



Putting Families First Playbook

Research on Supporting Children and Families

Poverty and Child Maltreatment in Wisconsin

Nationally, children in economically insecure households are more likely to experience maltreatment.¹ Only through combined community action and support can we truly ensure transformational change.

Key facts about Wisconsin:

- **1 in 10 children** in Wisconsin live below the federal poverty line.
 - ◇ In **2021**, the poverty threshold for a family of three **was \$23,960**. This is well below what most people would consider in poverty or economic hardship.
- **1 in 3 households** (35%) cannot afford to meet their basic household needs and are not prepared for an emergency expense.
 - ◇ This number reflects families who fall below the federal poverty line as well as those who earn below the cost of living in their county.

***Make it personal:** When using data with stakeholders, try to help them see the story behind the data. For example: “That’s **1 in 3 families**. Think about your block, your town or city, your county. These are our neighbors, the person behind us at the grocery store or at the school drop off.” This can help strengthen the impact of the data.*

- This truly impacts every area of the state of Wisconsin. In every Wisconsin county, at least one in four households earn **less** than the cost of living in their county. In some counties, that number increases to nearly **half** (44%) of households.
- To help in local conversations, you can look up your county’s information on this [United Way Dashboard](#).



Why does this matter?

- Families thrive when they are not overloaded with stress. For many families, **economic stressors** can be a major factor that prevents families from thriving.
 - ◊ The most common reason in Wisconsin for CPS involvement relates to neglect, which is often tied to economic stressors.
- Nationally, children in economically insecure households are **5x** more likely to experience physical maltreatment and **7x** more likely to experience neglect.²
- Nationally, nearly **85%** of families investigated by CPS earn below 200% of the poverty line.³
- Children in families of color are more likely to experience poverty, with nearly one in five Black households having a **zero** or **negative** net worth. Native American households own **\$.09** for every dollar of wealth held by white households.⁴
- It's not just economic factors though that keep families in Wisconsin from thriving, but also systemic factors, like **racism**, **sexism** and **marginalization**.
- **Systemic barriers** for families of color in various systems (education, health, housing, employment, law enforcement, etc.) can increase the probability for involvement with the child welfare system.

Food for thought: Depending on your audience, it may be useful to engage in a discussion around: **What are some local factors that prevent families from thriving?** Consider talking about housing affordability, accessible childcare or other local challenges.

This may be a useful exercise to help flip the narrative that there is a personal failure that has brought families to the child welfare system instead of systematic factors that have made it challenging for families to be successful

¹ Drake, B. Jonson-Reid, M., & Dvalishvili, D. (2022). Poverty and child maltreatment. In R.D. Krugman & J.E. Korbin (Eds.), *Handbook of child maltreatment* (pp. 239-257). Springer, Dordrecht.

² Drake, B. Jonson-Reid, M., & Dvalishvili, D. (2022). Poverty and child maltreatment. In R.D. Krugman & J.E. Korbin (Eds.), *Handbook of child maltreatment* (pp. 239-257). Springer, Dordrecht.

³ Drake, B. Jonson-Reid, M., & Dvalishvili, D. (2022). Poverty and child maltreatment. In R.D. Krugman & J.E. Korbin (Eds.), *Handbook of child maltreatment* (pp. 239-257). Springer, Dordrecht.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *Income and poverty in the United States: 2019*. www.census.gov/library/publications/2020/%C2%A0demo/p60-270.html.

