

Motivation Monday, April 20, 2020

We All Have a Part in Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect: Building Social Connections

“I define connection as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship.” -Dr. Brene Brown

A Parent’s Definition of Concrete Supports, Adapted from the [PA Strengthening Families Website](#)

To acknowledge the importance of Child Abuse Prevention Month, the Family Support Team is continuing to work to increase awareness and understanding of the Strengthening Families™ Protective Factors Framework through **Motivation Mondays!** This is important because when these five Protective Factors are present and robust in families, children are safe and families thrive.

This week, the Family Support Team is focusing on the Strengthening Families Protective Factor: Social Connections.

Why Is This Protective Factor Important?

People need people. Specifically, caregivers need people who care about them. They need someone (or ideally a few people) who can be a non-judgmental listener, who they can call when concerned, need to vent, or to share an exciting moment. Healthy social connections provide a sense of belonging, validation and encouragement. This protective factor promotes creating social networks that support positive parenting practices. Social connections stimulate community building, and encourage the opportunity to give back by helping others. It is valuable to be able to help someone else at a time when we might feel helpless.

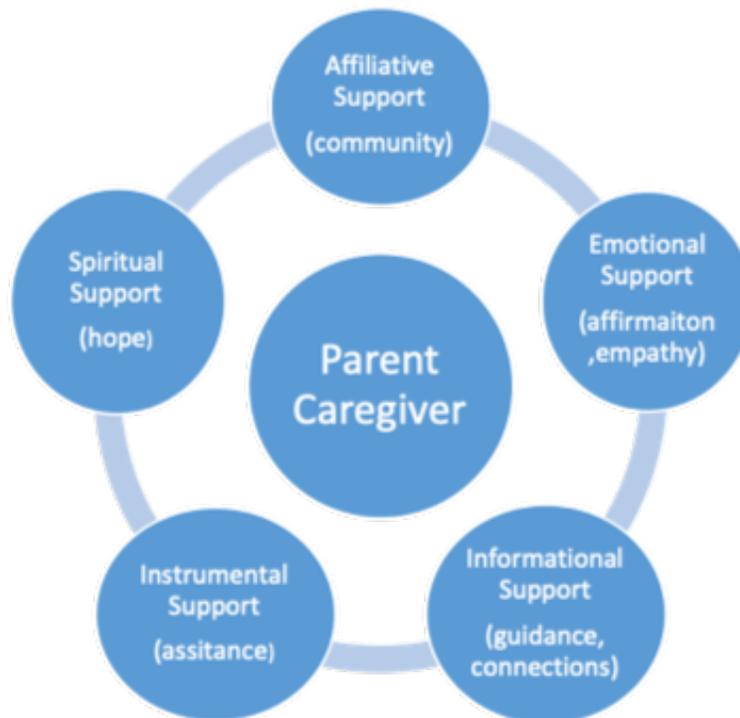


Figure 1 Elements of Social Connections from "[Branching Out and Reaching Deeper](#)" Charlyn Harper Browne, Ph.D. [CSSP](#)

Preventing Child Abuse with Concrete Supports

Social isolation is strongly connected to child maltreatment. This protective factor encourages strengthening the positive social connections for caregivers that reduce isolation. At this time of staying physically distant from people other than those in our household, we may feel an even stronger need to connect. Conversely, we may feel stress from being too close with the members of our household. Some ways family support professionals can help caregivers to build their social connections and reduce stress:

- Encourage caregivers to reach out to friends and relatives with whom they have positive relationships.
- Use social media such as Facebook as a way to connect, not to compare.
- Take time away from screens and disconnect from media. Play a game with those in the house.
- Encourage mutual support among families through offering to connect families via telephone or email or social media (with permission).
- Provide opportunities to contribute to the community.

Some internet activities that might be fun to do together with others in the house:

- Take a [virtual walk in the forest](#), especially if you're not somewhere that you can take easy advantage of nature (length 30:41)
- Check out [10 of the world's best virtual museum and art gallery tours](#) (lengths vary)
- And for kids (and kids at heart), [take a virtual field trip to a zoo](#) (lengths vary)

Check out these [Action Sheets](#) from CSSP, which provides more concrete ways that you can help families build Social Connections!

Resources for This Protective Factor

The Wisconsin Child Abuse and Prevention Board developed "Five for Families". This webpage includes videos in which parents describe the importance of [Connecting with Others](#) (social connections).

Some suggestions from [Georgia Division of Family and Children Services Prevention and Community Support Section](#) about staying close to friends and family despite the coronavirus: video call grandparents; plan virtual gatherings with friends; and spend quality time without screens. There is practical information about each protective factor.

Child Information Gateway offers a course, "[Train Staff With Protective Factors in Practice Vignettes](#)" that might be useful.

The Children's Trust Fund Alliance states that "Child neglect is the most prevalent form of child maltreatment and also the least clearly defined, understood and publicly recognized." Check this website for information, strategies and interventions that promote [preventing child neglect](#).

This National Association for Family, School, Community Engagement (NAFSCE) webinar: "[Engaging Families Through the Coronavirus Pandemic: National Organizations Share Their Plans](#)" features national family support and advocacy organizations plans to remain connected with families and provide resources related to the Coronavirus.

Our Communities' Response

“Alone, we can do so little; together we can do so much.” -Helen Keller

The [Family Resource Center of Blair County](#) has been working hard to keep their families engaged during COVID-19. Families were asked to submit photos of their activities. The Center then compiled these photos into a slideshow.

[Monessen Family Center](#) understands that kitchens are made to bring families together. Recently, they asked their families to cook together, giving children the chance to help prepare a meal.

Interested in sharing something positive from your community? Please send a message to your designated Family Support Consultant or Technical Assistance Specialist!

Social Media

While social media, Zoom and other internet applications have allowed many of us to remain connected, the constant flow of information could be overwhelming. As we remind families to stay connected via the web and smart phones, also encourage quiet time. This [article](#) by Steve Hickman, PSY.D provides interesting insights and tips.

The Wisconsin Prevention Board also provides [“Ideas for Connecting with Others Online”](#) which includes many great ideas to support families and programs using social media.

The Children’s Trust Alliance, a leading advocate for child abuse and neglect prevention, offers professional development about the Strengthening Families™ Protective Factors and [partners with parents](#) to develop tools and a social media to share the protective factors with each other.

The [Children's Bureau](#), within the [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#), funds the National Child Abuse Prevention Month initiative each April on the [Child Welfare Information Gateway](#) has release a [social media campaign](#) that you can use in your community.

At this time when access to health care is so important recognize that there are inequities in the system. Help families advocate for themselves and for reforms. The National Institute for Children’s Health Quality has launched a campaign about health equity, [National Minority Health Month Social Media Resources](#).

Be Strong Families offers daily webinars at 12 PM CT (English) and 1:30 PM CT (Spanish). These are opportunities for parents and staff members to share with and learn from each other as they build their personal plan for navigating the COVID-19 pandemic through building protective factors. Learn more about the webinars and [register here](#).

Resources

For Family Support Programs all resources provided in this email will be posted the next day to: <http://www.pa-home-visiting.org/covid-19/> under the appropriate Protective Factor heading. Please look for Social and Emotional Competence in the menu on the right hand side of the page.

Please note that ChildLine is available 24/7 to anyone wishing to report child abuse and general child well-being concerns at **1-800-932-0313** and at www.KeepKidsSafe.pa.gov. ChildLine response will not change because staff are teleworking from their homes.

The Office of Child Development and Early Learning would like to thank Early Intervention Technical Assistance and the Center for Schools and Communities for their support in this messaging.