Child Care Providers

Working to Support and Strengthen Families
The NJ Strengthening Families Initiative (NJ SFI) is an approach to preventing child abuse and neglect by strengthening families through early care and education. The fundamental principle is that certain protective factors contribute towards family resilience and strength. Child care providers play an important role in building these protective factors among the families they serve. By using these strategies, centers can help families build these protective factors that have proven to be effective in preventing child abuse and neglect.

For more information visit www.strengtheningfamilies.net
What are Protective Factors?

Protective factors are the strengths and resources that families can draw on when life gets difficult. Taking those good characteristics and building on them is a proven way to strengthen the entire family and thus decrease the likelihood of maltreatment. Each of the protective factors is essential, but most important is what they do together to create strength and stability in families.

This booklet outlines the Protective Factors© and provides a few ways in which those factors can be addressed:

1. **Parental Resilience** – Helping parents problem solve, place difficulties in perspective, and draw on trusting relationships and other resources when things go wrong can make a big difference when a family is under stress.

2. **Social Connections** – Helping parents build a social network goes a long way to decreasing their isolation – a major factor in child abuse and neglect.

3. **Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development** – Knowing ways to parent or what to expect at different developmental levels lessens stress for parents.

4. **Concrete Support in Times of Need** – Parents who know what’s available to them and how to get it – should they ever need it – are less stressed when difficult situations occur.

5. **Social & Emotional Competence of Children** – How caregivers support children’s emotional and social expressions profoundly influences how young children learn, develop self-esteem, and understand the world around them.
Parental Resilience

Resilience is the ability to “bounce back” when life becomes stressful. When parents feel stressed or frustrated, child care providers have the opportunity to support and encourage parents.

What might we do?

- Step in! Be supportive. Respond in positive ways. Ask, “How can we help you?”
- Meet with the staff to determine how the center might help a family in crisis or in need of help.
Social Connections

Parents, like all of us, need to have a network of trusted friends and family. Child care centers can be a supportive place for parents as well as their children.

What might we do?

- Introduce parents to each other as they pick up and drop off their children.
- Support the development of a “Parent Club” which will provide an environment where young families can meet with and get to know and support each other.
Parents often look to you – the center staff – to help them understand developmental levels of children or what they should or shouldn’t be doing as parents. This is a great opportunity to teach!

What might we do?

- Create a bulletin board to reinforce the message that “Being a Parent Is a Learning Experience!”
- Make sure your classroom has a posted list of the stages of development for the age group you have. This way parents know what should or should not be expected of their children.
- Share information about the useful web site, www.onetoughjob.org, with parents so they will have easy access to supportive child development materials.
- Help parents learn about their child—and especially take care to point out children’s achievements and positive traits.
Concrete Support in Times of Need

No matter what life brings, every family occasionally needs help. Center staff who see parents in need of help can often provide a way to access the services needed.

What might we do?

- Establish a resource table by the area where parents sign in and display local resources or fliers about housing, food, clothing, counseling and other special needs.
- Have representatives from local social service/agencies present to the parents on a regular basis.
- Invite parents to recommend resources they found helpful and to share information with other parents through newsletter articles, postings on bulletin boards and short talks at parent meetings.
Social & Emotional Competency of Children

Supporting children’s social and emotional skills helps the communication between parents and their children and can reduce tensions within the family.

What might we do?

- Because age appropriate activities are so critical for children, plan activities using the chart you created for the parents indicating what children can and cannot do at certain levels.
- Include the discussion of “feelings” in virtually all your conversations with children. Children who learn the importance of feelings – theirs and yours – learn the valuable trait of empathy.
- Help children learn appropriate social interaction skills so they may build connections and healthy relationships with others.
We depend on the child care providers and educators who provide care for our youngest, most vulnerable and most dependent citizens – our children.

Educators play such an important role in how children learn, grow and flourish.

They are the ones whose care, concern and support often guides parents through unfamiliar territory and helps them become better, more confident parents.
“A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops.”

Henry Brooks Adams