**CAPM Op-Ed template April 2021**

**FILL IN OR DELETE ALL HIGHLIGHTED AREAS AND REMOVE HIGHLIGHT. COPY AND PASTE THE FINAL op-ed INTO THE BODY OF AN EMAIL TO A REPORTER AND/OR EDITOR.**

GENERAL NOTE THROUGHOUT: COVID-19 RELATED LANGUAGE IS HIGHLIGHTED IN BLUE. REVIEW THE WORDING AND ADAPT IF NEEDED WITH MOST RECENT COVID-19 DEVELOPMENTS. CONTINUE TO STRESS PUBLIC HEALTH WHERE APPLICABLE. IF YOU NEED SUPPORT WITH THIS, VISIT [WWW.TEXASCASA.ORG/COVID19](http://WWW.TEXASCASA.ORG/COVID19) OR CONTACT COMMUNICATIONS@TEXASCASA.ORG.

**Coming Together to Support Families and Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect**

By [LOCAL CASA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR], Executive Director of [PROGRAM NAME]

Across our community, there are parents and caregivers who may be struggling with balancing the stress of daily life alongside caring for a child. Whether it is working multiple jobs trying to put food on the table, grappling with a substance use disorder, wondering where the next month’s rent will be coming from or figuring out how to deal with a major financial setback, balancing these pressures with parenting and running a household can at times be very difficult.

What’s more, with the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, more families than ever are struggling – with health anxiety, job loss, social distancing, children still out of school and other consequences.

Sadly, stress in its many forms can be a contributing factor to child abuse and neglect. At [YOUR PROGRAM NAME], we’ve see this time and time again with the children and families we serve who are involved in the foster care system. Stress is a natural byproduct of parenthood, but when those stresses are combined with anxieties over things like financials, health, employment or relationships, it can become too much for one person to handle.

While there is no excuse for abuse or neglect, we must understand what underlying issues can cause it to occur if we, as a community, wish to prevent it and help families safely stay together. After all, we know that the vast majority of parents love their children – and the last thing they want is for their kids to have to go into foster care based on a mistake they may have made during a difficult time.

So maybe you’re wondering: What can you do to help? As a community, we can come together to help prevent child abuse and neglect by aiding our own family members, friends and neighbors in reducing the stresses of parenthood. There are many efforts you can undertake to support families directly, and while they may seem small, they can have a major effect.

When reading these suggestions, please continue to be mindful of COVID-19, your health and the health of others.

Offering childcare is a wonderful way to support a family. That simple act can take an immense amount of stress off the back of that child’s caretaker. While you watch the kids, the caregiver has an opportunity to focus on getting important things done, but also more importantly has a moment to recuperate with some “me time”—reducing their stress.

Donating items is another great way to help relieve a strained family. Items like clothes, toys, diapers and toiletries are great examples of what you can give. By providing these items, you can help relieve the anxiety a caregiver may have about where they’ll find the money or time to buy them for their child and themselves.

Additionally, you can show your support for a family by offering to cook or buy them a meal. With around 11% of families in the United States experiencing some type of food insecurity, your simple action of donating a nutritious meal can make all the difference to a caregiver struggling to fill their pantry.

Beyond these acts of service, your time and conversation can be just as valuable to a new or stressed parent. This simple act can help a caregiver reduce their own stress by being able to talk out their feelings. Furthermore, if you have experience with raising a child, you can offer to share your advice and act as a resource for them. Let them know they can turn to you as someone with shared experience when they have moments of uncertainty or anxiety. Even if you don’t personally have experience with raising a child, you can still listen. You can also share resources or you can connect them with someone you know who may be able to give them advice.

These small acts of kindness do make a difference, because we never fully know what a family might be dealing with. Even one of these acts could mean the world to a caregiver who may feel alone in raising their child.

As friends and neighbors, we can work to build support systems around families, making sure they know they are not in this alone and their community is behind them. I ask the people of [LOCAL COMMUNITY AREA] to show your support for vulnerable families in our area. Show them that we have a community that is on their side, and that is willing and ready to support them in any way they need.

Will you join me in supporting families here in our community?

SIGN

[one-line bio of op-ed signer, for example: YOUR NAME is executive director of YOUR PROGRAM NAME, which recruits, trains and supports volunteers to advocate for children and families involved with the foster care system in YOUR SERVICE AREA.]

April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month. If you see abuse, report it to 1 (800) 252-5400 or go to [www.txabusehotline.org](http://www.txabusehotline.org/). If a child’s life is in danger, call 911.

If you’re interested in learning about the work of [CASA PROGRAM NAME], call LOCAL PROGRAM PHONE NUMBER or visit LOCAL PROGRAM WEBSITE OR BECOMEACASA.ORG for more information.