



the power to prevent

PREVENT CHILD ABUSE ILLINOIS
NEWS AND EVENTS

a note from our Executive Director



Dear Friends,

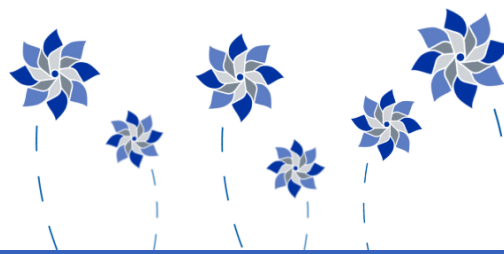
As we welcome a new year, **winter offers a natural moment to reflect and recommit.** Over the past year, PCA Illinois continued to strengthen its role as a leader in child abuse and neglect prevention across the state. Together with our partners and supporters, we reached thousands of professionals, parents, and community members, expanded access to prevention education, and elevated the conversation about what children and families need to thrive. **At the center of all this work is our unwavering belief that prevention changes lives.**

Looking ahead, we know there is more work to be done. In 2026, we are advancing our campaign, Investing in Prevention: Building a Better Future for Children, while continuing the education, training, public awareness, and advocacy that drive lasting change. When Illinois prioritizes equitable, sustained investments in primary prevention, **we create lasting benefits for children, families, and communities statewide.**

Thank you for standing with us and believing in the power of prevention. Your commitment fuels our mission and makes progress possible. Together, we can continue building a future where every child grows up safe, supported, and surrounded by opportunity.

Tarra Winters

Tarra Winters
Executive Director
Prevent Child Abuse Illinois



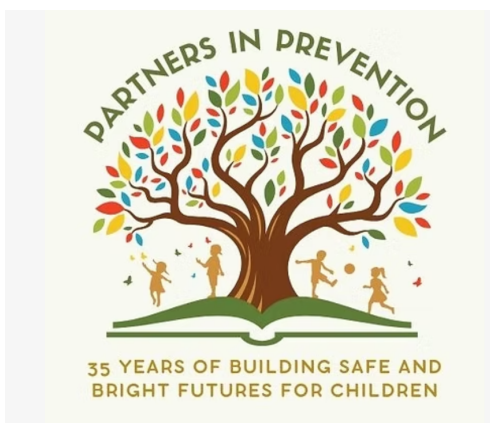
news at PCA Illinois

Welcome Jessica Kober!

Jessica Kober is excited to be the newest member of the **Prevent Child Abuse Illinois** team. Jessica brings a deep passion for supporting children, families, and communities, along with **years of experience in child abuse prevention work**. In her new role as the **Home Visiting Specialist**, she provides comprehensive technical assistance and support to home visiting programs across Illinois. Jessica believes that every child deserves to grow up in a safe, nurturing environment, and **she is committed to empowering families with the tools and support they need to thrive**. Outside of work, she enjoys spending time with her family, traveling, exercising, gardening and playing board games.



Conference Recap



This October, we were proud to host our **31st Annual Conference**—our largest gathering yet! **More than 500 attendees** came together for two inspiring days of connection, learning, and renewal. Participants had the opportunity to network with peers, recharge their passion for the work, and deepen their knowledge on **child abuse and neglect prevention through dynamic sessions and expert-led workshops**.

Thank you to everyone who joined us and helped make this year's conference such a meaningful and energizing experience. We look forward to building on this momentum as we continue **working together to create safer, healthier futures for children and families**.

Quotes from Attendees:

“

This is my first conference and I really appreciate the amount of information and resources that were presented to me.

”

“

Not only was I able to use the information for work, it benefited my personal life as well.

”

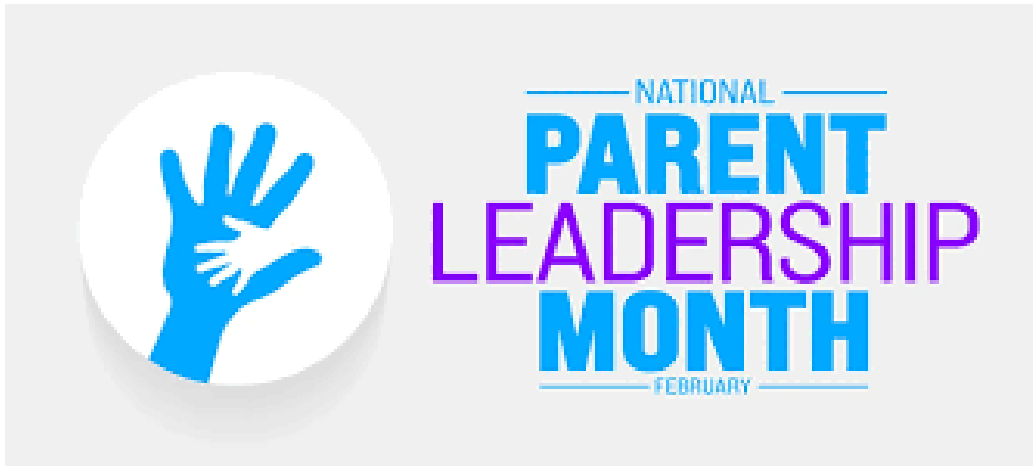
“

What I liked most about the conference were the encouraging words and it provided a safe place where we felt listened and heard.

”

knowledge is power

Celebrate National Parent Leadership Month with Us!



February is National Parent Leadership Month, and we're gearing up for a full month of celebration, learning, and connection! **Parents are the heart of strong families**, and this month gives us the chance to honor their leadership, amplify their voices, and spotlight the protective factors that help families thrive.

All month long, we'll be hosting energizing events—from celebrations and conversations to learning opportunities—designed to uplift parents and strengthen partnerships across our community. We invite you to join us, get involved, and help us shine a bright light on the incredible impact parents make every day. Let's celebrate together!



February is Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month

February is Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month, a crucial time to highlight that healthy relationships are built on respect, trust, and safety. **One in three teens will experience some form of dating abuse**, which can be physical, emotional, or digital. As parents and caregivers, our open conversations are a powerful prevention tool. **Talk with the teens in your life about recognizing red flags**, setting boundaries, and being a supportive friend. For dedicated teen resources and confidential support, visit loveisrespect.org.

If you or a teen you know needs help, the **National Domestic Violence Hotline offers 24/7 support at 1-800-799-SAFE or text LOVEIS to 22522**.



a call to action

JANUARY is
HUMAN TRAFFICKING
AWARENESS MONTH

Until Everyone is Safe

January Is Human Trafficking Awareness Month: Protecting Children Starts Online

January is **Human Trafficking Awareness Month**, and it's an important reminder that keeping children safe today also means helping them stay safe online. Many cases of child exploitation now start on the internet—through games, social media, and apps where kids spend time every day.

That's why **digital safety and children's well-being go hand in hand**. Kids may not always recognize when someone online isn't who they say they are, or when a conversation starts to feel uncomfortable. Parents and caregivers don't have to be tech experts, but a little awareness goes a long way. Talking with kids about what they do online, setting simple family rules for screen time, and checking privacy settings can make a big difference.

Learning about these issues helps families spot warning signs early and encourages children to come to a trusted adult if something doesn't feel right. **When we stay informed and involved, we help create a safer online world where kids can explore, play, and learn with confidence.**

Together, we can create safer digital spaces and help prevent exploitation before it starts.

Additional Resources

<https://www.d2l.org/safety-in-seconds-human-trafficking-prevention/>

<https://www.d2l.org/human-trafficking/>

[National Center for Missing & Exploited Children](#)

[Know2Protect | Homeland Security](#)

[Kids & Tech: 12 Tips for Parents in the Digital Age - HealthyChildren.org](#)

[Beyond Screen Time: Help Your Kids Build Healthy Media Use Habits - HealthyChildren.org](#)

prevention in partnership

Cook County Safe Sleep Initiative

The **Cook County Safe Sleep Initiative** refers to a collection of coordinated efforts to reduce Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID) through education and resource distribution, particularly in communities most impacted by SUID. The initiative is a **collaboration between state and local health departments**, hospitals like Lurie Children's Hospital and Rush University Medical Center, and community-based organizations, utilizing data from the Cook County Sudden Unexpected Infant

Death-Case Registry to target outreach. Key components include [training "Safe Sleep Ambassadors" to provide peer-to-peer education](#) and distributing resources like safe sleep kits.

Why the initiative is needed:

- High rates of SUID: Sudden Unexpected Infant Death is a leading cause of death for infants aged one month to one year.
- Racial and ethnic disparities: The initiative specifically addresses the disproportionately high rates of SUID among Black and Hispanic infants in Cook County.
- Preventable deaths: Many SUID deaths are caused by accidental suffocation in unsafe sleep environments, making them preventable.

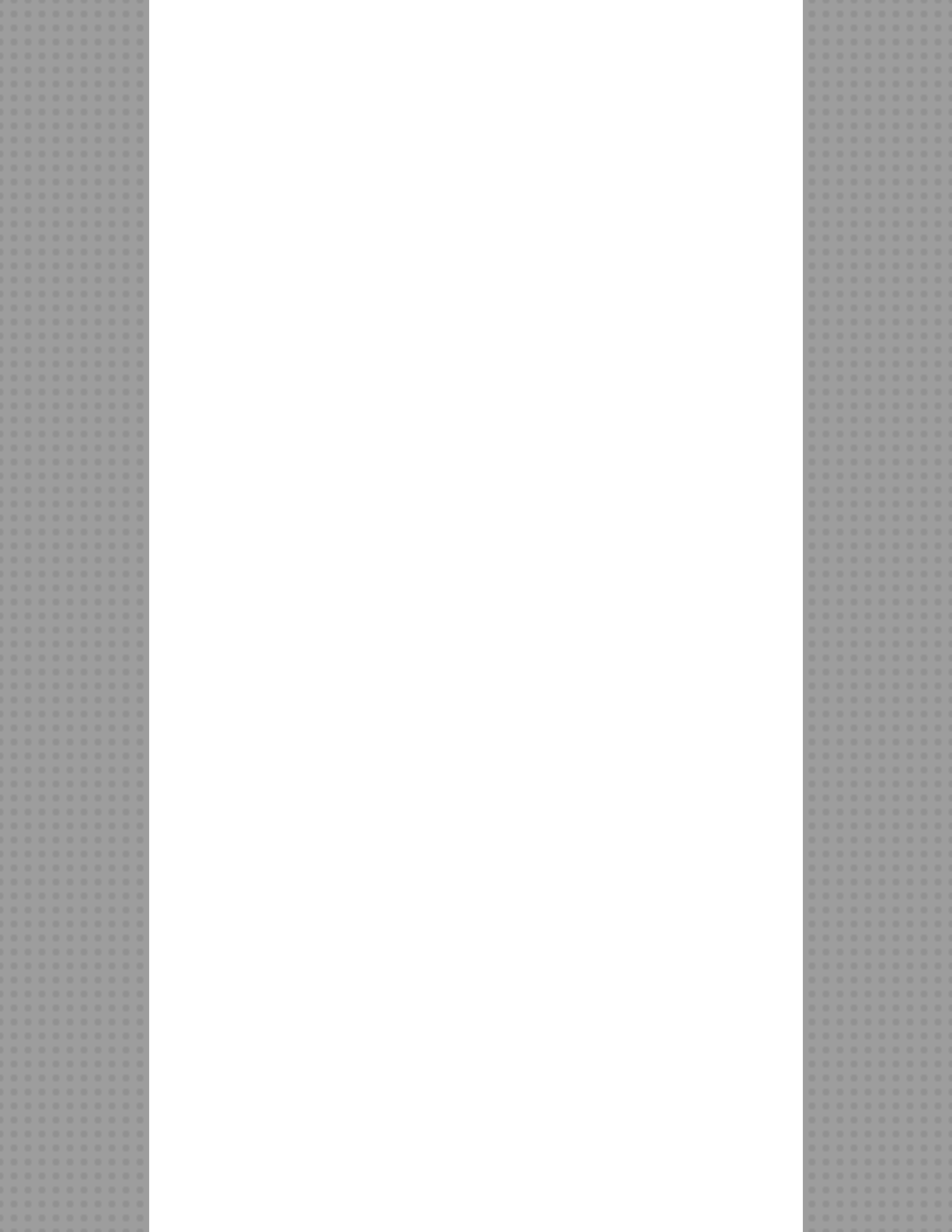
Additional Resources on SUID:

[Sleep-Related Infant Death Cook County, Illinois: A Five-Year Report, 2019 – 2023](#)

[IDHS: Infant Safe Sleep](#)

[Safe Sleep - Illinois Cares for Kids](#)

[Comer Children's Hospital Safe Sleep video](#)



★ SAFE SLEEP MATTERS ★

ILLINOIS INFANT SLEEP-RELATED DATA IN 2024



★ ILLINOIS DATA

In 2024, Illinois reported 126 infant sleep-related deaths, underscoring the ongoing need for vigilance and education around safe sleep practices.

★ CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

- Co-sleeping, where infants share a bed with adults or other children
- Unsafe sleep environments, including adult beds, couches, or chairs
- Soft bedding, such as pillows, blankets, bumper pads, and stuffed toys in the sleep area
- Incorrect sleep positioning, such as placing infants on their stomachs or sides

★ AGE MATTERS



The highest risk period is during the **first 4 months of life**. Caregivers who consistently place babies on their backs during this critical window are giving their infants the safest start possible.

★ ABC'S OF SAFE SLEEP

Alone: Infants should sleep alone, without other people, children, or pets.

Back: Always place infants on their backs to sleep.

Crib: Use a safe, approved crib, bassinet, or portable play yard with a firm, flat mattress and a fitted sheet.

For more information, please visit:

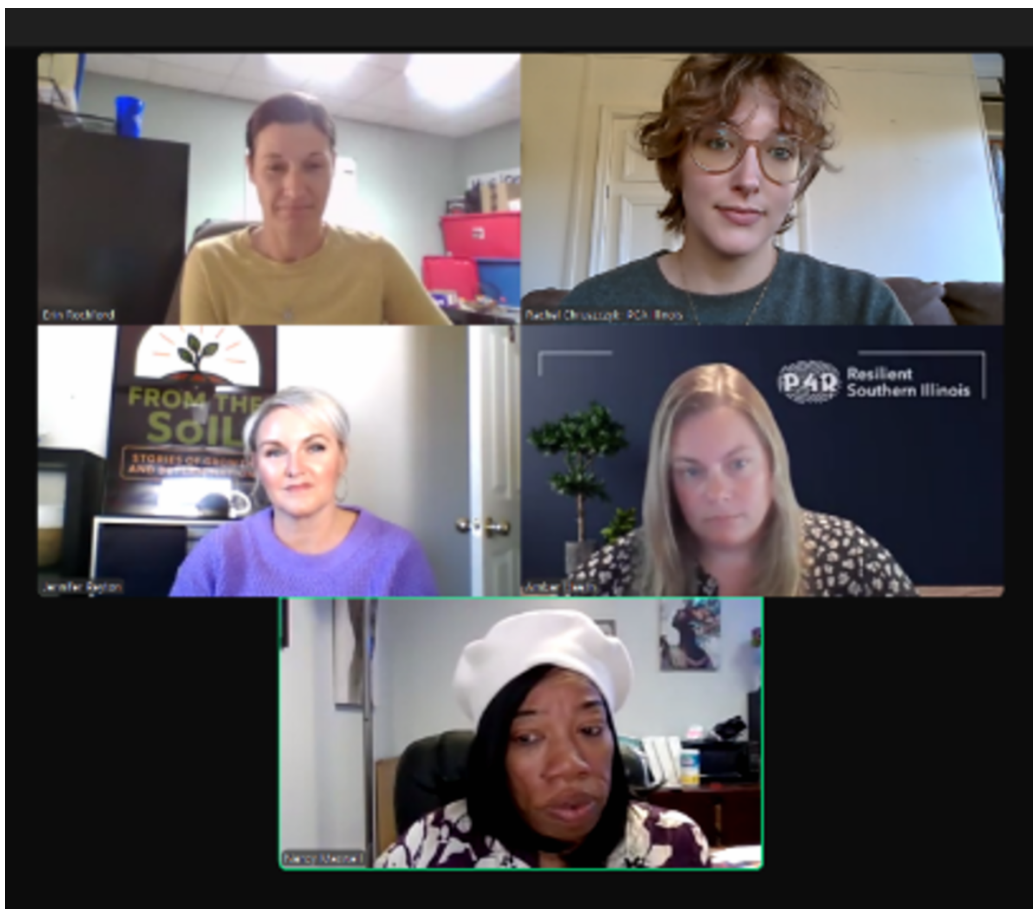


PCA Illinois was honored to present the 2025 Friend of Children Award to **Dr. Gina Lowell** and **Dr. Kyran Quinlan** for their ongoing support and leadership to promote safe sleep practices to parents and communities.

expanding our impact

Southern 7 Child Abuse Prevention (CAP) Coalition – Honoring Domestic Violence Awareness Month in October

Prevent Child Abuse Illinois provided a platform for the downstate coalition, the **Southern 7 Child Abuse Prevention Coalition**, to host a series of statewide trainings in October for Domestic Violence Awareness Month. **The series trained approximately 1,066 individuals across the state.** We would like to thank the trainers that provided their time and expertise as well as the attendees who took time out of their day to learn more about domestic violence prevention! (The photo is a screenshot from our Survivor Panel, which was so powerful and many attendees stated that it was one of their favorite webinars yet.)



staff spotlight

Abby Behrens

Railer Reach Out, Logan County
Abby Behrens, our Central Region Prevention Specialist, is part of a collaborative called **Railer Reach Out**. Railer Reach Out is a text-message campaign created and managed by members of the **Youth Mental Health Coalition** at Lincoln Memorial Hospital. Its purpose is to provide students with quick, supportive messages that promote mental wellness, connect them to resources, and help them feel supported throughout the school year.

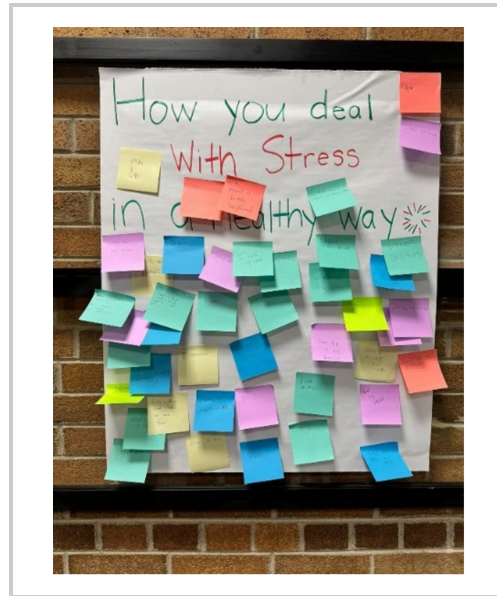


This semester, the program reached 316 subscribers and sent 10 messages covering topics such as 988, community events, study skills, healthy relationship boundaries, substance-use prevention, and mental wellness. The team attended freshmen orientation, where they helped students and their families subscribe to the campaign and handed out free T-shirts to welcome them to their first week of school.

They also hosted a student focus group with 21 participants, more than half of whom were already subscribed. Students shared thoughtful feedback that will help

the Youth Mental Health Coalition to tailor future messages to the needs of LCHS teens.

This past fall, the Coalition set up a table during lunch and offered a quick activity with prompts like “How do you manage stress in a healthy way?,” “What’s your goal for today?,” and “What’s your goal for next month?” Many students engaged enthusiastically and expressed interest in future activities.



SAVE THE DATE!

Parent Leadership Lunch n Learn Series: What is Parent Leadership Month?

February 4, 2026

12pm-1pm

Via Zoom

[Register here](#)

*Be on the lookout for more lunch and learn opportunities in February for Parent Leadership Month.

Family Sex Trafficking and Drugs: What is happening behind the closed door?

March 19, 2026

10am-11:30am

Via Zoom

[Register here](#)

2026 Child Abuse Prevention Month Community Packet Lunch and Learn

March 11, 2026

12pm-1pm

Via Zoom

[Register here](#)

Child Abuse Prevention Month 2026

April 2026 is right around the corner—and we're already gearing up for **Child Abuse Prevention Month**! This year, we'll be hosting and supporting a variety of events across the state to raise awareness, strengthen families, and bring communities together. Be sure to follow us on social media for updates, announcements, and ways to participate. Interested in getting involved? [Reach out to your local Prevention Specialist](#)—we'd love to have you join the planning!

2nd Annual ACEs Awareness Day Virtual Panel Session

April 23, 2026

Via Zoom

Registration coming soon!



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