

Enhancing the Circle of Support



to prevent child abuse and neglect.

DO YOUR **A B C**'S: ACT ON BEHALF OF CHILDREN!

Most of us have witnessed 'troubles' at the market, shopping mall, and other places where an angry adult got out-of-control and hurt or humiliated kids. Regardless of what triggers an adult to act that way, it's hard to watch. Deciding whether or not to get involved directly can be very difficult. Many say, "It's none of my business - it's not my responsibility." Oth-

ers may fear retaliation or further harm to the children. When it comes down to it, sometimes kids need protection and families need a helping hand. Intervening before something bad happens may be the best choice! Although it's probably uncomfortable - even scary - to witness maltreatment of children, there are things you can do that may be helpful.

- **Trade in your fears** for a commitment and a plan to help out.
- **Stay neutral.** Practice supportive, non-judgmental comments with your own friends and family. Most people don't realize how accurate their 'radar systems' are. Trust yourself to know the right thing to do.
- **Stay calm.** Make sure your intentions are supportive rather than critical.
- **'Talk story'.** Sometimes adults who are continuously with kids feel isolated. Just directing positive regard to another person, whether adult or child, can help. A mere adult exchange of conversation can sometimes be enough to defuse tension and anger.
- **Divert angry attention** away from the child. Acknowledge how hard it is to take care of kids— it can be embarrassing, especially when they're arguing or fighting. Some possibilities:
 - "They sometimes have a mind of their own, don't they..."*
 - "It's tough taking 3 kids to the grocery store when they each want all the attention."*
 - "Wow, those kids really know what they're shopping for even if it's different than your shopping list!"*
 - "Everyone okay over here?—Anything I can do to help out?"*
- **Stand guard quietly** when it appears that a child is being neglected and in jeopardy. For example, if a child is left unattended in a grocery cart, you can stay close to 'spot' him until the parent returns.
- **Act to avert harm** even when the discipline you witness doesn't match your own values. You can be supportive without agreeing with discipline methods. For example, if you see kids running wild away from parents or caregivers who appear mad (waving fists and yelling at kids), you can calmly step in, positioning yourself at kid eye-level. Paraphrase what you think the parents are wanting with supportive, directive statements: "I hear your dad telling you to come back. Where's your dad? He sounds worried." If it feels right and you're willing, you can add: "Come on, let's go get your mom and dad. They are calling you."

Helping out in the right ways at the right time can serve to strengthen families, build strong communities and prevent child abuse. Raising kids is hard but important work. You can do something, however small, to contribute to a safe environment for kids.

Resources: KIDS: Hawai'i's Treasure, American Humane Association and Child Welfare League of America

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