

Building Strong Families through the Protective Factors

Presented by: Natalie Kassenbrock, LCSW
Ireland Home Based Services, LLC

Objectives

- ▶ Define the Strengthening Families Framework of Protective Factors.
- ▶ Increase knowledge on the role of Protective Factors and how they relate to the overall well-being of children and families.
- ▶ Increase knowledge on practical strategies to support families.
- ▶ Understand the benefits of the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework.

Why Protective Factors?

- ▶ Child Abuse and Neglect can have a lifelong impact and effects on mental and physical health of children.
- ▶ According to the CDC, at least one in seven children experience abuse or neglect in the United States. Although many cases go unreported.
- ▶ Stresses and trauma related to abuse and neglect can negatively impact children's overall health.

What are the Protective Factors?

- At it's core, Strengthening Families is about how families are supported to build key protective factors that enable children to thrive. The 5 protective factors include:
 1. Parental Resilience
 2. Social Connections
 3. Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
 4. Concrete Support in Times of Need
 5. Social and Emotional Competence of Children
- Strengthening Families is an approach to working with families. It is not a model, program or curriculum. It can be implemented through small but significant changes in everyday actions. It provides a common language amongst staff, community partners etc.

Strengthening Families Protective Factors Overview

- SF builds on and can become part of existing programs, strategies, and systems.
- SF helps parents learn how to manage stress and function well when faced with challenges, adversity and trauma.
- SF builds Protective Factors, does not just reduce risk.
- Parents must be empowered and understand that they can take responsibility and make decisions for their children. Parents are the leaders of their families.
- SF is based on the idea that families function as a system and therefore, comprehensive family involvement must be encouraged from the beginning.

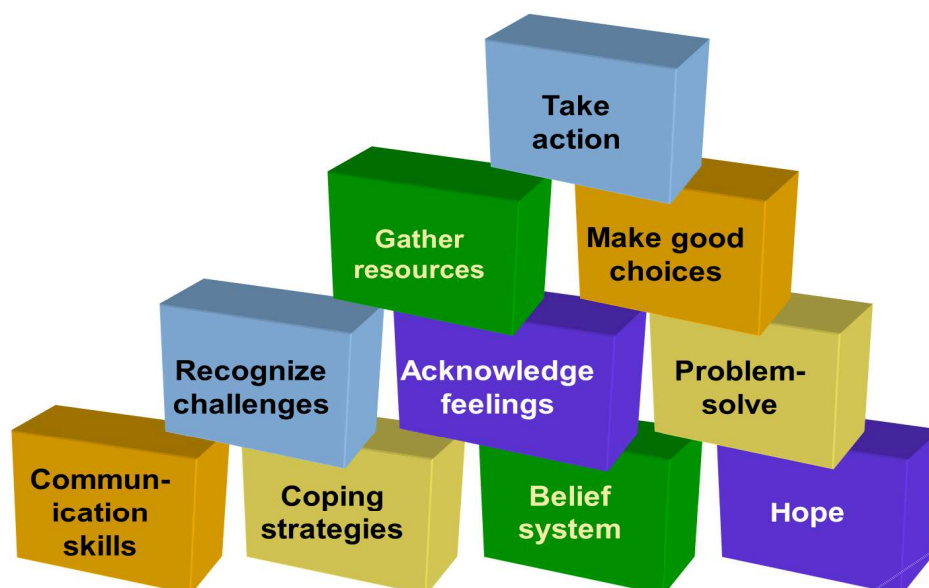
PURPOSE OF PROTECTIVE FACTORS

- ▶ Supports Families
- ▶ Prevents child abuse and neglect
- ▶ Helps families cope with stress and challenges
- ▶ Improved family dynamics
- ▶ Improves overall well-being of children and parents

Parental Resilience

- Parental Resilience is defined as: The ability of families to get through difficult and challenging circumstances, recover, and even grow from the experience.
- Research has concluded that how parents respond to stressors is much more important than the stressor itself in determining outcomes for themselves and their children.
- Parents are resilient when they are able to call forth their inner strength to proactively meet personal challenges and those in relation to their child, manage adversities, heal the effects of trauma and thrive given the unique circumstances of their family.
- Think about a stressor you have faced and how you responded.

Building Blocks of Resilience



Parental Resilience - Implications for Practice

- Parents and families are resilient when they can openly talk about problems, listen to each other, discuss past problems that have been addressed successfully, handle stress without negative consequences and communicate and pull together to address problems.

ACTIVITIES TO CONSIDER

- Provide parents with information/materials that educate the effect that stress has on families. Pinpoint and bring attention to stressors the family is facing.
- Help parents surround themselves with people that make them feel confident.
- Help parents identify someone they trust to share their feelings with.
- Help parents plan ahead and adapt to change.
- Identify opportunities to be physically active and engage in self-care.

Social Connections

- Social Connections can be defined as: A network of people who care, listen, share parenting values, and offer help.
- Parents' constructive and supportive social connections-that is, relationships with family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers, community members and service providers are valuable resources who provide emotional support, informational support, instrumental support and spiritual support.
- Research studies have demonstrated that, for both mothers and fathers, high levels of emotional, informational, instrumental and spiritual support is associated with positive parental mood and positive perceptions and responsiveness to one's children.
- Constructive and supportive social connections help buffer parents from stressors and support nurturing parenting behaviors that promote secure attachments in young children.

Social Connections - Implications for Practice

- Social Connections have been made when the parent(s) can identify someone to turn to for help, have people with who they interact with frequently, engage with extended family for meals, family get-togethers, and holidays and also when parents are involved with school and other organized activities, and can interact appropriately with other children and adults.

ACTIVITIES TO CONSIDER

- Take an assessment of those that the parent(s) communicate with often(at least 1x week)
- Join a group with people who have common interests
- Attend local learning opportunities
- Stay in contact with and utilize family and friends
- Participate in community events
- Explore volunteer opportunities to enhance social network

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

- Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development can be defined as: A basic understanding of how children develop and what children need from their parents, as well as parenting skills and strategies for guiding children's behavior.
- Scientists in the fields of neuroscience, pediatrics and developmental psychology have provided much evidence of the critical importance of early childhood as the period in which the foundation for intellectual, social, emotional and moral development is established.
- Numerous research studies show this foundation is determined by the nature of the young child's environments and experiences that shape early brain development.
- Acquiring new information about parenting and child development enables parents to critically evaluate the impact of their experiences on their own development and their current parenting practices, and to consider that there may be more effective ways of guiding and responding to children.

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development - Implications for Practice

- Knowledge of parenting and child development can be indicated when parents are realistic about expectations, provide clear and consistent messages to children, provide structure and support, speak to children in an age-appropriate manner, praise good behavior, and use appropriate discipline.

ACTIVITIES TO CONSIDER

- Develop and maintain consistent communication with child's Doctor
- Discuss child's academic development with teacher when applicable
- Obtain educational materials from local health department
- Attend community parent education events

Concrete Support in Times of Need

- Concrete Support in Times of Need can be defined as: Access to needed resources, including financial help, housing support, mental health or substance abuse services, health care, and more, through formal and informal supports.
- Parents need experiences that enable them to understand their rights in accessing services, gain knowledge of relevant services and learn how to navigate through service systems.
- Parents have unrealized resources and competencies that must be identified, mobilized and appreciated.
- Accessing Concrete Support in Times of Need must be accompanied by a quality of service coordination and delivery that is designed to preserve parents' dignity and to promote their and their family's healthy development, resilience and ability to advocate for and receive needed services and resources.

Concrete Support in Times of Need - Implications for Practice

- Concrete Support in Times of need can be achieved through receiving public assistance, having access to health clinics, utilizing subsidized housing, utilizing food pantries, having access to home-based services and receiving financial support from family and/or friends.

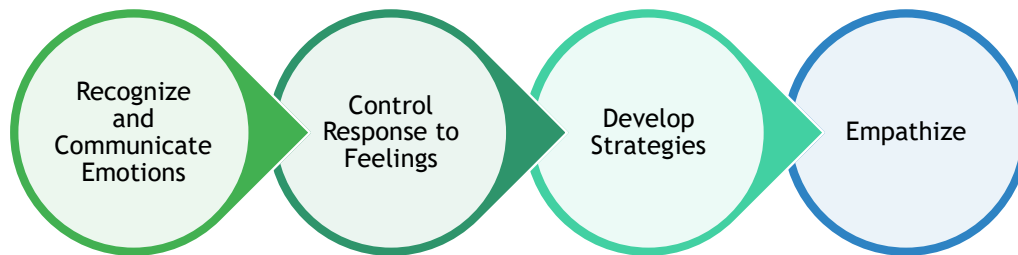
ACTIVITIES TO CONSIDER

- Identify Needs versus wants, complete a budget.
- Explore and become familiar with available community resources
- Have a working knowledge of resale and thrift shops in the area
- Contingency plan and prepare with family members/close friends to prevent crisis situations

Social-Emotional Competence of Children

- Social and Emotional competence of children can be defined as: The age appropriate ability of children to understand and cope with feelings such as anger, happiness and sadness, and relate to others.
- In recent years, a growing body of research has demonstrated the strong link between young children's social-emotional competence and their cognitive development, language skills, mental health and school success.
- Parents create social-emotional competence by creating a safe environment, setting clear expectations, encouraging and reinforcing social skills, separating emotions from actions and creating an environment in which children feel safe to express their emotions.
- Children who have experiences such as the ones mentioned above are able to recognize their and other's emotions, take the perspective of others and use their emerging cognitive skills to think about appropriate and inappropriate ways of acting.

Children's Social Emotional Skills to Build



Social and Emotional Competence of Children - Implications for Practice

- Children are emotionally and socially competent when: they can interact positively with others, self-regulate their behaviors, and effectively communicate their feelings such that it has a positive impact on relationships with their family, other adults, and peers.

ACTIVITIES TO CONSIDER

- Provide opportunities for children to socialize
- Identify and discuss feelings, express emotions
- Help children problem solve
- Obtain and read a book about emotions
- Empathize with children



Resources

- ▶ Parent Cafes
- ▶ Community Partners for Child Safety Program
- ▶ 988 Crisis Line
- ▶ www.safekids.org
- ▶ www.findhelp.org (translates for different languages)
- ▶ 211

References

- ▶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024). Child Abuse and Neglect. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov>
- ▶ Goosby, B. J., & Be Strong Families (2024), Building Protective Factors. <https://www.beststrongfamilies.org>
- ▶ Center for the Study of Social Policy. (n.d.). Protective Factors Framework. Center for the Study of Social Policy. <https://cssp.org/our-work/projects/protective-factors-framework>
- ▶ Fox, L., Dunlap, G., Hemmeter, M. L., Joseph, G. & Strain, P. (2003). The teaching pyramid: A model supporting social competence and preventing challenging behavior in young children. *Young Children*, 48-52

Questions?

Natalie Kassenbrock, MSW, LCSW

nkassenbrock@ihbs.us

(812) 430-5006