

COACHING ON PROTECTIVE AND PROMOTIVE FACTORS

Overview

The Center for the Study of Social Policy has developed two related frameworks:

- **Strengthening Families**, which focuses on families with young children (birth to age eight)
- **Youth Thrive**, which focuses on older children and adolescents (ages nine-26)

Both frameworks are based on current research findings and aim to build five key **protective and promotive factors**. Protective and promotive factors are conditions or attributes of individuals, families, communities or the larger society that mitigate or eliminate risk and promote well-being. The presence of stronger protective and promotive factors in families increases the probability of achieving positive outcomes, even in the face of adversity.

A hallmark of these initiatives is that they are not new models or programs, rather they are **approaches to policy and practice** that can be infused into everyday interactions with families. Using these frameworks, frontline workers can make small but significant shifts to more consistently identify and support protective and promotive factors in families. It is critical to introduce workers to the protective and promotive factor concepts through trainings. Real uptake happens only when knowledge of protective and promotive factors is reinforced, and workers are supported in implementing the framework's ideas within their day-to-day practice.

This **worksheet should be used as a part of regular supervision sessions**. The worksheet can stand alone, or its content can be incorporated within existing agency supervision tools. The worksheet provides supervisors with key questions on each of the protective and promotive factors. It can be used to guide discussion with caseworkers about specific families on their caseload and also provides ideas around focusing on protective and promotive factors to reach case plan goals. Specifically, the worksheet helps guide supervisors in:

- **Identifying workers' skills**
- **Knowing what to look for** in the case plan and in on-going activities with families and youth
- **Engaging in coaching activities** to build workers' skills for the five protective and promotive factors

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General Coaching Activities

Worker:

Family:

Date:

Ask the worker to answer the following questions based on a specific family or youth on their caseload:

- What protective and promotive factors are already in place for this family and/or youth?

- How can these strengths be used to help address the issues that brought the family to the attention of the child welfare system?

- How can protective and promotive factors be built or supported as part of the case plan?
 - Actions the family/youth will take:

 - Actions the worker will take:

 - Services or resources that will be engaged:

- What challenges is the worker experiencing in building protective and promotive factors with families and youth?
 - Brainstorm solutions with them to address any challenges.
 - Help them practice questions they can ask family members/ youth.
 - Observe interactions between the worker and families/youth and provide feedback.
 - Identify a staff member, co-worker or community partner who is a positive role model/example of how to implement a particular skill. Pair the two staff members to tackle a particular task together (e.g., go on a home visit together, collaborate to organize a family team meeting).
 - Consider additional training, on-the-job shadowing or a visit to a particular program or community organization that would help the worker gain new insight or experience.

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Resilience

The worker is consistently able to:

- Project a positive and strengths-based approach to the family/youth
- Encourage the caregiver to talk about stresses or challenges they experience, both in caring for the child and in life in general
- Encourage youth to talk about stresses or challenges they are experiencing
- Provide empathetic support and help the caregiver/youth to solve problems
- Support the family/youth as key decision-makers throughout the case planning process
- Validate and support good decisions
- Ask about activities the caregiver enjoys doing with the child/youth and identify opportunities for the family to do these activities as part of their regular routines
- Encourage the caregiver to explore personal experiences of trauma and understand how those experiences impact them in the present
- Normalize the fact that parenting is stressful and help the caregiver/youth plan ahead about how to respond to stress
- Encourage self-care strategies
- Work with older youth on identifying their hopes and dreams and to develop plans to make progress toward their goals
- Support youth in gaining experience with solving problems and dealing with setbacks

The worker can describe:

- Specific strengths of the family as a whole, as well as specific strengths for each family member
- Issues the family faces from the caregiver's point of view

Case plans contain:

- Parent/youth participation and input
- Specific self-care actions for the caregiver/youth
- Proactive strategies to cope with stress and/or the difficult situations that might have resulted in abuse or neglect in the past
- Specific services/resources to address issues that could undermine resilience (e.g., depression, family violence, substance abuse)

Extra support may be needed if the worker...

- Speaks very negatively about the family/youth
- Is not comfortable with the family/youth playing an active decision-making role in the case
- Has a personal history or trauma that is triggered by interactions with families
- Does not recognize or respond to caregivers' trauma histories or the implications of trauma histories

Coaching Activities may include...

- Reviewing the concept of resilience and how this particular family/youth has/has not been able to "bounce back" from problems
- Asking the caseworker to tell you the family/youth's story from their point of view
- Helping the worker confront any fears about family decision-making
- Role playing how to respond to scenarios that cause concern
- Asking what the worker is most worried about for this family/youth and helping the worker craft responses to these situations
- Providing opportunities for the worker to practice being empathetic and supportive during challenging conversations with families/youth

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Knowledge of parenting and child & adolescent development

The worker is consistently able to:

- Model nurturing, warm and loving behaviors/interactions with children and youth
- Observe and provide positive coaching around child development, nurturing and behavior management strategies
- Model appropriate expectations for the child and engage the caregiver in dialogue when expectations are not in line with the child's developmental stage
- Ask the caregiver about parenting challenges and recommend resources for how to address those challenges
- Connect caregivers to parenting education classes or resources as part of case planning
- Connect youth to "normal" adolescent development opportunities and resources
- Emphasize the critical importance of nurturing care and help the caregiver value their own role
- Provide "just in time" parenting education—information a parent needs at the time when parenting issues arise—by sharing and discussing tip sheets/resources related to parenting issues
- Help the caregiver identify friends, family members, neighbors and other trusted adults who can provide parenting information and support

The worker can describe:

- Parenting issues appropriate to the child/youth's developmental stage
- Any specific developmental delays, issues or concerns with the child/youth
- Sources the family turns to for parenting information

Case plans contain:

- Specific actions to help the caregiver build their knowledge of child and adolescent development
- Documentation of coaching or information provided on parenting issues
- Support for positive activities with child/youth

Extra support may be needed if the worker...

- Has difficulty being warm or nurturing with children/youth
- Does not have a strong understanding of child/youth development
- Is not sensitive to how culture/ethnicity/religion influences child rearing
- Has difficulty engaging caregivers about parenting and child development in a way that is respectful, responsive and builds on cultural, racial, ethnic and religious heritage

Coaching activities may include...

- Reviewing information on child and adolescent development to address particular gaps
- Providing opportunities for the worker to participate in parenting classes or otherwise strengthen their knowledge base in parenting and child/adolescent development
- Role playing a situation where the caregiver is struggling with a parenting issue to help the worker practice what to say and do
- Having the worker identify three parenting issues that parents in their caseload are currently dealing with, and, for each of these issues:
 - Listing the resources they are connecting families to
 - Describing how they provide information and guidance
- Having the worker practice coaching around alternative discipline activities and strategies
- Supporting the worker in participating in training on cultural diversity, competence and humility
- Developing, finding and/or sharing listings of community resources that support families with varying cultural, ethnic or religious backgrounds

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Social Connections

The worker is consistently able to:

- Model good relationships and behaviors that builds positive connections
- Use the case management process as an opportunity to help the caregiver/youth develop stronger relationship skills
- Help the caregiver/youth reflect on their existing relationships and identify people in their network who are positive supports
- Brainstorm with the caregiver/youth around how to manage relationships with people who are negative influences
- Encourage the caregiver/youth to expand or deepen their social network
- Encourage the caregiver to address any specific issues (e.g., anxiety, depression) that are barriers for developing healthy social connections

The worker can describe:

- The family/youth's social network, who is in it, and the quality of their relationships
- How the family/youth responds in social situations
- Strategies that help caregivers/youth negotiate and maintain reasonable boundaries with individuals who are somehow problematic or unsupportive of healthy development

Case plans contain:

- Specific steps to involve the family/youth's social network in positive ways
- Strategies to expand the family's social network (especially if the caregiver/youth seems isolated or lonely)

Extra support may be needed if the worker...

- Does not include the family's social network in case planning and activities
- Dismisses the importance of the youth/caregiver's social relationships
- Encourages the youth/caregiver to end negative relationships without building up or developing positive ones

Coaching activities may include...

- Developing an eco-map or genogram with the family and reviewing it together
- Practicing establishing genuine, caring relationships that are respectful of boundaries and encourage pro-social behaviors (e.g., sharing, having fun together)
- Identifying additional opportunities for caregivers/youth to participate in activities related to parenting (e.g., parent cafes, support groups), other types of activities (e.g., sports, arts, walking) and/or organizations they enjoy (e.g., faith-based institutions, neighborhood groups, schools)
- Going with families/youth to try out activities or new experiences that can help build connections, when appropriate

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Concrete Supports

The worker is consistently able to:

- Help the caregiver/youth identify the concrete services/supports they need
- Help the caregiver understand their role as an advocate for themselves and the child
- Encourage help-seeking behavior and reinforce that asking for help can be a sign of strength
- Work with the family/youth to understand past experience with service systems, as well as any negative experiences, frustrations or stigma they associate with certain services or providers
- Help the family to navigate complex systems (e.g., explaining eligibility requirements, finding and filling out forms)
- Make meaningful referrals with a connection to another individual who can help the caregiver/family negotiate access to needed services/supports
- Help caregivers/youth practice ways to handle setbacks and plan methods to get what they need.

The worker can describe:

- Concrete needs that are creating stress on the family
- The family/youth's history of accessing services
- Sources of concrete support available through both the agency and the community

Case plans contain:

- Specific referrals for concrete supports and plans for follow-up/follow-through
- Specific actions the family/youth can take to get the help they need

Extra support may be needed if the worker...

- Is not trying to address unmet needs
- Is not aware of internal agency programs or supports and guidelines for accessing these
- Does not know where to turn for concrete needs external to the agency
- Does not engage caregivers/youth as partners in securing support

Coaching activities may include...

- Making sure the worker is taking care of specific needs right away while meeting with family members
- Helping the worker think through how to solve specific problems with a family/youth (e.g., steps to take, who can help, how to get unstuck)
- Providing time for the worker to visit or get to know available resources in the community, preferably by going with a family/youth to access needed supports
- Role playing ways to engage the family/youth as partners in planning, even in cases where the worker has different perspectives on appropriate next steps
- Helping the worker think through possible challenges that might affect the family/youth's follow-through on recommended services

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Cognitive and Social Emotional Competence of Children and Youth

The worker is consistently able to:

- Provide warm and consistent support to children/youth
- Look for signs of trauma in children/youth
- Connect children/youth and caregivers who have experienced trauma to appropriate mental health resources
- Help caregivers/youth to understand and interpret behavior that stems from trauma
- Increase caregivers' awareness of the importance of early relationships and of their role in nurturing their children's social-emotional development
- Understand the role of caregivers in nurturing adolescents as they gain greater independence
- Provide concrete tips and connect the family to resources that help the caregiver support the child's social-emotional development
- Help caregivers and children deal with attachment issues and/or other challenging behaviors

The worker can describe:

- Children or youth's social emotional development
- How children or youth are doing in school (e.g., attendance, achievement, appropriate services)
- How trauma impacts children
- How any existing signs of trauma are being addressed
- "Red flags," or concerns in behavior that indicate need for additional supports (e.g., early intervention, mental health services)

Case plans contain:

- Specific activities to support the child/youth's development
- Connections to children's mental health resources (if the child/youth appears to have symptoms of trauma or other mental health needs)
- Documentation of all appropriate developmental screenings
- Collaboration with intervention or educational services, if needed

Extra support may be needed if the worker...

- Appears to be unsympathetic to the child/youth's emotional reactions
- Has difficulty being warm and affectionate with children or youth

Coaching activities may include...

- Asking the worker to describe the situation from the child/youth's point of view
- Having the worker spend some time in a high quality child care center to observe/learn how good providers respond to children
- Providing the worker with regular opportunities to connect with children's developmental specialists and mental health consultants to get feedback and support on understanding and meeting the social-emotional needs of children/youth
- Having the worker join the caregiver, child or youth in an activity that encourages positive cognitive and/or social emotional skills (e.g., playing games, doing a craft project together, going on an outing, following through on a task together) and debriefing with them afterwards about what the worker learned/potential next-steps.