



Risk Factors & Protective Factors



Founded in 1959 by Sara O'Meara and Yvonne Fedden on
PREVENTION *and* TREATMENT of CHILD ABUSE

Risk factors for abuse & neglect¹

Child abuse and neglect occur in all types of families, no matter the income, education, family size, race, religion, or any other trait.

While there is no way to know the exact risk a child faces, there are some factors for abuse and neglect risk we should be aware of:

Child Factors

- o Very young children
- o Children with disabilities and health problems
- o Children who have already been, or are currently being, abused and/or neglected

Parental Factors

- o Parents who are young when child is born
- o Parents who are poorly informed about parenting
- o Mental health issues, especially untreated
(e.g. depression, antisocial personality disorder, substance abuse and related disorders)

Other Contextual Factors

Family Factors

Single-parent households
Intimate-partner violence
Emotional and financial stress

Environmental Factors

Poverty
Social isolation
Violence in the community

¹Compiled from: New Directions in Child Abuse and Neglect Research, National Academy of Sciences and Child Welfare Information Gateway, Factors that Contribute to Child Abuse and Neglect ²Compiled from information provided by the Child Welfare Information Gateway and the Administration on Children, Youth and Families Protective Factors Framework

Factors to strengthen families and protect children²

While groups that work to protect children can function very differently, many follow a model that focuses on ways to protect children and build stronger families.

Nurturing and attachment

Parents and caregivers give affection and nurturing in different ways depending on the needs of the child and how they learned to parent. Consistent positive bonds between children and adults in their lives are important. The impact is most significant for the very youngest children, but caregivers continue to nurture their children throughout their lives.

Child's social and emotional skills

Children count on parents and caregivers to learn about emotions and learn how to relate to others in their lives. These skills are important to protect children from harm.

Parental Resilience

Parents that can change their attitudes and behaviors for the benefit of their child provide more consistent strength and support. Emotional resilience is a combination of flexibility and strength that can be learned and practiced. Think about a spring that bounces back, or a reed that bends, but does not break under stress.

Knowledge of parenting and child development

Every parent or caregiver should become an expert by learning: **parenting skills, how children grow and change and about their own child's unique needs and abilities.**

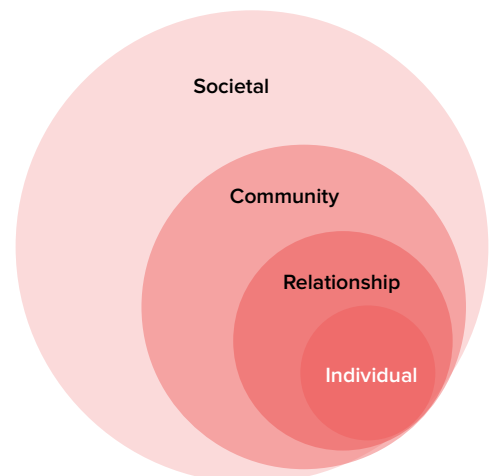
Social Connections

Building webs of trust with family and friends makes a family stronger and more resilient. Families who struggle need friends, neighbors and other loved ones to help.

Support systems for times of need

To provide children with adequate care, families must have their basic needs met in terms of food, clothing, housing, and access to other essentials (transportation, child care, medical attention). When families struggle to meet those needs, community and social resources can help.

It is useful to think of the factors that protect a child from abuse and neglect as a series of barriers, with the child on the inside, society at-large on the outside, and in between, families and other social systems that impact a child's life.



Skills for the individual

Examples of individual characteristics and skills that have been shown to protect the overall well-being of children include the following:

Self-regulation

Healthy coping skills and strategies to manage emotions and control behaviors

Relational skills

Tools to build healthy relationships (like honesty, effective communication, asserting interpersonal boundaries, refusal skills, compromise, and teamwork)

Problem solving skills

Build resilience and competently resolve conflicts with a balance of help-seeking and autonomy

Involvement in positive activities

Extracurricular activities, clubs, church groups, and rewarding work help build a sense of community and achievement

Relational Factors

Secure, loving relationships with parents and caregivers are central to ensuring safe, healthy childhoods. Similarly, compassionate relationships between peers promote feelings of safety and empathy, prevent bullying, and provide emotional support.

Parenting competencies

Parenting skills and understanding of child development: Effective parents are “experts on parenting” with knowledge of child development, discipline strategies, and other parenting skills.

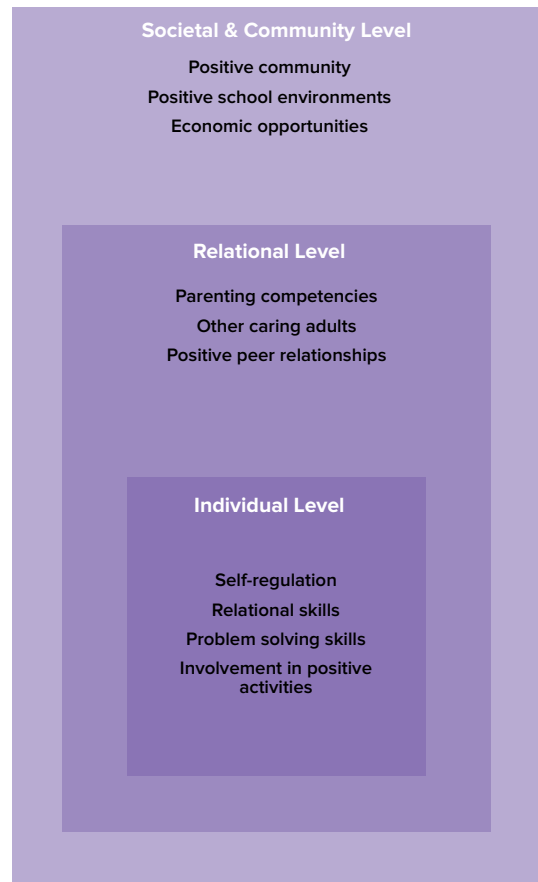
Positive interactions between parents and child: Children are safer and healthier when they enjoy a close, caring relationship with parents who nurture and respect them.

Caring adults outside immediate family

Aside from parents and guardians, children need adults in their lives to serve as mentors and provide enriching companionship to parents

Positive peer relationships

A child’s own friends provide support and are instrumental in a child’s social and emotional development.



Factors in the community & in society

Positive community

Churches, clubs and neighborhood groups can provide safe, stable and equitable environments for children and families. Strong community enriches lives by providing company of others and access to helpful family resources.

Positive school environments

In addition to academic opportunities, schools provide access to a bounty of social programs and opportunities to build on other protective factors.

Economic opportunities

Families must have access to necessary resources to ensure the safety, health and well-being of children. Consistent employment, access to adequate health care and access to social services strengthen families and protect children.