



The Protective Factors

An E-Book Series for Supervised Visitation Programs



Nurturing and Attachment

The First Protective Factor in a Series of Six



Introduction

Research indicates that children with parents who nurture them and develop attachment with them are at reduced risk for child abuse and maltreatment. Nurturing children and developing attachment with them is the process of a parent bonding emotionally with his or her children through kind, supportive, age-appropriate behavior. In this process, the child learns to trust and feel secure with the parent. Nurturing and attachment are keys for developing bonds between parent and child.

Objectives

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

- Understand what nurturing and attachment look like in a family setting and be able to describe different examples in the home.
- Learn about the importance of nurturing and attachment and the positive effects for children and families.
- Be able to explore strategies to help parents nurture and develop attachment with their children.
- Understand the specific ways supervised visitation personnel can help parents develop nurturing and attachment behaviors.
- Learn about the resources available to a social service providers and families looking for more information about nurturing and attachment.



Nurturing and Attachment

BELOW ARE SEVERAL EXAMPLES OF WHAT NURTURING AND ATTACHMENT MAY LOOK LIKE:



A father taking his son on a fishing trip.



A mother reading to her child.



A mother soothing her baby when he or she is fussy.

A father teaching his son to ride a bike and helping him when he falls down.



BELOW ARE SEVERAL INDICATORS THAT NURTURING AND ATTACHMENT ARE NOT PRESENT:



A parent frequently leaving a child alone at home without regard to his or her safety.



A parent unwilling to comfort the child when he or she is upset.



A parent refusing to hold his or her child.

A parent talking on his or her cell phone during a visit and ignoring the child.



The Importance of Nurturing and Attachment

Nurturing and attachment are very important in a child's development. They play key roles in the child's development of other social, emotional, and psychological skills.

CHILDREN WITH GOOD OR SECURE ATTACHMENTS:

Feel more comfortable learning new things.



Are more likely to build health and strong relationships with others.

Are better able to communicate their needs as they learn to speak.



Feel more comfortable and confident expressing their feelings.



CHILDREN WITH POOR OR INSECURE ATTACHMENTS:

May act out because they assume parents may not be present or concerned



May become overly attached to a parent and have trouble trying new things.

May feel as they are alone in the world.



Tend to withdraw from stressful situations and avoid dealing with their emotions.

Think about it....



What are the risks to families with parents who do not nurture and develop attachment to their child? How might the child, parent, or family as a whole be affected by this lack of nurturing and attachment?

Strategies for Working with Families

Social services providers can help parents learn about the importance of nurturing and attachment, and how to develop them. There are many different opportunities for social service providers to talk to parents. Some opportunities are described below:

- 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 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

There are different skills that help nurture and develop attachment with their children. Some are described below, along with information on how individuals who work with parents can help them to develop these skills both at visits and at home.

BEING ABLE TO COMFORT THE CHILD



- Talk to the parent about ways to soothe the child when he or she becomes upset or frustrated. These vary depending on the child's age. For a baby, this may be physically comforting the child by holding the child or using a soft voice to talk to the child. For an older child, this may be encouraging the child to express his or her feelings by sitting him or her down and asking the child how he or she is feeling.
- Encourage the parent to regularly communicate with the child. For a baby, this may be making eye contact and talking with the baby. For an older child, this may be encouraging the child to share what is happening in his or her life and letting the child know the parent is interested.

BEING ABLE TO BE SUPPORTIVE

- Talk to the parent about the importance of being present in the child's life at home, at school, or in the community. Help the parent understand the importance of spending time building a secure attachment. The child learns to trust that the parent will be there to support him or her.
- Talk to the parent about the importance of communicating with the child, as well as the importance of teaching the child to communicate with others. This shows the child that he or she is cared about the child and accepted.
- Encourage the parent to become involved in the child's school activities, such as going to a child's performance, sporting event, or other school event.



MAKING TIME TO PLAY TOGETHER

- Encourage the parent to spend time with the child doing activities, such as riding a bike, reading a book, or playing a game. Doing these activities allows the child to know that his or her parent wants to spend time with him or her and gives the child security in their relationship.
- Discuss with the parent the importance of helping the child learn to play a game and then playing the game together. This allows the child to feel supported by the parent while learning something new.
- Talk to the parent about identifying activities his or her child likes to do and make an effort to do these activities together. For example, if a parent knows his or her child is very interested in playing a sport, a good way to work on nurturing and developing attachment may be for a parent to practice with the child.



LEARNING AND KNOWING ABOUT THE CHILD

- Talk to the parent about the importance of nurturing the child and building attachment early on in a child's life. Help the parent identify ways to build that nurturing and developing attachment while the child is baby, such as through meeting the baby's basic needs, soothing the baby when he or she cries, and playing with the baby.
- Talk to the parent about the negative effects of not nurturing the child, which can lead to the child having poor attachments with the parent.



A Note on Cultural Competency...

Talk with parents about ways they express affection and show support within their culture. How was affection shown to the parent when he or she was young? Does the parent continue this same tradition with his or her child? How does the parent soothe or comfort the child? How does the parent communicate with the child? What are some things that the parent does to show the child that he or she care about the child? Work with the parent to identify ways through their own context. **Approaches to raising children can vary from culture to culture. It is important to be respectful of differences.**

Case Example

Read this case example and answer the questions that follows.

A case manager is working with a female client who has a six month old baby boy. The client had the baby when she was sixteen years old and she is a single mother. The client is working with the case manager to develop parenting skills. The case manager watches the client interact with the baby and sees that the child does not know what to do with the baby. When the baby cries, the parent becomes overwhelmed and frustrated. She expresses to the case manager that she does not know why the baby is crying nor does she know how to make him stop.

Questions:

1. What are some possible reasons the baby may be crying? What are some steps the mother and case manager can take to address the possible issues?
2. What are some risk factors that might be present?
3. What are some feelings this client may be experiencing?
4. What steps can the case manager take to help this parent learn to nurture and develop attachment with her baby?

Possible Answers:

1. The baby may be crying because he is hungry, tired, has a wet diaper, has gas, or is simply upset. The case manager can help the mother by helping her identify ways to help the baby, such as by considering the last time the baby ate or slept, checking the baby's diaper, massaging the baby's belly, or comforting the baby by holding him and speaking softly to him.
2. The client may be dealing with poverty, a large amount of stress from the lack of support, and inadequate parenting skills as a young mother.
3. The client could be feeling overwhelmed, upset, frustrated and/or confused. She expresses that she does not know how she should deal with a crying baby.
4. The case manager can encourage the parent to hold the child to soothe him and to speak softly to the child. The case manager can also talk with the parent about ways to nurture and develop attachment specifically with an infant.



Supervised Visitation Chart

The chart below describes how supervised visitation personnel can take advantage of opportunities with parents to encourage the nurturing and development of attachment. The chart also describes the positive effect of these behaviors.

Opportunities for Supervised Visitation Personnel	What the Parent Can Do	Positive Effect on the Child
During intake, allow the parent to be open about feelings he or she may be experiencing by asking directly about his or her feelings.	The parent can model being opened about his or her feelings.	The child learns how to communicate with his or her family about feelings in a healthy way.
During parenting time, encourage the parent to select or help the child select an activity that allows them to work together.	The parent can work with the child during the activity and express care and support for the child.	The child will feel encouraged to work together with the parent and develop trust.
When the child becomes upset, encourage the parent to find out what is wrong and soothe the child.	The parent meets the child's needs, and soothes the child to communicate.	The child feels comforted when he or she is upset and learns to trust his or her parent to help.
When the parent becomes frustrated, encourage the parent to take a step back from the situation so he or she does not become upset at the child.	The parent understands that he or she should calm down and not yell at the child in frustration.	The child learns that even when the parent is upset or frustrated, the parent still loves the child.

Case Example

Read this case example and answer the questions that follows.

A supervised visitation staff member is supervising a visit between a non-custodial father and his two year old daughter. The father has a history of alcohol use and violent outbursts with his family. The father has been attending AA meetings and trying to stay away from alcohol. The father's goal for supervised visitation is to try to build a better relationship with his daughter. While the father is playing with the daughter, she notices his phone on a nearby chair. She grabs the phone and begins to play with it. The father asks her to hand him the phone and she yells, "NO!" -- he takes the phone from her hands and she starts to have a temper tantrum. The father tries to calm the child, but she just keeps crying loudly. The father becomes very frustrated. He shouts, "Take her away from me!"

Questions:

1. What are some risk factors that might be present?
2. What are some feelings this client may be experiencing?
3. What steps can the supervised visitation worker take to help this parent learn to nurture and develop attachment with his daughter?

Possible Answers:

1. Some risk factors are the father's anger issues and frustration at his daughter. He may have poor relationships and poor coping skills due to his difficulty coping with his anger and frustration.
2. The father may be feeling self-blame, frustration, feelings of being overwhelmed, and possibly anger.
3. The worker can help the father take a step back from the situation and try to calm down. Then the worker and father can discuss techniques that the father can use to calm down when he gets angry or frustrated with his daughter, so that he does not damage his relationship with her. The worker and father can also discuss appropriate ways of dealing with his daughter's temper tantrum.



Affirmation Cards

Affirmation cards allow parents, children, and supervised visitation staff a chance to verbalize successes and congratulate families when they act positively.

Each card congratulates the child or parent, and provides a line for the supervised visitation worker to describe what the child or parent did to get a card. Below are some examples for children by age group, and parents.

CHILDREN (3-6 YEARS)

Thank you for:

- Saying please and thank you when asking to play a game
- Taking turns when playing with blocks.
- Sharing with your brother/sister.
- Using your inside voice.
- Talking about your feelings.
- Calming down after getting upset.
- Following the visitation rules.

CHILDREN (7-17 YEARS)

Thank you for:

- Calming down after getting upset.
- Talking calmly about a problem you have.
- Sharing with your brother/sister.
- Working hard and improving your performance at school.
- Being a good sport after playing a game.
- Following the visitation rules.
- Asking for help when you need it.
- Treating your parent/staff with respect.

PARENTS

Thank you for:

- Arriving on your visit on time.
- Expressing your frustrations calmly, instead of yelling.
- Correcting your children's behavior in a calm manner.
- Teaching your son/daughter something new.
- Following through with your case plan.
- Having a great visit.
- Following the program guidelines.
- Encouraging your child.
- Being sensitive to your child's needs
- Being a caring mom/dad!

Other Resources

- **Strengthening Families:** This guidebook offers information for social service providers on how to teach the protective factors to families.
<http://www.cssp.org/publications/neighborhood-investment/strengthening-families/top-five/strengthening-%20families-a-guidebook-for-early-childhood-programs.pdf>
- **Bonding with your Baby:** This webpage offers information specifically for bonding with a baby. It includes information on how to bond with babies and the importance of bonding with babies.
http://kidshealth.org/parent/pregnancy_newborn/communicating/bonding.html
- **Zero to Three:** This webpage offers information on the first three years of a child's life, including behaviors, development, and child care.
<http://www.zerotothree.org/>

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/preventing/preventionmonth/factors.cfm>

Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). *Child maltreatment: Risk and protective factors*. Retrieved from:
www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childmaltreatment/riskprotectivefactors.html

Lubell, K., M., Lofton, T., & Singer, H., H. (2008). *Promoting healthy parenting practices across cultural groups: A CDC research brief*. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.

Whittmer, D. (2011). *Attachment: What works?* US Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from : http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/briefs/wwb_24.pdf

Next Step:

Read about **Knowledge of Child Development**, the second protective factor in the E-Book Series for Supervised Visitation Programs.