



TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF: FOR EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION PROVIDERS

Putting Protective Factors into Play for Yourself

When you spend all day working with children and their families, it can be difficult to focus on your own well-being. This is especially true at times when some of the children or families you work with need a lot of support. One of the best things about the Protective Factors Framework is that it applies to everyone – including you and your family! Putting protective factors into play in your own life can help you keep going in the face of the daily challenges of your job.

Personal Resilience

What do you do to take care of yourself? Try to plan ahead of time so that when you are having a bad day you can:

- Do something that helps you to relax, feel calm and take your mind off of the stress you are experiencing.
- Take a break if you need it. This can be as simple as asking your partner to make dinner or a friend to take care of your kids for an evening, or taking a personal day from work if you can.
- Remind yourself of why you do this work. Reflect on what drew you to work with children, and remember the important role you play in their lives and the lives of their families.
- Take time to remember the impact you have made in the lives of others – through your work, in your extended family, in your neighborhood or in your community.
- Get help from a supervisor or a coworker if you need it.
- Find a way on an ongoing basis to release the emotional stress related to your work. Identify actions that help you to decompress. That might mean spending time in nature, exercising, reading a novel or having a long talk with a good friend.
- Take care of yourself by eating well, getting rest and creating separation from work in the rest of your life. Identify actions that help you to decompress.

Social Connections

Are there people in your life who can support you during rough times and help you recharge outside of work? Make sure that you benefit from positive relationships with others:

- Cultivate a supportive environment at work so that you and your coworkers have time to get to know each other and can turn to each other for support when needed.
- Spend time with family, spiritual groups, clubs, hobbies, sports, recreation or any other activity that refreshes you. Look into joining groups or organizations as a way to meet new people. Book clubs, school organizations, religious communities or clubs focused on a hobby you enjoy can be great places to start.
- When you're having a tough day due to a particularly challenging situation, don't hesitate to reach out to colleagues. They've all had those days!
- Use staff meetings as an opportunity to do a staffing of a challenging child or family situation to obtain different perspective.
- Reach out to friends and loved ones for help and support. And when they're having a bad day, make sure that you do your best to help them in return.



Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

If you are a parent yourself, the challenges faced by some of the children and families you work with can hit especially close to home. It can be difficult to keep a healthy perspective on your children's development and your own parenting when you come home. Even if you are not a parent, or don't have children living at home, increasing your own knowledge and understanding of parenting may help you better handle frustrating situations at work.

- Just as parents can catch their children being good, we can all support each other as parents by “catching” good parenting in action, including our own. Recognize and pat yourself on the back when you have kept your cool during a stressful situation, or made a difficult decision regarding your child or family.
- Remember that parenting is part learned and part natural – and that goes for you as well even though you are an early childhood professional. Take time to find out more about child development and effective parenting. Try out the information in your own home and make it part of the knowledge base you bring to families.
- Take time to think about beliefs you hold about parenting and parent-child relationships and how they may affect your interactions with parents in your work. Are there things in your own experience that may be coloring your response to families?

Concrete Support in Times of Need

Everyone needs support at different times in their lives. You may sometimes be in a position to help families in your program find the services or resources they need. But what do you do when you need support yourself? Some ways to shore up your concrete supports include:

- Talk to friends, neighbors and family members to be sure you have people lined up who can pick up your child from school when you aren't able to or give you a ride to work if your car breaks down. You can do the same for them, and know you can count on each other when you're in a pinch.
- Put money into savings when things are going well. An emergency fund that can cover 2-3 months of living expenses is ideal, in case you should face illness, unemployment or unexpected expenses.
- Stay aware of community resources available to help with issues that can come up for any family, such as substance abuse, mental health issues, domestic violence and material needs. Those can be valuable connections in a time of crisis not just for the families you work with but for yourself, a friend or a member of your extended family.
- If you've had a very difficult work situation, don't hesitate to ask your supervisor or agency administrator for counseling assistance for yourself and your co-workers who have been affected.

Social and Emotional Competence of Children

You got into this work because you care about children. Take time every day to connect with the children you work with and reflect on their progress over the time you've known them. Remember the importance of your work and the effect you have on them and their lives.