What are Protective Factors?
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Center for the Study of Social Policy
- In 2001, with funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, CSSP began studying the role that early care and education programs nationwide can play in strengthening families and preventing abuse and neglect.

Center for the Study of Social Policy
- They developed a new conceptual framework and approach to preventing child abuse and neglect, called Strengthening Families, which involved building evidence-based Protective Factors around young children by working with their families from a strengths focus.

Why Strengthening Families?
- Strengthening Families is a research-based, cost-effective strategy to increase family strengths, enhance child development and reduce child abuse and neglect.
- It focuses on building five Protective Factors within families that also promote healthy outcomes.

And why do they matter?
- Families come in all shapes and sizes with different customs, cultures and beliefs. However, research has shown us that all families need five protective factors to be strong and resilient. These protective factors are what all families often want to build.

The Five Protective Factors
- Parental Resilience: I have courage during stress.
- Social Connections: I have people who know and support me.
- Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development: I know about child development.
The Five Protective Factors

- Concrete Support in Times of Need: My family has access to basic needs.
- Social and Emotional Competence of Children: My child feels loved and can get along with others.

- 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.

How can schools help build protective factors?

One way of thinking about families is that every family needs certain tools in their toolbox. The 5 protective factors provide these tools through everyday use.

Parental Resilience

- Parents who can take it in stride when everyday life is stressful and can cope with the occasional crisis are said to be resilient.

- Trusting relationships between parents and teachers can help parents and staff stay healthy and resilient. By creating a welcoming environment; providing opportunities for supportive relationships to develop among parents; and being available to parents for information, conversation or formal problem solving, staff contributes to parents’ emotional health and well-being.
How do we build it?

- Watch for signs of success and discuss strengths.
- Compliment a parent on a positive change.
- Ask parents how they are doing.
- Smile with your voice and your eyes.

- Parent - Teacher Meetings.
- Move at each family’s pace - practice patience and empathy.
- Remind families that you can solve problems together.

Between peaks there are always valleys. How you manage your valley determines how soon you reach your next peak.

Spencer Johnson, M.D

Social Connections

- Most parents need people they can call on once in a while when they need someone to listen, give some advice, or just when feeling a little “down.”

When parents have an informal network of trusted friends in their community, they have a support system for meeting both practical and emotional needs. They can brainstorm about problems together, give and receive back-up childcare, and help meet unexpected needs such as transportation.

How do we build it?

- Notice personal changes, “I like your new haircut.”
- Post neighborhood or community events you hear about.
- Introduce parents to one another.

- Link parents whose children have the same interest.
- Ask friendly questions.
- Invite parents to help plan events.

- Having someone that supports your parenting is one of the most valuable treasures a parent can own.
Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

- Who knows a child best—their likes and dislikes, the things that interest them and the things they can do really well? Parents do! But, no parent is an expert in everything about their child’s development.

- Parents who understand normal child development have reasonable expectations for their children. Parents who have alternative strategies for dealing with children’s challenging behaviors can avoid harsh punishments.

How do we build it?

- Share children’s progress with parents.
- Ask parents about their children.
- Provide parent education opportunities.
- Provide observation opportunities for parents.
- Explain your teaching philosophy to families.
- Answer questions about child development.

- Successful parenting helps children succeed in school, feel loved, get along with others and have a sense of belonging.

Concrete Support in Times of Need

- Families need to have basic needs (shelter, food, clothing, health care) met to ensure child’s healthy development. Programs of all types need to be able to direct families to services and supports for meeting basic needs when necessary.

- Parents may not always know about community resources that can help meet their basic needs or how to find essential services. You can let them know about all available resources, so they may select what is best for their needs.
How do we build it?

- Keep a list of updated community resources.
- Train staff to listen for family stress.
- Initiate positive conversation about family needs.
- Be available and supportive.

- Acknowledge family feelings without trying to “fix” the problem.
- Ask yourself, “How would I want to be treated in a time of need?”
- Focus on family strengths.

- Working with parents to identify their most critical basic needs and local concrete supports keeps the focus on family-driven solutions.

Concrete Support Resource

- Call 211 for possible help with concrete needs.
- Also DCS Community Advisory Boards can sometimes provide concrete support for a family in need.

Healthy Social and Emotional Development

- Research shows that just as children’s brains and bodies develop so do their emotions and their ability to express themselves.

How do we build it?

- As children grow and develop the ability to interact with the family and others in a positive manner, it is easier for parents to respond in the same way. When a child has problems or needs due to age, disability or other factors, then the parent may need additional support.

- Replace judgment with compassion.
- Tell parents something good about their child.
- Pay a child a compliment in front of their parent.
- Share social and emotional resources with parents.
- Greet every child by name at the door.
- Direct teaching of social skills.
- Use descriptive, encouraging comments.
Social and emotional skills are the most important developmental skills that young children learn during their first years of life.

Social & Emotional Resources

- Here are some websites that provide practical tips for managing behaviors, fun activities for families and include chat sessions.
- Center on the Social & Emotional Foundations for Early Learning, http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/

http://www.challengingbehavior.org/ has an email sign-up for parents interested in getting practical tips on managing behaviors and routines through a newsletter.
http://www.parentsknowkidsgrow.org/ is sponsored by the Department of Human Services and is designed to be a resource for parents looking for information on raising their children.

What the five protective factors “give” families

- Parental resilience = Courage
- Social connections = Community
- Knowledge of parenting = Health
- Concrete support = Freedom
- Children’s social and emotional development = Compassion

Why the Strengthening Families Approach?

- Benefits ALL families.
- Builds on family strengths, buffers risks, and promotes better outcomes.
- Can be implemented through small but significant changes in everyday actions.
- Builds on and can be part of existing programs, strategies, and community opportunity.

For more information

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- www.strengtheningfamilies.net
- http://www.parentsknowkidsgrow.org/
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