

The Five Protective Factors

The Five Protective Factors are the foundation of the Strengthening Families approach. Extensive evidence supports the common sense notion that when these Protective Factors are present and robust in a family, the likelihood of abuse and neglect diminish. Research also shows that these are the factors that create healthy environments for the optimal development of children.

1. Parental Resilience

No one can eliminate stress from parenting, but building parental resilience can affect how a parent deals with stress. Parental resilience is the ability to constructively cope with and bounce back from all types of challenges. It is about creatively solving problems, building trusting relationships, maintaining a positive attitude, and seeking help when it's needed.

2. Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

Having accurate information about raising young children and appropriate expectations for their behavior helps parents better understand and care for children. It is important that information is available when parents need it, that is, when it is relevant to their life and their child. Parents whose own families used harsh discipline techniques or parents of children with developmental or behavioral problems or special needs require extra support in building this Protective Factor.

3. Social and Emotional Competence

A child's ability to interact positively with others, to self-regulate, and to effectively communicate his or her emotions has a great impact on the parent-child relationship. Children with challenging behaviors are more likely to be abused, which is why early identification and working with them helps keep their development on track and keeps them safe. Also, children who have experienced or witness violence need a safe environment that offers opportunities to develop normally.

4. Social Connections

Friends, family members, neighbors and other members of a community provide emotional support and concrete assistance to parents. Concrete connections help parents build networks of support that serve multiple purposes: They can help parents develop and reinforce community norms around childrearing, provide assistance in times of need, and serve as a resource for parenting information or help solving problems. Because isolation can be a common risk factor for abuse and neglect, parents who are isolated need support in building positive friendships.

5. Concrete Support in Times of Need

Parents need access to the types of concrete supports and services that can minimize the stress of difficult situations, such as a family crisis, a condition such as substance abuse, or stress associated with lack of resources. Building this Protective Factor is about helping to ensure the basic needs of a family, such as food, clothing, and shelter, are met and connecting parents and children to services, especially those that have a stigma associated with them, like domestic violence shelter or substance abuse counseling, in times of crisis.

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