

A Primer on Adverse Childhood Experiences and Protective Factors

Advisory Social Services
Board

March 15, 2023

Michael A Becketts, PhD, Director
Fairfax County
Department of Family Services

What are ACEs?

- Traumatic events that occur during childhood – ages 0 -17
- Potential to have lasting, negative effects on health, wellbeing and opportunity across the lifespan
- There 10 original ACEs in 3 categories in the initial CDC study in 1995 – focused on adversity in the home
- As research advances are made, more are being added to more accurately depict the lived experience of children
 - Exposure to violence, victims of bullying, discrimination

Types of Childhood Adversity

ABUSE



Physical



Emotional



Sexual

NEGLECT



Physical



Emotional

HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION



Incarcerated relative



Divorce



Mother treated violently




Substance abuse



Mental illness

3

types of
ACEs
Adverse Childhood Experiences



Why are ACEs Important?

- The impact of ACEs has negative physical and psychological implications in childhood and across the lifespan
- Childhood trauma does not just disappear
 - ACEs are linked to issues like substance use in adulthood, mental illness, and chronic health problems
- As the number of ACEs a person experiences increases so does the risk of negative social and health outcomes
- A person with 4 or more ACEs is:
 - 2.4 times more likely to have a stroke
 - 1.9 times more likely to have cancer
 - 12 times more likely to attempt suicide
 - 7 times more likely to be an alcoholic

WHAT IMPACT DO ACEs HAVE?

As the number of ACEs increases, so does the risk for negative health outcomes



HOW PREVALENT ARE ACEs?

The ACE study* revealed the following estimates:

ABUSE

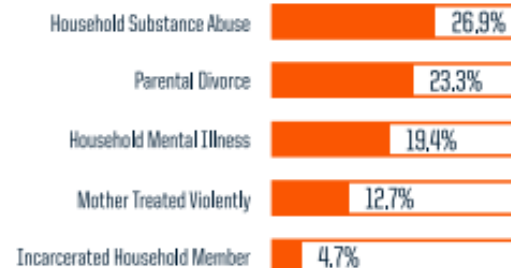


percentage of study participants that experienced a specific ACE

NEGLECT



HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION



Possible Risk Outcomes

Possible Risk Outcomes:

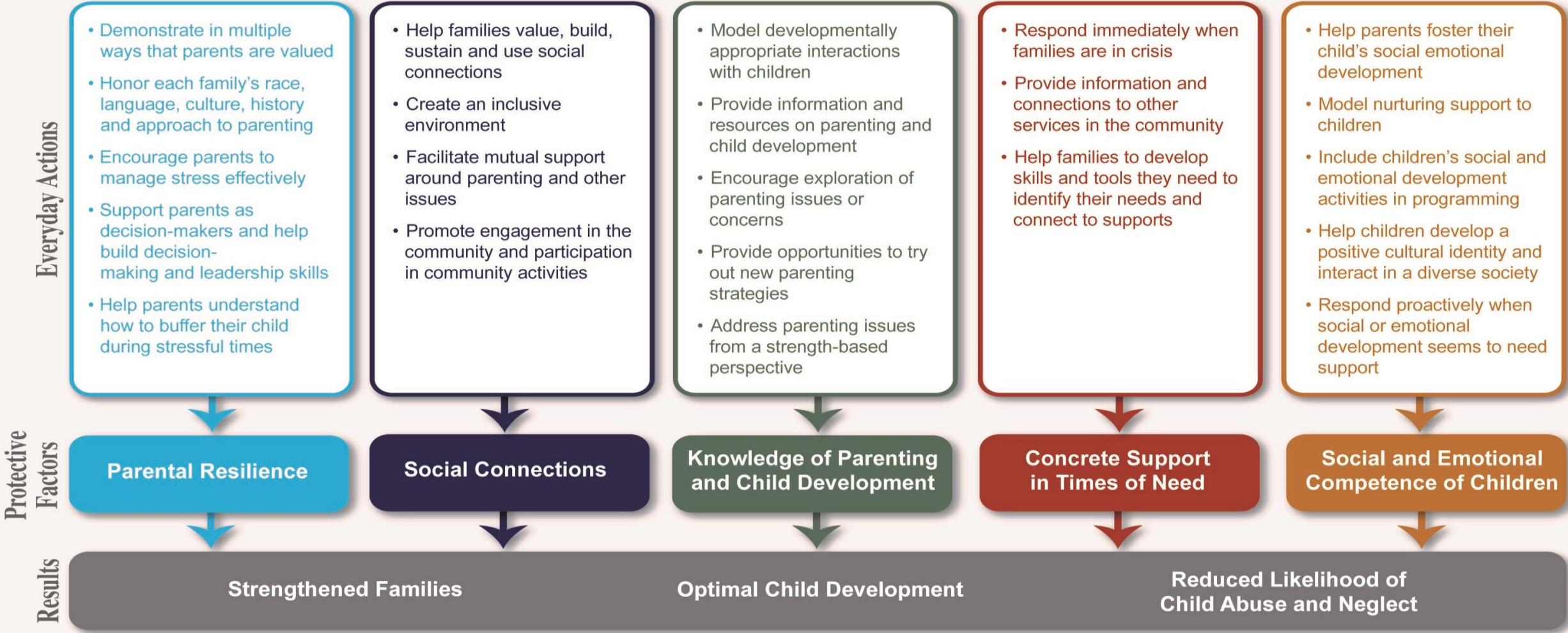


Protective Factors

- The impact of ACEs is mitigated by the presence and strength of protective factors
- The Protective Factors framework is a research-based, family-centered approach that builds supports the development of protective factors in families
- The research indicates these factors provide the best support to ensure that children thrive.



What we can do to support building resilience and protective factors in families



Graphics by Norma McReynolds for the NATIONAL ALLIANCE