Strong families are a great way to protect both children and adults. April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month, but instead of concentrating our efforts on prosecuting abusers, let’s make the effort to help encourage strong families, so there will be less need for prosecution.

It’s not easy to raise children. I know. I raised (and am still at it to some extent) four of my own. I think children are born with the knowledge of what it takes to push you to your limits. However, by developing your skills, you can become a resilient parent, ready to face anything they throw at you.

Alaska joined with other states in 2005 to support the Strengthening Families Initiative. We have a very high rate of child abuse and neglect in the state, but we are taking steps to protect children by giving parents the tools needed to be effective parents.

Here are some hints provided by Strengthening Families — Alaska Style from the Alaska Children’s Trust website as well as some ideas from other state Extensions.

Be a nurturing parent. Children need to know they are loved and are special. Every child wants, needs and deserves to be loved unconditionally. Make sure your child knows how important they are to you.

Help a friend, neighbor or relative. Being a parent isn’t easy. Offer a helping hand to care for children, so the parent(s) can have a break. Every parent and child deserves some time away from one another. In addition, it is a great way to develop relationships with other caring adults.

Help yourself. When the big and little problems of your everyday life pile up to the point you feel overwhelmed, take time out. Don’t take it out on your kids. Replace negative reactions with positive actions. Leave the room. Take a walk. Remove yourself from the situation mentally and physically by any means possible. Give yourself space from whatever is making you angry.
If your baby or child cries, learn what to do to soothe them. It is common to feel frustration, anxiety and even anger when faced with a crying baby — especially if your baby wails for hours on end and won’t calm down. Remember that this is the baby’s way of communicating with you, so learn what yours is trying to say. And never shake a baby — shaking a child may result in severe injury or death.

When the tension of being an adult gets to you, be a kid again. Go to the park and play on the swings with your children, play a game with them or do something to reconnect with your children and your inner child.

Look into parenting resources in your community. We are lucky here in Fairbanks to have so many wonderful parenting programs to help us learn how to be better parents. The library, churches, schools and community organizations offer training and support. The Resource Center for Parents and Children (RCPC) and our military bases are offering parenting training called Screamfree Parenting. As a former screaming parent, this class title really tickled me. So call RCPC at 456-2866 or on base at Family Advocacy to enroll.

Take advantage of those who care. The Alaska Parent Line — 1-800-643-KIDS (5437) — is a statewide phone line for parents, guardians and childcare providers to call for advice from a parent educator about parenting questions and concerns. This phone line is staffed from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., seven days a week. Callers will also receive referrals and find out what resources and services are available within their community.

Develop a caring and supportive environment for parents. Join with others who are struggling for strength and assurance. Talk openly with each other about stress and problems.

Report suspected abuse or neglect. If you have reason to believe a child has been or may be harmed, call your local Office of Children’s Services or your local police department.

All families have challenges and weaknesses. But take time this month to make sure that your family is on the path for everyone to grow and prosper.

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