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You Can Make a Difference in Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect

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On the news recently, a man described looking out of his apartment window on a freezing cold night and seeing a baby stroller abandoned in a neighborhood park. What he couldn't believe was that he thought he saw a baby in it. He went down and checked, and sure enough, someone had abandoned the baby in 30 degree weather. He called the local fire station and they came and took the baby into custody. This man prevented the death of that infant. He took action. He was not a bystander, he got involved.

Everyone has a role to play in protecting children; the case above is a good example. The government can't possibly be the only entity trying to keep children safe from abuse or neglect.

April is national child abuse prevention month. I encourage everyone to learn how to recognize the signs and symptoms of child abuse and neglect. Our [website](#) offers a guide.

It's interesting to me that although the age of social media has dramatically lowered the thresholds on privacy, and although many feel it's their right to know all, many adults are still reticent about reporting their suspicions about child abuse. How many times do we hear on the news, "I knew something was wrong, but I never thought he'd hurt the baby," or, "They are always fighting in that house, but you are afraid to get involved, don't know if they could turn on you."

So, alarmingly, significant numbers of child abuse and neglect incidents go unreported. I am encouraging you to take action. When a child is brought to the attention of the authorities, the children and their parents can get the help that they need to prevent future abuse and strengthen their family. It can mean the difference between life and death for newborns and children under the age of four, when most fatalities occur.

Many people tell me that taking the step of reporting makes them anxious, and that is understandable. Perhaps you are not 100-percent sure about your concerns. Even if this is the case, you can and should take steps to help rescue the child. I counsel parents that if they have a "reasonable suspicion" that a child is at risk, that's enough to make a call to the state's child abuse hotline. Much child abuse occurs behind closed doors; therefore, it's important for concerned friends, family members and neighbors to be familiar with the signs. And children, particularly younger ones, who may not be in school yet, will probably not tell you that they've been hurt, so concerned adults need to be their advocates if they have suspicions.

Please learn the basic steps and take action.

First of all, if you see a child being abused or hear a child screaming in pain, call 911. If you have suspicions that a child is at risk, every state has a hotline that you can call to make a report. They will ask for your name and number, but you can choose to remain anonymous. Even if you are not certain about all the specifics, make the call. It's then up to the investigators to follow through.

Yes, taking action may be a bit upsetting. That's understandable, as it's such an important undertaking. Nevertheless, you'll rest easier knowing that due to your intervention, the child and their parent will be getting help and attention. Remember, child abuse is preventable. Everyone must be part of the solution.

For more information on keeping your child safe and to learn more about The NYSPCC's Annual Spring Luncheon on Thursday, April 10, 2014, featuring Aaron Fisher, Victim #1, the first child who spoke out against the child sexual abuse perpetrator, Jerry Sandusky, visit www.nyspcc.org.