

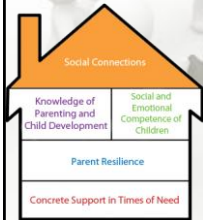
Social Connections



Social Connections



Build and maintain positive relationships that can provide emotional, instrumental, informational, spiritual, and other helpful support.



What is the #1 predictor of how long and how well you will live?



The quality of your close personal relationships!

Dr. Dean Ornish says he knows of no other factor – "not diet, not smoking, not exercise, not stress, not genetics, not drugs, not surgery" – that has such a major impact on quality of life, incidence of illness and premature death from all causes.

(Dr. Dean Ornish, founder of the Preventative Medicine Research Institute in California)

Benefits of Social Connections

(one of our 3 basic needs)



- Strong connection between perceived social support and happiness (.70 correlation)
- Social support affects health – high levels are as predictive of living a long time as regular exercise (low levels are as damaging as high blood pressure)
- Oxytocin is released, reducing anxiety, depression, improving heart and immune systems
- People receiving emotional support during 6 months after a heart attack were 3 times more likely to survive



Benefits of Social Connections



- When parents have good connections, children have access to more caring adults.
- Children learn about building and maintaining friendships by watching how adults interact.
- Children's safety depends on *strong* families; *strong* families depend on *strong* connections.



Quality Connections vs. Quantity Connections



- How many “friends” do you have on Facebook or other forms of social media?
- How much support do you feel from them? ☺
- Research shows it is not how *many* people an individual knows, but the quality of the relationships people have and the support they feel.



Social Support – Reaching Out



- Most research focuses on what people receive.
- Benefits of providing social support to others:
 - ▢ Giving feels better, does more for you, and has more benefits in the long run than getting support.
 - ▢ A “good life” focuses on what we receive. A “meaningful life” focuses on what we give.

“Even people who think they don’t want a lot of social contact still benefit from it. And it’s not just that we ‘all need somebody to lean on’; recent work on giving support shows that caring for others is more beneficial than is receiving help”

- Jonathan Haidt

Ways to Build Connections



- Giving back by volunteering and serving in one's community helps people feel better about themselves *and* they can connect with others.
- What are some other ways families can build connections in your community?



Helping Families Build Connections



- Some families need more help getting connected in the community.
- Many of you serve as a social connection for parents.
- What do you or your organization (if a service provider) already do to help families build social connections?

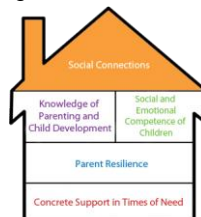


Social Connections



Key Principles:

- Child safety depends on strong families, and strong families depend on strong communities.
- Some families need extra help building and maintaining quality social connections.
- Recognize parents' bids for connecting and find ways to turn toward them.



Summary – Five Protective Factors

- **Concrete Support in Times of Need** – basic needs must be met to thrive; services and supports must be available during crises
- **Parental Resilience** – bouncing back from challenges, managing stress and problems in healthy ways, and reaching out for help
- **Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development** – accurate information about child development and appropriate expectations for children's behavior; building the parent-child relationship through nurturing and guiding
- **Social and Emotional Competence of Children** – effectively communicating and reflecting feelings; interacting positively with others; turn towards bids for connection
- **Social Connections** – social networks provide emotional support, help solve problems and offer opportunities for parents to give back

Ideas and Insights for Improvement

- What have you learned?
- What have you committed to do with what you have learned?

Strong Patterns, Stable Children:
Building Protective Factors for
Vulnerable Families

Notes and insights for improvement: I will keep at it...

Things I am doing well:

Now clear and things I will try doing more of:

Things I will do less of:

WELCOME TO TODAY
ANOTHER DAY
ANOTHER CHANCE
FEEL FREE TO
CHANGE

Willing to share?

Resources – www.ctf4kids.org

- Resources in the binder are available free to print from <http://www.uaex.edu/health-living/personal-family-well-being/parenting/> and <https://store.aces.edu/>
 - ▢ Nine 2-page guidesheets on Ages and Stages
 - ▢ Over 50 guidesheets on parenting and children topics



The Parenting Journey

Learn the six principles that will make you a more effective parent.



Online Resources



- ☐ Center for the Study of Social Policy – Strengthening Families
<http://www.cssp.org/reform/strengthening-families>
- ☐ National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds – www.ctfalliance.org
- ☐ Department of Mental Health – Early Childhood Mental Health
website: www.stopandplay.org
- ☐ Extension resources - www.Extension.org/parenting
- ☐ National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families -
<https://healthymarriageandfamilies.org/>



Strong Parents, Stable Children: *Building Protective Factors to Strengthen Families*



Social Connections

Make Time to Unwind with Social Connections

Parents need to know they have someone who cares about them and who they can call on once in a while when they need someone to listen, give some advice, help solve problems, or just when they feel a little “down.” When parents feel connected and believe there are others who care about them, they feel more confident and secure, have a better parental mood, and are more responsive to their children. These supports also help buffer against stressors, which helps parents be more nurturing to their children and promote secure attachments. Finding out about and building on parents’ current or possible social connections, interests and abilities is a great way to partner with parents. It is difficult for some parents to find time to establish and maintain social connections. Building new social connections is particularly difficult for some parents, including those who are new to a community, recently divorced, and new parents.

Here are some ways you can help:

- Create or find opportunities for parents to participate in social events with other parents.
- Talk about the benefits of getting out with others for fun or joining a group to learn a new skill.
- Think about what you can provide to parents to help them get out for an evening.
- Share information about community activities and events or support groups that might be of interest.

Here are some questions you can ask:

- Do you have family or friends close by who help you out from time to time?
- How easy is it for you to make friends?
- Do you belong to a church, temple, or mosque? Or to a community group or service organization? What do you like best about participating in these groups?
- Who can you call for advice or just to talk? How often do you see them?
- What do you enjoy doing for fun or to relax?
- Do you have family members or friends nearby who can help you out once in a while?
- Are you interested in meeting other moms/dads who have similar interests as you?
- What would you need so that you could participate in some activities outside the home?
- How does your partner help so you can interact with others from time to time?

Strong Parents, Stable Children: *Building Protective Factors to Strengthen Families*



Growing Family Connections

Extended family members offer love and support in good times and in bad. When we spend pleasant, positive time together with extended family, we build up a reserve of good feelings. When we are having some difficult times, those good feelings make it easier to reach out for help and also offer support to others.

Who is in your extended family? How do they offer you help and support? What are some ways you help them? List your answers in the spaces below.

People in my family:

Ways they help us:

Ways we help them:

How does it feel when you receive help from your extended family?

How does this support help make you stronger? Your children?

How do you feel when you offer support to your extended family?

Additional Tips

- ◆ Getting along with in-laws and relatives is not always easy. Family members can avoid hurting each other's feelings by not repeating past mistakes. Focus on the present and work together to build stronger relationships for the future.
- ◆ Adults and children need opportunities to have fun and learn from extended family. Building and maintaining supportive relationships among family members and with people in the community is important for you and your children.

Strong Parents, Stable Children: *Building Protective Factors to Strengthen Families*



Give to Others

When an individual does a good deed, it feels good. It gives that person a sense of accomplishment. When a couple does a good deed together, it has even greater meaning. Doing things for others provides couples with a greater overall sense of connectedness, both to each other and to their community. It also gives partners more time together!

What are some things others have done for you without being asked, or expecting anything in return? How did it make you feel?

Think of the last time you did something for someone else without needing to be asked. How did it make the other person feel? How did it make you feel?

What are some of your shared strengths or skills that you could put to use to help others?

If you already have engaged in volunteer work or service with your partner, what did you do and how did it make you feel?

*Our lives are improved and our relationships are strengthened when
we put our strengths to use by giving to and serving others.*

The Privilege of Parenting

Some researchers have found that when people have children their level of happiness drops. That is something of a surprise since we generally see the arrival of a baby as a "blessed event." Yet maybe it should not surprise us that all the demands of caring for children can also wear people out. One scholar has suggested that, while happiness may drop when a child is born, the meaning we get from life may increase. Even with all the demands associated with having children, they can make life more meaningful. Rather than live merely for ourselves, we begin to live for something that will last longer than we will. It is probably good for prospective parents to be prepared for the demands of parenting: lack of sleep, inconvenience, and frustration. It is also good for prospective parents to be prepared for the joy, learning, and love that come with having a child.

A wise parent will get information and help in order to be more effective. Your mother or a good friend who has had children may be able to help you in the first days of adjustment to a baby. Since the demands on a mother's body can cause exhaustion or depression, it is wise to counsel with your doctor as you make the adjustment to motherhood. Also, there are good books that can be helpful. (See a list of books at the end of this unit.) The study of parenting materials (such as these units) can help you be more effective.

Parenting is education on being a human. Like any education, parenting can be difficult, even confusing, at times. But parenting teaches the parent priceless lessons about understanding other people, the miracle of development, patience, service, learning, and love.

Parenting is an opportunity to draw people together. Involve other family members in loving and caring for your child. If you have other children, you can invite them to hold or feed the baby. Relatives can provide you with support and help. You may need to call on friends and family occasionally to care for the baby while you get a break.

Fathers can make a vital contribution to children's development. They should be involved in caring for the child, in supporting the mother, and in learning about child development. When there are two caring parents involved in a child's life, the child will learn important lessons from each parent.

Parenting is never finished. Even when our children are adults, they still need our listening, our counsel, and, most of all, our encouragement. Our children will make mistakes but, like us, they can learn from them and become better.

Applications:

Make a list of the people in your life who can teach you and support you during the vital transition to parenthood. In the weeks before birth, talk with them about both your fears and your excitement. Invite them to be a part of the journey. Each may help in a different way. One may call and encourage you. Another may make baby clothes or blankets. Another may be glad to care for the baby occasionally so that you can get out and exercise.

Keep a journal. Record the events as well as the feelings as your baby grows inside of you and then in the months and years beyond. Your journal might be just a few words about what the baby did or what you felt or it might be sketches you make or it might be a longer narrative. It might be notes on a calendar. In whatever way you keep a journal, it can be a reminder to you of struggles, growth, and joys in the process of parenting.

Ask people you know and admire about their experiences with parenting. What have they learned? What do they most cherish? What was most difficult? How did they solve problems?

There are excellent books that can help parents know how to be effective with their children.

Dr. Spock's Baby and Child Care by Benjamin Spock and Michael Rothenberg is like an encyclopedia for dealing with the needs of growing children from hugging to feeding.

To Listen to a Child by T. Berry Brazelton helps parents understand and deal with the normal problems of growing up.

What to Expect the First Year by Arlene Eisenberg, Heidi E. Murkoff, and Sandee E. Hathaway is another encyclopedic work that provides a month-by-month guide to care for a child during that vital first year.

Between Parent and Child by Haim Ginott is the classic book on dealing with children once they get beyond babyhood. He provides sound advice on being understanding while setting limits.

You can also search the web for resources to help. Some advice you will get is wise; some will be foolish. You can identify good advice because it is both practical and compassionate - it helps you deal with real problems while it shows caring and understanding for humans - both children and adults.

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