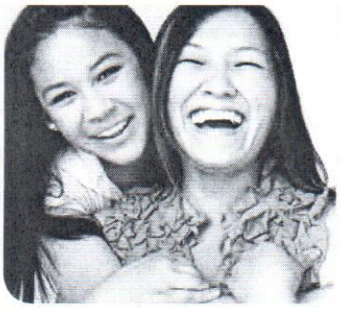
Every family has strengths, and every family faces challenges. When you are under stress—the car breaks down, you or your partner lose a job, a child's behavior is difficult, or even when the family is experiencing a positive change, such as moving into a new home—sometimes it takes a little extra help to get through the day.

Protective factors are the strengths and resources that families draw on when life gets difficult. Building on these strengths is a proven way to keep the family strong and prevent child abuse and neglect. This tip sheet describes six key protective factors and some simple ways you can build these factors in your own family.

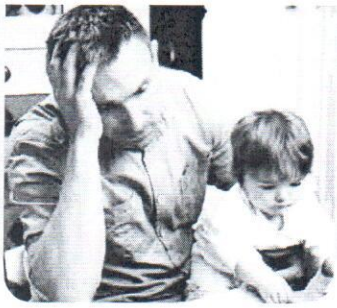
Protective Factor and What It Means	What You Can Do
Nurturing and Attachment: Our family shows how much we love each other.	Take a few minutes at the end of each day to connect with your children with a hug, a smile, a song, or a few minutes of listening and talking. Find ways to engage your children while completing everyday tasks (meals, shopping, driving in the car). Talk about what you are doing, ask them questions, or play simple games (such as "I spy").
Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development: I know parenting is part natural and part learned. I am always learning new things about raising children and what they can do at different ages.	Explore parenting questions with your family doctor, child's teacher, family, or friends. Subscribe to a magazine, website, or online newsletter about child development. Take a parenting class at a local community center (these often have sliding fee scales). Sit and observe what your child can and cannot do. Share what you learn with anyone who cares for your child.
Parental Resilience: I have courage during stress and the ability to bounce back from challenges.	Take quiet time to reenergize: Take a bath, write, sing, laugh, play, drink a cup of tea. Do some physical exercise: Walk, stretch, do yoga, lift weights, dance. Share your feelings with someone you trust. Surround yourself with people who support you and make you feel good about yourself.



Social Connections: I have friends, family, and neighbors who help out and provide emotional support.	• Participate in neighborhood activities such as potluck dinners, street fairs, picnics, or block parties. • Join a playgroup or online support group of parents with children at similar ages. • Find a church, temple, or mosque that welcomes and supports parents.
Concrete Supports for Parents: Our family can meet our day-to-day needs, including housing, food, health care, education, and counseling. I know where to find help if I need it.	• Make a list of people or places to call for support. • Ask the director of your child's school to host a Community Resource Night, so you (and other parents) can see what help your community offers. • Dial "2-1-1" to find out about organizations that support families in your area.
Social and Emotional Competence of Children: My children know they are loved, feel they belong, and are able to get along with others.	• Provide regular routines, especially for young children. Make sure everyone who cares for your child is aware of your routines around mealtimes, naps, and bedtime. • Talk with your children about how important feelings are. • Teach and encourage children to solve problems in age-appropriate ways.

This tip sheet was created with information from experts in national organizations that work to prevent child maltreatment and promote well-being, including the Strengthening Families Initiatives in New Jersey, Alaska, and Tennessee. At *https://www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/promoting/parenting* you can download this tip sheet and get more parenting tips, or call 800.394.3366.

Managing Stress



What's Happening

Everyone has stress, whether it's a bad day at work, car trouble, or simply too many things to do. However, too much stress can make it hard to parent effectively. After a while, your children may show signs of being stressed out, too!

What You Might Be Seeing

Some signs that you are stressed include:

- Feeling angry or irritable a lot of the time
- Feeling hopeless
- Having trouble making decisions
- Crying easily
- Worrying all the time
- Arguing with friends or your partner
- Overeating or not eating enough
- Being unable to sleep or wanting to sleep all the time

A build-up of stress also can contribute to health problems, including allergies, a sore neck or back, headaches, upset stomach, and high blood pressure.

What You Can Do

It is important to learn how to manage your stress—for your own sake and for your children. The following suggestions may help:

- Identify what's making you stressed. Everyone's stressors are different. Yours might be related to money, work, your surroundings (traffic, crime), your partner, your children's behavior, or health issues.
- Accept what you cannot change. Ask yourself, "Can I do anything about it?" If the answer is no, try to focus on something else. If there is something you can do (look for a new job, for example), break it into smaller steps so it doesn't feel overwhelming.
- Have faith. Look back at previous times when you have overcome challenges. Think, "This too shall pass." Consider that people who attend church, pray regularly, or practice other forms of spirituality tend to have less stress.
- Relax! Try deep breathing, meditation, yoga, or listening to music. Take 30 minutes to play a board game and laugh with your kids.
- Take care of your health. Getting enough sleep can make a big difference in your stress level. So can eating healthy foods and getting some exercise.
- Take time for yourself. Take a bath, read a book, or pick up a hobby. When you can, hire a babysitter (or trade time with a friend or neighbor) and get out for a few hours.
- Develop a support network. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Older children can set the table. Your spouse or partner could take over bedtime a few nights a week. Friends might pick up the kids from school to give you a break.

Remember:

Learning to manage your stress will improve your happiness and show your children that they can handle stress, too!

What's Happening

If you feel like your finances are out of control, you are not alone! Many people worry about money. While common, a daily struggle to pay bills creates stress that can harm your family life and your child's well-being.

What You Might Be Seeing

Your family is said to have "financial stability" if you have:

- The ability to pay bills on time
- A manageable amount of debt
- A 3–6 month emergency fund to protect you against loss of income

What You Can Do

No matter what your situation, you can take steps to move your family toward greater financial stability.

- **Know where your money goes.** Track your family's spending for a month, and balance your checkbook regularly. These steps will help you feel more in control and will help you create a realistic budget.
- **Get organized.** Make sure you know how much each person in your household gets paid and when. Know which bills need to be paid out of each paycheck. Keep all bills in one place so they don't get lost, and review your finances often.
- **Spend only what you make.** Put away credit cards and use cash instead. This will help ensure that you buy only what you really need and want.
- **Get a bank account.** Check-cashing services and payday loans charge high fees. One program that helps people access free or low-cost checking accounts is Bank On: *http://joinbankon.org/about/*
- **Build your emergency fund.** Keep unexpected expenses (car repairs, medical bills) from becoming crises. Include savings in your monthly budget, even if it's a small amount.
- **Maximize your tax refund.** Many people qualify for free tax help. Volunteers can help you receive all credits and deductions you are entitled to, including the Earned Income Tax Credit. Visit the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) website: *http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p4935.pdf*
- **Improve your credit.** A good credit score earns you lower interest rates and makes it easier to get a job or rent an apartment. Ask for a free copy of your credit report from *www.annualcreditreport.com* Then, create a plan to correct wrong information and pay any past-due bills.
- **Get help if you need it.** A credit counselor can help you pay down debt, create a budget, and save for your future. Find a credit counseling agency here: *http://www.nfcc.org/FirstStep/firststep_01.cfm*
- **Seek new employment opportunities.** Work readiness, vocational training, job placement, and career counseling programs can help you find and qualify for new opportunities that may pay better and move you toward greater security.

Remember:

It is possible to achieve financial stability, even after a setback. The steps you take today will help create a brighter future for your family!

Acknowledgment: National Foundation for Credit Counseling (*http://www.nfcc.org/*).

Helping Your Child Heal from Trauma

What's Happening

Trauma is an intense event that threatens or causes harm, either physical or emotional. Trauma can occur as a result of a natural disaster (such as an earthquake or flood), violence, or abuse. Seeing violence happen, even if you are not the victim, also may cause trauma.

Trauma can have a lasting effect on children's brain development. If not addressed, it can lead to trouble with school, relationships, or drugs and alcohol.

What You Might Be Seeing

Children's reactions to trauma vary with age, culture, and personality. Some children show the following signs of trauma:

- Startling easily and having difficulty calming down
- Behaviors common to younger children (e.g., thumb sucking, bed wetting, fear of the dark, clinging to caregivers)
- Tantrums, aggression, or fighting
- Becoming quiet and withdrawn, wanting to be left alone
- Wanting to talk about the traumatic event all the time, or denying that it happened
- Changes in eating or sleeping (sleeping all the time, not sleeping, nightmares)
- Frequent headaches or stomach aches

What You Can Do

Try the following to help your child heal from trauma:

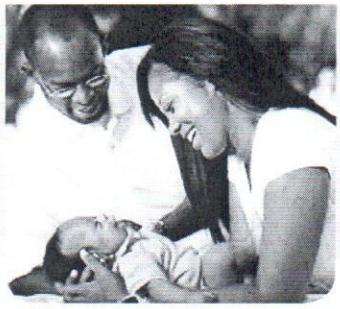
- **Help your child feel safe.** Stay calm and keep a regular routine for meals, play time, and bedtime. Prepare children in advance for any changes or new experiences.
- **Encourage (don't force) children to talk about their feelings.** Tell children it is normal to have many feelings after a trauma. Listen to their stories, take their reactions seriously, correct any misinformation about the traumatic event, and reassure them that what happened was not their fault.
- **Provide extra attention, comfort, and encouragement.** Spending time together as a family may help children feel safe. Younger children may want extra hugs or cuddling. Follow their lead and be patient if they seem needy.
- **Teach children to relax.** Encourage them to practice slow breathing, listen to calming music, or say positive things ("That was scary, but I'm safe now").
- **Be aware of your own response to trauma.** Parents' history of trauma and feelings about their child's experience can influence how they cope. Seek support if you need it.
- **Remember that everyone heals differently from trauma.** Respecting each child's own course of recovery is important.
- **Find help when needed.** If your child's problems last more than a few weeks, or if they get worse rather than better, ask for help. Find a mental health professional who knows proven strategies to help children cope with trauma.

Remember:

With patience and support, families can heal and recover from trauma.

Acknowledgments: Safe Start Center, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (http://www.safestartcenter.org/).

Bonding with Your Baby



What's Happening

Attachment is a deep, lasting bond that develops between a caregiver and child during the baby's first few years of life. This attachment is crucial to the growth of a baby's body and mind. Babies who have this bond and feel loved have a better chance to grow up to be adults who trust others and know how to return affection.

What You Might Be Seeing

Normal babies:

- Have brief periods of sleep, crying or fussing, and quiet alertness many times each day
- Often cry for long periods for no apparent reason
- Love to be held and cuddled
- Respond to and imitate facial expressions
- Love soothing voices and respond to them with smiles and small noises
- Grow and develop every day
- Learn new skills quickly and can outgrow difficult behaviors in a matter of weeks

What You Can Do

No one knows your child like you do, so you are in the best position to recognize and fulfill your child's needs. Parents who give lots of loving care and attention to their babies help their babies develop a strong attachment. Affection stimulates your child to grow, learn, connect with others, and enjoy life. Here are some ways to promote bonding:

- Respond when your baby cries. Try to understand what he or she is saying to you. You can't "spoil" babies with too much attention—they need and benefit from a parent's loving care, even when they seem inconsolable.
- Hold and touch your baby as much as possible. You can keep him or her close with baby slings, pouches, or backpacks (for older babies).
- Use feeding and diapering times to look into your baby's eyes, smile, and talk to your baby.
- Read, sing, and play peek-a-boo. Babies love to hear human voices and will try to imitate your voice and the sounds you make.
- As your baby gets a little older, try simple games and toys. Once your baby can sit up, plan on spending lots of time on the floor with toys, puzzles, and books.
- If you feel you are having trouble bonding with your infant, don't wait to get help! Talk to your doctor or your baby's pediatrician as soon as you can.

Remember:

The best gift you can give your baby is YOU. The love and attention you give your baby now will stay with him or her forever and will help your baby grow into a healthy and happy child and adult.

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Dealing with Temper Tantrums

What's Happening

Two- and 3-year-olds have many skills, but controlling their tempers is not one of them. Tantrums are common at this age because toddlers are becoming independent and developing their own wants, needs, and ideas. However, they are not yet able to express their wants and feelings with words. Take comfort in the fact that most children outgrow tantrums by age 4.

What You Might Be Seeing

Normal toddlers:

- Love to say "No!" "Mine!" and "Do it myself!"
- Test rules over and over to see how parents will react
- Are not yet ready to share
- Need lots of fun activities, play times, and opportunities to explore the world
- Respond well to a routine for sleeping and eating (a regular schedule)
- Like to imitate grownups and to "help" mom and dad

What You Can Do

It is often easier to prevent tantrums than to deal with them after they get going. Try these tips:

- Direct your child's attention to something else. ("Wow, look at that fire engine!")
- Give your child a choice in small matters. ("Do you want to eat peas or carrots?")
- Stick to a daily routine that balances fun activities with enough rest and healthful food.
- Anticipate when your child will be disappointed. ("We are going to buy groceries for dinner. We won't be buying cookies, but you can help me pick out some fruit for later.")
- Praise your child when he or she shows self-control and expresses feelings with words.

If you cannot prevent the tantrum, here are some tips for dealing with it:

- Say what you expect from your child and have confidence that your child will behave.
- Remain calm. You are a role model for your child.
- Holding your child during a tantrum may help a younger child feel more secure and calm down more quickly.
- Take your child to a quiet place where he or she can calm down safely. Speak softly or play soft music.
- Some children throw tantrums to seek attention. Try ignoring the tantrum, but pay attention to your child after he or she calms down.
- Resist overreacting to tantrums, and try to keep your sense of humor.

Remember:

When your child is having a floor-thumping tantrum, the most important thing you can do is remain calm and wait it out. Do not let your child's behavior cause you to lose control, too.

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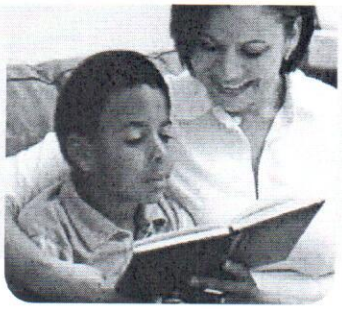
Parenting Your School-Age Child



What's Happening

Children ages 6 to 12 go through big changes. As they spend more time at school and away from home, they are working to develop an identity of their own. Their bodies are growing stronger and changing quickly, a process that will continue through puberty and the teen years. They are learning to control their feelings, use reason, and solve problems. Yet children in this age group still need rules and structure and, most of all, their parents' love and support.

What You Might Be Seeing

Normal school-age children:

- Mature unevenly. Their bodies may be growing, but they are still capable of having temper tantrums and need reminders to take baths and brush their teeth.
- See things in black and white. They are concerned about fairness and rules.
- Are capable of doing chores and homework more independently but may need you to remind and teach them (*not* do it for them).
- Get distracted easily and may lack organizational skills.
- Develop deeper relationships with peers and care deeply about "fitting in."

What You Can Do

- Model the behavior you want to see. Your children are watching and learning from you. Meet your responsibilities, follow house rules, and communicate with respect.
- Make a few important rules and enforce them every time. Remember, children want freedom, so give them choices in smaller matters (e.g., clothing, room decorations).
- Talk to children about what you expect. Post rules and routines where everyone can see them. Fewer "grey areas" means less to argue about.
- Support their growing bodies. Children this age still need nutritious meals (especially breakfast) and 10 hours of sleep each night.
- Limit time spent watching TV, playing video games, or using the computer. Monitor Internet use for safety, and encourage your children to participate in hobbies and sports.
- Be involved with your children's school. Talk to their teachers and attend parents' night and school conferences. Show that school is important to you by providing a quiet space for homework, volunteering in your child's school, and celebrating your child's hard work.
- Offer support and understanding when your child has problems with peers. Explore ways to resolve conflicts, but do not interfere. If your child is being bullied at school, alert school staff and work with them to keep your child safe.
- Don't wait for your children to learn about sex, alcohol, and drugs from peers. Educate yourself and talk to your children about your values. Help them practice ways to resist peer pressure.

Remember:

Talk to your children, and listen to what they have to say. School-age children may sometimes act like they don't care what their parents say, but they still want your love, attention, and guidance!

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Connecting With Your Teen

What's Happening

Many teens spend less time with their families than they did as younger children. As they become more independent and learn to think for themselves, relationships with friends become very important. Sometimes it may feel like your teen doesn't need you anymore. But teens still need their parents' love, support, and guidance.

What You Might Be Seeing

Normal teens:

- Crave independence
- Question rules and authority
- Test limits
- Can be impulsive
- Make mature decisions at times, and childish ones at other times

What You Can Do

Simple, everyday activities can reinforce the connection between you and your teen. Make room in your schedule for special times as often as you can, but also take advantage of routine activities to show that you care.

Tips to keep in mind:

- **Have family meals.** If it's impossible to do every night, schedule a regular weekly family dinner night that accommodates your child's schedule.
- **Share "ordinary" time.** Look for everyday opportunities to bond with your teen. Even times spent driving or walking the dog together offer chances for your teen to talk about what's on his or her mind.
- **Get involved, be involved, and stay involved.** Go to games and practices when you can. Ask about homework and school projects. Look for chances to learn about your teen's latest hobby.
- **Get to know your child's friends.** Knowing who their friends are is an important way to connect with your teen. Make your home a welcoming place for your teen and his or her friends
- **Be interested.** Make it clear that you care about your teen's ideas, feelings, and experiences. If you listen to what he or she is saying, you'll get a better sense of the guidance and support needed. Get to know your teen's friends and their parents, too, when possible.
- **Set clear limits.** Teens still need your guidance, but you can involve your teen in setting rules and consequences. Make sure consequences are related to the behavior, and *be consistent* in following through. Choose your battles. Try to provide choices in the matters that are less important.

Remember:

Your words and actions help your teen feel secure. Don't forget to say and show how much you love your teen!

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Teen Parents: You're Not Alone

What's Happening

Being a parent is a 24-hour-a-day job, and sometimes it can feel overwhelming. You may be juggling the demands of a baby, your family, school, and work. Chances are you're not able to do all of the things you enjoyed before your baby was born.

Many Teen Parents Sometimes Feel

- Confused and uncertain—about their future or their skills as a parent
- Overwhelmed—they don't know where to begin or they feel like giving up
- Angry—at the baby's other parent, their friends, or even their baby
- Lonely—as though they are the only person dealing with so many problems
- Depressed—sad and unable to manage their problems

These feelings do not mean you are a bad parent!

What You Can Do

Every parent needs support sometimes. If you think stress may be affecting how you treat your baby, it's time to find some help. Try the following:

- Join a support group. A group for young moms or dads could give you time with new friends who have lives similar to yours. Your children can play with other children, and you can talk about your problems with people who understand. Look on the Internet or call your local social services agency for information about support groups in your community.
- Find ways to reduce stress. Take a break while someone reliable cares for your baby. Take a walk with the baby in a stroller, or rest while your baby naps. A social worker or nurse can help you learn other ways to manage stress.
- Become a regular at baby-friendly places in your community. The playground and story time at the local library are great places to bond with your baby while getting to know other moms.
- Finish school. Even though it may be difficult, finishing high school (or getting a GED) is one of the most important things you can do to help your baby and yourself. A diploma will help you get a better job or take the next step in your education, such as vocational training or college.
- Improve your parenting skills. Don't be afraid to ask for advice from experienced parents. Classes for parents can also help you build on what you already know about raising a happy, healthy child.
- Call a help line. Most States have help lines for parents. Childhelp® runs a national 24-hour hotline (1.800.4.A.CHILD) for parents who need help or parenting advice.

Remember:

Stay in contact with friends and family who support you and make you feel good about yourself. Help is just a phone call away!

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Ten Ways to Be a Better Dad

What's Happening

Children need *both* parents. Involved fathers can help children lead lives that are happier, healthier, and more successful than children whose fathers are absent or uninvolved. Fathers who spend time with their children increase the chances that their children will succeed in school, have fewer behavior problems, and experience better self-esteem and well-being.

What You Can Do

1 **Respect your children's mother.** When children see their parents respecting each other, they are more likely to feel that they are also accepted and respected.

2 **Spend time with your children.** If you always seem too busy for your children, they will feel neglected no matter what you say. Set aside time to spend with your children.

3 **Earn the right to be heard.** Begin talking with your kids when they are very young, and talk to them about all kinds of things. Listen to their ideas and problems.

4 **Discipline with love.** All children need guidance and discipline, not as punishment, but to set reasonable limits and help children learn from natural or logical consequences. Fathers who discipline in a calm, fair, and nonviolent manner show their love.

5 **Be a role model.** Fathers are role models whether they realize it or not. A girl with a loving father grows up knowing she deserves to be treated with respect. Fathers can teach sons what is important in life by demonstrating honesty, humility, and responsibility.

6 **Be a teacher.** A father who teaches his children about right and wrong and encourages them to do their best will see his children make good choices. Involved fathers use everyday examples to teach the basic lessons of life.

7 **Eat together as a family.** Sharing a meal together can be an important part of healthy family life. It gives children the chance to talk about what they are doing, and it is a good time for fathers to listen and give advice.

8 **Read to your children.** Begin reading to your children when they are very young. Instilling a love for reading is one of the best ways to ensure they will have a lifetime of personal and career growth.

9 **Show affection.** Children need the security that comes from knowing they are wanted, accepted, and loved by their family. Showing affection every day is the best way to let your children know that you love them.

10 **Realize that a father's job is never done.** Even after children are grown and leave home, they will still look to their fathers for wisdom and advice. Fatherhood lasts a lifetime.

Adapted from the National Fatherhood Initiative (*http://www.fatherhood.org/*).

Raising Your Grandchildren

What's Happening

No matter why or how they came to live with you, your grandchildren will benefit from being in your home. When children cannot be with their parents, living with a grandparent may provide:

- Fewer moves from place to place
- The comfort of a familiar language, culture, and family history
- A chance to stay with siblings
- More contact with their parents, depending on the situation

What You Might Be Seeing

Despite these benefits, the children will face some unique challenges.

- They may feel insecure and unsure that you will take care of them.
- They may act out or challenge you.
- They will miss their parents.
- They may be anxious or depressed.
- They may seem young or act too old for their ages.

What You Can Do

It will take time for your grandchildren to feel safe and secure in their new home with you. You can encourage these good feelings in a number of ways:

- Set up a daily routine of mealtimes, bedtime, and other activities.
- Help your grandchildren feel "at home" by creating a space just for them.
- Talk to your grandchildren, and listen when they talk to you.
- Set up a few rules and explain your expectations. Then, enforce the rules consistently.
- Reward positive behavior. When children make mistakes, focus on teaching rather than punishing.
- Be as involved with their school as you can, and encourage your children to participate in school activities.

This is a big job, and you may need help from your community. Here are some suggestions:

- Help with housing or other bills, clothing, or school supplies may be available specifically for grandparents raising grandchildren in your community.
- Join or start a support group in your neighborhood. Often there are local groups for grandparents raising grandchildren.
- Ask for help and referrals from a church leader, the counselor at your child's school, or a social services agency.
- If necessary, get professional help to address your grandchild's special needs, such as medical care, mental health care, or special education. Use respite care if it is available.

Remember:

Parenting the second time around brings special challenges and special joys. Do not hesitate to ask for help or seek services in your community for yourself and your grandchildren.

For more information on support for grandparents raising grandchildren, please visit Child Welfare Information Gateway's web section, Kinship Care: *https://www.childwelfare.gov/outofhome/kinship/*

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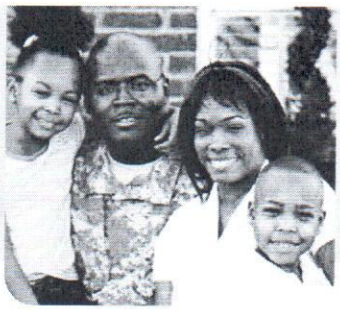
Military Families



What's Happening

Military families live in almost every community. Some parents in the military are on active duty and wear a uniform every day. Others may be in the National Guard or Reserves and only wear a uniform when they are called to active duty.

All military families face unique stresses that can make the difficult job of parenting even harder:

- The military parent must deal with periodic absences and the stresses associated with preparing for duty or reentering civilian life.
- Children must adjust to a parent being away from the family (and, in some cases, in harm's way) and then to the parent's reintegration into the family. Many military children also deal with frequent moves, changing schools, and new caretakers.
- A spouse, partner, or extended family member may face new and increased responsibilities while a military parent is away.

What You Might See

- A parent in uniform in your neighborhood, school, place of worship, or other community setting
- A civilian mother or father parenting solo for extended periods
- A grandparent or other family member caring for a child with a deployed parent
- A change in a child's behavior, either acting out or withdrawing, when a military parent is absent

What You Can Do

- Express appreciation for the family's service to our country. Invite parents and children to share their positive experiences of military life.
- Get to know your military neighbors, particularly if they serve in the National Guard or Reserves. Include them in neighborhood and community activities. Don't wait for your neighbor to ask for help—offer to mow the grass, share a meal, help with small household repairs, or care for the children for a few hours.
- Share information about community resources that provide support in times of need. Ask military parents what would help them most when they are facing a military-related separation, and help them to connect with these supports early.
- Help military parents and the other caregivers in their family understand how transitions, separation, and anxiety can affect their child's behavior. Knowing that acting out or withdrawing are normal can make these challenges easier to deal with.
- Invite military children in your neighborhood to share their thoughts and feelings about the separations and transitions they may be experiencing. If you plan activities for children in your community, remember to include a way for children with a faraway parent to participate.

Remember:

Military families need to feel supported and included in their neighborhoods and communities. You can help!

For more information on supporting military families, please visit Child Welfare Information Gateway's web section, Working With Military Families:
https://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/cultural/families/military.cfm

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Preventing Your Child's Developmental Delays and Disabilities

What's Happening

Children develop in many ways and at different rates. While each child is unique, there are developmental milestones or skills that children are expected to develop by certain ages. As parents, we expect these age-specific tasks to occur naturally. Children don't necessarily learn skills at the same pace, but when milestones don't develop within the expected broad timeframe or don't appear at all, parents and caregivers may become concerned.

What You Might Be Seeing

Parents and primary caregivers are in the best position to note any ongoing concerns about their child's development that may require action. Although children develop at their own rate, some differences may be signs of developmental delays or disabilities. You may want to observe your child in the following areas to decide if your child is on a typical developmental path:

- Gross motor skills: Using large groups of muscles to sit, stand, walk, run, etc.; keeping balance; and changing positions
- Fine motor skills: Using hands to eat, draw, dress, play, write, and do many other things
- Language: Speaking, using body language and gestures, communicating, and understanding what others say
- Cognitive: Thinking skills including learning, understanding, problem-solving, reasoning, and remembering
- Social: Interacting with others; having relationships with family, friends, and teachers; cooperating; and responding to the feelings of others

What You Can Do

First Steps

- If your child's development worries you, share your concerns with someone who can and will help you get clear answers about your child's development. Don't accept others dismissing your concerns by saying "You worry too much," or "That will go away in a few months." You know your child and are his or her best advocate.
- If your child seems to be losing ground—in other words, starts to not be able to do things they *could* do in the past—you should request an evaluation right away. Get professional input for your concerns.
- If you think your child may be delayed or have a disability, take him or her to a primary health-care provider or pediatrician and request a developmental screening. If you don't understand the words used to assess or describe your child, be sure to ask questions such as, "What does that mean?"

Next Steps

- If your child is diagnosed with a developmental delay or disability, remember that you are not alone. Meet and interact with other families of children with special needs, including those with your child's identified disability. You may have many questions about how your child's diagnosis affects your whole family.
- Seek information. Learn the specifics about your child's special needs. When your child is diagnosed with a delay or a disability, you should begin interventions as early as possible so your child can make the best possible progress.
- Find resources for your child. Seek referrals from your physician or other advisors to find professionals and agencies that will help your child. Keep in mind that some services that assist your child may also provide programs to benefit your entire family.

Ongoing Strategies

- Locate or start a support group. You may appreciate the opportunity to give and receive assistance or encouragement from others who can truly identify with your experience.
- Take a break and give yourself the gift of time to regroup, reestablish your relationships with family members, or reconnect with friends. You will be a better champion for your child when you take the time to care of yourself as well.
- Don't let your child's delay or disability label become the entire focus. Your child has special challenges but is also a member of your family. Seeing your child grow and develop as an individual and part of the family is one of the great pleasures of being a parent.

Remember:

You are your child's best advocate. Trust your feelings, be confident, and take action!

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How to Develop Strong Communities

What's Happening

Communities have a great influence in families' lives. Just as plants are more likely to thrive in a garden with good soil and plenty of sunlight and water, families are more likely to thrive in nurturing communities. A safe place for children to play is one feature of a nurturing community. Other features include the availability of food, shelter, and medical care for families, as well as a culture that encourages neighbors to get to know and help one another. Nurturing communities can help build strong families. They are critical in helping build protective factors.*

What You Might Be Seeing

Strong, nurturing communities that are supportive of families will have:

- Parks and recreation facilities that are accessible, safe, and inviting places for families
- Resources to help families in need access food, shelter, medical care, and other resources
- Early education programs that are easily accessible and welcoming
- Safe, affordable housing available to all families
- Clean air and water

What You Can Do

Baby steps

- Meet and greet your neighbors.
- Go to a parents meeting at your child's school.
- Participate in an activity at your local library or community center.

Small Steps

- Set up a playgroup in your community at homes or a local park (consider inviting people who may not have children at home, like local seniors).
- Organize a community babysitting co-op.
- Volunteer at your child's school through the school's administration or the parents' organization.
- Encourage local service providers to produce a directory of available services in the community.

Big Steps

- Organize a community event (a block party, father/daughter dance, parent support group).
- Run for an office in the parent organization at your child's school.
- Attend local government meetings (city council or school board meetings) and let them know how important resources are in your community. Let them know how parks, strong schools, and accessible services help to strengthen your family and other families.
- Join or create a group in which parents and children meet regularly to play or serve together, such as scouting, a flag football league, or service club.

Remember:

Everyone can take steps to make communities more supportive of families!

* To learn more about the protective factors, visit: https://www.childwelfare.gov/can/factors/protective.cfm

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