



## April is Child Abuse Prevention Month



**Protective factors are conditions in families and communities that, when present, increase the health and well-being of children and families. These attributes serve as buffers, helping parents to find resources, support or coping strategies that allow them to parent effectively, even under stress.**

**Research has shown that the following protective factors are linked to a lower incidence of child abuse and neglect.**

### **Nurturing and Attachment**

A child's early experience of being nurtured and developing a bond with caring adults affects all aspects of behavior and development. When parents and children have strong, warm feelings for one another, children develop trust that their parents will provide what they need to thrive, including love, acceptance, positive guidance and protection.

Research shows that babies who receive affection and nurturing from their parents have the best chance of healthy development. A child's relationship with a consistent, caring adult in the early years is associated later in life with better academic grades, healthier behaviors, more positive peer interactions, and an increased ability to cope with stress.

### **Knowledge of Parenting and of Child and Youth Development**

There is extensive research linking healthy child development to effective parenting. Children thrive when parents provide not only affection, but also respectful communication and listening, consistent rules and expectations, and safe opportunities that promote independence. Successful parenting fosters psychological adjustment, helps children succeed in school, encourages curiosity about the world, and motivates children to achieve.

### **Parental Resilience**

Parents who can cope with the stresses of everyday life, as well as occasional crises, have resilience; they have the flexibility and inner strength necessary to bounce back when things are not going well. Multiple life stressors, such as a family history of abuse or neglect, health problems, marital conflict or domestic or community violence – and financial stressors such as unemployment, poverty, and homelessness – may reduce a parent's capacity to cope effectively with the typical day-to-day stresses of raising children.

### **Social Connections**

Parents with a social network of emotionally supportive friends, family and neighbors often find that it is easier to care for their children and themselves. Most parents need people they can call on once in a while when they need a sympathetic listener, advice, or

concrete support. Research has shown that parents who are isolated, with few social connections, are at higher risk for child abuse and neglect.

### **Concrete Support for Parents**

Many factors affect a family's ability to care for their children. Families who can meet their own basic needs for food, clothing, housing and transportation – and who know how to access essential services such as childcare, health care, and mental health services to address family specific needs – are better able to ensure the safety and well-being of their children.

Partnering with parents to identify and access resources in the community may help prevent the stress that sometimes precipitates child maltreatment. Providing concrete support may also help prevent the unintended neglect that sometimes occurs when parents are unable to provide for their children.

***(Child Welfare Information Gateway)***