

Media Availability to Share Important Information and Resources About Safety and Prevention

Monday, April 15, 2024 at 11:30 a.m.

[Providence, R.I.] (April 12, 2024) – In light of a recent increase in child fatalities and near fatalities, state leaders will hold a media availability on Monday, April 15, 2024 at 11:30 a.m. to discuss preventative services and supports available to the community to ensure the safety of all children.

Media Availability:

Monday, April 15, 2024 at 11:30 a.m.

Location:

Rhode Island Department of Health, Room 401
3 Capitol Hill, Providence, RI

Reporters available to attend this media availability should send an email confirming attendance to Damaris Teixeira at damaris.teixeira@dcyf.ri.gov.

Note: Speakers are not able to share information on specific child fatality and near fatality case information, due to confidentiality laws.

“This week, Rhode Island has seen an increase of child near fatality and fatality reports,” said **Ashley Deckert, Director of the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF)**. “This is heartbreaking. Often when these incidents take place, families are not known to the Department. We need to urgently share prevention messages with all Rhode Island families regarding how to keep our kids safe.”

State leaders are raising awareness about the services and supports available to the community. These include services and supports related to:

- Safe sleep practices and supports;
- How to prevent accidental youth poisonings;
- Domestic violence supports;
- Referral services for behavioral health concerns; and
- Community-based services for a range of needs.

“Across our agencies and throughout our community, we must be certain that there is a broad awareness and understanding of the resources available to protect and enhance the lives of our youngest Rhode Islanders. We all play an important role in this effort, now more than ever,” said **Kimberly Merolla-Brito, Director of the Rhode Island Department of Human Services**.

“Being a parent is not easy. Everyone needs help sometimes, and everyone has questions. We have information and free resources available for parents and caregivers throughout the state,” said **Rhode Island Department of Health Deputy Director Seema Dixit**.

Many resources are available to promote health and safety for Rhode Island families. They include:

Support and Response Unit (SRU)

In September 2020, DCYF launched a Support and Response Unit (SRU) to better connect families and their children to support services. DCYF recognizes that many families struggle sometimes and could benefit from accessing

services and supports that were traditionally only available to families with formal DCYF or Rhode Island Family Court involvement.

The SRU provides assistance by identifying each family's needs and provides the necessary supports to help families thrive. The unit, which is located within DCYF's Division of Family Services (DFS), helps families navigate services in their own communities. Also, the unit is a resource to families who are feeling overwhelmed or who need assistance with accessing home and community-based services for a variety of needs.

SRU staff can offer:

- Assessments for families using established screening and assessment tools;
- Short-term, home- and community-based services for families and children who need support;
- Assistance for families when their older youth are exhibiting wayward or disobedient behavior; and
- Local resources to better support families whose children have behavioral health needs.

Rhode Island families are encouraged to call the SRU by dialing 1-888-RI-FAMILY (1-888-743-2659).

Family Care Community Partnerships (FCCPs)

Family Care Community Partnerships (FCCPs) are DCYF's primary prevention resource for the state. FCCPs partner with families and communities to raise healthy children in a safe, caring environment. Every family hopes their children will be safe, happy, and productive members of society. Sometimes, behavior or emotional problems, troubles in school or with the law, or family life in general put kids at risk of ever achieving the life we envision for them. The way kids get help in times like these has been transformed. Barriers to services are coming down, and families are being given a voice, a choice, and a shared responsibility for changing the course of their children's lives. The Department recognizes that all families struggle from time to time and need supports they can turn to when they need assistance. These supports range from basic needs to bridging family rifts with the over-arching goal to increase the overall well-being of families. Our FCCP agencies, part of DCYF's network of prevention-focused providers, brings community-based services to children and families to build a stronger, brighter futures.

For more information about how to contact FCCPs, visit the [FCCP website](#).

Family Home Visiting Supports

The Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) coordinates free Family Visiting supports for families that are expecting or have young babies or children at home. A family visitor will meet you at home, anywhere in your community, or virtually. Visits are about supporting you and children to develop and grow up healthy. Depending on what you want and need, visitors could answer questions you didn't get to ask your doctor or were too nervous to ask — like about safe sleeping, breastfeeding, how to calm a fussy baby, and more. Family visitors can also connect you to supports for your immediate needs, like housing or heating assistance. For more information, call 401-222-5960.

Safe Sleep Supports

As a parent or caregiver, you can take steps to create a safe sleep environment for your baby. Practicing safe sleep at naptime and nighttime reduces the risk of SIDS and accidental suffocation during sleep or in the sleep environment.

- Always place your baby on his or her back to sleep, for naps and at night.
- Use a firm sleep surface, covered by a fitted sheet.
- Do not let your baby sleep in an adult bed, on a couch, or on a chair alone, with you, or with anyone else. Room sharing—keeping baby's sleep area in the same room where you sleep—reduces the risk of SIDS and other sleep-related causes of infant death. If you bring your baby into your bed to breastfeed, make sure to

put him or her back in a separate sleep area in your room, such as a safety-approved crib, bassinet, or portable play area, when you are finished.

- Keep soft objects (including crib bumpers), toys, and loose bedding out of your baby's sleep area.

Parents or caregivers looking for information and support can call 401-222-5960 or visit the [Safe Sleep website](#) for more information and tips.

Preventing Youth Poisonings

Prescription drugs, over the counter drugs (OTCs), opioids, stimulants, and alcohol can unintentionally poison – or even hospitalize – children and youth.

Children and youth are curious and always exploring the world around them. When drugs are not in a secure and out-of-reach place, the risks of unintentional poisoning rise significantly. We know that 6 in 10 child poisoning deaths are caused by prescription or illicit drugs. The frequency of children accidentally ingesting cannabis is up 1375% in recent years. We all have a role to play.

No matter what drugs are in your house, put them away, lock them up, store them out of reach, and keep kids safer.

Domestic Violence Supports

Any Rhode Islander who feels their safety is in danger or who has questions about abuse/domestic violence can find support through the [Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence Helpline](#) or 1-800-494-8100.

Child Abuse Prevention

Under the law, everyone in Rhode Island is a mandated reporter. If you see something, say something. DCYF has a single, statewide toll-free hotline that operates twenty-four (24) hours per day, seven (7) days per week. This hotline is dedicated to the receipt of reports concerning child abuse and neglect. The number is [1-800-RI-CHILD \(1-800-742-4453\)](#). All calls are recorded. You may call anonymously.

Behavioral Health Support

[KidsLink](#) – [1-855-543-5465](#) Kids' Link RI is a behavioral health triage service and referral network. The program is offered in collaboration with Gateway Healthcare, Lifespan, Hasbro Children's Hospital and Bradley Hospital. Kids' Link RI is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to help triage children and youth in need of mental health services and refer them to treatment providers.

The free, confidential phone line connects parents and caregivers to an experienced clinician that can help them access children's services in Rhode Island and determine the best place for treatment and counseling.

Contact Kids' Link RI if your child is:

- Feeling excessive anger or sadness.
- Lashing out at siblings, friends, and adults.
- Having behavior problems at school.
- Having severe worries.
- Hurting himself/herself or others.

[BH Link](#) and [9-8-8](#)

988 is the dialing code for the new suicide and crisis lifeline in Rhode Island. 988 offers 24/7 access to trained crisis counselors. People can [call or text 988](#) for themselves or if they are worried about a loved one who may need crisis

support. What does 988 help with? Thoughts of suicide, mental health crisis, substance use crisis, any other emotional distress.

Child Care Support

The Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) can subsidize the cost of childcare for eligible families that reside in Rhode Island and are U.S. citizens or legal residents with children under the age of 13. The age can be extended to 18 if the child has special needs.

CCAP provides financial support for all eligible families with young children. By removing the expense of childcare as a barrier to employment, it promotes self-sufficiency for all Rhode Island citizens.

Financial support through CCAP is available to:

- Low-income families who meet federal poverty level (FPL) guidelines and are working a minimum of 20 hours per week.
- Families participating in training, apprenticeship, internship, on-the-job training, work experience, work immersion sponsored by the Governor's Workforce Board, who need childcare in order to take part in these job readiness/training opportunities.
- Families participating in the RI Works program.
- Pregnant/Parenting Teens participating in DHS' Youth Success program.

Also available to families is Transitional Child Care which allows families already participating in the CCAP program to remain eligible for the subsidy program if their income increases, but does not exceed 300% of the federal poverty level (as of July 1, 2022). If you have questions regarding accessing/applying for CCAP, you can contact the Department of Human Services at 1-855- MY-RIDHS (1-855-697-4347) or visit, [this website](#).

BrightStars also serves as Rhode Island's Resource and Referral Agency. They assist families in identifying childcare options in their area, including family child care homes, child care centers, school age programs and summer camps. Families can call (401) 739-6100 or 1-855-398-7605 to speak with a childcare referral specialist. Rhode Island implements a tiered quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) called BrightStars through a contract with the Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children (RIAEYC). All CCAP providers are required to be BrightStars rated.

The Rhode Island Department of Human Services (DHS) assists individuals and families with locating and receiving various resources and services including temporary shelter, financial assistance, nutrition, medical, and community services. Go to www.dhs.ri.gov to learn more about any of these services.

##