

Child Abuse Prevention Month April 2012



Photo: Emily Elliott (swaddlerichmond.com)

Dear Friend,

When we became first-time parents last September, we discovered how rewarding, yet challenging, caring for a child can be. The love in our hearts expanded and so did our thirst for knowledge – what did we need to do and learn to nurture our daughter?

In the months since Zora's birth, we've been absorbed in the most intense on-the-job training we've ever experienced. We quickly realized that we don't have to have all the answers. Rather, we need the courage to ask for help and advice and the wisdom to accept it. Parenthood is truly the hardest job we'll ever love and it has made us strong advocates for programs that educate and inspire strong families.

As Virginia's 2012 Honorary Co-Chairpersons for national Child Abuse Prevention Month, we are encouraging adults throughout the Commonwealth to embrace the truth that every child matters, and that each of us – regardless of whether we're a parent – can do something to help children grow up safe and healthy.

Last year in Virginia, more than 6,000 children were victims in founded reports of abuse and neglect. Thirty children died as a result of being abused or neglected by a parent or caretaker. We can all work together to prevent this kind of abuse and neglect by helping parents understand their children's needs from birth through the teen years. We can help equip parents with skills to raise their children with patience and love.

We urge you to support the parents and children you know in simple ways. Contact your state and local lawmakers to voice support for policies and funding that strengthen families. Encourage parents to call a statewide toll-free helpline – 800-CHILDREN (800-244-5373) – for advice, information and support. If you witness, or learn of a child being harmed, call the Virginia Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-552-7096.

Today's children are tomorrow's citizens and parents. If we want them to become healthy and productive, let's invest the appropriate resources and time into nurturing their wellbeing now.

Sincerely,

Shaka and Maya Smart
Head Basketball Coach, Virginia Commonwealth University
Professional Writer