



TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

Putting Protective Factors into Play for Yourself

Child welfare work is hard. When you spend all day working with families who need a lot of support, it can be difficult to focus on your own well-being. One of the best things about the Protective Factors Framework is that it applies to everyone – including you and your family! Thinking about how to put protective factors into play in your own life can help you keep going in the face of the daily challenges of doing child welfare work.

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 the kids, or taking a personal day from work).
- Remind yourself of why you do this work. Reflect on what drew you to social work as a career and what you want to achieve for children and families in your community through your work.
- 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 the work. Allow yourself physical & emotional enhancers. Take care of yourself by eating well, getting rest, creating separation from work. Identify actions that help you to decompress.
- Recognize your own humanness and learn ways to separate who you are as a person from what the job requires you to do.

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 removes you from the stress of work. 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 backlog on cases or a particularly challenging family, don't hesitate to reach out to colleagues.
- Use unit meetings as an opportunity to do a staffing of a challenging case 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 children in the child welfare system 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, it is important to check your assumptions and understanding about parenting and child development through your interactions with families that are struggling.

- Just as parents can catch their children being good, we can all support each other as parents by “catching” good parenting in action. Recognize and pat yourself on the back when you have kept your cool during a stressful situation.
- Remember that parenting is part learned and part natural and that goes for you as well even though you are a “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 it impacts your child welfare 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. As a child welfare worker, you are probably more attuned than many community members to the resources available in your community. What do you do when you need support yourself? Some ways to shore up your concrete supports include:

- 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 case that has not ended well, don't hesitate to ask your supervisor or agency administrator for counseling assistance for yourself and others within your unit.
- 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.
- 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.

Social and Emotional Competence of Children

Many of us get into child welfare because we care about children. Take time in your work to connect with the children in your caseload – and remember the importance of your work and the effect you have on them and their lives.