

Circles of Caring:

Protective Factors that Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect

About Protective Factors...

The Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) has completed a comprehensive research analysis, which identified the following five Protective Factors that are linked to the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

These Protective Factors or “Circles of Caring” are conditions in families and communities that, when present, increase the health and well-being of children and families. These attributes also serve as buffers against risk factors for child maltreatment.

Research confirms that children are shaped by the people, experiences and environment in which they live. By implementing strategies that build these Protective Factors, we can create communities that care for children, which will enhance the lives of children and their families and greatly improve our common future.

Knowledge of Parenting & Child Development.

Crying babies, challenging children, and children with special needs are at the highest risk of abuse and neglect.

Parents need:

- information to help them understand the reasons behind their child's behavior,
- techniques to manage those behaviors and guide development, and
- perspective, to put their child's behavior in the context of overall development (*for example: intense infant crying is a phase that will pass; stubborn and independent behavior in toddlers is normal*)



Parents have teachable moments just like children do – usually when their child has presented them with a new challenge or they are trying to tackle a new task like toilet training.

Finally, parents need alternative ways of responding to their children than simply the ones they learned from how they were parented (especially parents who were abused or neglected as children – but also for people who grew up in families that over-relied on physical punishment and spanking).

Parental Resilience.

Resilience is the ability to “bounce back” when life becomes stressful. Problems at work or challenges at home can make parenting even more difficult and ensure that children get the love and attention they need.

We can build resilience by reaching out to one another and helping parents during the inevitable challenges of life. When parents feel stressed or frustrated, you have the opportunity to offer support and encouragement.



Social Connections.

Having trusting relationships and being part of a social network goes a long way to decrease isolation – a major factor in child abuse and neglect. When parents have friends they can trust and confide in, they feel supported and are less likely to feel lonely.



For preventing child abuse and neglect, it's not just having social connections, but the quality of the connections:

- Having someone to talk to and vent frustration, especially about parenting challenges.
- Connections that help families to access resources – (e.g. a friend that will provide babysitting)
- Opportunities to see other parents parenting – this allows parents to pick up some good techniques and perhaps also recognize some strategies that don't work.
- Social networks that include positive norms about parenting – conversations with other parents about the joys of raising children and sharing tips for positive things to do with children.



Social and Emotional Development of Children.

Supporting children's social and emotional skills helps the communication between parents and their children and can reduce tensions within the family.

When parents, caregivers and others help children express their feelings and needs effectively, children are less likely to resort to tantrums, biting or fighting. Over time, better communication about feelings helps cement the important bonds that children have with their parents and other adults.

In addition, being able to talk about how they feel helps children be more likely to confide in a trusted adult about situations that make them feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

Concrete Support in Times of Need.

Providing concrete supports is an important way of intervening before a crisis happens. Parents that are struggling to meet basic needs for their families will not be able to focus on less-immediate concerns like positive discipline and enhancing their child's development.



Concrete Support may include:

- Response to a crisis such as food, shelter, and clothing,
- Assistance with daily needs such as health care, education, or job opportunities,
- Services for parents dealing with depression and other mental health issues, domestic violence, or substance abuse,
- Specialized services for children.

"Times of need" is not limited to families in poverty. All families have times of need, whether it's at the birth of a new child, health problems, etc. Mental illness, substance abuse and domestic violence can happen in any family.

For more information visit:
<http://www.preventchildabusewv.org>