Resilience Toolkit:
Building Protective Factors for Youth

How to Use This Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to help parent educators and caregivers move beyond simply "managing behavior" to building a foundation of lasting resilience and stability.

Step 1 - Identify Strengths:
Use the Protective Factors Checklist first to highlight the existing assets within the family. This strengths-based approach builds the trust necessary for deeper work.

Step 2 - Understand the Impact: Use the ACEs Insight Tool to gain a clearer picture of how past trauma may be influencing current challenges.

Step 3 - Create a Path Forward: Use the combined results to identify specific areas where extra support is needed, helping caregivers foster the resilience children need to thrive.

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Protective Factors Checklist

Tool for Parent Educators & Caregivers

Use this checklist to help strengthen the five Protective Factors that support resilient, healthy families—especially in foster and kinship care settings. The five Protective Factors are based on the Strengthening Families Framework developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP). By identifying these strengths, parent educators can help caregivers move from "managing behavior" to building a foundation of lasting stability.

1 Parental Resilience

Managing stress and bouncing back from challenges

Active Parenting Connection:
Encouragement • Self-talk • Problem-solving • "Freedom Within Limits"

- ☐ I model calm, respectful responses—even during stressful moments
- ☐ I replace negative self-talk with encouragement ("I'm learning," "I can handle this")
- ☐ I focus on solutions rather than blame when challenges arise
- ☐ I take breaks or use stress-management tools when needed
- ☐ I recognize that progress matters more than perfection
- ☑ **Key Skill:** Encouragement builds resilience in both parent and child

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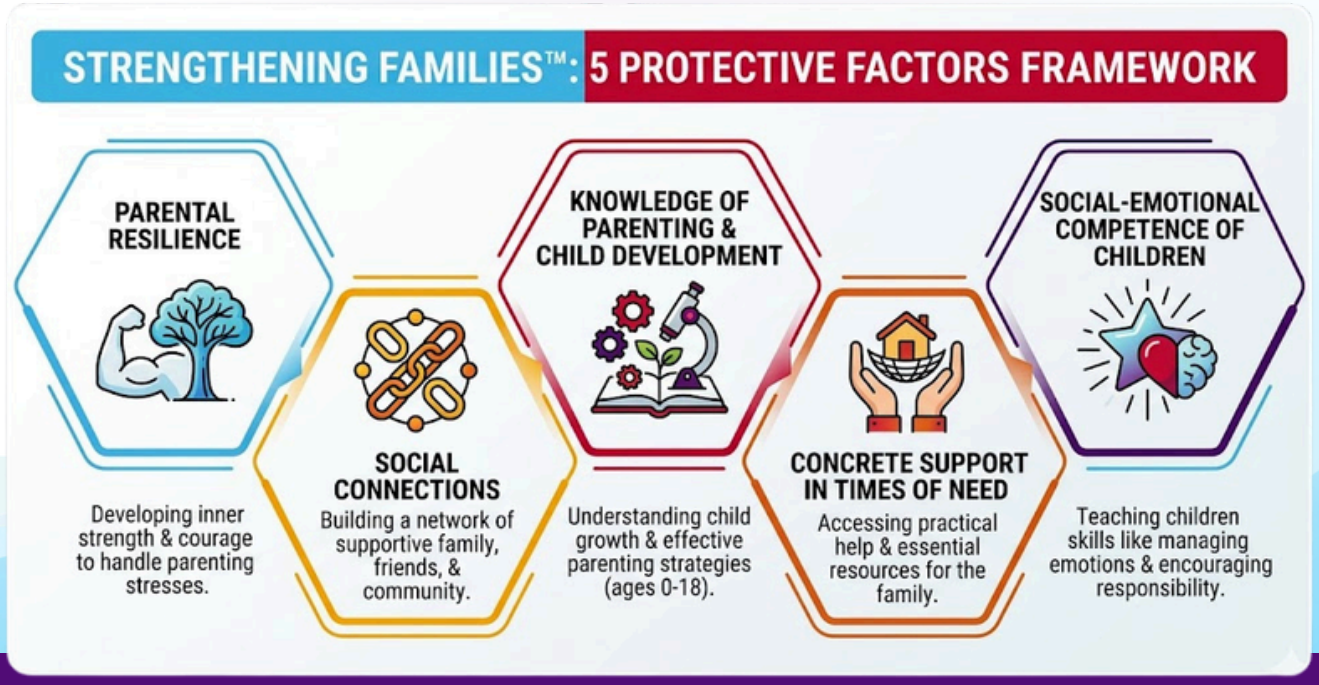
Protective Factors Checklist

2 Social Connections

Building positive relationships for support

Active Parenting Connection:
Communication • Active Listening • Family Meetings

- ☐ I connect regularly with other caregivers, friends, or support groups
- ☐ I practice **active listening** when others share experiences
- ☐ I ask for help when I need it
- ☐ I participate in parenting classes or community programs
- ☐ I create opportunities for children to build healthy relationships
- ✓ **Key Skill:** Listening without judgment strengthens trust and connection



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Protective Factors Checklist

3 Knowledge of Parenting & Child Development

Understanding what children need at different stages

Active Parenting Connection:
Developmentally appropriate expectations • Goals of Behavior • Positive discipline

- ☐ I understand that behavior is a form of communication
- ☐ I respond to misbehavior by identifying the child's underlying need
- ☐ I use positive discipline strategies instead of punishment
- ☐ I adjust expectations based on age, development, and trauma history
- ☐ I continue learning about child development and parenting approaches
- ☑ **Key Skill:** Understanding the "why" behind behavior leads to better understanding and responses

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Protective Factors Checklist

4 Concrete Support in Times of Need

Accessing resources and solving practical problems

Active Parenting Connection:
Problem-solving model • Decision-making • Taking action

- ☐ I know where to find local support resources (housing, childcare, therapy, etc.)
- ☐ I use a step-by-step process to solve challenges
- ☐ I seek guidance when navigating complex systems (schools, agencies, courts)
- ☐ I plan ahead for potential challenges or transitions
- ☐ I view asking for help as a strength, not a weakness
- ✓ **Key Skill:** Problem-solving creates confidence and reduces overwhelm

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Protective Factors Checklist

5 Social & Emotional Competence of Children

Helping children manage emotions and build relationships

Active Parenting Connection:
Emotion coaching • I-messages • Choices • Connection over correction

- ☐ I help children name and understand their emotions
- ☐ I use **I-messages** to model healthy communication
- ☐ I offer choices to encourage independence and responsibility
- ☐ I focus on connection before correcting behavior
- ☐ I teach problem-solving and conflict resolution skills
- ☑ **Key Skill:** Connection builds emotional safety—and emotional safety improves behavior

Quick Reflection

- ✓ Which Protective Factor is strongest for you right now?
- ✓ Which one needs the most support?
- ✓ What is one small step you can take this week?

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The ACEs Insight Tool: Understanding & Addressing Childhood Toxic Stress

Developed with Insights from Pamela Wood, National Active Parenting Trainer

What are ACEs?

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are stressful or traumatic events that occur during childhood, such as neglect, abuse, or household dysfunction. The original ACE Study was conducted as a partnership between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Kaiser Permanente's Health Appraisal Program (Felitti et al., 1998). When children are exposed to these experiences without the buffer of a supportive adult, it can lead to "toxic stress" that can adversely affect a child's brain. Research shows that a high ACE score can significantly increase the risk of serious health, mental health, and behavioral consequences later in life.

Expert Resource: For a deeper dive into the science of toxic stress, click here to watch Dr. Nadine Burke Harris (California's First Surgeon General and Founder of the Center for Youth Wellness) explain how childhood trauma impacts lifelong health.

From Awareness to Action: While ACEs identify potential risks, Active Parenting programs provide the specific "Protective Factors" needed to build resilience and improve outcomes for children and families.

The Expanded ACE Questionnaire

This assessment includes the original 10 core ACE questions plus 7 additional indicators of childhood stress identified by our National Active Parenting Trainer, Pamela Wood.

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The ACEs Insight Tool:
Adverse Experiences Questionnaire

- [ ] Were your parents or guardians ever divorced or separated?
- [ ] Did a parent or guardian ever serve time in jail or prison?
- [ ] Was a household member depressed, mentally ill, or suicidal?
- [ ] Did you witness household members hurt or threaten to hurt each other?
- [ ] Did a household member frequently insult, humiliate, or put you down?
- [ ] Did you ever feel afraid that a household member might physically hurt you?
- [ ] Did someone ever touch your private parts or ask you to touch theirs in a sexual way?
- [ ] Did you often go without food, clean clothing, or a safe place to live?
- [ ] Did you feel you lacked someone to protect you or keep you safe?
- [ ] Did a household member ever push, grab, or slap you hard enough to leave a mark?

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The ACEs Insight Tool:
Adverse Experiences Questionnaire

- [ ] Did you live with someone who struggled with alcohol or drug use?
- [ ] Did you feel unprotected, unloved, or that your family wasn't close?
- [ ] Were you ever placed in the foster care system?
- [ ] Were you frequently harassed or bullied in school or your community?
- [ ] Did you experience the death of a close family member?
- [ ] Were you separated from a parent due to deportation or long-term absence?
- [ ] Did a parent suffer from a life-threatening illness or permanent injury?
- [ ] Did you see or hear violence in your neighborhood or school?
- [ ] Were you treated differently because of race, gender, or sexual orientation?

The ACEs Insight Tool:
Adverse Experiences Questionnaire

Building Resilience with Active Parenting

National Trainer Pamela Wood utilizes this questionnaire to help families identify where they may need additional support. Once these stressors are identified, our evidence-backed programs help caregivers move from "managing behavior" to building the Protective Factors that foster long-term health:

- **Parental Resilience:** Learning to manage stress and function well through challenges.
- **Knowledge of Development:** Understanding how trauma impacts a child's brain and behavior.
- **Social & Emotional Competence:** Teaching children the regulation skills they need to succeed.

Next Steps for Professionals

- **Explore Our Curricula:** Discover our range of evidence-based programs designed to build resilience and strengthen families across all developmental stages, from the first five years through the teen years.
- **Deepen Your Impact:** Join a Leader Training Workshop available via—Live Webinar or Self-Paced Online Study)—to learn master these concepts for the First Five Years and beyond. Gain the certification and confidence to lead high-impact parenting classes in your community.
- **Professional Certification:** Register for our July Training of Trainers (TOT) in Atlanta. Master the curriculum and join our network of National Trainers to train the next generation of Parent Educators to lead parenting classes.