

What We Know About Protecting Our Children.

When families are supported, children are less likely to be at risk of child maltreatment and more likely to grow up happy and healthy. When a parent treats a child with respect, love, and understanding, it affects the child for a lifetime – making it easier to develop and keep friendships, succeed in school and work, sustain a happy marriage, and parent effectively. Unfortunately many factors can limit parents' ability to protect and nurture their children. Certain factors have been shown to serve as buffers against these risks, enhancing parents' coping skills and helping them to raise happy, healthy children, even under stress.



What are the protective factors that promote healthy families?

Nurturing and Attachment—Parents and caregivers who bond with and respond to the basic needs of their babies and young children lay the foundation for a positive and loving relationship. They also stimulate the growth of their child's brain and help their child learn how to interact in positive ways with others.

Knowledge of parenting and of child and youth development—Helping parents learn about normal infant, childhood, and teen development will help them understand what to anticipate as their children grow and develop, and what types of support and discipline may work best at each stage.

Parental resilience—Parenting can be stressful, especially when parents are also managing work demands or unemployment, financial worries, illness, or difficulties with a spouse or others. Parents who have support and skills for managing stress will be better able to cope with day-to-day challenges.

Social connections—For most of us, family, friends, and neighbors form a network that provides social interaction, recreation, advice, and help. When parents have the opportunity to interact with, learn from, and seek the support of other adults, their children benefit.

Concrete supports for parents—When parents are not employed or face other challenges, they may need assistance in order to provide adequate food, clothing, housing, and medical care for their children. These supports may reduce the stress parents feel in difficult circumstances, giving them more energy to nurture and support their children.

Anything you do to support kids and parents in your family and community helps reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect. Next week, we will look at concrete suggestions for each of these five factors that may be taken on by a faith-based community and make a difference in the lives of children.