

THE PROTECTIVE FACTORS
AN E-BOOK SERIES FOR SUPERVISED VISITATION PROGRAMS

Knowledge of Child Development



The Second Protective Factor in a Series of Six



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INTRODUCTION

Research indicates that children with parents who understand child developmental stages are at reduced risk for child abuse and maltreatment. Knowledge about child development is gained through the parent learning about how the child changes emotionally, physically, and mentally, and the needs that accompany these changes. This knowledge allows parents to have realistic expectations of a child's behavior and abilities, as well as to be able to fulfill the child's needs from birth to adulthood.

Objectives

After completing this training, social service providers and supervised visitation personnel should be able to:

- Understand what having knowledge of child development looks like in a family setting, and be able to describe different examples in the home.
- Understand the importance of having knowledge of child development and the positive effects for children and families.
- Explore strategies providers can use to help parents develop knowledge of child developmental stages.
- Understand the specific ways supervised visitation personnel can help parents develop knowledge of child developmental stages.
- Learn about the resources available to social service providers and families who are looking for more information about child developmental stages.

Target Audience

This training can help any people that work with families, especially:

- Child Protection Workers
- Supervised Visitation Staff
- Case Managers
- Teachers
- Counselors
- All other social service providers working with families
- Families themselves!



KNOWLEDGE OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Below are several examples of what knowledge of a child's developmental stages may look like:

- A father understanding why his seven month old baby cannot be potty trained.
- A mother understanding toddlers, and why toddlers have tantrums.
- A father understanding that his newborn sleeping a total of 20 hours per day at intervals throughout the day and night is normal.
- A mother understanding why her thirteen year old son wants to spend a lot of time with his friends.

Below are several indicators that a parent does not have adequate knowledge of the child's developmental stages:

- A parent yelling at a baby for not listening or following directions.
- A father allowing a young child to be alone in the home.
- A mother insisting that her six year old supervise a toddler.
- A parent becoming upset when a two year old cannot speak in full sentences.



Additional Multimedia Materials...

For detailed information on the child developmental stages, such as ***what to expect at every age from birth to adulthood***, please see the Institute for Family Violence Studies' Family Skill Builder: <http://familyvio.csw.fsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/FINALFamilySkillBuilder.pdf>

THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING THE CHILD DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES



A parent knowing about child developmental stages is important for the parent and for the child. The parent is better able to recognize when a child is not on target for an appropriate milestone. The child will feel secure in his or her development because the parent will have reasonable and achievable expectations of the child.

A Parent that understands the developmental stages:

- Encourages age-appropriate behavior that helps the child develop.
- Helps the child to feel encouraged and capable of achieving goals.
- Will have appropriate expectations of what a child can and cannot do, which can build an environment that helps the child live up to his or her potential.
- Is in a better position to notice when a developmental milestone has not been reached, and can therefore access early, appropriate interventions if necessary.

A Parent that does not understand the developmental stages:

- May negatively impact the child's ability to learn new things when a parent expects too much or too little from a child. Holding a child to too high a standard can affect his or her self-esteem. When a child fails to live up to a parent's expectations, it also discourages that parent from teaching the child new things.
- May have a child that has difficulty expressing his or her feelings because the parent is unaware of the child's abilities or difficulties expressing him or herself. This can lead to further frustration from parents and children.
- May have unrealistic expectations of the child and set goals that the child cannot achieve because the parent does not understand that young children do not function on the same level as older children or adults.
- May harm the child's self-esteem and confidence because the child will not understand why he or she cannot succeed or fulfill the parent's expectations. Parents who do not understand child development may use the child's low self-esteem, lack of understanding, and their own dissatisfaction with the child's development as justification to emotionally (or even physically) harm the child.

Think About It...



Now that you know about the importance of understanding a child's developmental stages, what are the risks to families with parents who do not know about them? How might the child, parent, or family as a whole be affected by this lack of knowledge?

STRATEGIES FOR WORKING WITH FAMILIES

Social service providers can help parents learn about the importance of understanding the developmental stages of children. There are many different opportunities for social service providers to discuss child developmental stages with parents. Some opportunities are described below:

- Talking with parents during intake and follow-up procedures to social service delivery.
- Talking with parents when they express things.
- Talking with parents during a problem in supervision.
- Talking with parents about occupational, education, and social resources.
- Talking with parents during pick up, drop off, or parent-teacher meetings.



Skill Building

There are different skills that help parents understand child development with their children. Some are described below with information on how individuals that work with parents can help them to develop these skills:



Skill

Strategy

Having Age-Appropriate Expectations

- Encourage parents to engage in activities with the child that the child can understand and that will be appropriate for his or her attention span. For instance, if the parents have a five year old child, encourage them to choose a game like Candy Land instead of Monopoly, which is designed for older children.
- Talk with parents about setting age-appropriate limits for the child. For instance, not allowing a five year old to ride his or her bike to school alone even though the child's 13-year-old sibling does.
- Talk with parents about different discipline techniques and what is most effective for the child. For example, parents may not punish a four year old by not allowing him or her to go out with friends, but with a time out. Conversely, parents would be more likely to ground a teenager than give a time out, which would not be as severe for a teenager. Discipline is more effective and nurturing when parents know how to encourage appropriate behaviors based on child development.
- Talk with parents about developmental challenges the child may be facing. These can include tantrums, crying, bedwetting, issues eating or sleeping, school issues, puberty, and problems getting along with peers.

Skill**Strategy*****Helping the child
achieve goals***

- Encourage parents to make an effort to help their children learn new games and new skills. Teaching new games will allow the children to grow and challenge their current abilities.
- Talk with parents about age-appropriate games they can play with the child. These games will allow parents to strengthen their bond with the child and allow the child to feel that the parents understand and respect his or her abilities. Talk with parents about age appropriate ratings and postings on games, movies, and other activities, and why these are important for parents to understand.
- Discuss with parents ways that they can support their child in trying new activities. A child trying something new may feel nervous. Having parental support will enable the child to build confidence in his or her developing abilities.
- Encourage parents to learn about their child's developmental stage and how to challenge the child within that stage. The parent can encourage the child to try new activities and learn new things. This allows the child to develop skills without the fear of failing.

***Ability to help the
child grow***

- Help parents understand ways to help a child when he or she is trying to develop a new skill or learn something new. For instance, show the parents how to guide the child in how to do something without actually doing it for the child. Instead of getting frustrated and tying a five-year-old's shoe, show the child how to do it. Parenting is teaching!
- Talk with parents about child safety concerns, including child-proofing homes, safe eating and sleeping habits for infants, shaken baby syndrome, and SIDS.



Skill

Strategy

Knowing what a child can and cannot do

- Explain to parents the importance of having realistic expectations about the child. Understanding where the child is developmentally helps parents know what to expect. This, in turn, helps the child to feel capable, successful, and the child will feel secure.
- Help parents identify unrealistic expectations for their child based on developmental stage or abilities to help ease further development, and how parents can encourage appropriate behavior through positive behavior modeling and discipline.
- Discuss with parents the importance of having age-appropriate consequences so the child is able to learn from his or her mistakes.



A Note on Cultural Competency...

It is important to recognize that there common values across cultures. Research indicates that parents, across cultures, have **common expectations for their children**. Some examples of such expectations are: to be respectful, well-behaved, and honest; to do well in school; and to share with others. Parents from different cultures also seem to have some common approaches to disciplining children. Examples include: expressing disapproval through talking with, or making gestures to, the child; establishing rules and expectations; and having consequences for breaking rules. When working with families, **be open, non-judgmental, and flexible** when you encounter unfamiliar parenting practices, preferences, and perceptions of a child's behavior. Have a conversation with parents about what parenting strategies and values they already have. Discuss their perceptions of what is or is not appropriate behavior for a child. What expectations does the parent have of the child? Are these developmentally appropriate?



CASE EXAMPLE

Read this case example and answer the questions that follow.

A child protection agency is working on parenting skills with a couple. The couple has two children: an eight year old son and a five year old daughter, both with different special needs. The parents report that they have more trouble with their daughter than their son. The parents don't understand why their daughter acts differently than their son did when he was five. Both parents become very frustrated with the daughter. They think she should understand more than she does and that she should be able to do more things on her own than she does.



Questions

1. What steps can the child protective worker take to help these parents understand their daughter's development?
2. What are some possible risk factors with regard to child maltreatment?
3. What are some feelings these clients may be experiencing?
4. What are some feelings the daughter may be experiencing?

Possible Answers

- 1. The child protective worker can talk with the parents about the dynamics of raising a child with special needs. The worker can also talk with the parents about how their daughter's development may differ from their son's because of her Down syndrome. The worker may also be able to suggest some activities the parents can engage in with their daughter, or some resources (or referrals) where the parents can access some appropriate services for their daughter in order to assist with age-development activities.*
- 2. These parents may be dealing with a lack of parenting skills and stress from the challenges that can arise when raising a child with a disability, which could put both children at greater risk of abuse.*
- 3. These parents may be experiencing frustration, anger, and confusion, which, again, could potentially put both children at greater risk of abuse.*
- 4. The daughter may be feeling... (examples include sad, like a failure, fearful, ashamed, stupid, etc.)*



SUPERVISED VISITATION CHART

The chart below describes how supervised visitation personnel may take advantage of opportunities with parents to help them gain knowledge and understanding of a child's developmental stages. The chart also describes the positive effect of these behaviors on the child.

**It should be noted that supervised visitation personnel should be very familiar with the typical child developmental phases.*

Opportunities for Supervised Visitation Personnel	What the Parent Can Do	Positive Effect on the Child
<i>During intake, talk with the parent about the child's age and developmental stage. Discuss typical behaviors during that stage of development.</i>	The parent can know what a reasonable expectation of the child is.	The child can understand and learn what the parent expects from him or her.
<i>During parenting time, encourage the parent to select an activity that the child will be able to understand and enjoy.</i>	The parent chooses an activity or game that the child can understand at his or her age.	The child feels as if he or she has the power to understand, achieve, and grow.

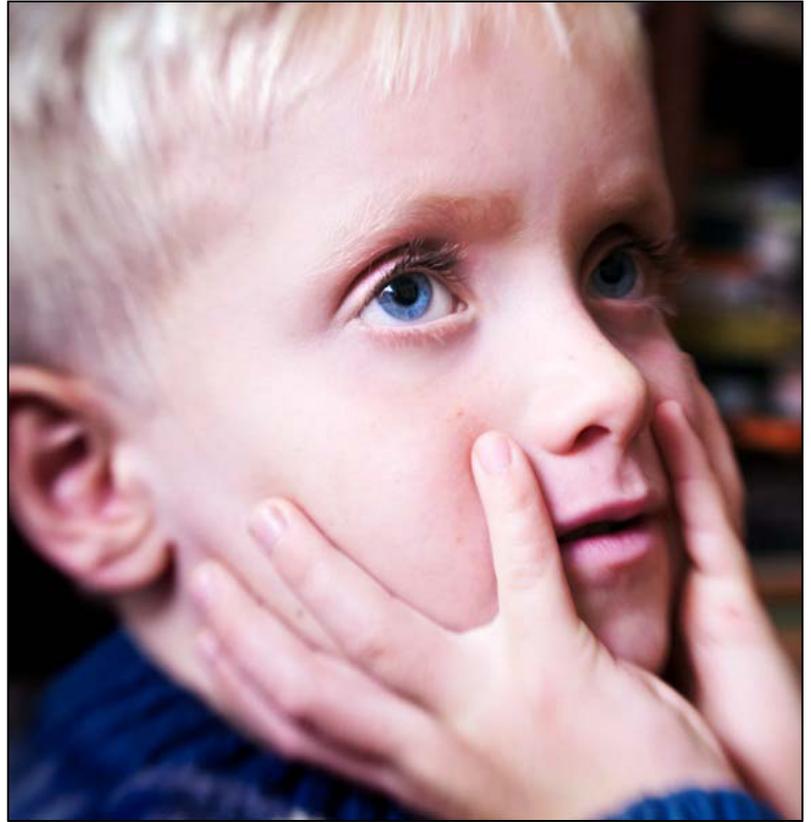
Opportunities for Supervised Visitation Personnel	What the Parent Can Do	Positive Effect on the Child
<p><i>When the child becomes upset, encourage the parent to think about the child's developmental stage and to how to deal with the situation. For instance, if an infant is crying, he or she may need to be comforted. However, if a child becomes frustrated with a game, the parent can identify what is wrong and help the child.</i></p>	<p>The parent learns the importance of the developmental stages of the child during the time when the child becomes upset. Based on the reason the child is upset, the parent identifies the correct way to handle the situation and assist the child.</p>	<p>The child understands what the parent expects from him or her and is able to learn new things, and feel capable.</p>
<p><i>When the parent becomes frustrated, discuss the importance of the child's age and development. The parent may not understand why the child cannot do something.</i></p>	<p>The parent understands that because of a child's developmental stage, the child may not understand the situation and may act out in confusion. The parent learns these limitations and is better able to help the child accomplish his or her goal.</p>	<p>The child feels that the parent understands his or her abilities and feels supported.</p>



CASE EXAMPLE

Read this case example and answer the questions that follow.

A supervised visitation staff member is supervising a visit between a father and his two year old son. During the visit, the father learns that the son is not potty-trained yet and is still using diapers. The father becomes frustrated at the child for not knowing how to use the bathroom yet. He starts to yell at the child and the child becomes upset.



Questions

1. What are some risk factors for child maltreatment that might be present?
2. What are some feelings this client may be experiencing?
3. What are some feelings the child may be experiencing?
4. What steps can the supervised visitation worker take to help this parent understand more about his son's developmental stage?

Potential Answers

1. *Some risk factors are the father's anger and frustration, as well as the father's lack of understanding about his son's developmental stage.*
2. *The father may be feeling frustration, anger, confusion and embarrassment.*
3. *The child may feel... (examples include sad, frustrated, confused, unsure, scared, etc.) The worker needs to encourage the father to take a step back from the situation and to calm down. Then the worker and father can discuss his son's developmental stage, and the father can learn about potty training, and better understand his son's mental and physical capabilities. Explain to the parent that not all two-year-olds are potty trained yet, and it is something that takes time.*



A NOTE ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT

A parent may notice that his or her child is not developing at a normal pace, or is missing developmental milestones. Parents whose children are not developing at a normal pace may feel that they have failed as parents, or that their child will never be “normal.”

However, many children are able to catch up to their peers through early intervention. Parents, doctors, and teachers can help children grow when they recognize the children’s needs.

Parents who are concerned about child development can contact their pediatrician or child’s health care provider to learn more about development, and to have the child’s development assessed by a professional.

For parents with children in dependency cases, these issues can also be discussed with the case manager, therapist, and other professionals involved with the child. Encourage parents to express these concerns to supervised visitation staff, case managers, teachers, day care personnel or other professionals who can help or who can refer the parent for assistance.





OTHER RESOURCES

There is an opportunity to share resources and explore solutions to family problems when parents and social service workers communicate about child development. Materials on child development and parenting can usually help parents realize their child's skills and where he or she stands in relation to other children. The following resources can further assist parents in understanding and meeting their child's needs.

The Family Skill Builder: This resource from the Institute for Family Violence Studies information on parent and children interactions at each stage of development.

<http://familyvio.csw.fsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/FINALFamilySkillBuilder.pdf>

Play at Different Ages and Developmental Stages: This webpage lists different play activities based on a child's age. It discusses different actions to expect from each.

<http://school.familyeducation.com/games/growth-and-development/38382.html>

Early Childhood Development Kit: This document offers a wealth of information on different age-appropriate activities for children in early childhood. It includes different types of games and activities.

http://www.unicef.org/earlychildhood/files/Activity_Guide.pdf

Developmental Delay: This webpage offers information regarding development for children with developmental disabilities.

<http://nichcy.org/disability/specific/dd>

Strengthening Families: This guidebook offers information for social service providers on how to teach the protective factors to families.

<http://www.cssp.org/publications/neighborhood-investment/strengthening-families/top-five/strengthening-families-a-guidebook-for-early-childhood-programs.pdf>

REFERENCES

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<https://www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/preventionmonth/factors.cfm>

National Resource Center from Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention. (n.d.). Protective factors. Retrieved from: <http://friendsnrc.org/cbcap-priority-areas/protective-factors>

Next Step

Read about *Parental Resilience*, the third protective factor in the E-Book Series for Supervised Visitation Programs.



The Clearinghouse on Supervised Visitation



awards this Certificate of Training to

for completion of a Protective Factors training on
**Protective Factor 2: Knowledge of Normal
Developmental Stages.**

Karen Oehme, Director, Institute for Family Violence Studies

Date