



# C.A.T.S. Chats

CHILD ABUSE TRAINING SERVICES  
PROSECUTING ATTORNEYS ASSOCIATION OF MI  
[www.michiganprosecutor.org/cats](http://www.michiganprosecutor.org/cats)

Fall 2015

*Julie A. Welch, Director  
Brianna Schafer, Editor*

**Together we can make a difference.**

This time of year is one of my favorites. Along with Fall and the cooler weather, Friday night football, sweaters and Pumpkin Spice lattes it is a natural time of year for learning to occur. Not only are our kids heading back to school, we here at CATS are gearing up for our new year of trainings.

We have been busy over the summer planning and learning new technologies, advances in learning and what's coming down the road in the field of child abuse and neglect.

If you have a chance to attend one of our conferences please do, the CATS seminars are free to our target audience, which includes law enforcement, CPS workers and prosecutors.

Some of the things we are working on include a prosecutor only child abuse basic prosecution class, with the success of our prosecutor only training last year we are excited to expand this to a more in depth training for those dealing with these important and often times confusing cases. Forensic Interviewing will continue to be our priority, look for our 16th annual conference this year as well as Internet Safety and What's Trending in Child Abuse trainings.

Sexting and Internet Safety has recently been added to the top 10 health concerns for children according to the University of Michigan Health Science group. This is among things like obesity, teen pregnancy, school violence, etc. Internet predators are reaching more kids than ever before and with the majority of kids owning devices the problem will continue to grow. CATS has developed a community based training for parents and school administrators teaching how to help keep their kids safe and how to recognize possible signs of problems with online harassment, trafficking, bullying and sexting. We also have programs for K-12 teaching internet safety. Please consider having us into your community to help you combat this growing crime.

If there are issues your are dealing with in your county please feel free to give me a call, we can design trainings specifically for your folks to assist with those issues.

Our website is updated regularly with our trainings and you can view it at [www.michiganprosecutor.org/cats](http://www.michiganprosecutor.org/cats).

## C.A.T.S.



The CATS mission is to promote multi disciplinary expertise in the prevention of child abuse by providing professionals with up-to-date information about suspected or alleged sexual or physical abuse, neglect and the training of Forensic Interviewing.



Prosecuting Attorneys  
Association of MI



## Michigan News

### Mom Pleads Guilty to Killing 2 Kids Found In Home Freezer



Above: Michelle Blair after being sentenced. <http://www.uppermichiganssource.com/news/photos.aspx?id=1223726#.VcpIMflViko>

DETROIT -- A Detroit woman has pleaded guilty to killing two of her children and storing their bodies in a home freezer.

Mitchelle Blair has never challenged the allegations. She entered her plea to murder Monday, saying she killed her 13-year-old daughter and 9-year-old son months apart.

She faces life in prison without parole.

The children's bodies were discovered in a freezer in March, while Blair was being evicted from her Detroit home. Police believe they died in 2012 and 2013.

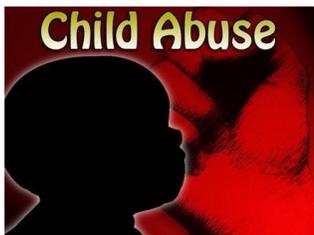
For weeks, the 36-year-old Blair has openly declared her guilt and even said she

would accept the death penalty if Michigan had it.

Authorities also are seeking to end her parental rights to two other children.

*uppermichiganssource.com*  
*June 29, 2015*  
*Associated Press*

### Task Force Shares Report on Preventing Child Sexual Abuse



Above: The group was created through Erin's Law, legislation Snyder signed in 2013 named after child abuse survivor Erin Merryn

LANSING (AP)—A task force organized under the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services has made recommendations to protect children from sexual abuse.

A report was sent Thursday to Gov. Rick Snyder.

Department of Health and Human Services Director Nick Lyon says he looks forward to working with

Snyder to review the recommendations and take action.

The report was written by the Task Force on Prevention of Sexual Abuse of Children. The group was created through Erin's Law, legislation Snyder signed in 2013 named after child abuse survivor Erin Merryn.

Members of the task force included representatives from the Health and Human

Services department, the attorney general's office, law enforcement, prosecutors' offices, schools, courts, children's advocacy groups and other public and private organizations.

*uppermichiganssource.com*  
*June 18, 2015*  
*Associated Press*

### Stepfather of Boy Charged in Killing Awaits Abuse Sentencing



<http://www.uppermichiganssource.com/news/story.aspx?id=1237528#.VcpVsPIViko>

GRAND RAPIDS (AP) - The stepfather of a 13-year-old boy charged in the fatal stabbing of a 9-year-old at a western Michigan playground faces sentencing in September for child abuse.

The 38-year-old on Thursday told Kent County Circuit Court that he hit the boy with a belt, leaving marks on the child's body

about a year before the August 2014 stabbing. The Grand Rapids Press reports he pleaded guilty to third-degree child abuse.

The boy, who was 12 at the time of the killing, is scheduled for trial Aug. 31.

The Associated Press isn't naming the boy or his family members because of his

age. His mother also is charged with child abuse. He's charged with murder in the death of Michael Verkerke, who was killed at a playground in Kentwood, near Grand Rapids.

*uppermichiganssource.com*  
*August 1, 2015*  
*Associated Press*



Michael E. Lamb

## Sensitive, Open-ended Questioning When Interviewing Child Abuse Victims Yields Better Information

**Less direct approach to interviewing child abuse victims increases disclosures, prosecutions, guilty pleas & convictions, providing better child protection**

Today's increased commitment to uncovering the truth about child abuse is vital. Yet asking children detailed questions about abuse can be counterproductive. If children are questioned too directly, particularly about traumatic events, they may clam up. So the truth may never be known: children miss out on therapeutic help, and prosecutions fail for lack of evidence.

Evidence shows that a different approach can avoid letting so many of these children down. Interviewers achieve greater success if they have been trained to be supportive and empathetic when talking to abused children. They are instructed to avoid narrowly defined questions. For example, they simply ask the child what happened, rather than saying: 'Did he touch you?' or 'Did he pull your clothes?' or 'Did he hurt you?'

According to a recent study, this less direct, more sensitive approach produces striking results. There are more disclosures of child abuse and more prosecutions, leading to more guilty pleas. If cases go to trial, guilty verdicts are more likely. Greater certainty about whether abuse has taken place also helps the authorities make a child safe. Action typically relies upon a child's disclosing what has happened. Without that disclosure, therapy is unlikely. Furthermore, conducting a good interview can increase confidence that something did *not* happen, allowing help to focus on genuine victims.

They ask the child what happened, rather than saying: "Did he touch you?" or "Did he pull your clothes?" or "Did he hurt you?"

In the past, investigators typically adopted the more direct approach. They took a view that the child was frightened and should be shown that the adults knew what had happened. All the child had to do was to confirm what the adults already believed. But this approach can be risky. Words may be put into children's mouths and they may provide information whose accuracy is difficult to judge. Also, if a child fails to confirm what is believed to have happened, interviewers can become irritated that the child seems unwilling to cooperate. Interviewers may become coercive, putting pressure on the child, when what the child really needs is support and reasons to trust the interviewer.

My colleagues and I have shown repeatedly that more supportive and open-ended interviews do not require more time or resources. Achieving greater success simply demands a better understanding of children and knowledge of what works best.

These insights have been widely commended among those working with abused children. Many criminal justice systems would say that they have already adopted a more sympathetic, open-ended style of interviewing. The UK Government has, for example, published a 250-page guide, 'Achieving Best Evidence', which provides high-level justification for this approach. Nevertheless, there seems to be gap in many jurisdictions worldwide between aspiration and practice.

**Continued on next page.**



Michael E. Lamb: Professor of Psychology at the University of Cambridge.

Child witnesses; factors affecting the well-being and adjustment of children and adolescents.



### **Sensitive Questioning When Interviewing—Continued from page 3**

In the mid-1990s, while I was a senior research scientist at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development in Washington, DC, we developed what has become known as the NICHD Protocol. It's a straightforward, 18-page practice-based guide, now translated into many languages, that offers concrete advice on what to do, plus specific examples of how to interview children in ways that can free them up to reveal abuse. It details how, for example, to let a child talk about the abuse, without raising the subject explicitly, and suggests ways to ask open-ended questions. It highlights signs of anxiety or distress in children and shows the interviewer how to relate to and empathise with those signs rather than ignore them.

We have measured the outcomes of investigations where interviewers adopted the Protocol and compared the results with pre-Protocol practice, often involving the very same people as interviewers. There is a striking association among use of the NICHD Protocol, more cooperative and informative interviewees, and better disclosure and conviction rates.

Our findings offer considerable prospects for improved evidence-gathering from victims in child abuse cases. The same approach can also yield better information from suspects. The criminal justice system is understandably expected to be inquisitive and punitive. However, our research suggests that less inquisitorial and punitive styles of questioning can lead to more successful identification of the guilty and better support for victims, particularly in cases of child abuse.

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October 2, 2014

*Childandfamilyblog.com*

## **Child Maltreatment Stats**

### **What Were the Most Common Types of Maltreatment?**

- 79.5% of victims suffered neglect.
- 18.0% of victims suffered physical abuse.
- 9.0% of victims suffered sexual abuse.
- 8.7% of victims suffered psychological maltreatment.
- 2.3% of victims suffered medical neglect.
- 10.0 percent experienced “other” maltreatment, such as threatened abuse or parents’ substance abuse.

### **Who Abused and Neglected Children?**

In FFY 2013, 51 States reported a total of 515,507 perpetrators of child maltreatment

- Women comprised a larger percentage of all perpetrators than men: 53.9% compared to 45.0%.
- Four-fifths (83.0%) of all perpetrators were between the ages of 18 and 44 years.
- The great majority of perpetrators were parents: One or both parents maltreated 91.4% of victims.
- Of the percentage of perpetrators who were parents, 88.6% were biological parents.
- A perpetrator who was not the child’s parent maltreated 12.9% of victims, sometimes alone and sometimes with other perpetrators.

### **Who Were the Child Victims?**

- Children in the age group of birth to 1 year had the highest rate of victimization at 23.1 per 1,000 children of the same age group in the national population. The youngest children are the most vulnerable to maltreatment.
- Slightly more than one-half (50.9%) of the child victims were girls, and 48.7% were boys.
- The gender was unknown for less than 1% of victims.
- Three races or ethnicities comprised more than 87% of victims: African-American (21.2%), Hispanic (22.4%), and White (44.0%).
- African-American children had the highest rates of victimization at 14.6 per 1,000 children in the population of the same race or ethnicity.

### **Who Received Services, and What Did They Include?**

- Forty-seven States reported that approximately 3.1 million children received prevention services.
- Forty-eight States reported that 1,294,118 children received postresponse services from a CPS agency.
- Approximately two-thirds of victims (63.8%) and one-third of nonvictims (32.6%) received postresponse services.
- Two-thirds (63.6%) of victims and 89.3% of nonvictims received in-home services only.

This factsheet presents excerpts from Child Maltreatment 2013, a report based on data submissions by State child protective services (CPS) agencies for Federal fiscal year (FFY) 2013.

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April 2015

Child Welfare Information Gateway  
[www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov)



## Training

### Forensic Interviewing

Remember that the two day Michigan Forensic Interviewing Protocol is the only one required by Michigan’s Child Protection Law for child abuse professionals interviewing children. Please make sure you are attending an authorized Michigan training. The Child Abuse Training Services department within PAAM is governed by DHS and the Governor’s Task Force to provide this two day training. **It is the only approved training within the state by these two entities.** You can always check our website to assure you are attending an actual PAAM training. Attending out of state trainings does not fulfill your obligation of forensic interviewing training.

### C.A.T.S. Upcoming Trainings

#### September 2015

Child Exploitation Case Study: What is Child Sexually Abusive Material? Internet Crimes Against Children  
September 21, 2015—Novi, MI

#### October 2015

Child Abuse Training: The Basics  
October 20, 2015—MSP Training Academy

Forensic Interviewing of Children  
October 27-28, 2015—The English Inn

#### December 2015

Forensic Interviewing of Children  
An Introduction to the Forensic Interviewing Protocol  
December 10-11, 2015--Zehnder's Splash Village

### Training Opportunities Offered by Others in the CA Field:

34th Annual Michigan Statewide Conference: Child Abuse & Neglect: Prevention, Assessment & Treatment. November 2-3, 2015—Plymouth, MI

30th Annual International Conference on Child and Family Maltreatment. January 25-28, 2016—San Diego, CA



### Other Trainings

**Michigan Arson Prevention Committee**  
Mobile Burn & Theft Seminar: September 18, 2015—Davison, MI



*Check our website for training updates and announcements  
[www.MichiganProsecutor.org/cats](http://www.MichiganProsecutor.org/cats)*



Sasha N. Rutizer

## Crimes Against Children: Examining Technology's Impact on Victimization and Witness Intimidation

National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse

Introduction Technology has fueled a generation that does not fully comprehend the potentially damaging consequences of its engagement, creating a scenario in which any crime could be a cyber-crime. Whether it is used as an avenue to gain access to a child, to share child sexual abuse images, to cyberbully, or simply for impeachment evidence at trial, child abuse professionals must have an understanding of the available technology and how it impacts their role.

A 2013 Pew Research Study shows that teens are sharing more personal information on social networking sites than ever before. Ninety-one percent of teens admit to posting a photo of themselves, and more than 70% post personal information about their school and town they live in. Of teens who use Twitter, 64% say their tweets are public, while only 24% say theirs are private. The archetypal portrayal of the child predator that lies about his age and then abducts a child is less than accurate, however. Research suggests that only 5% of offenders represent themselves as peers of victims; while most are relatively accurate about their age difference. These statistics are alarming, and the gulf between tech-savvy kids and well-meaning but uninformed professionals is too great. This article seeks to bridge the divide and illustrate how technology and cyberspace permeates every case.

### The Technology, Its Uses, and Abuses

Websites used to advertise buying and selling of bicycles and used furniture are also being used to advertise the buying and selling of access to children, child sexual abuse images, as well as full blown domestic minor sex trafficking. Sites such as Craigslist and Backpage have been routinely vilified for doing little to internally weed out this illegal activity. However sites like these barely skim the surface of this criminal enterprise. Websites that exist on the so-called "deep web" like the infamous silk road 2.0, are reached via anonymous onion routing, advertise in the open, and routinely conduct transactions with bitcoin or other types of crypto currency that are nearly impossible to trace. A popular method for the online sharing of music and movie files, generally known as peer-to-peer sharing, is also used for the trading of illegal child sexual abuse images. The use of this technology has moved the trading of these images from underground magazines and dark alleys to any coffee shop or home with a wifi connection.

Peer-to-Peer Networks have changed over time but typically rely on many users operating the same program, such as eMule, Ares, and Shareaza. Once the software is downloaded, the user searches for either general content or specific files using search terms. A return on the search will list the files available that matched the search terms. The user chooses the files for download and makes a connection with another computer (peer) who is offering those particular files and downloads them.

Another version of peer-to-peer file sharing is via torrent files or BitTorrent software. Again, software is downloaded that relies upon a massive collection of peers offering files for sharing. Unlike other peer-to-peer programs, the BitTorrent programs such as uTorrent, Vuze, and Tixati are designed to allow users to download pieces of a file from multiple peers, thus resulting in much faster download speeds as well as allowing for downloading of larger files. Once the pieces of the files are downloaded they are checked against the hash value of that particular file to ensure an accurate copy.

Perhaps less ominous, but no less dangerous is the proliferation of the social media application (app). Children do not need access to cell phones in order to communicate. Apps such as Kik, Whatsapp, Viber, Keek, and Voxer allow users to send text messages, voice chats, and/or multimedia messages by connecting to a wifi source, thus requiring no data plan. For parents who attempt to monitor their child's messaging use via their cell phone provider, a grossly incomplete picture will be painted. In fact, the Poof app allows users to hide any apps (icons) they don't want others to see; thus giving the appearance of someone who does not use these types of social media apps. To illustrate how popular social media apps can be, WhatsApp with its more than 450 million users worldwide was recently purchased by Facebook for \$19 Billion. Apps such as Instagram, Snapchat, and Vine allow users to send photos or videos with captions and comments either directly to contacts, or to integrate them into other social media apps, such as Twitter or Facebook. Snapchat for example, is unique because it allows the user to choose the duration the photo will show up on the recipient's phone (i.e., 10 seconds). Then the photo is deleted and the recipient can no longer access it. This sounds fairly safe, except that most smartphones come with a screen capture feature, thus allowing the recipient to permanently capture the sent image. While Snapchat says it will notify the sender if the recipient takes a screenshot, little can be done about it, and companies hosting these apps cannot with certainty protect against all vulnerabilities.

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### Crimes Against Children: Examining Technology's Impact on Victimization and Witness Intimidation

Additionally, there are third party apps such as SnapBox and Snapkeep which bypass the notification system setup on Snapchat, thus the sender will not know if the recipient captured the image. The relatively recent phenomenon of sexting is often accomplished with apps such as these. There is also a significant danger of being sextorted<sup>18</sup> by a recipient of a photo. Even if the original photo was a teen in a bikini, apps such as Adobe Photoshop Express allow significant photo manipulation enabling the recipient to edit the photo into the appearance of a nude picture. Sextortion can occur even if the photos never leave one's own computer or phone because computers and phones can be hacked or simply fall into the wrong hands.

The growth of anonymous apps such as Ask.fm, BackChat, Omegle, Whisper, and Secret allow users a massive platform to communicate anonymously. To highlight one such app, Yik Yak, serves as a local online bulletin board. Using GPS technology, it allows users in a 1.5 mile radius to post comments completely anonymously, as it requires no username/password. Similar to Reddit, Yik Yak comments are voted up or down by the community. With almost no ability to trace the source of the message absent criminal activity, the opportunity for cyberbullying is staggering. Schools have begun to take action by blocking access to some of these sites, though that does little for after school online activity. Older social media apps such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are also still popular amongst teens, and in fact may be continuing to gain in popularity. One might think that Twitter would hold little appeal to teens, as it is typically used for political or news commentary. However, teens use Twitter for its instant communication feature rather than the typical adult newsworthy article/story post. It is simply easier to constantly update daily activities and thoughts via an app like Twitter than the more conventional Facebook status update.

Access to children is all too easy for any perpetrator with patience and an Internet connection. Nearly 97% of online teens (ages 12-17) play computer, Web, portable, or console games. Game consoles such as Xbox Live, Sony Playstation, Nintendo Wii, and their smaller handheld devices now come standard with Internet connection capability. There are many games which require an Internet connection in order to take advantage of teamwork from outside players, such as the Massive Multi-Player Online Roleplaying Game (MMPORG) mega series Final Fantasy. All of these MMPORGs have some degree of chat capabilities between players, whether by selected text, typing with an attached keyboard, or voice communication via headset. Many MMPORGs only require a computer, and an Internet connection, such as the wildly popular World of Warcraft series, the Guild Wars series, and Dream of Mirror Online. It is all too easy for a perpetrator to befriend a young person during gameplay and groom that child for sexually explicit purposes over time. The exploitation can be accomplished completely remotely via Webcam or by acquiring enough information over a period of time to achieve hands-on access.

#### Implications for Child Abuse Professionals

Parents as well as teachers, counselors, and other school administrators are in a unique position to educate children on the dangers of technology. While prevention through education will always be a critical component of protecting children, the sad reality is that many children are harmed every day. When this happens and law enforcement becomes involved, it is vitally important that investigators are trained on technology-facilitated crimes and understand the technologies used by victims and offenders.

Time is often of the essence when it comes to preserving and seizing digital evidence; delays of even a short duration can have deleterious effects on the acquisition of digital evidence. More, affidavits for search warrants are routinely attacked by defense attorneys prior to trial in an effort to get all seized evidence excluded from use at trial, and in some cases result in the reversal of a conviction on appeal. Therefore, a carefully crafted and educating affidavit is important both for the issuance of the warrant, as well as the litigation regarding the issuance of the warrant at trial or on appeal.

Prosecutors are responsible for understanding the role technology plays in crimes they prosecute. Whether it's using historical cell site analysis to place a defendant at the scene of the crime, impeaching a witness through social media posts, or arguing for remote live testimony of a child victim due to intimidation of the child through technology, the prosecutor must ensure the judge or jury understands the technology at issue. Allied child abuse professionals, such as medical and mental health clinicians, victim advocates and child forensic interviewers should also be versed in technology in order to better question, care for, or treat the children they encounter.

As new technology emerges, so, too, do ways in which perpetrators abuse this technology to harm children. Engaging the resources of local multidisciplinary collaboratives, such as child advocacy centers (CACs), sexual assault response teams (SARTs) and other community response teams can allow for broad-based education of professionals responding to child abuse. Engaging tech-centered businesses and research institutions to participate in educating responders can also help elevate awareness and maintain currency with changes in technology. Staying abreast of new technology ultimately means children won't get left in the dark.

November 17, 2014  
Update: Volume 24, number 3  
[www.ndaa.org](http://www.ndaa.org)



## Sexting and Internet Safety Climb Top 10 List of Health Concerns for Children Across the U.S.

With more kids online and using cell phones at increasingly younger ages, two issues have quickly climbed higher on the public’s list of major health concerns for children across the U.S: sexting and Internet safety.

Compared with 2014, Internet safety rose from the eighth to the fourth biggest problem, ahead of school violence and smoking, in the 2015 annual survey of top children’s health concerns conducted by the C.S. Mott Children’s Hospital National Poll on Children’s Health. Sexting saw the biggest jump, now the sixth top-ranked issue, up from thirteenth.

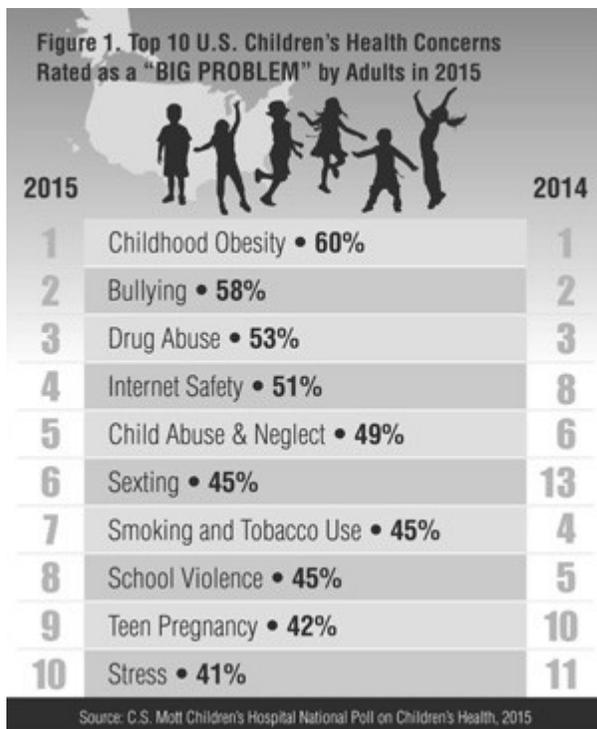
Childhood obesity, bullying, and drug abuse remained the top three child health concerns for a second year in a row, while child abuse and neglect ranked fifth. Smoking and tobacco use, usually rated near the top of the list, dropped from the fourth top concern to the seventh – which may reflect the decline in smoking and tobacco use by youth in recent years.

“The major health issues that people are most worried about for children across the country reflect the health initiatives providers, communities and policy makers should be focused on,” says Matthew M. Davis, M.D., M.A.P.P., director of the National Poll on Children’s Health and professor of pediatrics and internal medicine in the Child Health Evaluation and Research Unit at the U-M Medical School.

“The increasing level of concern about Internet safety and sexting that are now ranked even higher than smoking as major childhood health issues really dominates the story this year,” adds Davis, who is also with the U-M School of Public Health, Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, and deputy director for U-M’s Institute for Healthcare Policy and Innovation.

“We found that while the public may find benefits to today’s shifting media environment, whether through cell phones or other technology, many also recognize risks that may make young people vulnerable.”

Expanding use of smart phones and other technology potentially exposes children and teens to the danger of predators and other harms like cyber-bullying. Sexting (sending and receiving sexually suggestive text messages and photos) has also led to cases of teens around the country suffering from low self-esteem and even committing suicide following photos being widely shared among peers.



Sexting and Internet safety, however, were not as high on the list for African American adults, who rated depression fourth, school safety fifth and alcohol abuse as the seventh highest childhood health concerns. Hunger climbed from spot No. 15 in 2014 to the tenth biggest childhood health concern among African American respondents in 2015.

“We found that adults from different communities across the U.S. see the challenges of child health differently,” Davis says. “It’s important to understand the priorities of different communities we are trying to reach as we work to safeguard children’s health and help them live the healthiest lives they can.”

While white, African American and Hispanic respondents all list childhood obesity and bullying in the top three child health issues, Hispanics list child abuse and neglect as the No. 3 health concern for kids across the U.S. Overall, the public viewed child abuse and neglect as the fifth major health concern.

“Since we began tracking how the public rates child health problems nearly a decade ago, we have found persistent and consistent concern for child abuse and neglect,” Davis says. “This is an area we must continue to focus on in medical care, in our public health efforts and also in our health policy making.”

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**Sexting and Internet Safety Climb Top 10 List of Health Concerns for Children Across the U.S.**

This is the ninth year adults were asked to rate their concerns for kids' health in the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital Poll. Other child health concerns rated as a "big problem" in 2015 for children and teens across the U.S. include: unsafe neighborhoods (40 percent), alcohol abuse (39 percent), sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS (38 percent), depression (38 percent), suicide (37 percent), hunger (34 percent), not enough opportunities for physical activity (31 percent), gun-related injuries (30 percent), motor vehicle accidents (30 percent), attention deficit disorder (26 percent), autism (24 percent), safety of medications (17 percent) safety of vaccines (15 percent) infant mortality (13 percent) and food allergies (13 percent).

*August 10, 2015  
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