

The Protective Factors Framework

What is the Protective Factors Framework?

Protective Factors are characteristics or strengths of individuals, families, communities, or societies that act to mitigate risks and promote positive well-being and healthy development. Most often, they are seen as attributes that help families to successfully navigate difficult situations. The Protective Factors Framework¹ is an organized set of strengths-based ideas that are used to guide programs, services, supports, and interventions aimed at preventing child maltreatment and promoting healthy outcomes. The five factors are:

1. **Parental Resilience:** Managing stress and functioning well when faced with challenges, adversity, and trauma
2. **Social Connections:** Positive relationships that provide emotional, informational, instrumental, and spiritual support
3. **Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development:** Understanding child development and parenting strategies that support physical, cognitive, language, social, and emotional development
4. **Concrete Support in Times of Need:** Access to concrete support and services that address a family's needs and help minimize stress caused by challenges
5. **Social and Emotional Competence of Children:** Family and child interactions that help children develop the ability to communicate clearly, recognize and regulate their emotions, and establish and maintain relationships

How can you use the Protective Factors in your work?

- **As a needs assessment:** Examine the needs of the families and community you work with. What are their strengths? Which factors need additional support and development?
- **As a service planning tool:** Use the Framework to target your agency's service array, as well as to identify the factors that an individual family needs assistance in developing.
- **As an outcome measure to show the impact of your work:** Celebrate your successes by showing how families benefit from working with you. Assess the Protective Factors when families first come to you and then later on, either at a set time (e.g., 3 or 6 months of services, after a training ends, etc.)
- **As an advocacy tool with funders, policymakers, and stakeholders:** Use the framework as a tool to report on the needs of your families and community. Match your services to the factors they address and show how your agency is supporting the development of the Protective Factors.

How can the CEBC help?

- **Needs assessment:** The CEBC has reviewed the [Protective Factors Survey \(PFS\)](#), which is commonly used by Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) programs to assess changes in family Protective Factors. The PFS, along with the revised PFS-2, can be used as a baseline assessment and service planning tool for individual families. The results can be examined at the agency level to assist with training and service delivery plans. Other tools in the [Measurement Tools section](#) also examine Protective Factors and may be a good fit for your needs.
- **Service planning:** The CEBC has many topic areas that address Protective Factors. A few examples are given in Table 1. You can use the CEBC to identify evidence-based practices to meet the needs of your families and community.
- **Outcomes and evaluation:** The CEBC offers free consultation to agencies in California to review, refine, and revise their evaluation process, including guidance on measurement tools, data collection, and analyses. Assistance is provided via phone and video conference.
- **Advocacy tool:** The CEBC can provide feedback and support on the interpretation and presentation of agency data.

¹Harper Browne, C. (2014). *The strengthening families approach and protective factors framework: Branching out and reaching deeper*. Center for the Study of Social Policy.



Table 1. Crosswalk of Protective Factors and CEBC Topic Areas

Factor	Example Strategies	Relevant CEBC Topic Areas
Parental Resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support parents as decision-makers for their families • Encourage parents to practice self-care, especially when stressed • Develop plans for how to respond to parenting stress • Address underlying mental health and substance abuse issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anger Management Treatment • Depression Treatment • Parent Training Programs • Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (Secondary) • Substance Abuse Treatment
Social Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help identify positive supports in the family's existing network • Help parent network together and develop new friendships and supports • Identify and grow new social supports – community organizations, faith-based groups, schools, parents of children's friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Stabilization Programs • Father Involvement Interventions • Parent Partner Programs
Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent education classes • Home visiting programs • Identify reliable sources of parenting information when issues come up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home Visiting Programs for Child Well-Being • Home Visiting Programs for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect • Parent Training Programs
Concrete Support in Times of Need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage help-seeking behavior • Develop local resources to support client needs • Ensure warm hand-offs occur when referring families • Assess and address barriers families have experienced when accessing support services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Stabilization Programs • Interventions for Neglect • Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (Primary)
Social and Emotional Competence of Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect family to needed local resources that meet their level of need • Encourage social skill development in children • Role play appropriate interactions between parents and children • Address trauma needs of both child and family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depression Treatment • Disruptive Behavior Treatment • Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Programs (Birth to 5) • Mentoring Programs • Parent Training Programs • Substance Abuse Prevention (Child & Adolescent) Programs • Trauma Treatment

For [in-depth training](#) on each of the Protective Factors visit our partner project, [California Training Institute](#).

Visit the [Center for the Study of Social Policy](#) for more information on the [Protective Factors Framework](#).