



# The Protective Factors

An E-Book Series for Supervised Visitation Programs



## Parental Resilience

The Third Protective Factor in a Series of Six



# Introduction

Research indicates that children with parents who have resilient coping skills are at reduced risk for child abuse and maltreatment. Parental resilience is defined as a parent's own inner resources and coping skills that help them to handle stress and crises. Resilient coping skills allow a parent to be able to solve problems, keep calm and collected when upset, and make it through challenging times. When parents are resilient, they are better able to build strong and resilient families.

## Objectives

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

- Understand what resilient coping skills look like in a family setting and be able to describe different examples in the home.
- Recognize the importance of parental resilience and its positive effects on children and families.
- Explore strategies to help parents develop and use resilient coping skills.
- Understand the specific ways supervised visitation personnel can help parents develop and use resilient coping skills.
- Recognize resources available to social service providers and families looking for more information about parental resilience.



# Parental Resilience in the Home

**BELOW ARE SEVERAL EXAMPLES OF WHAT PARENTAL RESILIENCE MAY LOOK LIKE:**



A mother counting to ten to calm down when she is frustrated by a toddler's tantrum.

A father recognizing his need to de-stress and finding a responsible caregiver to supervise his children while he takes time for himself.



A father calmly handles a financial crisis in the family without raising his voice or lashing out physically or emotionally



A mother takes time to work with a child who is acting in a challenging way



**BELOW ARE SEVERAL INDICATORS THAT PARENTAL RESILIENCE MAY BE LACKING:**



A parent exploding in anger at a child physically or verbally.

A parent refusing or hesitant to plan for the future.



A parent unable to get out of bed after encountering a difficult situation



A parent avoiding conflict resolution.




# The Importance of Parental Resilience

Though some parents deal with stress in negative ways, such as drinking alcohol or becoming violent, parents with resilient coping skills are able to handle stress in healthy ways and model effective coping skills for their child.


Parents who are emotionally resilient have a positive attitude, creatively solve problems, effectively address challenges, and are less likely to direct anger and frustration at their children. In addition, these parents are aware of their own challenges—for example, those arising from inappropriate parenting they received as children—and accept help and/or counseling when needed (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, n.d.).

**PARENTS WHO HAVE RESILIENT COPING SKILLS:**


May relieve stress through physical exercise.




May cope with problems by talking with friends or family.



Use activities to help them deal with difficult times.

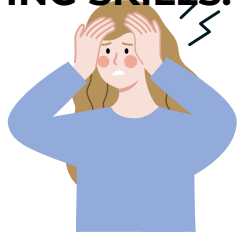


Use methods for remaining calm in frustration situation.




**PARENTS WITHOUT RESILIENT COPING SKILLS:**


Often feel overwhelmed and frustrated



May develop health problems related to stress.



Are less able to address marital and family problems in a healthy, productive way.



Are at increased risk for drug and alcohol use.



## Think about it....



Knowing the importance of parental resilience, what are some of the risks to families with parents who do not have good coping skills? How might the child, parent, or family as a whole be affected?

# Strategies for Working with Families

Social service providers can help parents learn the importance of having resilient coping skills and how to develop them. There are many different opportunities for social service providers to discuss resilience and healthy coping strategies with parents. Some opportunities include:

- 1 Talking with parents during intake and follow-up procedures to social service delivery.
- 2 Talking with parents when they express things.
- 3 Talking with parents during a supervised visitation.
- 4 Talking with parents about occupational, education, and social resources.
- 5 Talking with parents during pick up, drop off, or parent-teacher meetings.



# Skill Building

As parents begin to discuss their worries and anxiety, supervised visitation monitors have a chance to help build resilience and coping strategies. Because parents may not recognize the ways stress may impact their interactions with their child, supervised visitation monitors can help parents to understand the importance of coping with stress in a healthy, positive way and modeling coping behaviors for children. Monitors can work with parents to understand what causes and triggers stress, currently inappropriate or unhealthy coping methods and the impact of stress on the family dynamic. After identifying stressors and existing coping skills, monitors and parents can identify healthy coping skills and preventative methods to reduce stress. Preventative methods can include pre-planning, recognizing triggers and when stress is building, using appropriate coping skills to avoid a blow-up, and communicating clearly to avoid misunderstandings. Supervised visitation monitors can also work with parents to help build self-care into coping skills and daily routines, as parents who do not care for themselves are unable to care for their children. Below are several different skills to help parents to develop resilient coping strategies.

## TAKING STEPS TO PREVENT STRESS

- Discuss with parents how to avoid potential stress through engaging in alternative activities, such as listening to music, taking a walk, or other activities the parents like to do to relax.
- Talk with parents about the importance of communication and positive coping skills to avoid tension building and stress triggers. Help the parent to pre-plan and set goals to avoid future stress to the greatest extent possible.
- Talk with parents about what activities he or she likes to do to relax, such as physical activity, art, or yoga, and help him or her make time for these activities in his or her schedule. If the parent engages in negative coping behaviors such as abusing drugs or alcohol, have the parent identify positive and negative consequences of their negative coping behaviors. For example, if the parent copes by doing drugs, a positive consequence may include forgetting reality for a bit, but a negative consequence may be losing custody of his/her child, or endangering his/her child. Do the same for positive coping skills, to help the parent see the difference in positive and negative consequences and use positive coping skills in the future.



## STAYING PHYSICALLY HEALTHY

- Help parents identify physical activities they can do with or without their child to relieve stress, such as running, yoga, or swimming.
- Encourage parents to make sure they take care of themselves physically by exercising and eating healthy. Remind parents their physical health is as important as their child's.
- Encourage parents to visit the doctor regularly to ensure they are healthy and not experiencing any negative health consequences from stress. Negative health effects of stress may put more stress on the family.



## STAYING EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY

- Talk with parents about child-related stress. For instance, take a breath and count to ten instead of immediately punishing the child for age-appropriate behaviors, such as needing to be reminded of instructions, or not cleaning up after themselves.
- Help parents identify supportive social systems they can turn to when they experience stress or feel overwhelmed.



## LEARNING ABOUT SOURCES OF STRESS

- Talk with parents about what parts of his or her life are causing stress and recommend some resources to help reduce stress. For instance, if parents feel stressed about child care, it may be helpful to suggest some low-cost child care options.
- Encourage parents to talk about how they feel when they are stressed. Help parents identify feelings they may be experiencing. This allows the parents to name their feelings, while also modeling healthy labeling for their children.



Every parent has ways to manage stress, regardless of cultural context. **Have a conversation with the parent about how he or she has handled stress in the past.** Work with the parent to identify activities that are relaxing and what resources are utilized for support, **while exploring the parent's perception of a healthy lifestyle.**

# Case Example

**Read the case example below and answer the following questions.**

A supervised visitation monitor meets before a visit with the single mother of two brothers who have been recently suspended from school for continuously disrupting class. The supervised visitation monitor learns that the mother receives little financial support from the boys' father. During the first meeting, the mother seemed very overwhelmed by all of her responsibilities. The mother became emotional and told the supervised visitation monitor that she does not know how to handle everything and has been getting angry with her sons because she feels constantly overwhelmed.

## Questions:

1. What steps can the supervised visitation monitor take to help this parent with the stress she is experiencing?
2. What are some possible risk factors with regards to child maltreatment?
3. What are some of the feelings this parent may be experiencing?

## Possible Answers:

1. The supervised visitation monitor can help the mother identify what parts of her life are causing her stress and then refer the mother to resources to help deal with these stressors. The supervised visitation monitor could recommend different resources available in the community or at school for the boys, such as afterschool care, tutoring and behavioral counseling. The supervised visitation monitor can also recommend the mother try to seek out some systems to help her with self-care. For example, she can try and identify a friend, maybe a parent from school, who can help watch the boys while the mother takes some time for herself. If the case is a dependency case, the monitor should ensure that the case manager is aware of the problems and is offering assistance to the mother. At a minimum, the monitor can direct the mother to the Office of Child Support Enforcement.
2. This parent is dealing with high levels of stress caused by being a single parent, having a limited support group, and also experiencing some financial instability.
3. This parent may be experiencing a heightened emotional response due to stress, including depression, frustration, and feeling overwhelmed. She needs resources and help.



# Supervised Visitation Chart

The chart below describes how supervised visitation personnel can take advantage of opportunities with parents to help them develop resilient coping skills. The chart also describes the positive effect parental resiliency can have on children.

<b>Opportunities for Supervised Visitation Personnel</b>	<b>Opportunities for Parents</b>	<b>Positive Effect on the Child</b>
<p>During intake, talk with the parent about ways he or she handles stress. Discuss stressful events the parent might have going on in his or her life.</p>	<p>The parent has the opportunity to identify how he or she copes with stress and can learn new and healthy ways of coping.</p>	<p>The child may adopt and replicate effective coping skills when the parent exhibits them.</p>
<p>During parenting time, encourage the parent to choose an activity that will be low stress for the parent and child.</p>	<p>The parent chooses a low-stress activity in a potentially high-stress situation, or when they are feeling stressed. Parent and child can enjoy time together without heightened emotions and tense interactions.</p>	<p>The child also gets to participate in a low- stress activity in a potentially high-stress situation, or when the parent is feeling stressed.</p>
<p>When a child becomes upset, help the parent learn to comfort the child and not become overwhelmed by the upset behavior.</p>	<p>The parent learns ways to comfort the child and avoid more potential stress.</p>	<p>The child feels comforted by the parent and will imitate the parent's reaction and demeanor</p>
<p>When a parent becomes frustrated, help him or her use resilient coping skills to calm down before reentering a stressful situation.</p>	<p>The parent learns to effectively use his or her coping skills in a stressful situation.</p>	<p>The child sees his or her parent use coping skills to deal effectively with crises.</p>

# Case Example

**Read the case example below and answer the following questions.**

A supervised visitation monitor is supervising a visit between a father and his six year old son and eight year old daughter. When the father arrives for the visit, he appears tired. Before the visit, the father mentions to the supervised visitation monitor he has recently lost his job and is searching for a new one. The father tells the supervised visitation monitor he is having trouble paying his bills and he doesn't know what to do. During the visit, the father seems distracted from his activity with the children.

## **Questions:**

1. What steps can the supervised visitation monitor take to help this parent with the stress he is experiencing?
2. What are some of the risk factors this parent may be experiencing for child maltreatment?
3. What are some of the feelings this parent may be experiencing?
4. What are some activities or strategies you can use to help the dad to de-stress, build resilience and engage with his kids?

## **Possible Answers:**

1. The supervised visitation monitor can recommend community resources to the father and help the father identify support structures in his life. For instance, the monitor could recommend different financial support resources or resources to help find a job.
2. This parent is dealing with a high level of stress caused by unemployment and financial strain, which may impact the parent's patience and tolerance, and lead to possible child maltreatment.
3. This parent may be experiencing feelings of self-doubt, anger, frustration, loneliness, and high levels of stress.
4. The supervised visitation monitor could help the dad by providing access to a phone onsite to communicate with employers and listen to the difficulties the dad is experiencing, to help him handle his emotions. Additionally, the monitor could play soft music and help the father brainstorm resources within his social support network to help improve his situation.



# Other Resources

**Families:** This website from the American Institute of Stress discusses the impact of stress on the whole family. This includes different family dynamics or family structural changes that may cause stress.

<http://www.stress.org/families/>

**Practical Ways to Handle Stress:** This webpage includes a step by step list of ways to avoid stress and cope with stress.

<http://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2011/07/11/10-practical-ways-to-handle-stress/>

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

<https://cssp.org/our-work/project/strengthening-families/>

# References

Administration for Children and Families. (n.d.). *The six protective factors*. US Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from:

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/preventionmonth/protective-factors-conversation-guides/>

American Psychological Association. (2019). *Stress in America 2019 report*.

Retrieved from:

<https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2019/stress-america-2019.pdf>

## Next Step:

Read about **Supportive Social Connections**, the fourth protective factor in the E-Book Series for Supervised Visitation Programs.