



Bringing the Protective Factors Framework to Life in Your Work

Early Care, education, and other systems serving a general population of families

Parents exhibit wide variations in their parenting skills and knowledge. Those variations can occur over time in the same family. For example, parents who handled infancy very well may struggle to adjust to their toddler's behaviors and need help with new techniques.

Your role in strengthening parenting is to offer opportunities for all parents to gain new information, techniques, and perspective; make yourself available to discuss child development and parenting questions; and notice and provide extra support when parents are struggling to understand their children's development or their role as parents.



Early care and education programs are a natural place for parents to turn for parenting information and support. Those who work in childcare settings have a unique perspective on children and parenting. Parents often turn to these professionals for parenting and child development information because they regularly see many kids, but they also know the children as individuals. This makes the information they share more meaningful because it is based on their understanding of child development and the individual children in their care.

Research by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) tells us that parents appreciate helpful information from their childcare providers. Parents prefer to be informed and supported by someone they know and trust. Also, parents appreciate help in understanding their child's development and how it compares to developmental milestones. Ideas and strategies for handling the everyday challenges of raising young children are welcomed. Overall, parents appreciate help when experiencing high-stress levels, concerns with their child's development or behavior, or a family crisis.

STRATEGIES TO STRENGTHEN PARENTING



Help parents build their knowledge through your daily informal interactions. Talk with parents about their child's development and progress in your classroom.

Point out to parents when their children are doing well, what they are learning and new tasks they are mastering.



Allow parents to observe your classroom. It can be so beneficial for parents to observe their child interacting with other children while learning new techniques from you and the other staff working with all the children.

Model skills such as listening, redirecting, and reflecting. When parents see these techniques work for you, they may try them at home.



Keep in mind that parenting education needs to be provided within a context of trust and mutual respect. Parents are receptive when they believe that you know their child and you have the child's best interests in mind.

Parents and professionals caring for children don't always have the answer, which is all right. Knowing where to go for information when parenting issues arise is important. Partnering with parents to communicate that parenting is "part natural and part learned" is the first step in helping to build knowledge of parenting.

Supervisors and Program Directors in Early Care and Education

Making your program a source of knowledge for families

As a supervisor or program director, you have the opportunity to make your program a place where parents will feel comfortable seeking knowledge about parenting and child development. You also have a role to play in empowering your staff to provide that support.



STRATEGIES TO IMPLEMENT IN YOUR WORK



Offer and encourage parents to attend parenting education classes. Invite all parents enrolled in the program. This allows parents to come together in a safe environment where they can learn from each other as well as a professional.

Formal parenting education events will be more successful if parents have the opportunity to have input on the topic shared. This will make the event more meaningful to parents attending.



Another element that makes parenting education more effective is the opportunity for parents to practice their new skills with their children. You might do this by bringing the children in at the end of the program and facilitating some interactions, or by giving parents specific “assignments” to complete once they get home.



Consider bringing in a parent educator to be available to parents during pick-up time once a week for informal conversation.



Support teachers in developing trusting relationships with parents and creating an atmosphere where it is okay to ask for help. One way of doing this is to create that atmosphere for staff as well.

Ensure that your staff are providing the most up-to-date, accurate parenting and child development information by supporting ongoing professional development and continued learning.





Bringing the Protective Factors Framework to Life in Your Work

Child welfare or systems serving families that are struggling

When parents are experiencing difficulties in parenting their children well and facing allegations of abuse or neglect, a lack of knowledge of parenting and child development may or may not be part of the problem. Parenting education can be a valuable tool, but may not always be the support that is needed to strengthen parenting.



For example, in some cases, you may encounter a family purely because of misperceptions or lack of knowledge – in which case, education about child development, parenting strategies, and acceptable levels of supervision may be sufficient to strengthen their parenting and keep the children safe.

In other cases, parents may have a good understanding of child development and what they should do, but struggle to do so due to circumstances like poverty, illness or unemployment. In those cases, families need to be connected to benefit programs and other systems of support. Formal parenting education alone will do little to strengthen parenting or keep their children safe, and may not even be necessary if they already have an understanding of child development.

More often, unfortunately, lack of knowledge is just one of many challenges facing the families that come to your attention. Other issues, such as substance abuse, mental health problems, domestic violence, poverty, or lack of housing may need to be resolved before a parent will be able to take in and use new information, techniques, and perspective. In fact, helping parents to resolve those problems will strengthen their parenting to some degree – at which point you can assess whether there is a need for parenting education.

STRATEGIES TO USE WITH FAMILIES WHO ARE STRUGGLING



Wouldn't it be nice to have a "knowledge of parenting handbook" with all the answers about your child's development? The truth is that parenting is part natural, and part learned. There are days when parenting feels easy and when it feels challenging. Parenting strategies can vary depending on our child's age, development, and temperament. How we support parents by providing resources, and modeling strategies while letting them know they are not alone on this journey can make all the difference.

Encourage parents to attend parenting education classes. This allows parents to come together in a safe environment where they can learn from each other as well as a professional.



Formal parenting education will be most successful if it targets specific concerns that are very relevant to the target audience. Try to find classes that are focused on the types of challenges facing the parent.

Another element that makes parenting education more effective is the opportunity for parents to practice their new skills with their children. This can be difficult for noncustodial parents. If appropriate, arrange for children to attend the class with their parents (most parenting education programs will offer childcare and bring the children to join their parents at the end of the class) or suggest other ways the parent might be able to practice their new skills.

Exploring Parents' Strengths and Needs

All parents have everyday questions about raising their children, and they need timely answers and support from someone they trust. One way to describe this is simply to acknowledge:

Parents may feel more comfortable voicing concerns and exploring solutions when providers:

- Focus on the parents' own hopes and goals for their children.
- Help parents identify and build on their strengths in parenting.
- Model nurturing behavior by acknowledging frustrations and recognizing the parents' efforts.



Everyday questions lead to everyday actions that can support the optimal development and well-being of young children.

In order to explore...	Ask the parent...
The parent's view of their child's strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does your child do best? • What do you like about your child?
How the parent views their own role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you like about being a parent of an infant, preschooler, or teenager? • What are some of the things that you find challenging as a parent?
Ways the parent is currently responding to the child's needs and behaviors How the parent encourages positive behavior through praise and modeling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kinds of things make your child happy, frustrated, sad, or angry? • What does your child do when they are happy, frustrated, sad or angry? • Why do you think your child cries, eats slowly, says "no," or breaks rules?
Whether the parent can identify alternative solutions for addressing difficult behaviors Community, cultural and ethnic expectations and practices about parenting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How have you seen other parents handle this? What would your parents have done in this situation? • What teaching (discipline) methods work best for you? How does your child respond?
How the parent understands the child's development Any parental concern that the child's behavior appears to be outside the typical range	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you think your child compares to other children their age? • Are there things that worry you about your child? • Have others expressed concern about your child's behavior?
How the parent encourages healthy development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you respond to your baby's attempts to communicate? • How do you encourage your child to explore their surroundings, try new things and do things on their own? Be more independent and competent?