The Protective Factors Framework

Five Protective Factors are the foundation of the Strengthening Families Approach: parental resilience, social connections, concrete support in times of need, knowledge of parenting and child development, and social and emotional competence of children. Research studies support the common-sense notion that when these Protective Factors are well established in a family, the likelihood of child abuse and neglect diminishes. Research shows that these protective factors are also “promotive” factors that build family strengths and a family environment that promotes optimal child and youth development.

Parental Resilience

No one can eliminate stress from parenting, but a parent’s capacity for resilience can affect how a parent deals with stress. Resilience is the ability to manage and bounce back from all types of challenges that emerge in every family’s life. It means finding ways to solve problems, building and sustaining trusting relationships including relationships with your own child, and knowing how to seek help when necessary.

Social Connections

Friends, family members, neighbors and community members provide emotional support, help solve problems, offer parenting advice and give concrete assistance to parents. Networks of support are essential to parents and also offer opportunities for people to “give back”, an important part of self-esteem as well as a benefit for the community. Isolated families may need extra help in reaching out to build positive relationships.

Concrete Support in Times of Need

Meeting basic economic needs like food, shelter, clothing and health care is essential for families to thrive. Likewise, when families encounter a crisis such as domestic violence, mental illness or substance abuse, adequate services and supports need to be in place to provide stability, treatment and help for family members to get through the crisis.

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

Accurate information about child development and appropriate expectations for children’s behavior at every age help parents see their children and youth in a positive light and promote their healthy development. Information can come from many sources, including family members as well as parent education classes and surfing the internet. Studies show information is most effective when it comes at the precise time parents need it to understand their own children. Parents who experienced harsh discipline or other negative childhood experiences may need extra help to change the parenting patterns they learned as children.

Social and Emotional Competence of Children

A child or youth’s ability to interact positively with others, self-regulate their behavior and effectively communicate their feelings has a positive impact on their relationships with their family, other adults, and peers. Challenging behaviors or delayed development create extra stress for families, so early identification and assistance for both parents and children can head off negative results and keep development on track.
The Strengthening Families Approach

- Benefits ALL families
- Builds on family strengths, buffers risk, and promotes better outcomes
- Can be implemented through small but significant changes in everyday actions
- Builds on and can become a part of existing programs, strategies, systems and community opportunities
- Is grounded in research, practice and implementation knowledge

**A New Vision**

Families and communities, service systems and organizations:
- Focus on building protective and promotive factors to reduce risk and create optimal outcomes for all children, youth and families
- Recognize and support parents as decision-makers and leaders
- Value the culture and unique assets of each family
- Are mutually responsible for better outcomes for children, youth and families

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**Community and multi-system leaders act to build sustainable infrastructure through key levers for change:**
- Parent Partnerships
- Policy/Systems
- Professional Development

**Community programs and worker practice consistently:**
- Facilitate friendships and mutual support
- Strengthen parenting
- Respond to family crises
- Link families to services and opportunities
- Value and support parents
- Further children’s social and emotional development
- Observe and respond to early warning signs of abuse and neglect

**Families and communities build protective factors that also promote positive outcomes:**
- Parental resilience
- Social connections
- Knowledge of parenting and child development
- Concrete support in times of need
- Social and emotional competence of children

**Results:**
- Strengthened families
- Optimal child development
- Reduced child abuse & neglect