Families entering family support programs under difficult circumstances such as those who are seeking asylum, facing substance abuse disorders, or who are unable to meet the basic needs of their families, are experiencing toxic stress. Toxic stress is an ongoing heightened level of stress, which children who are a part of these families also experience.

Toxic stress negatively impacts the development of the whole brain, and has been shown more specifically to have the greatest impact on areas of the brain that are responsible for social-emotional wellbeing and language development. Children exposed to toxic stress also have an increased likelihood of developing the habit of smoking, alcoholism, drug abuse, depression and anxiety.

These negative impacts can be negated when community champions pull together for the sake of the families. Family support programs responsible for supporting families who are experiencing toxic stress, can partner with other care providers to advocate for them by ensuring that their medical, legal, mental, educational and basic needs are met. Collectively, representatives from each area of care can create nurturing environments that promotes healthy social-emotional development, positive physical health development, and contribute towards the architectural development of the whole brain.

Promote their protective factors. Even in the face of trauma, families are still growing and developing. It is essential that parents are able to see their strengths and focus on them so that they can bolster their resilience. The stress level may then become tolerable, making it feel more manageable. Partnering with parents to identify resources needed to overcome their challenges, highlights their confidence and competence in accessing social connections and concrete support in times of need. A child’s developing brain needs the constant attention of a parent who has the knowledge of parenting and child development. When a parent is equipped with the knowledge of how stress can negatively impact their child’s brain growth and social and emotional competence, they are more likely to maintain a nurturing and supportive environment.

Resources


Affiliate Performance Report Benefits

The Parents as Teachers (PAT) affiliates annually complete the Affiliate Performance Report (APR) by providing data on service delivery and program implementation. After submitting the APR, a Performance Measures Report (PMR) is run. The PMR uses data from the APR to demonstrate if the affiliate is meeting the Essential Requirements.

Completing the APR is beneficial. It helps affiliates evaluate operations and services, and assess implementation fidelity, as well as provides valuable insights into the needs and strengths. In addition, affiliates can develop and revise strategies for improvement. This allows the affiliates to identify and analyze issues and goals, and thus practice continuous quality improvement.

After completing the APR, affiliates can create a two page infographic report that summarizes the services delivered. This infographic can be used to inform funders, policy makers, stakeholders, media and local champions about the impact of PAT services on families.

Using Penelope? Need Help? Penelope Q&A sessions are available upon request for all PAT Affiliate programs in Pennsylvania. Contact Wenda Deardorff for more information or to schedule a session.

Self-Care and the Protective Factors

As family support professionals we often use the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework with families. Research shows that when all protective factors are present and robust, families and children thrive. Not only are these characteristics protective, meaning they buffer against stress, they are also promotive; they actively promote well-being in families. To support families we create environments where parents can explore and build these protective factors and the outcomes for their families are powerful. What if we considered this same framework for ourselves? How can we consider and build protective factors in our own lives to enhance our well-being?

Looking at protective factors in our own lives is a shift for those working in family support. The work in this field can be demanding and workers dedicate their time and energy to supporting the families they serve. It may feel odd to use the same framework we use with families to think about self-care, but as the developer of the framework, the Center for the Study of Social Policy, explains, “one of the best things about the Protective Factors Framework is that it applies to everyone – including you and your family!”

Consider how you can build the protective factors in your own life and family.

**Resilience.** This is the protective factor related to being able to handle life’s difficulties while still being able to function effectively. Stress related to work, family struggles, finances and more can feel overwhelming. Identify and commit to practices that help to alleviate stress in your life. Another way to build resilience is to recognize that we are valued. Take time to consider the impact you have on others – whether they are the families with whom you work, your friends or your own family.

**Social Connections.** This protective factor recognizes that we all need friends. Having a support network is a crucial aspect of self-care. You might consider the types of connections that are helpful to you – who do you go to for emotional support? Spiritual support? Advice about work? Identify who your supports are and make a concerted effort to connect with them regularly.

**Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development.** Having knowledge of children’s developmental stages and having tools and strategies in your parenting toolbox makes parenting less stressful. Similarly, having adequate knowledge and skills to do our jobs makes work less stressful. Find professional development opportunities that can help you build your knowledge and skills. Further, if you are a parent, consider how your own parenting beliefs and strategies impact how you interact with families. What can you learn from the families you serve?

**Concrete Support in Times of Need.** We all need help sometimes. And it can be difficult to ask for help. However, learning to ask for help when needed and knowing how to access it is an important aspect of self-care. Be familiar with services in your community as well as at your organization (such as employee assistance programs). Build a culture of encouragement that eliminates the stigma associated with asking for help in your workplace and family.

Self-care is important practice for those working in family support. It is important to make a commitment to practice strategies that help you take time to care for your well-being and build protective factors. For more information and strategies see the Center for the Study of Social Policy’s resource Taking Care of Yourself: Putting Protective Factors into Play for Yourself.

**Resource**

Participation in sports offers tremendous social, emotional and physical benefits for children. We know that one of the worst things for kids is being on the sidelines with an injury. As parents and coaches, there are simple things we can do to help reduce preventable injuries, so our kids can continue playing the games they love.

Facts
In 2013, more than 1.24 million children ages 19 and under were seen in emergency departments for injuries related to 14 commonly played sports.

Tips
Before playing organized sports, make sure your child receives a pre-participation physical exam, or PPE, performed by a doctor, or a nurse practitioner or qualified clinician under the supervision of a physician. Whomever performs the exam, the same practices should be followed including the need for a medical history.

Bring a water bottle to practice and games. Encourage children to stay well hydrated by drinking plenty of water before, during and after play.

Stretching before practice and games can release muscle tension and help prevent sports-related injuries, such as muscle tears or sprains. Make sure there is time set aside before every practice and game for athletes to warm up properly.

Take time off from one sport to prevent overuse injuries. It is an opportunity to get stronger and develop skills learned in another sport.

It is a good idea for coaches to get certified in first aid and CPR, learn the signs and symptoms of a concussion and help avoid overuse injury by resting players during practices and games.

For additional tips read Sports Safety Tips by Safe Kids Worldwide.
The Sharing Corner

The Sharing Corner is for you, by you. Share your expertise, celebrations, testimonies and news. Send an email with the information you would like to share to Wenda Deardorff.

Center for Schools and Communities reserves the right to determine the appropriateness of the information.

Family Support

Family Support Webinars
First Wednesday of the month
10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.
Aug 1, Strengthening Families: Building Your Toolbox
Sep 5, TBA

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 Wenda Deardorff.

PAT Foundational & Model Implementation
For new supervisors/parent educators of affiliate programs
Sep 10-14, Homestead, Pa.

PAT Foundational
For new curriculum subscribers
Sep 10-12, Homestead, Pa.

PA Foundational 2: 3 Years through Kindergarten
July 16-17, Camp Hill, Pa.
Sep 24-25, Homestead, Pa.
Dec 3-4, Camp Hill, Pa.

Family Support at the 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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Pennsylvania Parents as Teachers is based at the Center for Schools and Communities. Learn more at the following sites:
Children's Trust Fund
Strengthening Families