

Child Abuse Prevention Month, April 2011

Dear Friend,

Though my five children are now adults, with the youngest two in the middle of their first year in college, I'm a mom who still walks life's journey with them—encouraging and advising as necessary, and loving each one as an individual gem. I hope the care and attention that their father and I have provided throughout their lives has helped shape them into confident men and women whose endeavors make a difference for them and for others. I wish that same confidence and purpose for all Virginia's children.



April is Child Abuse Prevention Month in Virginia. As Honorary Chairperson for 2011, I encourage adults throughout the Commonwealth to give the children they parent, regularly care for, or nurture in other ways, the support and positive experiences they need to have bright and productive futures.

The efforts we make to help kids treasure their childhood give them a chance to learn, grow, and explore in ways that will serve them well for years to come. When children get to run and play, they naturally get the exercise that keeps them fit and prevents obesity. When they are encouraged to read or draw, their minds stay active and they become creative thinkers. When they're allowed to have unscheduled down time, away from the television and video games, they brainstorm ways to entertain themselves that are memorable and worthwhile.

Ultimately, children need our permission to just be kids. By giving them this opportunity, we are protecting their childhoods. You can play a role in helping children in your city or town, and across the state, develop into positive adults, who become effective employees or employers, community residents, and parents.

Do your part to insure that Virginia's children are getting proper nutrition and exercise. Monitor music, movies, video games and fashion to determine whether they are age- and value appropriate for children in your care. Give them independence, but don't release the reins too soon—middle schoolers and young adults need wisdom and discipline before launching out on their own.

We all know that parenting is a hard job, but the rewards of watching children blossom into adults we can be proud of makes the collective effort to stand up for them and protect them worthwhile. Last year in Virginia 6,234 children were victims in founded reports of abuse and neglect. Forty-four children died as a result of abuse or neglect, by people they knew and trusted. Let's work together to not only reduce these tragic numbers over the coming year, but to replace the incidence of abuse with reports of more positive parenting practices. We all have important roles to play in ensuring bright futures for every child who calls Virginia home. Their future opportunities start with our current involvement.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Maureen McDonnell".

Maureen McDonnell
Virginia's First Lady