



## CHILD WELFARE POSITION STATEMENT

### INTRODUCTION/PROBLEM STATEMENT

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The issue of child welfare is important to pediatric nurses and to the health care of children. Essentially, it is the promotion of child well-being and the protection from harm. The efforts of the Society of Pediatric Nurses with regard to child welfare are rooted in the need to make children, and children's health, a national priority. Children may be vulnerable for a variety of reasons and need the advocacy of adults in order to grow and thrive. The assessment of family's resources to ensure adequate support is essential (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016). The pediatric nurse is in the key position to identify the needs of children, assess children's vulnerabilities, advocate for their rights, and ensure public protection.

### DEFINITION(S)

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Child welfare is the support of children and youth to ensure optimal development and well-being. Child welfare is promoted through a continuum of services that support children and families to ensure children are safe and adequate resources are available (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016).

### RATIONALE AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

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The issues associated with child welfare are many. Any situation or environment which places a child's health and well-being at risk may be considered threats to child welfare. There are risk factors or situations that may make children vulnerable to health and social issues. Such situations may include children and adolescents living in poverty, and those who are abused or neglected, homeless, in foster or kinship care, or juvenile detention, or who have mental health issues. An increasing concern is child and parental substance abuse (Child Welfare League of America, 2019) These issues all warrant the attention of pediatric nurses. In addition, pediatric nurses are concerned with the priorities of children with special needs, ensuring continuation of care and services after in-patient discharge, and extending care of medically fragile children in the community. It is especially important to consider the role of the staff nurse when children are discharged to homes riddled with poverty, instability, and at-risk environments.

Current statistics validate several significant issues related to child welfare in the United States today:

- In 2017, there were 674,000 victims of abuse (Child Welfare League of America, 2019).
- Children who have died due to child abuse numbered 1,720 in 2017 (CWLA, 2019)
- Approximately 442,995 children live in foster care, Of those children, 42% were age 5 or younger, 42% were ages 6 through 15, and 14% were 16 or older (CWLA, 2019).
- Girls in foster care are 2.5 times more likely to get pregnant by age 19 and many will have a repeat pregnancy before the age of 19 (Gutmacher Institute, 2011)
- More than 50% of children in the child welfare system have special health care needs (Ringeisen, Casanueva, Urato, & Cross, 2008); and approximately 50-75% of these children have significant emotional or behavioral issues (Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), 2016).

- In 2017, approximately 7.6 million children under age 18 lived in homes with a householder who was their grandparent or other relative. Of these, approximately 5.8 million lived with grandparents who were the householders. (CWLA)
- An estimated 345,000 adolescents in 2017 had a co-occurring substance use disorder and a major depressive episode in the past year. This number represents 1.4 percent of all adolescents in the United States.(CWLA, 2019)

The millions of children who lack adequate housing, health care, and nutrition amplify these statistics. With constant advances in technology, increasing numbers of children with special needs and their caregivers are less equipped to manage that technology.

### POSITION and/or RECOMMENDATIONS

The role of the nurse in child welfare issues is to be aware of the vulnerability of children affected by social issues and to advocate and champion for those needing protection. Pediatric nurses may serve as healthcare experts and advisors to improve the status of these children. Pediatric nurses are knowledgeable about child development and the unique needs of children, and may serve as teachers, counselors, referral agents, case managers, program developers, researchers, and supports to families and children with regard to child welfare issues. Nurses may work closely with a variety of disciplines, providing the comprehensive knowledge of the child and family in various settings to enhance management of the child's care.

In an effort to address the issues related to the welfare of children, the Society of Pediatric Nurses recommends pediatric nurses:

1. Assess each pediatric client to ensure his or her need for health and welfare are being met to promote optimum growth and development.
2. Advocate for all children, including those who have disabilities or special health care needs to ensure they have a medical home.
3. Assess for indications of abuse and offer emotional support and help obtaining resources for care.
4. Know local laws, regulations, and policies/procedures for reporting of suspected child abuse/neglect and report suspected abuse/neglect in accordance with these statutes.
5. Support efforts for primary prevention of child abuse.
6. Encourage educational offerings for parents and children.
7. Work closely with social services and other social workers to ensure seamless care, appropriate counseling, and connection to key community resources.
8. Identify children who are in need of child welfare advocacy and provide appropriate referrals.
9. Establish close rapport with clients and families to promote trust and communication about perceived needs and available resources.
10. Encourage agencies to have the resources available to meet the social, financial, and emotional needs of vulnerable children.
11. Support legislation to enhance services which emphasize child health and welfare.

12. Develop partnerships between healthcare agencies (e.g., children's hospitals, community hospitals), community and social service agencies, advocates, and children and their families to ensure communication of needs, the provision of resources, and service delivery to vulnerable populations of children.
13. Communicate the cost effectiveness of various child welfare prevention and management interventions and communicate the data to important stakeholders, including legislators, the media, parents, and other advocacy groups.
14. Partner with nursing and other organizations to influence child welfare policies and initiatives.
15. Work with local media to generate interest in child welfare issues unique to a region.
16. Emphasize the unique role, knowledge, and skill set which pediatric registered nurses may contribute to child welfare efforts.

## RESOURCE(S)

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American Academy of Pediatrics

[www.aap.org/](http://www.aap.org/)

Child Trends

[www.childtrends.org](http://www.childtrends.org)

Child Welfare Information Gateway

[www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov)

Child Welfare League of America

<http://www.cwla.org/>

National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

[www.napnap.org](http://www.napnap.org)

National Association of School Nurses

[www.nasn.org](http://www.nasn.org)

The National Campaign to Prevent Teenage and Unplanned Pregnancy

<http://thenationalcampaign.org/>

US Department of Health and Human Services

- Administration for Children and Families

[www.acf.hhs.gov/](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/)

- Children's Bureau

[www.acf.hhs.gov/cb](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb)

## REFERENCES

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	Original date/Revisions:	9/2008; 2011; 3/2017
	Next Review:	6/10/2021

REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY:  
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Date: 3/10/2017, 6/10/2019

SPN Board of Directors:  
Date: 6/17/2019