

THE ARKANSAS DEFENDING CHILDHOOD INITIATIVE



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**DEFENDING
CHILDHOOD**
PROTECT HEAL THRIVE

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Department of Justice National Survey

A recent DOJ study revealed that over 60 percent of American children were exposed to violence annually, either directly or indirectly as a victim or witness. Forty percent were direct victims of two or more violent acts and one in ten were victims of violence on five more occasions. These children experience emotional, behavioral, and mental health problems, which decreases their ability to focus, behave, and perform well in school. Without adequate support, the child is likely to become truant, involved in criminal activity, and highly susceptible to dropping out of school.

Arkansas Defending Childhood Initiative

A-CHANCE is an Arkansas initiative developed by U.S. Attorney Conner Eldridge in accordance with the DOJ's mission to mitigate the negative impact of a child's exposure to violence and abuse. The program is specifically and carefully designed to apprise school officials that one of their students recently had "some form" of contact with law enforcement. Information or details surrounding the actual contact will not be provided. The predominant purpose of the notification is to give school officials a "heads up" that a student may be acting out or underperforming for justifiable reasons. The hope is that schools will provide adequate support for the child, if necessary, and not mislabel them as a "problem child."

Law Enforcement's Role

If a child is present at the scene of a "traumatic event" or any event that would place a reasonable child under distress, police officers would be tasked with obtaining the name of the child and their school. A "traumatic event" includes but is not limited to a child witnessing domestic violence, a battery, drug use, or execution of a search warrant. Again, schools will not be apprised of the details that trigger a "Handle with Care Notice." Shortly after obtaining this information, the police department will send a "Handle with Care Notice" to school administrators—either to the superintendent's office or school principal. Generally speaking, a "Handle with Care Notice" should be generated in most circumstances where law enforcement responds and a child is present.

School's Role

Upon notification, school officials may implement the appropriate action(s) it deems necessary, if any is warranted. At the very least, the school should be notified the morning of the next school day. Appropriate action may include but is not limited to (i) notifying the student's teacher(s) to keep an eye on the student; (ii) re-teaching important lessons and/or postpone testing; (iii) permitting the child time to rest if he/she has trouble focusing or staying awake; or (iv) referring the student to the school counselor if he/she exhibits behavioral or emotional problems in the classroom.

NOTIFICATION PROCESS

1

POLICE

Police Send "Handle With Care Notice" To School Officials By Morning of Next School Day

2

SCHOOL

School Officials Take Appropriate Action

3

CHILD

Child Receives Adequate Supervision And/Or Appropriate Care

MISSION STATEMENT



"We must stand up for children across Arkansas that are exposed to violence, crime, or abuse. The fact that so many kids are put in these situations at an early age is harrowing. The A-Chance program seeks to address this epidemic in Arkansas by bringing together the pillars of our communities to work together to see that these children are given the necessary assistance to succeed in school and in life. Treating the effects of trauma in children is the only way we can truly change the cycle of violence in our communities."

--- U.S. Attorney Conner Eldridge