

UPDATED TRENDS IN CHILD MALTREATMENT, 2024

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New national data have been released for 2024, showing a 3% decline in the rate of all substantiated child abuse compared to 2023. Sexual abuse declined 10% compared to the previous year, neglect dropped 6% while physical abuse increased 2%. The trends continue a pattern of intermittent declines since the 1990s (Figure 1).

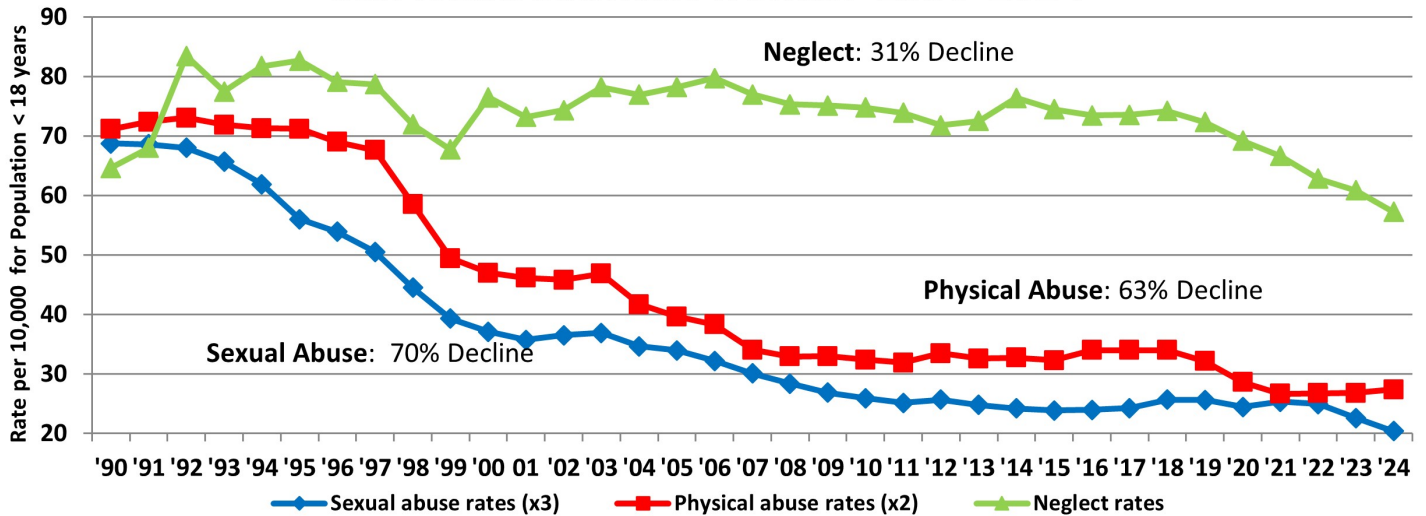
Since 1993, sexual abuse has declined 70%, physical abuse has declined 63% and neglect has declined 31%. Child maltreatment fatalities also declined by 10% from 2023 to 2024, but this comes after several years of increases.

The data used in producing the graphs and tables come from calculations with data from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS). The statistics in NCANDS are provided from state child protection agencies. The most recent data from NCANDS were published in January 2026, and concern cases of child maltreatment investigated in 2024.

<https://acf.gov/cb/report/child-maltreatment-2024>

The declines in all forms of maltreatment over time seem encouraging, but some observers wonder whether it could be a result of changes in willingness to report. However, overall reports to agencies have increased. What has declined are cases confirmed as substantiated after investigation and review.

U.S. Maltreatment Trends: 1990-2024



Note: Trend estimates represent total change from 1990 to 2024. Annual rates for physical abuse and sexual abuse have been multiplied by 2 and 3 respectively in Figure 1 so that trend comparisons can be highlighted.

¹ The statistics in Table 1 and Figure 1 concern substantiated cases of sexual abuse, physical abuse and neglect. A substantiated case means a case that has been reported to a child protection agency, investigated and deemed to have occurred according to a “preponderance of evidence.” The child maltreatment cases referred and investigated by state child protection agencies primarily involve abuse by caregivers. The cases do not include many involving stranger abusers, unless some element of caregiver neglect was involved.

Table 1: State Trends in Child Maltreatment: 2023-2024 and 1992-2024*

US States	Recent Trends: % change in rate 2023-2024			Long-term Trends: % change in rate 1992-2024		
	Sexual Abuse	Physical Abuse	Neglect	Sexual Abuse	Physical Abuse	Neglect
Alabama	-13%	-2%	-5%	-68%	-21%	-62%
Alaska	1%	1%	-9%	-86%	-78%	-36%
Arizona	-9%	-10%	-18%	-87%	-48%	-8%
Arkansas	-14%	-7%	-18%	-33%	-53%	-10%
California	-17%	5%	-6%	-91%	-93%	-43%
Colorado	-39%	-11%	-17%	-79%	-76%	15%
Connecticut	-5%	3%	4%	-58%	-92%	-52%
Delaware	-21%	0%	-8%	-49%	-60%	-74%
District of Columbia (DC)	-28%	-33%	-24%	-39%	-74%	-73%
Florida	-16%	-18%	-27%	-85%	-91%	-83%
Georgia	4%	19%	4%	-91%	-81%	-78%
Hawaii	-5%	-12%	13%	-86%	-92%	-75%
Idaho	-11%	-7%	-15%	-89%	-87%	-72%
Illinois	-7%	3%	-3%	-31%	37%	19%
Indiana	-6%	22%	21%	-74%	-80%	15%
Iowa	11%	-3%	-16%	-54%	-61%	121%
Kansas	16%	11%	9%	-52%	-36%	59%
Kentucky	10%	17%	-6%	-48%	-26%	-38%
Louisiana	-5%	-7%	-10%	-63%	-74%	-15%
Maine	34%	-6%	0%	-38%	16%	90%
Maryland	-7%	-6%	8%	-30%	-79%	-63%
Massachusetts	-25%	-4%	-7%	-77%	-72%	17%
Michigan	-12%	-6%	-5%	-41%	-12%	98%
Minnesota	-12%	6%	-6%	-5%	-87%	-58%
Mississippi	-6%	11%	13%	-41%	-46%	55%
Missouri	-2%	13%	-3%	-54%	-57%	-76%
Montana	-41%	3%	-4%	-92%	-92%	-26%
Nebraska	-23%	113%	10%	-77%	-62%	-42%
Nevada	7%	-21%	-12%	-49%	-80%	-47%
New Hampshire	-19%	22%	1%	-83%	-41%	207%
New Jersey	-12%	1%	-25%	-76%	-94%	-82%
New Mexico	22%	21%	9%	-76%	-45%	55%
New York	-7%	4%	-7%	-72%	-73%	45%
North Carolina	-13%	52%	0%	-34%	119%	-53%
North Dakota	-21%	-48%	-26%	-89%	-97%	-70%
Ohio	-8%	-3%	-9%	-67%	-29%	-64%
Oklahoma	6%	5%	-2%	-50%	-46%	55%
Oregon	-6%	9%	-10%	-67%	-37%	-2%
Pennsylvania	-2%	4%	-7%	-54%	-33%	88%
Rhode Island	-18%	-11%	-10%	-84%	-78%	-47%
South Carolina	-7%	-11%	-12%	-72%	113%	-9%
South Dakota	-2%	18%	21%	-86%	-70%	-13%
Tennessee	-9%	43%	-6%	-38%	77%	-70%
Texas	-19%	-6%	-10%	-69%	-79%	-17%
Utah	-15%	4%	5%	-60%	6%	-22%
Vermont	6%	-16%	-53%	-55%	18%	-95%
Virginia	-13%	-3%	4%	-79%	-76%	-73%
Washington	-4%	8%	11%	-87%	-87%	-87%
West Virginia	-9%	-53%	-2%	-64%	-50%	-17%
Wisconsin	-6%	-4%	-9%	-89%	-89%	-62%
Wyoming	-16%	-63%	0%	-91%	-99%	-54%

The newly released NCANDS report combined sexual abuse, physical abuse and neglect with several other kinds of maltreatment and estimated a total of 532,228 substantiated reports for 2024, a 3% drop from 546,159 substantiated reports for 2023.

It is not possible to directly compare state maltreatment rates with each other because states differ in how their statutes define abuse and how abuse is investigated and processed. However, looking at within-state trends, most individual states experienced substantial declines in sexual and physical abuse during the period since the early 1990s (see Table 1). The data do not show any obvious regional patterns to the decline (Joseph, J et al. 2025).

In the findings on child maltreatment fatalities, the 2024 data show a decrease of 10% from the previous year (Table 2). But this is the first substantial decline in fatalities for over a decade in the NCANDS data. Note that there are very large declines in Maryland and Texas. The Maryland decrease is due to a change in definition. Other data sets have found declining rates of homicide for children under age 6 in data from medical examiners (Wilson et al., 2023).

*Note that in states with smaller populations and lower rates of reported maltreatment, small changes can result in large percentage changes

Note: Negative percentages: % decline; Positive percentages: % increase.

There is currently no consensus in the child maltreatment field about why child abuse substantiations, and physical and sexual abuse, in particular, have declined so considerably over the longer term (Finkelhor & Jones, 2006; Finkelhor, 2008). The period when sexual and physical abuse started their dramatic downward trends was marked by some economic improvement, expansions in medical coverage, increases in the numbers of law enforcement and child protection personnel, more aggressive prosecution and incarceration policies, growing public awareness about the problems, and the dissemination of new treatment options for family and mental health problems, including new psychiatric medication. One study finds an association between the expansion of Medicaid and declines in physical abuse and neglect (McGinty, E. E., Nair, R., Assini-Meytin, L. C., Stuart, E. A., & Letourneau, E. J., 2022).

Another study looked at the possible relationship between various state economic and child welfare policy indicators with the NCANDS levels of physical and sexual abuse over the years 1997 to 2020. It also looked at the correlates of the police data on child homicide (Rezey, 2023). Decreasing levels of physical abuse were associated with higher expenditures on child welfare, increases in female incarceration and the adoption of alternative response practices. Decreasing levels of child homicide were associated higher state expenditures for child welfare. None of the indicators were associated with declines in sexual abuse.

There are some possible reasons why neglect trends have lagged in improvement compared to sexual and physical abuse (Jones, Finkelhor & Halter, 2006). One possibility is that neglect has not declined as much because it has not been the subject of the same level of policy attention and public awareness as sexual and physical abuse.

Another possibility is that the identification of new forms of neglect like drug-affected babies or exposure to domestic violence have masked a decline in other conventional types of neglect.

It is unfortunate that information about the trends in child maltreatment are not better publicized and more widely known. The long-term decline in abuse and neglect may have important implications for public policy. These trends deserve more discussion, analysis and research.

Additional information about trends in child abuse and neglect is available at: <http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/Trends/index.html>.

Note: Unlike Table 1, Table 2 is not a change in rate, but the raw number of child fatalities in each state. Negative percentages: % decline; Positive percentages: % increase.

Table 2: Child Maltreatment Fatality Trends: 2023-2024

US States	Count	Count	% Change
	2023	2024	2023-2024
Alabama	43	36	-16%
Alaska	5	13	160%
Arizona	43	36	-16%
Arkansas	33	27	-18%
California	150	144	-4%
Colorado	32	28	-13%
Connecticut	11	16	45%
Delaware	7	8	14%
District of Columbia (DC)	5	7	40%
Florida	75	72	-4%
Georgia	103	104	1%
Hawaii	2	4	100%
Idaho	8	8	0%
Illinois	83	66	-20%
Indiana	65	56	-14%
Iowa	14	12	-14%
Kansas	12	16	33%
Kentucky	5	16	220%
Louisiana	47	31	-34%
Maine	7	7	0%
Maryland	83	46	-45%
Massachusetts	11	6	-45%
Michigan	43	54	26%
Minnesota	32	30	-6%
Mississippi	76	66	-13%
Missouri	61	90	48%
Montana	2	2	0%
Nebraska	0	3	missing
Nevada	21	19	-10%
New Hampshire	2	4	100%
New Jersey	14	14	0%
New Mexico	16	17	6%
New York	123	108	-12%
North Carolina	107	46	-57%
North Dakota	2	2	0%
Ohio	140	134	-4%
Oklahoma	17	26	53%
Oregon	19	16	-16%
Pennsylvania	50	71	42%
Rhode Island	1	4	300%
South Carolina	43	32	-26%
South Dakota	7	3	-57%
Tennessee	31	47	52%
Texas	187	107	-43%
Utah	17	7	-59%
Vermont	3	2	100%
Virginia	55	40	-27%
Washington	31	24	-23%
West Virginia	8	13	63%
Wisconsin	22	27	23%
Wyoming	0	0	0%
Total	1974	1767	-10%

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