California provide services for families with children five years of age and younger, although some do offer services for children up to age 11. These programs provide a safe place for the most vulnerable populations of children at risk to suffer from abuse or neglect. In California, there are over 496,000 reports of child abuse and neglect each year. Nearly half of these claims are for children under the age of five.⁶ Roughly 80 percent of child fatalities resulting

⁴ Melton, G. B. (2014). Strong Communities for Children: A community-wide approach for prevention of child maltreatment. In J. E. Korbin & R. D. Krugman (Eds.), *Handbook of child maltreatment* (pp. 329-339). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.

⁵ <http://www.cebc4cw.org/ratings/scientific-rating-scale/>

⁶ Webster, D., et al. California Child Welfare Indicators Project Reports, UC Berkeley Center for Social Services Research (May 2015); Child Trends, analysis of data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, as cited on KIDS COUNT (Jun. 2015)

from abuse or neglect affect victims under three years of age and approximately 15 percent occur in ages four to 11.⁷

Research suggests that the effect of crisis nurseries on the safety and well-being of families has positive results. In California, counties with crisis nurseries had lower rates of substantiated claims of child abuse and neglect than counties without crisis nurseries.⁸ This correlation between crisis nurseries and fewer substantiated claims supports the approach of utilizing crisis nurseries as an effective strategy to prevent child maltreatment. In 2015, the Sacramento Crisis Nursery reported that 90 percent of caregivers said they were better able to work on resolving their crisis situation after using the Crisis Nurseries.

The Sacramento Children's Home operates Sacramento's crisis nursery program at two locations, which offer voluntary, confidential, free care for children newborn through age five for up to 30 days and provide case management support and referrals to available resources to caregivers for crisis intervention services. Visit <http://www.kidshome.org/what-we-do/crisis-nursery/> for more information.

The Bay Area Crisis Nursery offers emergency child care services to families facing extraordinary situations. This organization consists of two sites, each with the ability to provide 24-hour residential care for children. One facility houses ages birth to five years old and the other ages six to 11. Since opening in 1981, they have had over 20,000 admissions. For more information, visit <http://www.bayareacrisisnursery.org/>.

Caregivers should always entrust the care of their child to someone they feel comfortable with and who will provide a safe environment for that child. Caregivers who wish to check the background of their selected child care provider can be referred to the **TrustLine**. The TrustLine is a statewide registry of in-home child care providers who have proper clearances including fingerprinting and background checks. Parents can call the TrustLine at (800) 822-8490 to ensure that their providers have been properly screened. Families participating in the Welfare-to-Work program may be eligible for help with child care. For information, visit <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/cdssweb/pg141.htm>.

If you have any questions regarding this ACIN, please contact the Family and Community Support Services Unit at (916) 651-6960.

Sincerely,

Original Document Signed By:

KEVIN GAINES, Chief
Child Protection and Family Support Branch

⁷ Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2015). *Child abuse and neglect fatalities 2013: Statistics and interventions*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau.

⁸ National Respite Network and Resource Center : <http://archrespite.org/productspublications>