

Facts about Child Abuse

What is Child Abuse and Neglect?

- ▣ **Physical abuse** – an injury to a child that is not an accident: may include beating, burning, biting, kicking, cutting, shaking, or punching a child.
- ▣ **Emotional abuse** – maltreatment of a child that may involve criticizing, insulting, yelling, swearing, manipulating, rejecting or withholding love.
- ▣ **Sexual abuse** – any sexual contact with a child, including exhibitionism, photographs or films, pornography, prostitution, rape, or fondling.
- ▣ **Neglect** – failure to provide for a child's basic physical, emotional, or medical needs

Who Abuses Children?

- ▣ Most often the abuser is someone the child knows, such as a parent, relative, neighbor or friend of the family.

Where Does Child Abuse Happen?

- ▣ Wherever children are, where they live, sleep, learn or play.

How Often Does Child Abuse Occur?

- ▣ Each year, close to 3 million reports of suspected abuse are filed in the United States.
- ▣ Many more cases never get reported. One victim of child abuse is one too many!



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Warning Signs of Abuse

Children who are abused may show physical and behavioral signs. You may be a child's only lifeline to safety. Please pay attention to the treatment of children around you.

Children who have been abused or neglected may be:

- ☐ Nervous around adults or afraid of certain adults
- ☐ Reluctant to go home (coming to school early or staying late, for example)
- ☐ Very passive and withdrawn—or aggressive and disruptive
- ☐ Tired often or complaining of nightmares, or not sleeping well
- ☐ Fearful and anxious
- ☐ Showing sudden changes in behavior or school performance

Possible signs of physical abuse:

- ☐ Unexplained burns, bruises, black eyes and other injuries
- ☐ Apparent fear of a parent or caretaker
- ☐ Faded bruises of healing injuries after missing school

Possible signs of sexual abuse:

- ☐ Difficulty walking or sitting, or other indications of injury to the genital area
- ☐ Sexual knowledge or behavior beyond what is normal for the child's age
- ☐ Running away from home

Possible signs of neglect:

- ☐ Missing school frequently
- ☐ Begging for or stealing money or food
- ☐ Lacking needed medical or dental care
- ☐ Being frequently dirty
- ☐ Using alcohol or other drugs
- ☐ Saying there is no one at home to take care of him or her

Possible signs of emotional abuse:

- ☐ Acting overly mature or immature for the child's age
- ☐ Extreme changes in behavior
- ☐ Delays in physical or emotional development
- ☐ Attempted suicide
- ☐ Lack of emotional attachment to the parent

Many of these signs may also be present in children exposed to violence in their homes and communities, like domestic violence and gang violence. These signs don't prove that a child is being abused. But they could be a signal that the child and his or her family need help.

Also know the signs of an abusive adult.

Consider the possibility of abuse if a parent or caretaker:

- ☐ Seems unconcerned about the child's welfare at school or at home
- ☐ Denies problems at school or at home—or blames the child for them
- ☐ Sees the child as worthless or as a burden
- ☐ Avoids discussing the child's injuries or gives conflicting explanations for them
- ☐ Abuses alcohol or other drugs
- ☐ Seems isolated from other parents and school and community activities
- ☐ Uses harsh physical discipline or asks other caretakers to use it
- ☐ Depends on the child for emotional support
- ☐ Seems indifferent to the child
- ☐ Seems secretive or tries to isolate the child from other children
- ☐ Frequently blames, belittles, or insults the child

These signs don't prove that an adult is abusive. But they could be a signal that the adult and his or her family need help.



The Story of the Blue Ribbon

The Blue Ribbon Campaign began in Virginia in 1989 when a grandmother, Bonnie W. Finney, tied a blue ribbon to the antenna of her van “to make people wonder.” The story she told to inquisitive community members was a tragic story about the abuse of her grandchildren, which ultimately led to the brutal death of her grandson.

“It has been so long since I sat by my grandson’s side in the hospital. Of course, I knew something was wrong as I sat there, I saw fear on his face, the bruises on his body, and the healing cigarette burns on his hands. His doctor did not believe my daughter’s story...’he fell in slippery water in the bathtub.’”

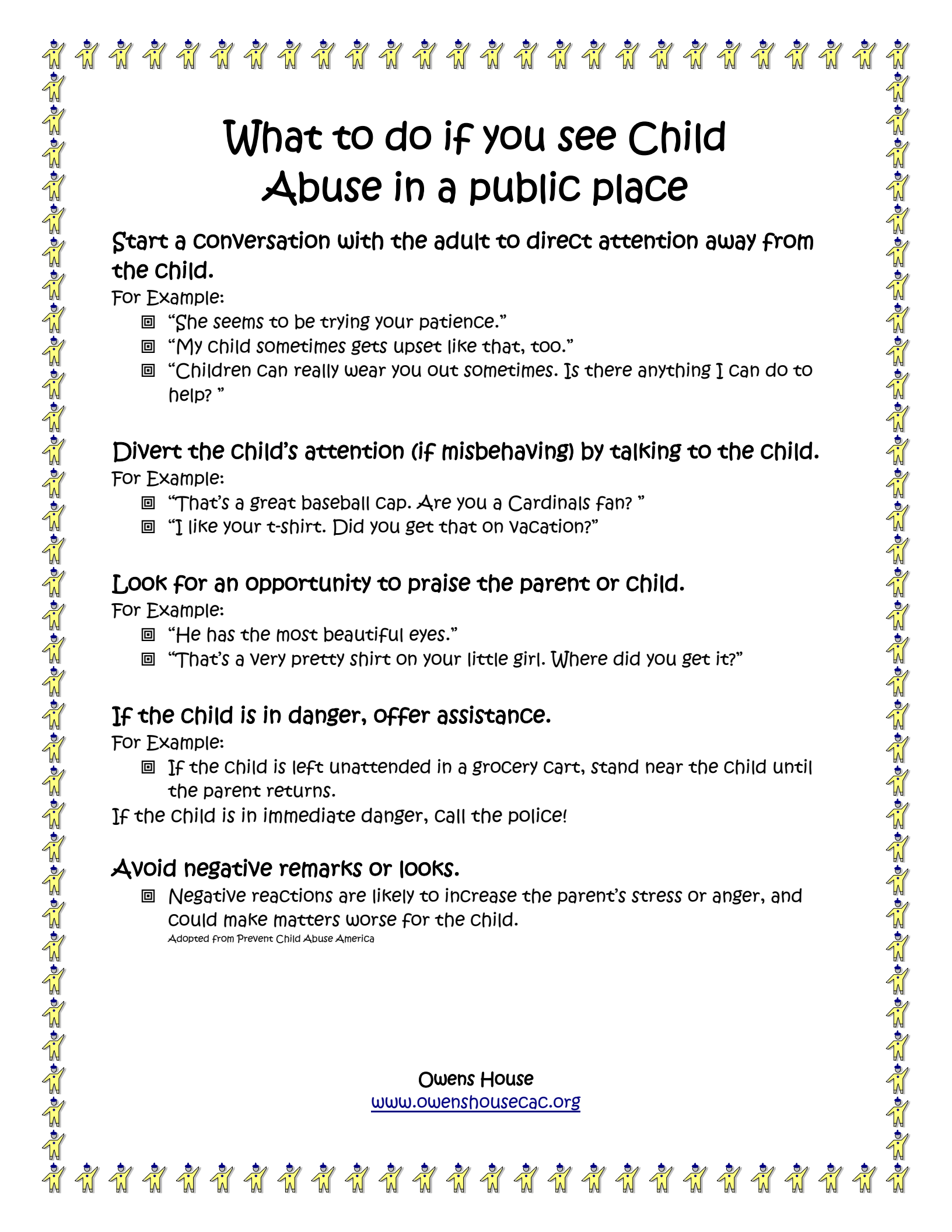
“After the ordeal at the hospital my grandson was placed into foster care for three weeks. He cried when they came to take him back to his mother... I ached for this dilemma, but I was not physically able to care for him.”

“I never saw him again. My 16-month old granddaughter was hospitalized after being beaten severely... Her leg broken in four places and her hand burned from the tip of her little fingers to her wrist. It was only then that the search was on for my grandson. We learned that he had been killed, wrapped in a sheet, stuffed in a toolbox and dumped into the dismal swamp three months earlier.”

“My grandchildren had suffered and battled so much throughout their young lives that it sickened me. My life was turned into physical and mental chaos. My efforts to understand became a plea to stop abusing children. I tied a blue ribbon on my van antenna to make people wonder. Why blue? I intend never to forget the battered, bruised bodies of my grandchildren. Blue serves as a constant reminder to me to fight for protection for our children.”

The story of Bonnie Finney demonstrates the effect that just one concerned citizen can have on raising public awareness of child abuse and in promoting prevention.

Since Bonnie Finney first tied that blue ribbon to her van antenna in 1989, millions of people across the country have participated in blue ribbon campaigns. Each year more people join the effort by wearing blue ribbons, encouraging others to wear and display them, and getting involved in community activities to “make people wonder” about the significance of the blue ribbon.



What to do if you see Child Abuse in a public place

Start a conversation with the adult to direct attention away from the child.

For Example:

- ☐ “She seems to be trying your patience.”
- ☐ “My child sometimes gets upset like that, too.”
- ☐ “Children can really wear you out sometimes. Is there anything I can do to help?”

Divert the child’s attention (if misbehaving) by talking to the child.

For Example:

- ☐ “That’s a great baseball cap. Are you a Cardinals fan?”
- ☐ “I like your t-shirt. Did you get that on vacation?”

Look for an opportunity to praise the parent or child.

For Example:

- ☐ “He has the most beautiful eyes.”
- ☐ “That’s a very pretty shirt on your little girl. Where did you get it?”

If the child is in danger, offer assistance.

For Example:

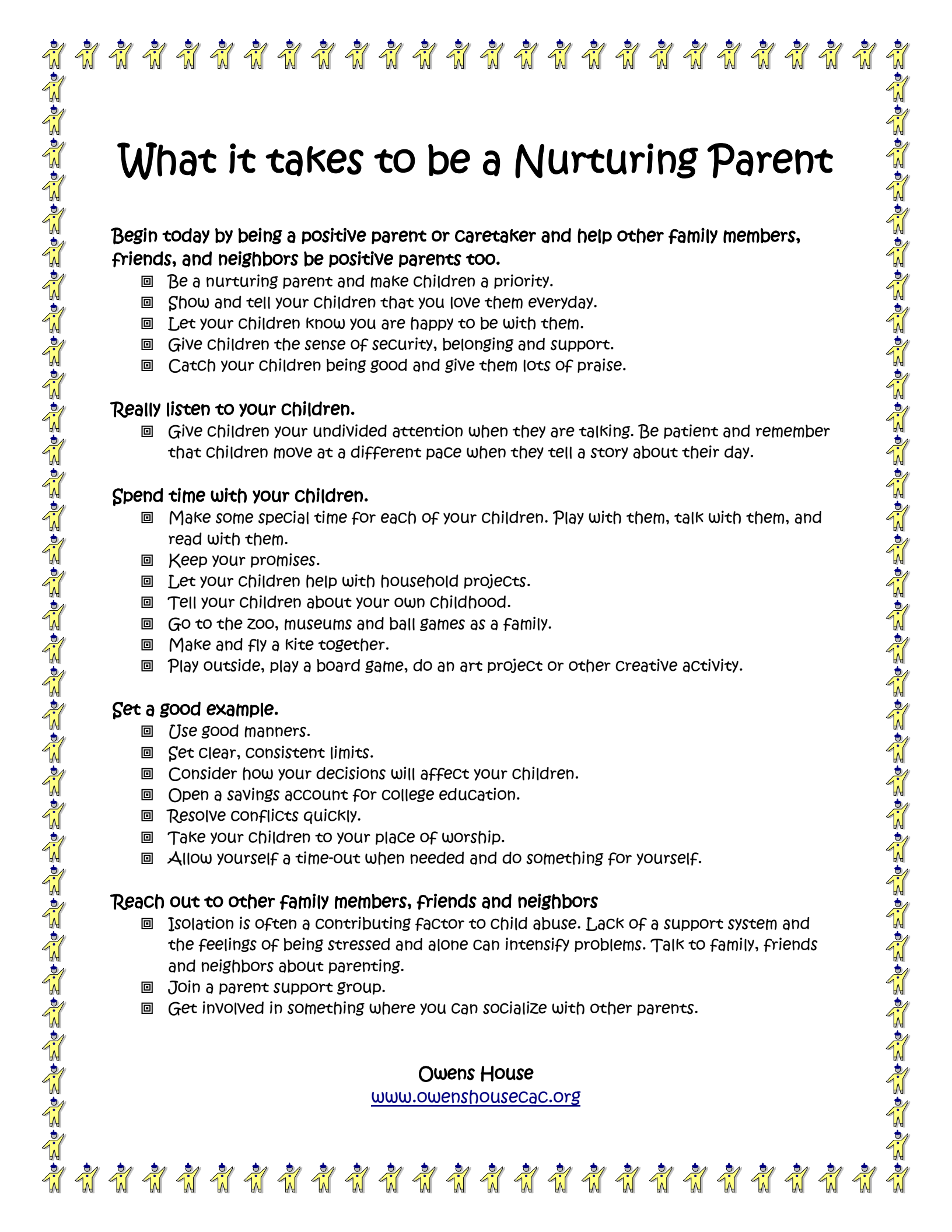
- ☐ If the child is left unattended in a grocery cart, stand near the child until the parent returns.

If the child is in immediate danger, call the police!

Avoid negative remarks or looks.

- ☐ Negative reactions are likely to increase the parent’s stress or anger, and could make matters worse for the child.

Adopted from Prevent Child Abuse America



What it takes to be a Nurturing Parent

Begin today by being a positive parent or caretaker and help other family members, friends, and neighbors be positive parents too.

- Be a nurturing parent and make children a priority.
- Show and tell your children that you love them everyday.
- Let your children know you are happy to be with them.
- Give children the sense of security, belonging and support.
- Catch your children being good and give them lots of praise.

Really listen to your children.

- Give children your undivided attention when they are talking. Be patient and remember that children move at a different pace when they tell a story about their day.

Spend time with your children.

- Make some special time for each of your children. Play with them, talk with them, and read with them.
- Keep your promises.
- Let your children help with household projects.
- Tell your children about your own childhood.
- Go to the zoo, museums and ball games as a family.
- Make and fly a kite together.
- Play outside, play a board game, do an art project or other creative activity.

Set a good example.

- Use good manners.
- Set clear, consistent limits.
- Consider how your decisions will affect your children.
- Open a savings account for college education.
- Resolve conflicts quickly.
- Take your children to your place of worship.
- Allow yourself a time-out when needed and do something for yourself.

Reach out to other family members, friends and neighbors

- Isolation is often a contributing factor to child abuse. Lack of a support system and the feelings of being stressed and alone can intensify problems. Talk to family, friends and neighbors about parenting.
- Join a parent support group.
- Get involved in something where you can socialize with other parents.

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