



The Protective Factors

An E-Book Series for Supervised Visitation Programs



Concrete Community Supports

The Fifth Protective Factor in a Series of Six



Introduction

Research indicates that children with parents who have access to concrete community supports during times of need are at a reduced risk for child abuse and maltreatment. When a family is struggling to meet basic needs, this stress can lead to family dysfunction. Concrete community supports are social services that provide basic resources such as food, water, shelter, safety, health care, and mental health care. Other services that can be included in community supports are: childcare, domestic violence services, substance abuse treatment, employment assistance, housing, transportation, and financial literacy.

Objectives

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

- Understand what access to concrete community supports looks like in a family setting and be able to describe different examples in the home.
- Learn about the importance of concrete community supports and the positive effects for children and families.
- Be able to explore strategies to help parents gain access to concrete community supports.
- Understand the specific ways supervised visitation personnel can help parents gain access to concrete community supports.
- Learn about the resources available for social service providers and families looking for more information on concrete community supports.

Concrete Community Supports in the Home

BELOW ARE SEVERAL EXAMPLES OF WHAT HAVING ACCESS TO CONCRETE COMMUNITY SUPPORTS MAY LOOK LIKE IN THE HOME:

A single father is called into work and is able to take his child to a daycare center.

A single mother is laid off and is able to find help filing for unemployment.

A child becomes sick and the parent immediately takes him to the doctor.



An unemployed parent is able to accept the first job she finds because she has reliable transportation.



BELOW ARE SEVERAL INDICATORS THAT ACCESS TO CONCRETE COMMUNITY SUPPORTS IS NOT PRESENT IN THE HOME:



A single father cannot stop drinking and does not know who to ask for help.



A single mother leaves her young child alone at home when she goes to work.

In a family without health insurance, the children only see the doctor in an emergency.



The three children of a two-parent family only eat when they are at school.



The Importance of Concrete Community Supports

Concrete community supports play a role in how well parents are able to manage day-to-day challenges, handle crisis situations, and tend to the needs of their children.

PARENTS WITH ACCESS TO CONCRETE SUPPORTS:

Are able to spend more time helping their children.



Have resources needed to handle high-stress situations.



Are able to meet a child's basic needs.



Are at reduced risk for child maltreatment and neglect.



PARENTS WITHOUT ACCESS TO CONCRETE SUPPORTS:

Are less able to meet the physical and/or emotional needs of their children.



Are at greater risk of being involved with the child welfare system.



May find it difficult to make positive changes for their family.



May be less responsive to other services.



Think about it....



Knowing about the importance of concrete community supports for families, what are the risks to families with children who do not have access to community supports? How might the child, parent, or family as a whole be affected?

Strategies for Working with Families

Social service providers can help parents learn about the importance of concrete community supports and how to access them. There are many different opportunities for social service providers to discuss concrete community supports with parents. Some opportunities include:

- 1 Talking with parents during intake and follow-up procedures to service delivery
- 2 Talking with parents when they express their feelings.
- 3 Talking with parents during a problem in supervision.
- 4 Talking with parents about occupational, educational, and social resources.
- 5 Talking with parents during pick-up, drop-off, or parent-teacher meetings.



Skill Building

There are different skills that help parents access concrete community supports. Some of these skills are described in detail below, along with information on how individuals that work with parents can help them to develop these skills.

AWARENESS OF NEEDS AND CONCERNS



- During visits or meetings, talk with parents about what their specific needs are.
- Assist the parents in prioritizing their needs and make referrals for their top needs.
- Help parents identify the best community resources for their situation.

ABILITY TO MEET REQUIREMENTS

- When a parent has contacted a referred agency, ask him or her specific questions about what tasks he or she needs to complete. For example: What paperwork needs to be turned in for the referral? What is the next step?
- Guide clients to action and be encouraging. Help the client set a goal of accomplishing a task.
- If possible, schedule a time to sit down with the parent and help him or her with any tasks that need to be completed (paperwork, making a phone call, etc).



AWARENESS OF AVAILABLE COMMUNITY RESOURCES

- If possible, suggest multiple resources. In many cases, a client will need referrals to more than one service and there may be more than one community resource that can serve his or her family.
- Look for community resources in nontraditional places. Sometimes there are programs at houses of worship, domestic violence centers, homeless shelters, community colleges or universities, as well as in larger social services agencies.
- Host an “Open House,” a “Community Resource Fair,” or a “Community Services Day/Evening” during which service providers can present or set up a table for local families who can learn about the available services in the community.



ABILITY TO ACCESS RESOURCES

- Think about how well the client will “fit” the agency. Assist the parent in connecting to local social service agencies that are culturally appropriate (services that meet the parent’s cultural needs, such as his or her ethnicity, religious background, or special needs). If for some reason the client’s needs or personality does not “fit” the agency, make a referral to the agency that can best suit the needs of the client.
- Talk with the parent about what he or she is comfortable with or uncomfortable with when seeking services.
- If a parent does not know how to organize the tasks he or she is given, offer to help him or her to accomplish a task.



Case Example

Read this case example and answer the questions that follow.

Nathan is a 27 year old single father of an eight year old child, Jeremy. He recently found a job at a convenience store where his schedule requires him to work three night shifts a week, from 3:00PM to 11:00PM. He does not know anyone who can watch Jeremy while he is at work, and he cannot afford to pay a sitter. He has been working at his new job for two weeks and has left Jeremy at home alone while he is gone. Jeremy has rules to follow, including not to go outside, not to open the door for anyone, and not to answer the phone. When Nathan tells his case manager about his new job, he admits to leaving Jeremy at home alone, but does not see any other way to keep his job.

Questions:

1. Is this a case of child neglect? Why or why not?
2. What are some ways that the case manager can assist Nathan in resolving this dilemma?

Possible Answers:

1. No. Based on the information from the case scenario, the lack of supervision appears to be due to low-income. The father is leaving the child alone when he goes to work because he has no one else to watch him. According to Florida Statute 39.01, the parent or legal custodian of a child is responsible for assessing when it is appropriate to leave a child without supervision or arrangement, based on the child's age, mental status, and physical condition, but without proper support many parents are not able to meet this legal requirement.
2. Nathan and the case manager can work together to try to identify an affordable community resource that can assist Nathan with childcare. He may be eligible for a childcare subsidy. There may be other options, such as connecting Nathan with some of the parents of the other children at Jeremy's school in order to find a family that would be willing to supervise him on those nights.



Supervised Visitation Chart

The chart below describes how supervised visitation personnel can take advantage of opportunities with parents to connect them to concrete community supports. The chart also describes the positive outcomes for the child.

Opportunities for Supervised Visitation Personnel	What the Parent Can Do	Positive Effect on the Child
During intake, talk with the parent about needs or concerns he or she may have and refer him or her to community resources.	The parent can work with personnel to identify his or her strongest areas of need and which referrals he or she is most interested in.	The child's needs can be addressed directly through a service or indirectly through benefiting the parent.
During follow-up, see if any new needs have come up or if the circumstances have changed.	The parent can discuss any new concerns and contact referrals with the supervised visitation provider.	Any new needs that the child may have can be identified and addressed.
During follow-up, encourage the parent to complete referral tasks, and if possible assist him or her in connecting with resources.	The parent can work with personnel to contact resource agencies and prepare any eligibility requirements.	The parent models effective help-seeking behavior for the child.

Case Example

Read this case example and answer the questions that follow

Maggie is a 34-year-old mother who is visiting her four girls. The girls were removed from her care after she went into a rage and pushed her oldest daughter into the wall, causing the child to hit her head. During intake, she tells the supervised visitation monitor about the family's last two years. When she found out her abusive husband was cheating on her, Maggie says that she felt like her "life was over." Her husband did not want to stay together, and he kicked her and the children out of the house. They had to move to another state and into Maggie's parent's home and lived in one bedroom together. Maggie was working over 50 hours a week and barely making ends meet when she began to feel that she was "losing control." Maggie tells the visitation monitor that she loves her children, but she is afraid that she is "too broken" and a "horrible mom."

Questions:

1. What are some of the feelings that Maggie may be experiencing?
2. In what ways could the supervised visitation monitor link Maggie with community resources that may be helpful for her?

Possible Answers:

1. Given the stressful events, Maggie could be experiencing depression, hopelessness, or guilt.
2. During their discussion, the monitor could work with Maggie to identify what she feels she needs the most help with, and if she is open to receiving help, refer her to the most appropriate services, such as services that offer low cost housing options, information about the public transportation system, assistance from the local domestic violence shelter.



Other Resources

- <https://www.myflfamilies.com>
As the home website for the Florida Department of Children and Families, this site contains a search engine for locating local resources and a listing of the services that DCF offers and programs that it partners with.
- http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/sub_section_main_1043.aspx
This link connects to a step-by-step guide for identifying community assets. This chapter is part of The Community Toolbox, an online resource for developing community-building skills, a project hosted by Work Group for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas.
- <https://www.211.org/>
This link connects individuals to local resources available in their area.



Access to Concrete Supports

A checklist to see if the client has difficulties accessing basic needs.

Shelter

Ask questions to see if the client has stable housing

- Do you have a place to stay?
- Do you have running water?
- Do you have electricity?
- Do you have heating and cooling?

Food

Ask questions to determine if the client needs help accessing adequate food for the family.

- Do you get enough food to eat each day?
- Do your children get enough food to eat each day?
- Do you have drinking water readily available?

Safety

Ask questions to determine if the client needs different housing or is experiencing violence.

- Do you feel safe in your home?

Medical

Ask questions to determine if the client needs help accessing medical resources.

- When was the last time you went to the doctor?
- When was the last time you took your children to the doctor?

Transportation

Ask questions to determine if the client needs has access to transportation.

- Do you have access to transportation?
- Do your children have transportation to childcare/school?

Childcare

Ask questions to determine if the client needs help with childcare resources

- Does your child/children have childcare while you are away?

Employment/Education

Ask questions to determine if the client needs help finding a job or needs help giving their child an education.

- Do you have a job or means to make money to support yourself and your child?
- Do your children have access to school to gain an education?

References

- Clearinghouse for Supervised Visitation. (2010). *Supervised Visitation and Low-Income Families: Replicating Florida's Pilot Project to Improve Family Financial Stability*.
- Hardy, F. & Darlington, Y. (2008). What parents value from formal support services in the context of identified child abuse. *Child & Family Social Work*, 13, 252-261.

Next Step:

Read about **Emotional and Social Competence in Children**, the sixth protective factor in the E-Book Series for Supervised Visitation Programs.