

Child abuse increases during Christmas holidays

By SHERRY KAHAN

"Around the holiday season, there is an increase in the severity of child abuse," said Dr. Charles Hostetter of the Children's Protective Service of Wayne County.

"There is an increase in the number of children placed in emergency shelters."

In his opinion, the worsening of the child abuse problem at a time when everything should be magical and festive is because of holiday anxieties.

"The holiday adds stress to people already under stress," he said.

"For an ADC mother struggling to pay the rent and support her family, the additional problems caused by Christmas may cause her to lose control. So it becomes the straw that breaks the camel's back."

He recalled a case concerning a mother who gave a plastic racetrack to her youngsters as his Yuletide treat.

"She used that very toy to beat him after Christmas," reported Hostetter. "It left a distinct imprint on the child's back and arm. It was not permanent. The child was a victim of the mother's loss of control. The kid didn't obey an order quick enough."

Hostetter, who does intake work and screens child abuse cases coming to his

agency, has seen more than enough injuries done to children to last a lifetime. He is painfully aware that one of the most common ways to hurt a child is with an extension cord.

"SOME PEOPLE say it's just an ordinary punishment," he said. "But it leaves distinct marks. I've seen children with permanent scars from it. Belt whipping is common. But I didn't expect to see a kid deliberately whipped with a belt buckle."

"Burns are a frequent method used to hurt youngsters," he pointed out. "Parents stick part of the body into hot water, or spill hot oil on them," he continued. "Most of these immersion burns are distinct. There is a line showing how far the body was immersed."

Hostetter stressed in an interview that abuse takes place among people in all walks of life and economic classes. In remarks made at a press conference last week in Detroit, he asked the public to call his agency to report observed cases of this abuse.

The press conference was called by the Exchange Club of Detroit to announce its adoption of the problem of child abuse and neglect as its national issue. It spokesman, Joe Neussendorfer, explained that various Exchange clubs around the country may

soon set up local programs on child abuse similar to a successful one started in Little Rock, Ark. It is called SCAN (Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect).

One of the hallmarks of the SCAN project is the training of volunteers to work directly with abusive parents and their children, giving advice on parenting and serving as role models. SCAN also aims to educate parents on child development, and to refer them when necessary to community agencies for more intensive therapy.

OTHER OBJECTIVES of SCAN are to bring about the responsiveness of social institutions to the needs of abusive families, and to promote the development of Parents Anonymous, an organization which offers counseling to abusive parents.

The Exchange Club hopes to prevent abuse by supporting programs like these, said Neussendorfer. He said that six clubs in Michigan, including one in Muskegon have already indicated an interest in promoting the SCAN philosophy.

Several members of the media and some of the professionals in the child abuse field questioned whether the Exchange program would duplicate services already in place in Detroit.

Ruth Baker of Children's Hospital suggested that the club provide financial backing for programs now in existence which are being forced to curtail their work in child abuse because of budget cuts.

Neussendorfer did not reveal what specific plans the Exchange Club of Detroit had in mind to meet its new commitment to improving the abuse situation.

A representative of Parents Anonymous, using only her first name, Connie, indicated to those present that there is enough room in the child abuse scene for many kinds of help.

"The people we counsel need a lot of support," she said, "all they can get."

She added: "Not every agency or organization is for every parent. Our parents are often isolated people with no friends. They don't feel they can go to their own family about their abuse problem. In many cases their own parents once abused them."

"We (in PA) give one-on-one counseling for two hours once a week. Why not have one-on-one in the home? The mother can be told what's normal in raising kids, that kids are often slow in going off to school, for example. She can also be told that it is OK to get angry if it's not directed at the children

in the form of physical violence. Abuse is a parent losing control and not being able to handle it."

MANY PARENTS DON'T understand what having a baby means, she continued. "They need to know how to raise their kids," she said. "We regard neglect also as child abuse. Some parents are not feeding or clothing their children properly. Somedon't care for their child at all. When they had the baby they wanted it to love them and make them feel good, or keep their marriage together. But babies don't respond right away. It is the child who needs the mother's love."

The number to call in Wayne County to report abuse is 256-9661. The number in Oakland County is 858-1590. Both phones are answered 24 hours a day. To reach Parents Anonymous dial 237-0943.

Chorale Yule concert

The Kenneth Jewell Chorale, an ensemble of 50 singers directed by Eric Freudigman, will give a program of Christmas and holiday music at 7:30 p.m. Friday. The concert will be held at St. Mary's Catholic Church, 730 S. Lafayette in Royal Oak.

The chorale's Christmas albums — "Bring a Torch — a Christmas Celebration" and "A Child is Born" — will be available at the concert.

To conclude a month of festive holi-

day music, the Jewell Chorale will present its annual Detroit Symphony Orchestra "Messiah" at Ford Auditorium with a sing-along at 8:30 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 27. A standard performance will also be given at 3:30 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 28. Maestro Vittorio Negri will conduct these two concerts.

For further information about the chorale, call manager Barbara Diles at 567-1233.



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