

CHILDREN & YOUTH

2011-2012

MESSAGE POINTS

Issue - NATIONAL FAMILY WEEK

Message points

- One of the guiding principles of The American Legion Children & Youth program is to maintain the integrity of the family home. As the most basic unit in our society, the family must be strengthened against the negative pressures pushing against it every day.
- In order to have the means to survive, two-income families are the norm rather than the exception in today's economy.
- The numbers of divorced families, step or blended families, and single parent families have reached all time highs and more teenagers than ever now hold part time jobs.
- Children are now being placed in day care centers at a much earlier age and young children are home alone after school (latch key) until a parent returns home.
- Our family week program suggests ways for better family interaction and requests that Congress designate a permanent annual observance of National Family Week during the traditional Thanksgiving holiday week.

Issue - JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

Message Points

- The American Legion continues to be concerned about violent crimes committed by juveniles.
- Juveniles account for approximately twenty-four per cent of our population and account for fifteen percent of violent crimes (murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assault) as reported by the 2009 FBI Uniform Crime Reports.
- Numerous government-supported institutions nationwide, specifically schools and housing, are still experiencing serious, violent acts of crime and criminal damage.
- Any instance of crime or violence in a school not only affects the individuals involved, but may also disrupt the educational process and affect bystanders, the school itself, and the surrounding community.
- Every child has the right to attend a school that is safe and secure, conducive to learning, and free of fear.
- The American Legion recommends that school boards and national and state education agencies, in conjunction with parents and community members, develop and implement programs that create violence prevention strategies, to include consistent, fair and responsible “zero tolerance” policies.
- Local law enforcement is urged to implement programs designed to reduce juvenile delinquency in coordination with the Department of Education, community citizenry and other agencies within the criminal justice system.
- Posts continue to urge and assist those in the educational community and criminal justice system to work closely together with communities and families to reduce juvenile delinquency in schools and our communities.

Issue - IMMUNIZATION

Message points

- The American Legion has recognized the need for immunizations being available for all children for many years.
- Medical advances in vaccines have eliminated many serious diseases over the past several years. As a result, many parents neglect to immunize their children because of a false belief that there is no longer a danger present, or they cannot afford the cost of the shots.
- Most school systems now make it mandatory for children to be immunized before enrolling in school as many diseases are reappearing in larger numbers because of this apathy toward necessary inoculations.
- The American Legion supports the continued funding of federal programs available to provide free immunizations to those families which are not able to pay so all children can be protected from disease.

Issue - YOUTH SUICIDE PREVENTION

Message Points

- Youth suicide is a serious problem across the United States and The American Legion was one of the first organizations to bring the problem to the attention of communities through our Posts and volunteers.
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death among 10 – 25 year olds and the third leading cause of death for those ages 15 – 24.
- Eleven people between ages 15 and 24 kill themselves every day, accounting for over 4,000 deaths per year.
- The American Legion provides the brochure “Warning Signs” that can be used to educate children and adults on what to look for and what can be done to prevent this senseless tragedy.

Issue - CHILD MALTREATMENT

Message Points

- The American Legion has been concerned about child maltreatment from the very beginning of our organization. Our major emphasis has always been the education of adults who come in contact with children to recognize the signs of physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect.
- Teachers, coaches, administrators, and others responsible for children while they are away from their parents should familiarize themselves with the warning signs of all forms of child maltreatment and, when necessary, report any suspected maltreatment to the proper authorities, and ensure that these children are referred to the appropriate child protective service in their community.
- All laws and penalties relating to child abuse and neglect should be reviewed to determine if they are adequate, based on current model programs as determined by their state.
- The American Legion continues, at all levels, to educate the public of their obligations and duties with respect to reporting suspected cases of child maltreatment.
- Departments and Posts should cooperate in all ways possible with organizations and agencies that advocate for child maltreatment prevention, and promote and increase the public's awareness of child maltreatment and its detrimental effects on the children and youth of our society.

Issue - DRUGS AND NARCOTICS

Message Points

- Illegal trafficking of drugs into the United States is one of the greatest threats to the welfare and safety of our citizens, particularly our youth.
- Illegal drugs have an enormous negative impact on the youth of our society in more ways than just physical health. Once “hooked”, the individual often commits crimes to obtain money to pay for their addiction.
- According to current studies, alcohol abuse by teenagers is the number one drug problem in America with increased use of marijuana and other drugs right behind it.
- We oppose any legislation that lowers the drinking age or would legalize the use or sale of marijuana or other hallucinatory drugs.
- The American Legion has been involved with the issue of drug abuse, to include alcohol abuse, since the early 1960's. Our materials are prevention-oriented. We are assisting Posts in developing drug education programs in their communities, which encourages children to achieve their highest potential by living a drug free lifestyle.

Issue - CHILD PORNOGRAPHY & OTHER OBSCENE LITERATURE

Message Points

- Since the early 1960's The American Legion has taken a stand against the production, sale or distribution of pornographic materials that involve the children.
- Pornography has invaded our neighborhoods at increasing rates and methods to combat the trafficking of this obscenity should be explored by government agencies to include the Post Office, FBI, and the U.S. Customs and Border Protection.
- Investigation is necessary by all concerned to ensure that adequate legislation is in place in each state to prohibit the production, sale or distribution of this obscenity and to also insure that tough penalties exist and are enforced on those that violate these laws.
- The American Legion opposes any legislation that eases present laws against pornographic material in their production, sale or distribution or reduces any existing penalties that would be enforced.

Issue - CHILD ABDUCTION/MISSING CHILDREN

Message Points

- Each day in the United States, an average of 2,185 children, 17 years and younger, are reported missing or disappear by abduction, run away or are lost to some unknown cause.
- The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) was created in 1984 as a central resource and data clearinghouse for law enforcement, victims and their families, fighting for safe recovery of missing children and the protection of all children from sexual exploitation.
- Due to the tireless work of NCMEC and law enforcement, today more children come home safely than at any time in our nation's history, law enforcement is better prepared, and families are more alert and aware than ever before.
- Although NCMEC has made a significant impact in tackling this daunting problem, there is much that remains to be done, for too many children still do not make it home, and too many are still victims of sexual predators.
- The American Legion urges the President and Congress to provide adequate annual funding for the continued operation and expansion of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, America's best resource to combat the national crisis of child victimization.
- Departments and Posts seek to increase the public's awareness of child victimization and its detrimental effects on the children and youth of our society and cooperate with credible organizations and agencies that seek to locate missing children in their state and communities.
- The American Legion supports the America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response (AMBER) and the national AMBER Alert Network Act of 2003 to help missing children to be returned to their homes.

Issue - CATASTROPHIC ILLNESS AMONG CHILDREN

Message points

- A catastrophic illness is any illness or condition, acute or chronic, for which expenses are incurred that are not fully covered by a private insurer, federal or state health care assistance, or other financial source.
- Many children are not receiving needed medical treatment because their families have been unable to afford the cost of catastrophic illness to one of their children. While many of these families have hospitalization insurance, even major medical, they cannot meet the cost of a major illness.
- Several states have enacted legislation to establish Catastrophic Illness in Children Relief Funds to help families bear the excessive financial burdens associated with the care of children with special health needs and disabilities.
- These funds have proven effective and are designed to act as a safety net for families from all walks of life who have excessive expenses related to a child's medical needs.
- The American Legion urges the federal government to enact legislation to financially assist families faced by the catastrophic illness of one of their children, thus preserving the family's financial integrity and their ability to cope with the responsibilities that accompany significant health problems in children.
- The American Legion, through Department and Post leadership, urges state governments to enact legislation including, but not limited to, state specific Catastrophic Illness in Children Relief Funds, to assist financially those individual families faced by catastrophic illness of one of their children in order to maintain the integrity of the family.

Issue - PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM THE UNRESTRICTED MEDIA

- Computer usage statistic shows that 90% of children in the United States have access to a computer in their home and 93% with access also have Internet access.
- Children, especially teens, are more likely to encounter sexual conversations and materials on the Internet, according to a congressional study. One in five youths online face invitations to engage in cybersex or receive other risqué solicitations.
- The study also found that one in four children encounter pornographic pictures while researching homework topics or checking their e-mail.
- The producers of our nation's movies, TV shows and TV news and the Internet have become very explicit in describing and depicting various types of violence, also.
- The American Legion supports appropriate state and federal legislation to restrict the excessive use of violence, vulgarity and other forms of moral depravation in movies, TV programs, TV news and the Internet.
- Departments and Posts of The American Legion conduct awareness campaigns to educate their members, their families and the general public about the potential dangers the Internet and other forms of electronic media pose to children and teenagers.

Issue – POLICY STATEMENT ON FAMILY AND THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

Message points

- A guiding principle of The American Legion's Children & Youth Program is to strengthen and maintain the integrity of the family, defined by the World Congress of Families II as the fundamental unit, inscribed in human nature and centered on the voluntary union of a man and woman in a lifelong covenant of marriage.
- A child's biological connection to a married father and mother increases the likelihood that they will identify with the child, be willing to sacrifice for the child, and thereby reduce the likelihood that either parent would abuse the child.
- Children are dependent on a mother and father for their physical, emotional and spiritual needs. The existence of a marital bond between a mother and father is vital for the child's overall well being.
- The American Legion recognizes that marriage is a fundamental institution that predates the law and the Constitution of the United States and opposes all efforts to undermine, alter or otherwise corrupt the institution of marriage, which is the cornerstone of a healthy family.
- The American Legion urges the President of the United States and the Congress to ensure that the institution of marriage is preserved and protected, either through appropriate federal legislation or through an amendment to the Constitution of the United States.

Issue – SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

Message points

- The sexual victimization of children is overwhelming in magnitude, yet largely unrecognized and underreported.
- Statistics show that one in five girls and one in ten boys are sexually exploited before they reach adulthood, yet less than 35 percent of those child sexual assaults are reported to authorities.
- According to *Highlights of the Youth Internet Safety Survey* conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice “one in five children (10 to 17 years old) receives unwanted sexual solicitations online.”
- By far the most prevalent exploitive act reported is the production and distribution of pornographic images of children.
- The impact of these terrible acts can devastate families and put children at risk of depression, disassociation and post-traumatic stress – symptoms that can last well into adulthood.
- The American Legion supports appropriate state and federal legislation aimed at the prevention, investigation and prosecution of child sexual exploitation.
- Departments and Posts seek to raise community awareness about the prevalence of sexual exploitation of children and cooperate with law enforcement agencies, government entities and public/private organizations that seek to empower the public to take immediate and direct action to enforce a zero tolerance policy regarding child sexual exploitation.

Issue – CHILD CARE SERVICES

Message points

- The American Legion is deeply concerned about the quality of life issues surrounding our children and youth.
- According to the National Center for Education Statistics there are approximately 21 million infants, toddlers and preschool children under the age of six in the United States, with more than 12.9 million of these children in childcare.
- The Carnegie Report finds that quality childcare enables a young child to become emotionally secure, socially competent and intellectually capable.
- Consistent studies have found that childcare at most centers in the United States are poor to mediocre and childcare licensing standards, designed to assure minimal standards for health and safety, vary widely from state to state.
- Departments and Posts seek to cooperate with the state and community public or private agencies with day care responsibilities to the end that licensed childcare facilities will be available to all children in our nation.
- Departments and Posts seek to encourage the adoption and implementation of safe and consistent licensing standards for childcare in facilities throughout this nation.
- Departments and Posts are assisting in raising the level of understanding among the general public about the needs of adequate childcare and seeking to encourage the public to commit more resources to achieve a level of quality that is necessary for children to grow in a healthy and safe environment.

Issue – CHILD SAFETY

Message points

- According to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, unintentional injury remains the leading cause of death and disability among children ages 14 and under in the United States.
- Every day, more than 39,000 children are injured seriously enough to require medical treatment, totaling more than 14 million children each year.
- The top cause of unintentional injury-related deaths and disabilities among children and adolescents are: automobile accidents, drowning, fire, falls and poisoning.
- Based on the specific needs of individual communities, a combination of factors – education, environmental improvements, engineering modifications, enactment and enforcement of legislation and regulations, economic incentives, community empowerment and program evaluation – have been proven effective in reducing the incidence and severity of unintentional death and disability.
- The American Legion supports appropriate federal and state legislation aimed at preventing or reducing unintentional injury among children and adolescents.
- Departments and Posts seek to provide leadership on organized safety commissions and actively promote child safety at the state and local levels.

Issue – FIREWORKS SAFETY

Message points

- Hospital emergency rooms in the United States treat nearly 10,000 fireworks-related injuries each year, with 45 percent of these injuries occurring among children under the age of 15.
- Fireworks can result in severe burns, fractures, lifetime disfigurement or death.
- Every type of legally available consumer “safe and sane” fireworks has been associated with serious injury or death.
- Fireworks typically cause more fires in the United States on the Fourth of July than all other causes of fire combined on that day resulting in direct property damage in excess of \$25 million annually.
- Departments and Posts are assisting to alert, inform and educate parents, children, community leaders and others, about the dangers of fireworks.
- Departments and Posts encourage children and their families to enjoy fireworks at public fireworks displays conducted by professionals, rather than purchase fireworks for home or private use.