Protective Factors- 30 Minutes credit

## What are protective factors?

Protective factors are attributes of a child, family, and community that promote wellbeing and reduce the risk for negative outcomes. Protective factors impact the individual, family and community’s ability to manage difficult circumstances and promote positive outcomes for the individual, family or community.

## How do Protective Factors Relate to Foster Care?

Children in foster care are often exposed to circumstances that place them “at risk” for negative outcomes in their lives. Identifying and developing protective factors for children in foster care at the individual, relationship and community level can help those children cope with trauma and increase resilience in the short term, allowing time and increased ability for therapeutic interventions to address the child’s recovery in the long term. This can promote skills, characteristics, opportunities and relationships which will offset the impact of risk factors.

## What Protective Factors Most Impact Outcomes for Children in Foster Care?

Research literature has indicated that it is essential to work at various levels to impact individual skills and knowledge, focus on nurturing relationships and increase supports and opportunities available in the community.

Protective factors are directly related to: lower risk for homelessness, substance abuse, unemployment, criminal behavior and incarceration, and many other negative outcomes that are sadly, very common, for children in the foster care system.

The presence of protective factors promotes a child’s increased ability to cope with stress, build healthy attachments, increase confidence and feelings of self-worth, develop independent living skills and have more positive outcomes in their lives.

The following protective factors have the strongest evidence to support better outcomes for children in foster care and/or children who have been abused or neglected.

# The Child’s Skills and/or Knowledge: Individual Level

**Sense of purpose**: A child’s connection with religion, faith or spirituality

**Self-regulation skills**: a child’s ability to manage and control his/her emotions and behaviors (anger management, self-control, emotional intelligence)

**Relational Skills**: a child’s ability to form positive bonds and connections (social skills, empathy, friendships and relationships) as well as his or her interpersonal skills (communication skills and conflict resolution skills)

**Problem-solving skills**: A child’s ability to navigate problems and think of solutions

**Involvement in positive activities**: Activities that promote a positive sense of identity and connect the child with their community, such as sports, clubs, religious groups, etc.

# People in the Child’s Life: Relationship Level

**Parenting Competencies**: Parenting skills of both the birth family and the foster family such as adequate supervision, consistency, setting clear expectations, positive reinforcement and appropriate discipline

**Positive Peer Group:** Children who share interests such as sports or hobbies

**Caring Adults:** Positive adults in the child’s life, such as a teacher, mentor, coach or advocate

**Parent or caregiver well-being:** Caregivers with strong emotional skills, lower stress levels and social supports

# The Community Level

**Positive School Environment:** School environment and programs that effectively meet children’s needs

**Stable Living Situation:** Achieving permanency (return home, placement with relative, adoption) for youth in care is directly related to the child’s success after leaving the foster care system

**Positive Community Environment:** neighborhood cohesion, community belonging and involvement

# What Can You Do?

Foster parents can work with the child(ren) in their home to assess and promote the protective factors in their lives. You can identify protective factors that are present and work to build factors that are absent. Help a child build his/her relationship skills by keeping them connected with family and friends, creating a life book and getting them involved in extracurricular activities.

***Answer these below questions and email them to*** ***tspeight@nvfs.org*** ***or*** ***mpalanci@nvfs.org*** ***to receive credit for this training.***

1. Why is it necessary to determine what protective factors are present for foster children?
2. How can you assist a child to develop “problem solving skills”, a protective factor?
3. What protective factor(s) does a foster parent offer to a foster child?
4. Why do children benefit from protective factors?