Restoring Hope: Intervening Successfully to Increase Safety for Neglected Children

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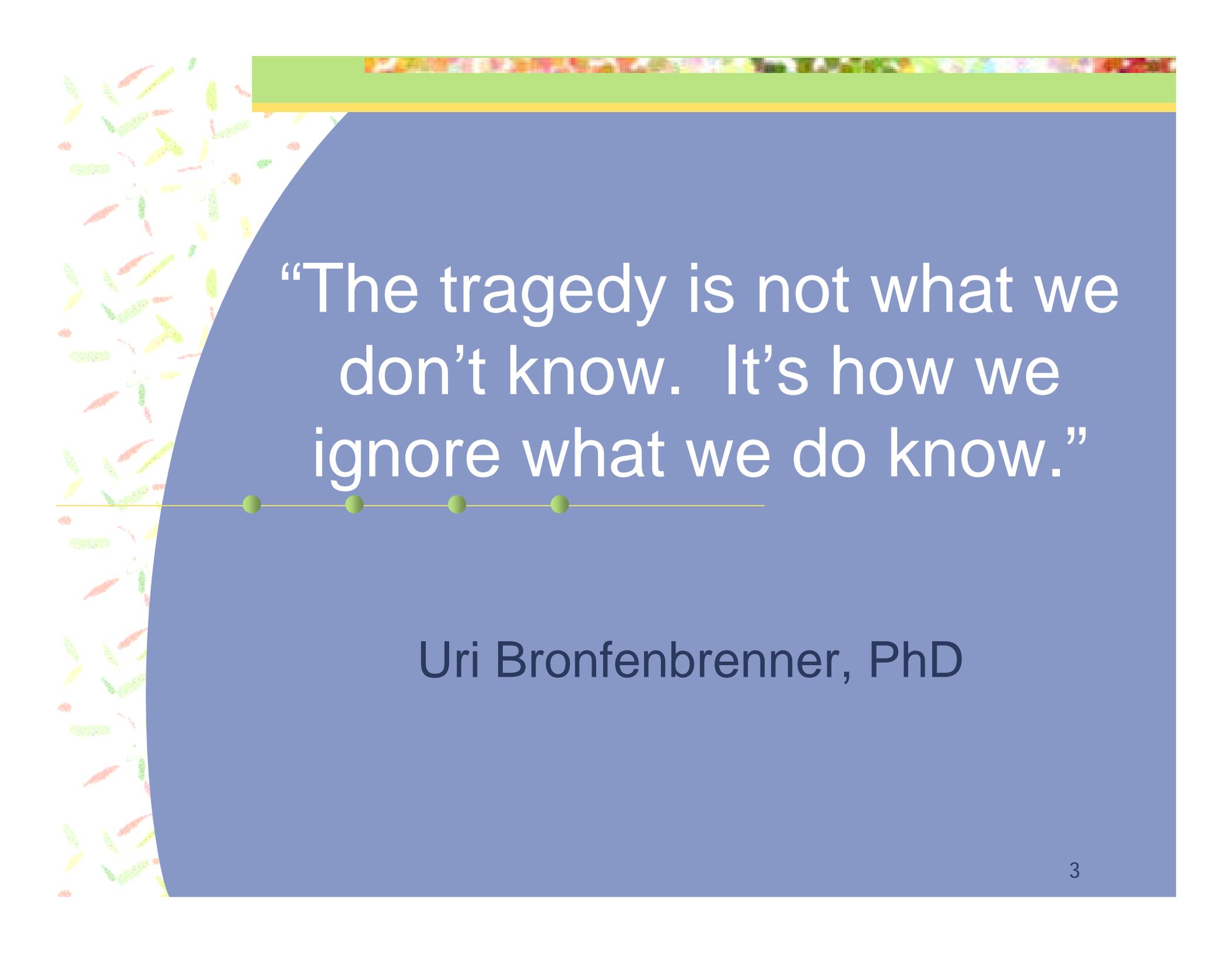
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Goals for Presentation

- Highlight why this is important
- Consider important definitions
- Highlight best practice principles
- Apply these principles

"The tragedy is not what we don't know. It's how we ignore what we do know."

Uri Bronfenbrenner, PhD

Why Child Neglect is Important

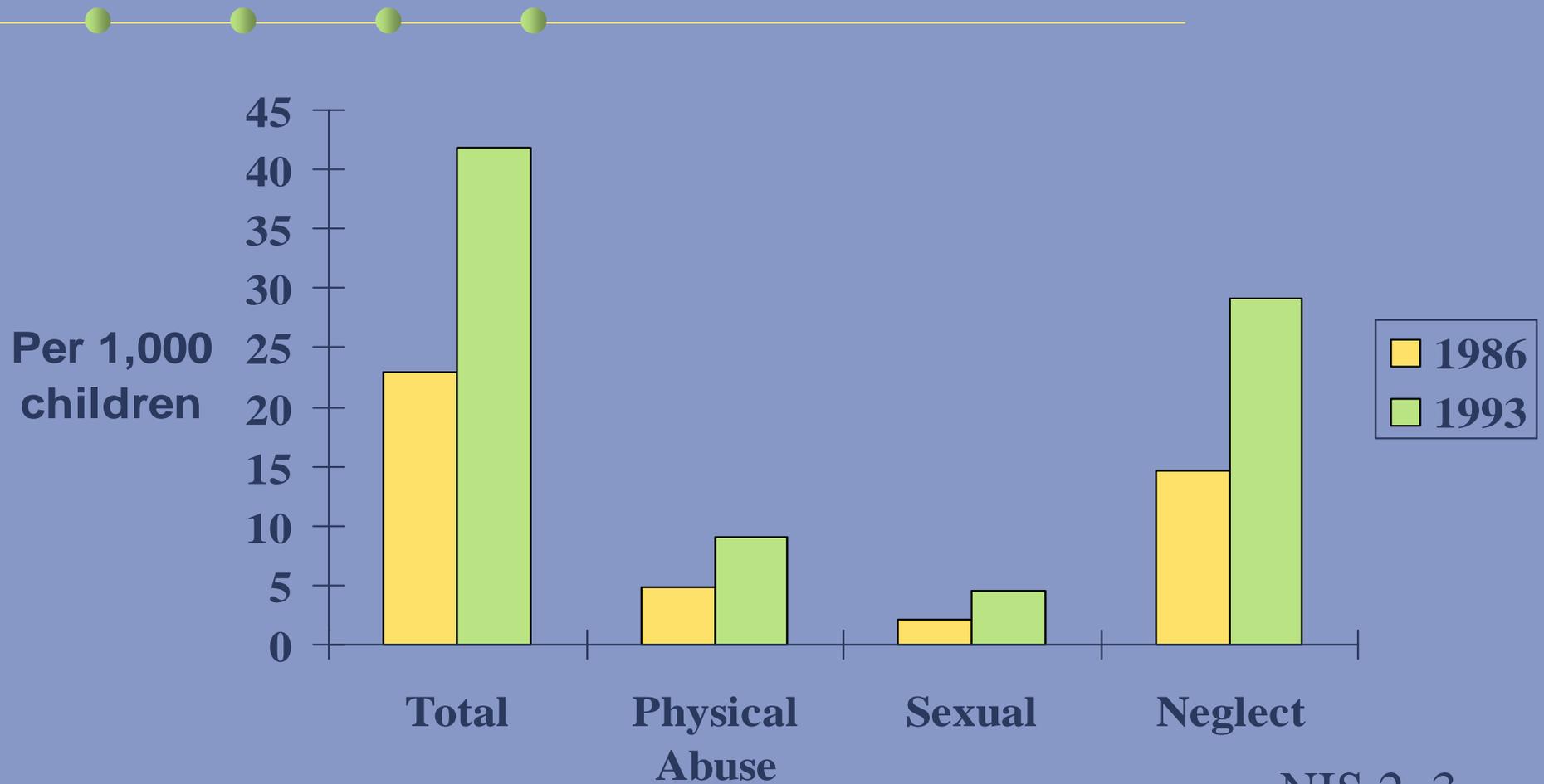■ It's common

National Data

- **NCANDS**
  - 1.9 million reports
    - 55% of substantiated reports for neglect
- **National Incidence Study**
  - 1.5 million maltreated by the "harm" standard
    - 743,200 – child abuse
    - 879,000 – child neglect
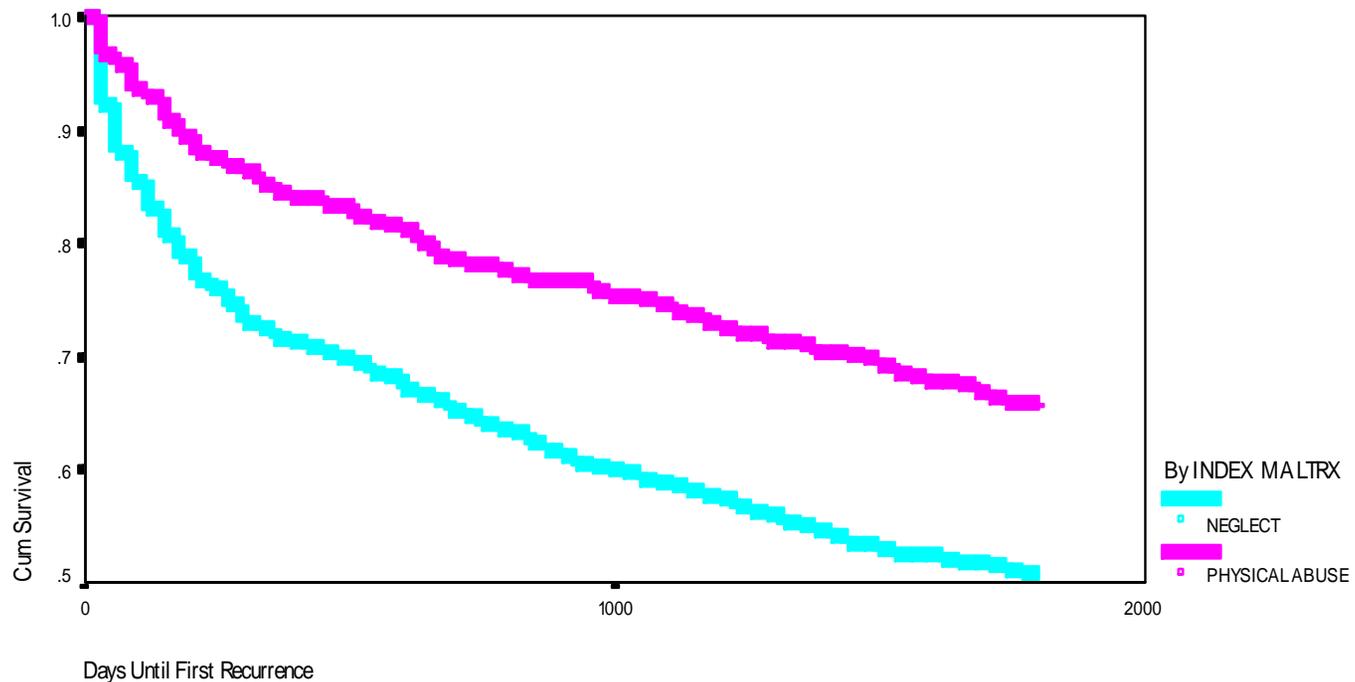 - Number of neglected children almost doubled from 1986-1993

Incidence of Child Maltreatment in the U. S.   1986 - 1993

NIS 2, 3

For Example: Comparison of recurrences over 5 years between neglect and physical abuse cases - n = 1167

Figure 17. Survival (Without Recurrence)

Over Five Years

Days Until First Recurrence

DePanfilis, D. (1995). Epidemiology of Child Maltreatment Recurrences.

Doctoral Dissertation. University of Maryland at Baltimore.

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Why Child Neglect is Important

- It's common

- Negative consequences

Outcomes Associated with Neglect

"There is no longer any doubt that child maltreatment – whether it be physical abuse, neglect or some mixture – has significant adverse effects on the development and adjustment of children, adolescents and adults."

– Trickett & McBride-Chang, 1995, p. 324.

Effects of Neglect

- Poor cognitive-educational performance
- Behavior problems
- Academic challenges
- Developmental lags: short- & long-term
- Insecure attachments among infants
- Passive & withdrawn preschool behavior
- Growth retardation
- Death
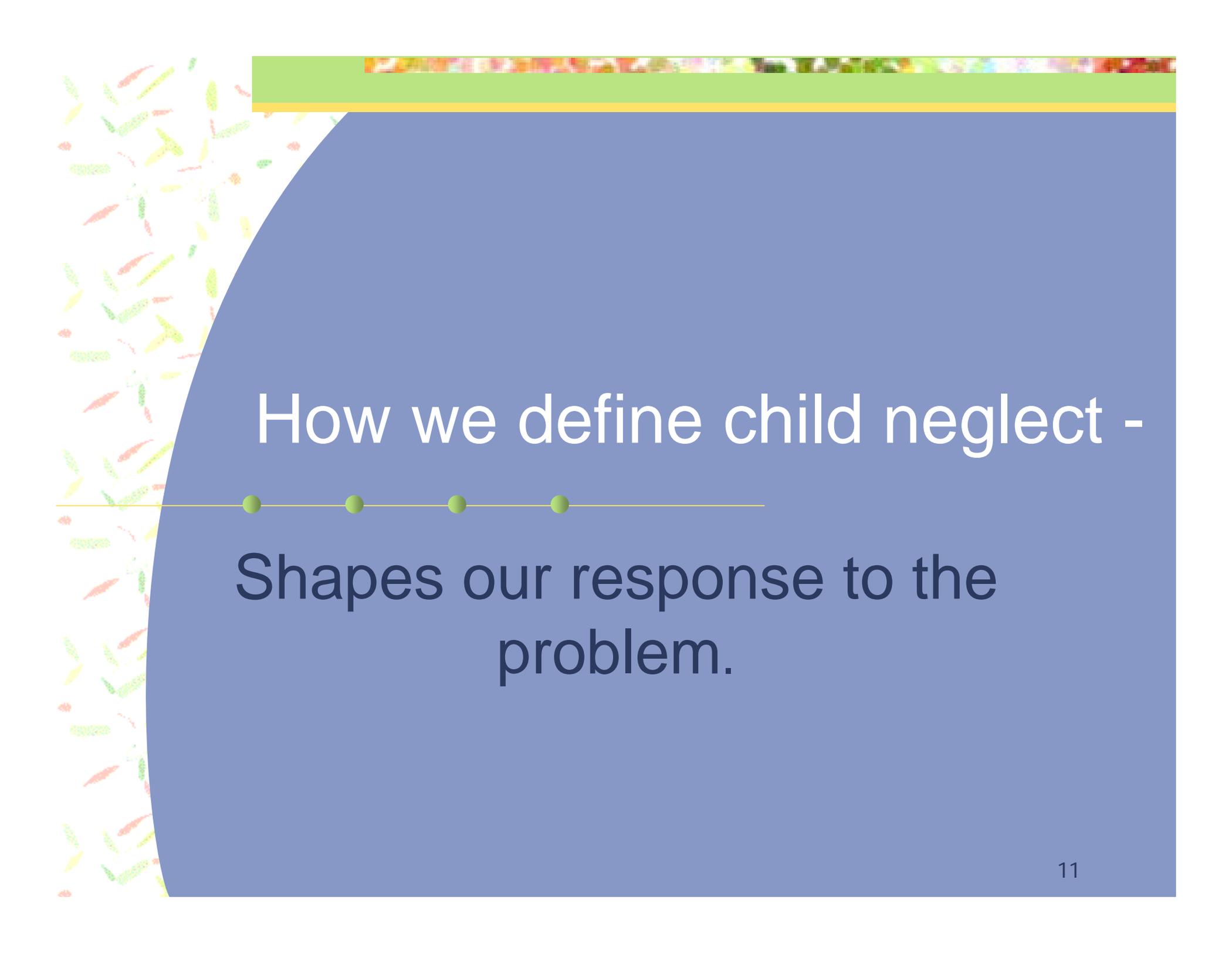
How we define child neglect -

Shapes our response to the problem.

Maryland's Definition of Neglect

- "Neglect" means the leaving of a child unattended or other failure to give proper care and attention to a child **by any parent or other person who has permanent or temporary care or custody or responsibility for supervision of the child ….** that the child's health or welfare is harmed or placed at substantial risk of harm.

Why do we want to define child neglect?

To protect children

    & improve their safety & well-being

    NOT

        to blame parents

Child neglect: Proposed definition

■ **Child neglect** occurs when a child's basic need is not adequately met

■ **Basic needs** include: adequate food, clothing, health care, supervision, protection, education, nurturance, love, & a home

Advantages of a Child-focused, Broad Definition

- Focuses on the basic needs of children

- Moves us beyond the narrow focus on parents to consider other contributors

- A more constructive, less blaming approach

- Fits with our broad interest in the health, safety & well-being of children

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Complexity of the problem

- Think carefully as you look at the next pages... The first take home point is that how children are neglected and the reasons children are neglected differ significantly between families.

Forms of Neglect

- **<u>Physical</u>** – inadequate:

  - Health care: medical, dental, mental health
  - Nutrition: hunger, failure to thrive, obesity
  - Hygiene, sanitation
  - Clothing
  - Home

- **<u>Psychological</u>** – inadequate:

  - Nurturance, warmth, affection, guidance
  - Supervision, monitoring, support

Forms of Neglect

- **Educational**
  - Not enrolled. Not "home schooled"
  - Poor attendance, truant
  - Special ed. needs not met

- **Environmental**
  - in home: safety hazards, smoking, DV, guns
  - out of home: car safety restraints, crime & violence in neighborhood

Children's Development & Needs

- Children's needs change as they grow

- Children the same age vary in their development, needs

- Neglect needs to be understood in the context of the individual child

Consensus

- Targeting single risk factors not likely to be as effective as an ecological perspective.

- Intervention and prevention programs must be individualized and offer multiple services.

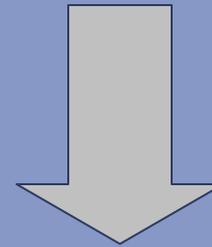- Services must empower families, build on strengths, and respect cultural diversity.

Goals of Promising Programs

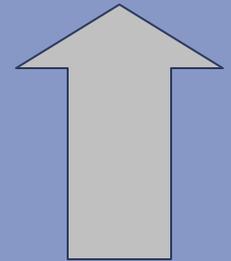- To increase protective factors

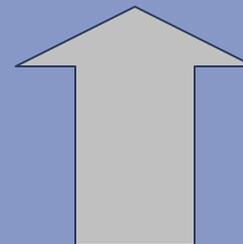- To decrease risk factors
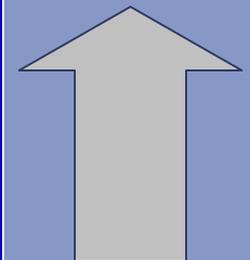
Approach to Change

Focus on Reducing Risk Factors

Increase Child Safety

Focus on Increasing Protective Factors
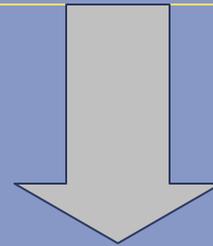
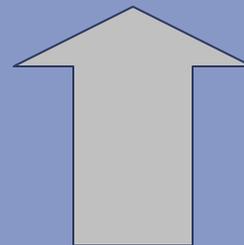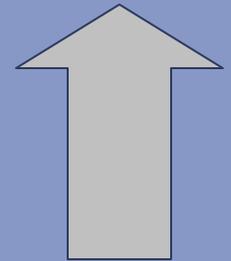**Increase Child Well-Being**

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For Example

Risk Factors:

- Caregiver depressive symptoms

- Parenting stress

- Life stress

Child Safety

Protective Factors:
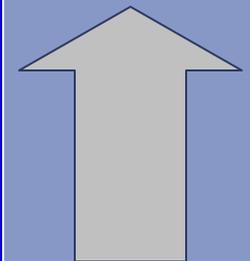
- Parenting attitudes

- Parenting competence

- Social support

Child Well-Being

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Examples: Protective Factors

- Supportive caregiver-child relationships
- Positive discipline methods
- Spend time together as a family
- Coping strategies by adults & children
- Social support & community connections
- Spirituality
- Cultural roots and connections
- Economic stability

Examples: Risk Factors

- Family conflict, chaos, stress
- Caregiver mental & physical health & substance abuse problems
- Child behavioral, mental and physical health problems
- Poor caregiver-child relationships
- Social isolation
- Poverty & community violence

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Important considerations

- Situational risks may be addressed in shorter term intervention
- Enduring risks take longer intervention to yield sustained change

Prevention & Intervention

- Promising principles have been derived from demonstration projects
    - Strengths-based practice
    - Motivation and readiness to change
    - Helping alliance
    - Family assessment
    - Differential & tailored responses
    - Importance of neighborhood
    - Cultural competence
    - Focus on outcomes

# Important need for Family Assessment

- A time when we join with the family to understand their strengths and needs *in relation to risks* that may be present in their lives.

- This *focused* process helps us arrive at specific intervention outcomes and service plans that will empower families to strengthen their capacity to meet the basic needs of their children.

Intervention Planning - Principles:

- Maximum involvement of family members and informal networks in development of plans.

- Short term, measurable, achievable goals (linked to outcomes) with positive feedback (SMART GOALS).

- Selection of interventions that help families achieve individualized outcomes and goals.

Intervention

- Multi-model intervention: Individualized services geared to increase protective factors and decrease risk factors.
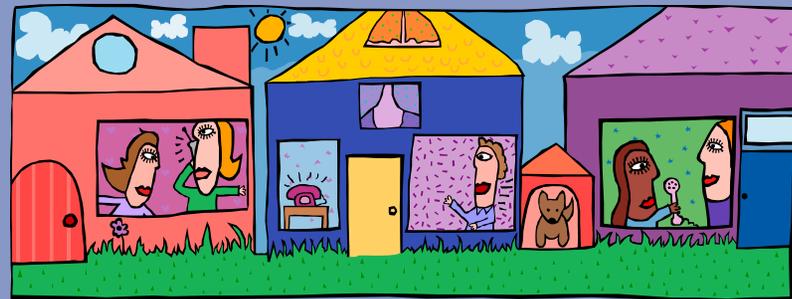
Time to practice

- Consider the Leman family
- What basic needs are neglected?
- What risk factors do you identify?
- What protective factors do you observe or would you try to increase?

Tailoring Intervention

- Interventions should be selected that are strategically structured to increase protective factors or decrease risk factors.

- Based on your practice with the Leman family, select interventions that would facilitate change in risk and protective factors.

  - (the next pages are examples of interventions).

Selecting Interventions

- Concrete resources
- Social support
- Developmental focus
- Cognitive/behavioral
- Individual focus
- Family system focus

Concrete Resources

- Housing assistance
- Emergency financial, food, clothing, household items, etc..
- Hands on assistance to increase safety and sanitation of home
- Transportation
- Quality child and health care

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Social Support

- Individual (parent aide, volunteer)
- Social support groups
- Social networking
- Recreation programs
- Mentoring programs
- Cultural festivals/activities
- Connections to religious groups

Developmental

- Therapeutic day care
- Individual assistance with role achievement, e.g., parenting
- Home visiting, public health nurse
- Peer groups geared to developmental tasks
- Mentors for nurturing, recreation

Cognitive/Behavioral

- Social skills training
- Communication skill building
- Home management, meal preparation, parent-child interaction training
- Teaching new thought processes regarding childhood history
- Financial management counseling, problem solving training

Individual focus

- AOD in-patient and out-patient counseling
- 12 Step programs
- Mental health counseling
- Crisis intervention
- Stress management
- Behavioral management

Family System

- Home based family centered counseling regarding family functioning, communication skills, home management, roles & responsibilities

- Center based family therapy

- Nurturing family camps

- Modeling positive caregiving behaviors

Final Take Home Points

- Need to carefully define the problem
- Need to specifically identify risk factors and protective factors
- Need to tailor intervention for each family
- Your professional relationship will be the vehicle for change
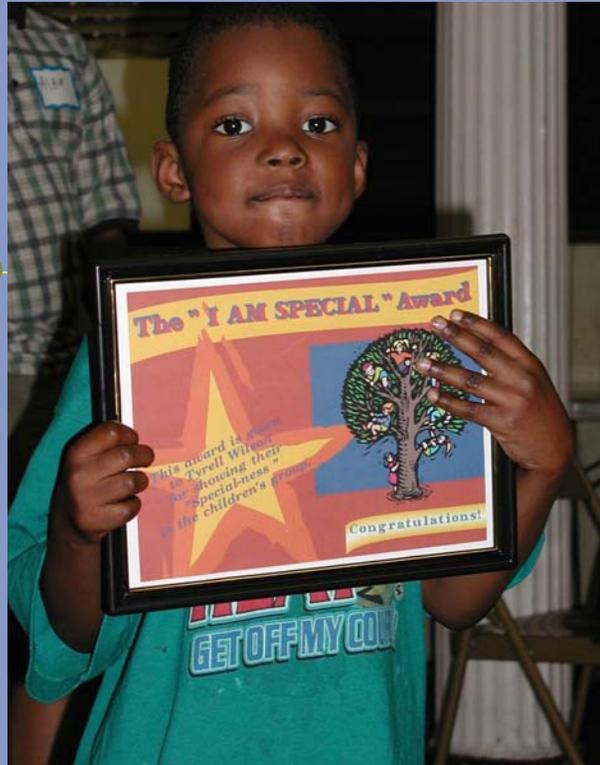
Copies of these slides will be made available at:

http://www.family.umaryland.edu