



SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES • THRIVING FAMILIES

Bring Up Nebraska is administered by Nebraska Children and Families Foundation.

WHAT ARE PROTECTIVE FACTORS?



Protective Factors help families stay safe, healthy and strong.

According to research, when multiple risk factors are present in a family, there's a greater likelihood of negative outcomes, including child maltreatment. But when multiple Protective Factors are present, we see a greater probability of positive outcomes for children, families and communities.

Protective Factors are critical for all children, youth, families and communities. They are the difference between families and communities that not only survive but thrive. Each of us has a role to play to help strengthen Protective Factors in our community and the families around us.

Following are brief descriptions of each Protective Factor.



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KNOWLEDGE OF PARENTING/CHILD DEVELOPMENT

The ability to support nurturing attachments and have realistic expectations in order to effectively promote development in children and youth.

Parents who understand the usual course of child development are more likely to be able to provide their children with respectful communication, consistent rules and expectations, developmentally appropriate limits and opportunities that promote independence. But no parent can be an expert on all aspects of infant, child and youth development or on the most effective ways to support a child at each stage.

As children grow, parents need to continue to foster their parenting competencies by learning about and responding to children's emerging needs. Information about child development and parenting may come from many sources, including extended families, cultural practices, media, parent education classes or a positive school environment that supports parents. Interacting with other children of similar ages also helps parents better understand their own child. Observing other good caregivers can also help.

Parenting styles need to be adjusted for each child's unique temperament and circumstances. Parents of children with special needs may benefit from additional coaching and support to reduce frustration and help them become the parents their children need.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE OF CHILDREN

The ability to recognize and regulate emotions and behavior and communicate clearly in order to establish and maintain healthy relationships with family, peers and others.

Children's emerging ability to form bonds and interact positively with others, regulate their emotions and behavior, communicate their feelings, and solve problems effectively has a positive impact on their relationships with their family, other adults and peers.

On the other hand, children's challenging behaviors or delays in social-emotional development create extra stress for families. These children may be at greater risk for abuse. Identifying and working with children early to keep their development on track helps keep them safe and helps their parents facilitate their healthy development.

PARENTAL RESILIENCE

The ability to recover from difficult life experiences and often to be strengthened and even transformed by those experiences.

Parents who can cope with the stresses of everyday life, as well as an occasional crisis, have the flexibility and inner strength known as resilience.

Parents also know how to seek help in times of trouble. Their ability to deal with life's ups and downs serves as a model of coping behavior for their children.

Multiple life stressors, such as a family history of abuse or neglect, physical and mental health problems, marital conflict, substance abuse and domestic or community violence—and financial stressors such as unemployment, financial insecurity and homelessness—can reduce a parent's capacity to cope effectively.

All parents have inner strengths or resources that can serve as a foundation for building their resilience. These may include faith, flexibility, humor, communication skills, problem-solving skills, mutually supportive caring relationships or the ability to identify and access outside resources and services when needed.



SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

The ability and opportunity to develop positive relationships that lessen stress and isolation and become a supportive network.

Parents with a network of emotionally supportive friends, family and neighbors often find that it is easier to care for their children and themselves. Most parents need people they can call on once in a while when they need an empathetic listener, advice or support such as transportation or occasional child care. In other words, a positive community environment—and the parent’s ability to participate effectively in his or her community—is an important protective factor. On the other hand, research has shown that parents who are isolated and have few social connections are at higher risk for child abuse and neglect.

Social connections support children in multiple ways. A parent’s positive relationships give children access to other caring adults. Parents’ social interactions also model important relational skills for children and increase the likelihood that children will benefit from involvement in positive activities. As children grow older, positive friendships and support from peers provide another important source of social connection.

Being new to a community, recently divorced or a first-time parent makes a support network even more important. Some parents may need to develop self-confidence and social skills to expand their social networks. In the meantime, social connections can come from other caring adults such as service providers, teachers or advocates. Helping parents identify resources and/or providing opportunities for them to make connections within their neighborhoods or communities may encourage isolated parents to reach out. Often, opportunities exist within faith-based organizations, schools, hospitals, community centers and other places where support groups or social groups meet.

CONCRETE SUPPORTS FOR FAMILIES

The ability to access resources and services that help make children, youth and families stronger and more resourceful for themselves and others.

Families whose basic needs are met have more time and energy to devote to their children’s safety and well-being (e.g., food, clothing, housing, transportation, counseling). When parents do not have sufficient financial resources, lack stable housing, lack health insurance or face a family crisis (such as a natural disaster or the incarceration of a parent), their ability to support their children’s and their own health and safety may be at risk.

Partnering with parents to identify and access resources may help prevent the stress that sometimes precipitates child maltreatment. Offering concrete supports also may help prevent the unintended neglect that sometimes occurs when parents are unable to provide for their children.

Taken together, these five Protective Factors increase the probability of positive, adaptive and healthy outcomes across the developmental continuum, even in the face of risk and adversity.