



Coping with Stress by Building Protective Factors

Stress has become a common issue among individuals in the United States. The American Psychological Association (APA) has been studying stress among citizens for more than ten years. In their report *Stress in America: Coping with Change*, APA notes that “the results of the January 2017 poll show a statistically significant increase in stress for the first time since the survey was first conducted in 2007.”^{1(p3)} Further, 20 percent of those surveyed rated their stress as extreme.¹ While finances, work, economy and health concerns were cited as the major source of stress, professionals working with families know that in addition to these everyday stressors, parents experience stress related to raising their children. Balancing time between work and family, ensuring their children’s safety, and concerns about development can all cause added stress for parents. Family support professionals can help caregivers cope with this stress by identifying and building the protective factors articulated in the Strengthening Families Framework.

Protective factors are “the conditions or attributes of individuals, families, communities or the larger society that mitigate or eliminate risk.”^{2(p18)} Protective factors are parents’ strengths that buffer their families and children from stressful

situations and events, and are correlated with positive outcomes. The characteristics identified in the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework are also considered to be promotive. They actively contribute to the well-being of a family by “build[ing] family strengths and a family environment that promotes optimal child development.”^{2(p20)}

Although these factors are interrelated and work together to provide parents and children a strong foundation for success, each has a role to play to support parents in stressful situations.

Parental resilience. This protective factor is all about being strong and flexible. When a parent or caregiver has resilience, they are able to bounce back from difficult situations and bounce forward when they apply what they have learned to the next stressful event in their lives. By helping parents identify and develop healthy coping skills, family support professionals can help parents build resilience. Programs may offer activities and workshops that help to reduce stress such as yoga, meditation, meal planning and time management.

Social connections. We all need friends and those connections can be crucial to handling stressful situations. For parents it is particularly important to have people

that support them with their parenting. This can be other parents who have children around the same age, relatives and friends that can provide safe and loving care for children when needed, and individuals that recognize when parents are doing well and reach out when they might need support. Programs and family support professionals can help build this protective factor by helping parents to identify their supports and offering opportunities for parents to connect with other parents.

Knowledge of parenting and child development. Parenting can be difficult. Knowing what to expect from your child based on their development and having tools that support parenting can make it more manageable and less stressful. Parenting is part natural and part learned, and family support professionals can be the bridge to reliable, research-based information about child development and parenting topics. Further, by connecting with other parents with children in similar age ranges, caregivers can see positive parenting in action



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and learn that they are not alone when experiencing challenging times related to toilet training, biting, tantrums, etc.

Concrete support in times of need. As noted above, finances, healthcare and work are major sources of stress for many people. Being able to provide for their children can be a major source of stress for parents. When a family is in crisis or struggling to get by, family support professionals can be a bridge to needed resources and services. By providing a non-judgmental support to identify needs, find resources in the community, and referring families to needed services, staff can help mitigate parental stress.

Social and emotional competence of children. This protective factor focuses

on the social and emotional development of children. The interactions between parents and their children form the basis of this development. It begins with a strong nurturing bond between infants and their caregivers. Stress can interfere with bonding and attachment. Staff can support new parents that may be struggling and ensure that parents have the concrete supports they need as they welcome their new baby. If perinatal depression is present, staff can offer access to therapeutic services. As the child grows, monitoring the social and emotional development for delays and referring parents to services as needed also works to alleviate stress.

The Strengthening Families Protective Factors, when robust in families, work

together to reduce stress in families. By identifying which protective factors are present, building on parent strengths, and supporting the development of protective factors not present, staff can help parents to create environments where families thrive.

Sources

¹ [Stress in America: Coping with Change](#)

² [The Strengthening Families Approach and Protective Factors Framework: Branching Out and Reaching Deeper](#)



Using Outcome Measurements

Many funders, stakeholders and government organizations recognize the value and significance of family support services. As a result, organizations receive more funding to provide more services to families and children. However, with increased funding comes an increasing need for family support organizations to demonstrate the impact upon families and children as result of the services provided. Therefore, more organizations are using outcome measurements to communicate the significant impacts.

Outcome measurements demonstrate the changes that occur and impact of services upon families and children. Results indicate the positive impact of services on children, families and the community at large. For example, outcome measures may exhibit how child maltreatment rates reduced through the efforts of home visiting in a community.

Parents as Teachers affiliates are now required to select two outcomes for the new essential requirement. Affiliates will document and track indicators that will provide evidence to funders and families that services provided to families make a meaningful and impacting difference.

There are various guidelines to select outcome measurements. One is to first identify meaningful, sustainable outcome targets or target population. Another is to identify what types of changes in the families and children an organization would like to achieve. Organizations select effective tools to guide the evaluation design and practice and determine how often the tools will be administered; establish activities, strategies and resources to implement, which can be measured to demonstrate the achievements of outcomes; and select a time period for achieving the goals, which will prove to be beneficial.

Outcome measurements can benefit an organization in multiple ways. It helps to assess progress and promote continuous quality improvement. Organizations may use the results to design and distribute effective infographics and demonstrate to funders and families the impact of their services. Results can demonstrate connections between the work being done and types of changes programs are designed to achieve. Outcome measurements also helps organizations learn what services are working in different contexts, as well as use data to help sustain services.

Local organizations have a unique advantage to using outcome measurements. Many local organizations have a closer view of positive and negative influences upon families and children. Therefore, it may be easier for them to capture evidence that supports the impact of services provided. Implementing outcome measurements can be an integral part of the organization's continuous quality improvement processes and may prove to be a large component of the organization's future success.

2018 Parents as Teachers International Conference Recap

October 8 through 11, more than 1,300 early childhood development professionals converged in Phoenix for the PAT International Conference. Attendees had the opportunity to meet people from the U.S. and other countries, which resulted in rich conversations. Keynotes and interactive workshops covered a variety of topics such as diversity, equity and inclusion, exploring new data-driven practices, working with families facing addictions, building stronger brains, valuing the role of dad, cultural competency in home visiting,

engaging Latino families, evaluation, and conversations about federal and state advocacy efforts.

There were several awards ceremonies – Jack Tweedie Human Services and Early Learning, Losos for Excellence, Losos for Innovation, and Parent Educator of the Year Awards – and 75 Milestone recipients. In addition, 100 PAT programs were recognized as Blue Ribbon Affiliates. Among the Blue Ribbon Affiliates were the following Pennsylvania programs:

- Coatesville Family Center, Community, Youth & Women’s Alliance, Parents as Teachers
- Community Services of Venango County, Parents as Teachers
- Infant Development Program

- Lancaster Family Center, Community Action Program of Lancaster County, Parents as Teachers
- Salisbury Area Family Center, Salisbury-Elk Lick School District, Parents as Teachers

PAT national center staff met with state and county office leaders to learn about O.L.I.V.E.R. and discuss the roles of state, county and national office staff in supporting high quality implementation of the PAT model.

We had an “aha” moment when keynote presenter Paul Schmitz talked about the glass half full or half empty. Optimistic and strengths focused people, as a lot of us are, tend to say glass half full. Paul reminded us that the glass half empty

is also a reality for people. We need to connect with both gaps and resources as we conduct work in our communities.

Even though it is a year away, it is not too soon to think about attending the 2019 International Conference being held October 14-17 in St. Louis, Mo., and about nominations for the Losos Awards and Parent Educator of the Year.

Using Penelope? Need Help?

Penelope Q&A sessions are available upon request for all PAT Affiliate programs in Pennsylvania. Contact [Alexia Brown](#) for more information or to schedule a session.



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Center for the Study of Social Policy Launches New Website

The Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) has launched their new website. In addition to Strengthening Families, CSSP has many initiatives related to the well-being of children and families. To find Strengthening Families resources, go to [Publications and Resources](#) page and click on Strengthening Families in the Project drop down list. If you are unable to locate a specific resource, contact [Cailin O'Connor](#).

SAVE THE DATE: Bringing the Protective Factors to Life in Your Work

Week of March 11, 2019 | Center for Schools and Communities, Camp Hill, Pa.

The Pennsylvania Strengthening Families Leadership team will be offering a two-day institute featuring the Bringing the Protective Factors to Life in Your Work courses from the National Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds. In December we will send an email with more details.



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Safe Kids Corner

Choking Prevention for Little Kids

Like babies, little kids are curious about the things around them and will touch, taste and smell just about anything. That is the way they learn. But this is an area where parents have to be diligent, because swallowing the wrong thing can cause serious injury. Here are some ways to make home and play areas safer.

Top Safety Tips

- Keep small objects such as buttons, beads, jewelry, pins, nails, marbles, coins, stones and tacks out of reach and sight.
- Cut food for toddlers into tiny pieces. Children under five should not eat small, round or hard foods, including pieces of hot dogs, cheese sticks or chunks, hard candy, nuts, grapes, marshmallows or popcorn.
- Consider your child's age when purchasing a toy or game. It is worth a second to read the instructions and warning labels to make sure it is just right for your child.
- Before you have settled on the perfect toy, check to make sure there are no small parts or other potential choking hazards.

Retrieved from [Safe Kids Worldwide](#).



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The Sharing Corner

The Sharing Corner is for you, by you. Share your expertise, celebrations, testimonies and news. Tell us about:

- How you maintained such great retention of families in your program
- Fund development activities that yielded the best results
- How a Plan Do Study Act (PDSA) cycle informed your work
- Who you work with in the community and what you have done together
- An event or how you reached a program goal
- How you reduced a barrier to service or worked collaboratively in the community

Send your articles to [Jennifer Esposito](#). Center for Schools and Communities reserves the right to determine the appropriateness of the information.

Philadelphia Nursing-Legal Partnership

Since January 2016, public interest lawyers have worked hand-in-hand with public health nurses through the innovative Philadelphia Nursing-Legal Partnership (NLP). NLP is a collaboration between the National Nurse-Led Care Consortium's two evidence-based home visiting programs – Philadelphia Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) and Mabel Morris Family Home Visit Program – and Widener University Delaware Law School's Medical-Legal Partnership. NLP began with the support of the Rita & Alex Hillman Foundation, Oak Foundation and Prevention and Public Health Fund. In November 2016, the Pennsylvania Children's Trust Fund provided an additional grant to fund a second attorney

for the project, which made a huge impact on the number of families that could be served during the original three-year grant period and into a fourth year.

Through integrating legal services into the home visiting programs' curriculum and continuum of support, the NLP interdisciplinary team works to ensure that pregnant women and new mothers have the opportunity to raise their children in safe, healthy homes with uninterrupted health coverage and other benefits. NLP's four main objectives are to:

- Increase the identification of unmet legal and social needs
- Provide direct legal, healthcare and educational services to clients in their homes
- Enhance the advocacy capacity of nurse home visitors
- Improve community health through systemic advocacy and policy change

To date, more than 400 unique clients have received a consultation or case representation from NLP attorneys and the program has shown to have tremendous impact on families being served by the NFP and Mabel Morris program. Legal services have resulted in significant, measurable outcomes that stabilize housing, income and health insurance, and positively impact maternal and child

health, including a reduction in maternal stress.

Many pregnant and parenting women enter home visiting programs with concerns about their physical safety, housing and other basic needs. These crises increase toxic maternal stress and interfere with maternal-child bonds. NLP evaluation data show that mothers who use NLP services are at higher risk of negative health consequences than most mothers enrolled in home visiting programs. By providing concrete support to high-risk mothers, NLP helps to stabilize families and prevents crises from escalating. Among mothers who completed pre-and-post assessments and follow-up interviews, the majority said that the legal services decreased their stress (82 percent), improved their quality of life (71 percent) and positively impacted their families (84 percent).

More than 20 trainings on a wide-range of legal topics have prepared nurses to spot potential legal issues impacting family health. Nurse home visitors have gained a better understanding of clients' rights and the ways families can advocate for themselves. Nine out of ten nurses surveyed now say they are comfortable addressing client issues related to domestic violence, housing and public benefits. A majority of nurses also express comfort addressing family needs related to education, immigration and employment. Nurses say that NLP has made them more effective at their jobs, including their capacity to engage in policy advocacy around issues that impact maternal-child health, and better equipped to address social needs of families.

Finally, the NLP Social Return on Investment (SROI) evaluation is significant. According to the most recent analysis, the overall monetized social impact of successful NLP cases is \$1,062,431. The expected SROI by the project's completion is estimated to be between 275 and 500 percent and the economic case benefit is estimated to exceed \$1.5 million.

“I've had to handle so many issues on my own for so long – with my housing, utilities and the kids – that at first I didn't see what the lawyers could do for me. But when it came down to it, just having someone there with me in court was such a relief. And she did help; she was able to apply some legal knowledge that made the housing authority be more open to making an arrangement and letting me stay. In my daughter's social security case, she helped us focus us on the most important facts to tell the hearing officer, and he wrote about that in the decision. But the most important thing for me was having someone there to listen to my concerns, help me through the process and treat me like a human being.”

– Sarah, NPL client

Institute for the Advancement of Family Support Professionals

The Institute offers family support professionals the opportunity to learn new skills and grow their careers. Through engaging, online modules and a personalized learning map, professionals take charge of their growth and advancement. Courses are available at no cost.

Family Support

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Pennsylvania Parents as Teachers at Center for Schools and Communities.

Children's Trust Fund
Strengthening Families

Family Support at Center for Schools and Communities provides training and technical assistance to Parents as Teachers providers, Children's Trust Fund grantees and the Strengthening Families leadership team.

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Family Support



Family Support Webinars

First Wednesday of the month

10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

Jan 9, CANCELLED

Mar 6, Reframing Challenging Conversations to Meaningful, Impactful and Solutions Oriented Conversations

PAT Knowledge Studio Course Facilitating Groups

Apr 2-3, Camp Hill, Pa.

Interacting Across Abilities

Apr 23-24, Camp Hill, Pa.

2019 Pennsylvania Strengthening Family Conference

Apr 30 – May 2, Camp Hill, Pa.

Bringing the Protective Factors to Life in Your Work

Mar 13-14, Camp Hill Pa.

Parents as Teachers

Until one month prior to the event, registration will only be open to Pennsylvania participants. If you have a new hire in the month before the event, contact [Jennifer Esposito](#).

PAT Foundational & Model Implementation

FFor new parent educators and supervisors of affiliate programs

Jan 14-18, Camp Hill, Pa.

Mar 4-8, Camp Hill, Pa.

Apr 8-12, Homestead, Pa.

PAT Foundational

For new approved users

Jan 14-16, Camp Hill, Pa.

Mar 4-6, Camp Hill, Pa.

Apr 8-10, Homestead, Pa.

PA Foundational 2: 3 Years through Kindergarten

Feb 19-20, Camp Hill, Pa.

Apr 23-24, Homestead, Pa.



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