



## May is Mental Health Awareness Month

Mental Health Awareness Month provides us with a timely reminder that social distancing and vast changes to our daily routines almost certainly affect our mental health — especially those of us who struggle, or know someone who struggles, with a mental health condition. The new realities of working from home — or worse, unemployment — plus homeschooling children and lack of physical contact with other family members, friends, and colleagues may almost seem too much to manage.

It is important to remember there are lots of things that we can do to look after our own mental health and to help others who may need

extra support and care during this time. Here are some tips and advice we hope you find useful.

**Stay informed.** Listen to advice and recommendations from your national and local authorities. Follow trusted news channels, such as local and national TV and radio, and keep up to date with the latest news from the CDC and WHO on social media. But also...

**Minimize newsfeeds.** Reduce how much you watch, read, or listen to news that makes you feel anxious or distressed. Seek the latest information at specific times of day, once or twice a day if needed.

**Maintain a routine.** Keep up with daily routines as much as possible or make new ones.

- ▶ Get up and go to bed at similar times every day.
- ▶ Keep up with personal hygiene.
- ▶ Eat healthy meals at regular times.
- ▶ Exercise regularly.
- ▶ Allocate time for working and time for resting.
- ▶ Make time to do things you enjoy.

**Social contact is important.** If your movements are restricted, keep in regular contact with people close to you by telephone and online channels.

**Limit alcohol and drug use.** Limit the amount of alcohol you drink, or don't drink alcohol at all. Don't start drinking alcohol if you have not done it before. Avoid using alcohol and drugs to deal with fear, anxiety, boredom, and social isolation.

**Utilize social media.** Use your social media accounts to promote positive and hopeful stories. Correct misinformation wherever you see it.

**Help others.** If you can, offer support to people in your community who may need it, such as assisting them with food shopping.

**Support health workers.** Take opportunities online or through your community to thank your local healthcare workers and all those working to respond to COVID-19.

## FOR FAMILIES

If you are a parent, you may find your children seek more of your attention during times of stress like this. Here are some things you can do.

**Maintain familiar routines** as much as possible, or create new ones, especially if you must stay at home.

**Discuss the novel coronavirus** with your children in an honest way, using age-appropriate language.

**Support your children** with at-home learning, and make sure time is set aside for play.

**Help children find positive ways to express feelings** such as fear and sadness. Sometimes engaging in a creative activity, like playing or drawing, can aid you with this process.

**Help children stay in contact** with friends and family members through telephone and online channels.

**Make sure that your children have time away from screens** every day and spend time together doing offline activities. Do something creative: draw a picture, write a poem, build something. Bake a cake. Sing and dance or play in your garden if you have one. Try and ensure that your children do not spend significantly more time than usual playing video games.

Millions of Americans are successfully parenting children, leading healthy lives, and learning to cope with and recover from mental health conditions — even during a pandemic.

**Remember, there is no shame in asking for help. Keep these resources in mind for yourself and others:**

PA Mental Health Consumers' Association  
800-887-6422 | [pmhca.org](http://pmhca.org)

Mental Health America  
800-969-6642 | [nmha.org](http://nmha.org)

National Alliance on Mental Illness Keystone PA  
888-264-7972 | [namikeystonepa.org](http://namikeystonepa.org)

Mental Health Association in Pennsylvania  
866-578-3659 | [mhapa.org](http://mhapa.org)

National Crisis Text Line  
Text HOME to 741741



# Identifying Child Abuse During a Pandemic

With most in-person activities moving to virtual platforms in an effort to slow the spread of COVID-19, many are asking, "How will we know if child abuse is happening?"

Calls to report suspected child abuse and neglect to ChildLine have dropped by 50% since the social distancing efforts went into effect. Although many of the warning signs of child abuse remain the same, here are some tips, signs, and suggestions to help mandated reporters protect kids and know when to make that report of suspected child abuse or neglect.

## **Stressors within the family often increase instances of physical abuse to children.**

During this time of high stress on parents and caregivers, we know that abuse is increasing, even though the number of cases being reported is declining. Hospitals across the country are already seeing an increase in severe cases of physical abuse to children. Be prepared to report when you suspect abuse by keeping ChildLine's information handy.

*A report to ChildLine can be made by calling 800-932-0313 or making the report online at [www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis](http://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis).*



**Encourage the professionals from youth-serving agencies to hold regular virtual sessions with the children they serve during this time of social distancing.** By seeing the children through these virtual platforms, you may be able to see if a child has injuries. Pay special attention to any injuries on their neck or near their ears or patterned marks on the face, as these are highly indicative of abuse. Also pay attention to any yelling or other concerning interactions in the background with family members; it can be surprising what you see and hear during a virtual session in the home.

**Lack of participation in virtual school or a decline in grades could be a sign that something is wrong in the home.** If possible, consider reaching out to the parents/caregivers to offer support. It could be that the family is still adjusting to the new "normal," or there may be significant stressors in the family that your agency could help with by connecting them with resources. By addressing stressors within the family, you can help reduce the likelihood of abuse or neglect occurring.

**Understand that children are online more than ever before, and therefore there is a higher risk of online perpetrators trying to engage them in sexual talk and activities virtually.** Encourage the children you work or volunteer with to tell you or another trusted



adult if they ever feel unsafe or if someone makes them feel uncomfortable.

**Children are more likely to express their concerns and frustrations and disclose abuse through social media and other online forums during this time.** Consider providing online communication networks for children to communicate with your agency.

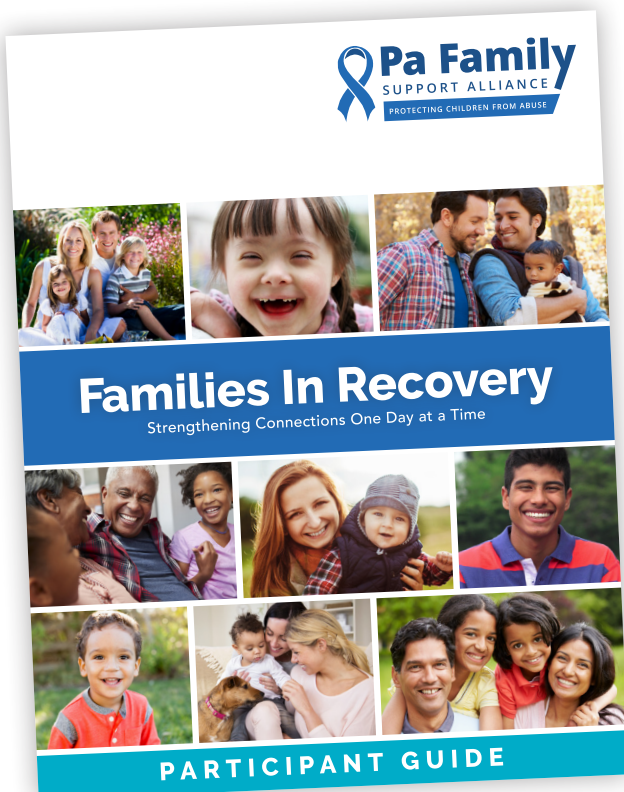
**Revise your agency's child protection policy to include this new virtual world.** While connection with kids virtually is encouraged, it also opens the door for staff with ill-intent to engage children in sexual talk or other abusive behaviors. Building in safeguards such as always cc'ing another staff person on emails to children, always having two adults on calls, and recording all virtual calls are wise additions to your child protection policy.

**Schedule training for all your staff and volunteers working with children on how to recognize and report suspected child abuse.** Contact PFSA at [training@pa-fsa.org](mailto:training@pa-fsa.org) to schedule a virtual training session free of charge.

**As always, you know the kids you work with best. If something doesn't seem right, and you suspect possible abuse or neglect, it is always best to make that call to ChildLine so that the situation can be assessed or investigated further.**

If you need help with finding resources for families or want further information on what you can do during the pandemic to assist families, go to our website at [pa-fsa.org](http://pa-fsa.org) or email us at [info@pa-fsa.org](mailto:info@pa-fsa.org).

## PFSA's Versatile Families in Recovery Program Adapts to Social Restriction



Despite recent challenges arising from COVID-19 and the precautions of social distancing, PFSA's Families in Recovery program is continuing. Several of our pilot agencies are providing virtual group sessions to participants in Columbia, Mercer, Montgomery, and Westmorland counties!

Through virtual meeting apps such as GoToWebinar and Zoom, the Columbia County Family Center, the Monessen Family Center, the Farrell Family Center, and the Family Service Association of Bucks County are still providing the essential support and guidance of the Families in Recovery program to those affected by substance use disorder.

This adaptation of the established program delivery is a fine example of how flexible the program is—and how dedicated these agencies are!

Thank you, Families in Recovery agencies. We appreciate you!

# *An Interview with...* **Ron Bonacci**

## *of Weis Markets*

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Ann Moffitt, ACFRE and PFSA's Director of Development, had the opportunity to interview Ron Bonacci earlier this month. Ron is the Vice President of Marketing and Advertising for Weis Markets. Weis Markets remains a dedicated partner and sponsor of our PA Blue Ribbon Champion for Safe Kids awards, celebrating those Champions who have done great things to keep PA's children safe.



***Ann: What does it mean to you to be a Blue Ribbon Champion for Safe Kids?***

Ron: PA Family Support Alliance's core mission is to help train people to recognize the signs of child abuse, which is a hidden crisis in our country. The PA Blue Ribbon Champion for Safe Kids brings together businesses, community organizations, religious organizations, and everyday people to learn and adopt proven strategies to help children who are being abused. If we can recognize the signs, we can help.

***Ann: We all have a role to play as part of our communities in keeping kids safe. How does this relate to the activities of your organization?***

Ron: We're a locally focused company with 116 stores in Pennsylvania. We strongly believe in giving back to the communities we serve. We're a local company: Our associates live and work in these communities, which is why we target our giving to help families through our year-round Fight Hunger program and our support of PA Family Support Alliance, which helps fight child abuse in all its forms.

Ron: We believe in giving back to our communities. Throughout the year, we are supporting organizations that help families as well as food banks, schools, libraries, and local health programs. That's why we are so committed to PA Family Support Alliance — we want to see Pennsylvania's children grow up healthy and strong. We're in their corner.

## **Trainer Spotlight: Mark Nuzzo**

Mark Nuzzo has over 20 years of experience in child protective services, including 6 years as an Intake Caseworker and 2 years as an Intake Supervisor at a county children and youth agency. Mark is currently employed as a Human Services Program Representative with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Department of Human Services, a position he has held since 2008, and has also been a contracted trainer for PA Family Support Alliance since 2006. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in criminology from Indiana University of Pennsylvania in 1991 and currently resides in Lawrence County.

Thank you, Mark, for the wealth of knowledge you bring to each mandated reporter training!



# Partner with our CBCAP Network!

PFSA has a Partnership Fund! With your generous donation, PFSA can make Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) Network resources available to organizations that otherwise could not afford the \$325 annual membership fee.

These smaller agencies may have smaller budgets, but their community needs are comparable to larger organizations that belong to CBCAP.

By joining the CBCAP Network, members receive access to PFSA trainings, technical assistance, and public relations expertise. Your gift to the Partnership Fund makes that possible.

To donate in support of the Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention Network, please contact Director of Development Ann Moffitt, ACFRE, at 800-448-4906 or [amoffitt@pa-fsa.org](mailto:amoffitt@pa-fsa.org).

## Be a good neighbor.

PFSA is updating the Front Porch Project (FPP) program!

Through a lens of empathy, this training equips participants with tools and approaches for use when witnessing a parent and/or child in distress.

Stay tuned to PFSA's website and social media for information on upcoming training opportunities as they become available.



## Virtual Mandated Reporter Training

To meet the needs of our mandated reporters during the COVID-19 crisis, PFSA is now offering FREE 3-hour virtual training. This training is approved by the Departments of State, Human Services, and Education and meets all requirements for Mandated Reporter Training in

Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse.

This training will satisfy requirements for both Act 31 CEUs under the Department of State and Act 48 CEUs under the Department of Education, to include Act 126.

To obtain information about our training options and available sessions, please email [training@pa-fsa.org](mailto:training@pa-fsa.org).