Setting the Context

This Resource Guide was developed by the Office on Child Abuse and Neglect (OCAN) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Children's Bureau, Child Welfare Information Gateway, and the FRIENDS National Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention. OCAN released its first Resource Guide more than 15 years ago with the goal of raising awareness about emerging child abuse prevention concepts. It was created primarily to support community-based service providers who work to prevent child maltreatment and promote family well-being. However, over the years many others—including policymakers, health-care providers, program administrators, teachers, child care providers, parent leaders, mentors, and clergy—have found the resources useful.

IN THIS CHAPTER:

- Protective Factors 201
- An Enhanced Social-Ecological Approach
- New Protective Factors Conversation Guides
- Other Resources

Prevention is generally recognized as occurring at three levels: primary (directed at the general population), secondary (focused on families where risk factors are present), and tertiary (focused on families where maltreatment has already occurred). This guide has traditionally focused on *primary and secondary prevention* activities, which endeavor to stop maltreatment before it occurs.

Promoting protective factors has been central to the Resource Guide for many years. Protective factors are conditions or attributes in individuals, families, communities, or the larger society that mitigate or eliminate risk in families and communities, thereby increasing the health and well-being of children and families. Protective factors help parents find resources, supports, or coping strategies that allow them to parent effectively, even under stress. Since 2007, this Resource Guide has employed a protective factors framework adapted from the Strengthening Families framework developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy. The following are the six protective factors in this framework:

- Nurturing and attachment[1]
- Knowledge of parenting and of child and youth development
- Parental resilience
- Social connections
- Concrete supports for parents
- Social and emotional competence of children

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[1] "Nurturing and attachment" is not delineated as a separate protective factor within Strengthening Families; however, it is an implicit and valued component to the entire framework.

A [protective factors approach](#) to the prevention of child maltreatment focuses on positive ways to engage families by emphasizing their strengths and what parents and caregivers are doing well, as well as identifying areas where families have room to grow with support. This approach also can serve as the basis for collaborative partnerships with other service providers, such as early childhood, behavioral health, maternal and child health, and other family-serving systems that support children and families and promote child and family well-being.

Periodic revisions of the guide have introduced other key concepts, such as the following:

- How the experiences of early childhood, including **early trauma exposure,** have a lifelong impact on brain development

- The effects of **adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)**, such as child abuse and neglect, on physical and mental health into adulthood

- The ways that investments in **prevention strategies** keep children safe, families strong, and communities resilient and pay dividends well into the future

Many of these concepts—once on the cutting edge of practice—are now generally accepted truths. They underlie some of today's most effective prevention strategies, including home visiting programs, therapies to strengthen parent-child bonds, neighborhood-based family resource centers, interdisciplinary community collaborations, and more.

PROTECTIVE FACTORS 201

We live in an ever-evolving world, one we could not have predicted 15 years ago. The importance of protective factors, ACEs awareness, and trauma-informed approaches is widely recognized. Still, child and family serving agencies and the broader community face both systemic and practical challenges to integrating and implementing them in their daily work with families. Some communities have overcome these barriers and created comprehensive family well-being systems that wrap an array of protective, preventive interventions around families with phenomenal results—but these communities are still the exception, not the rule.

The current generation of child welfare and parent leaders knows *what* they need to be doing better for children and families, but they continue to need support in *how* to implement these concepts effectively.

That is why this year's Resource Guide takes a "Protective Factors 201" approach that shifts the focus to a deeper understanding of how successful families, neighborhoods, communities, and States are using the protective factors to protect children, strengthen families, and promote well-being.

Throughout this guide, the protective factors serve as a theoretical underpinning for many of the strategies described. Although they are not always referenced directly, they continue to be infused in this work in countless ways.

Foundational information about the protective factors can be found on the Information Gateway website. For a list of Protective Factors 101 resources, see [page 51](#) of this guide.

AN ENHANCED SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL APPROACH
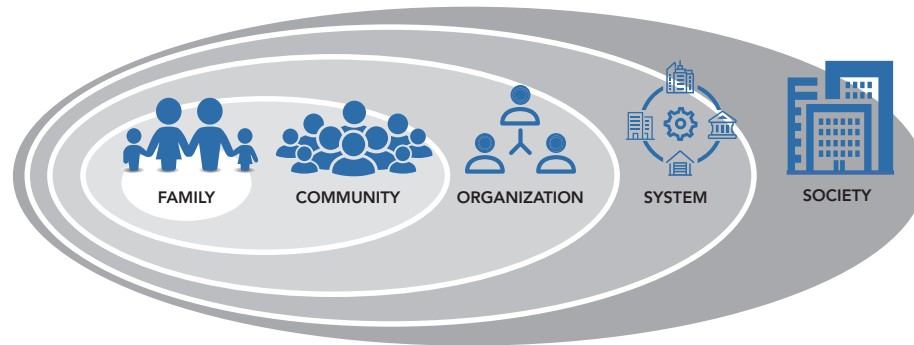
This year's Resource Guide continues and expands upon the tradition of addressing prevention from the perspective of a social-ecological model. This approach acknowledges that there are many factors beyond the individual child and family that affect caregivers' ability to nurture and protect their children.

A social-ecological model helps us understand the range of factors that place children at risk for abuse or neglect or protect them from experiencing maltreatment, including Federal and State policies, norms about child-rearing and asking for help, community and neighborhood resources and environments, and the approaches employed by family-serving organizations and systems. The overlapping rings in the model show how factors at one level influence those at other levels. To prevent maltreatment, social-ecological theory acknowledges that it is critical to take action across multiple levels of the model at the same time.

The next five chapters of this guide each address a different level of the social-ecological model:

- Chapter 2: Creating a More Supportive Society for All Families

- Chapter 3: Building Protective Systems: A Public Health Approach to Preventing Child Maltreatment

- Chapter 4: Aligning Organizations for Family Resilience and Healing

- Chapter 5: Embracing Community and the Wisdom of Lived Experience

- Chapter 6: Protective Factors Conversation Guides for Partnering With Families

These chapters offer caregivers, service providers, and community leaders a wealth of information, resources, and examples from Federal partners, Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) programs, and other communities and organizations that have successfully employed the strategies in this Resource Guide to effect real change for children and families. CBCAP programs are funded by the Children's Bureau to—among many important actions—develop, operate, enhance, and coordinate efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect and strengthen and support families.

We have found that the most successful prevention efforts are rarely accomplished by implementing an isolated program or practice; rather, they are achieved by employing and integrating many of the concepts represented here, in authentic partnership with families and through collaboration with many partners over extended periods of time.

At the end of chapters 2 through 5, you will find a series of questions to consider. We invite you to use these both for individual reflection in your work with families and as a starting point for conversations within your community group, agency, or jurisdiction. There is always room for learning and growth.

NEW PROTECTIVE FACTORS CONVERSATION GUIDES

Chapter 6 returns to the foundation of the protective factors in a new series of caregiver conversation guides. These guides were created to help users engage parents and caregivers in more personalized conversations about how they care for their children and themselves to create a stronger, more resilient family.

The interactive conversation guides draw on the legacy of Parent Cafés. These structured peer-to-peer conversations to strengthen families and prevent child abuse and neglect have been happening since at least 2007, when Strengthening Families Illinois debuted Parent Cafés, based on the World Café model. Parent Cafés were designed to facilitate deep individual self-reflection and peer-to-peer learning around the Strengthening Families protective factors. Similar models, sometimes called community cafés, have proliferated since then. Taking a variety of forms, these gatherings bring parents, caregivers, and other community members together for structured conversations that build leadership and relationships as well as the protective factors that help to strengthen their families.

For each protective factor, we provide talking points and guidance for the service provider, paired with a worksheet that can be used while engaged one-on-one with a parent or caregiver or as part of a group activity. After a brief introduction about the protective factor from a service provider, caregivers respond to prompts about their own family's strengths, sources of support, and areas where they may need additional support. Caregivers can customize each worksheet to reflect their family's unique circumstances and goals. Each worksheet is available in both English and Spanish. If you are missing a tip sheet you found useful in the past, never fear! Many of the former tip sheets are still available on the Information Gateway website.

OTHER RESOURCES

Additional resources for building strong and thriving families are available from the many national organizations and Federal partners listed in chapter 7 that have been vital in supporting and moving this important prevention work forward.