

# Help prevent child abuse by supporting family resilience

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By Jim Provenza

In the words of C. Everett Koop, M.D., “Life affords no greater responsibility, no greater privilege, than the raising of the next generation.”

As we think about how much we all want the children of today to become the healthy, productive and happy adults of tomorrow, let us think about how important it is to support parents and caregivers in the incredibly challenging job that they have of raising children.

All of us can play a role in supporting parents and caregivers in our communities, thereby strengthening families, and reducing children’s exposure to adversity and trauma. This will help to prevent child abuse and neglect.

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month. During this month, we raise awareness of the thousands of children who are abused or neglected every year. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reports that there were 683,000 victims of child abuse and neglect reported to Child Protective Services in the United States in 2015.

According to SafeMeasures, there were 315 substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect in Yolo County in 2015. While it is important that we support law enforcement and child welfare services in their efforts to protect children from further abuse, we need to do much more to prevent abuse before it occurs.

One important way to prevent child abuse and neglect is to strengthen families. Strong families are more resilient and are better able to manage stress, adversity and trauma. Parents in strong families are also less likely to behave in ways that can negatively impact their children.

The Strengthening Families Framework has identified five research-informed protective factors that families need to succeed and thrive, even in the face of risk and challenges. These factors protect against poor outcomes for children and families, promote strong families and optimal development for children, and reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect.

Parents in strong families have resilience; social connections; knowledge of parenting and child development; concrete support in times of need (e.g., access to food, health care, housing and needed services); and the ability to help children develop social and emotional competence.

The above protective factors involve supporting parents so they can be the parents that their children need. Through our programs and written materials, Yolo County Children’s

Alliance works to provide parents the tools they need to be successful. This year, we have developed a self-care guide for parents and caregivers called “Make Time for Yourself” to support the parental resilience and social connections protective factors.

To help parents prioritize making time for themselves, the guide covers the importance of self-care and divides specific self-care ideas into those that take only five minutes to do and those that take more time. There are also activities that parents can do with children.

The ideas involve calming the mind, connecting with supportive relatives and friends, exercising, laughing, finding activities that bring joy and getting enough sleep. The guide is available in English, Spanish and Russian at [www.yolokids.org/forfamilies](http://www.yolokids.org/forfamilies).

While “Make Time for Yourself” is one way to support protective factors, there are many others as well. Families get support through the work of family-serving organizations, such as local family resource centers and the Yolo Crisis Nursery. These agencies provide assistance, services and referrals. Friends, relatives, neighbors, teachers, medical professionals and concerned citizens can help support protective factors, as well.

So what can you do to strengthen families?

If you are a parent or caregiver, you can read the “Make Time for Yourself” guide and try out the ideas that feel right for you. You also can look for other ways to take care of yourself, get support from friends and relatives, and teach your child about how they can take care of themselves, too.

Making time for yourself actually can improve your relationship with your child. As Carl Bryan said, “Taking care of you, means the people in your life will receive the best of you, rather than what’s left of you.”

If you are a family-serving provider, you can pass out copies of “Make Time for Yourself” to the parents you serve and take time to ask how parents are practicing self-care using the conversation starters for providers document on our website ([www.yolokids.org/forfamilies](http://www.yolokids.org/forfamilies)).

You also can learn more about the Strengthening Families protective factors and how you can promote them at the Center for the Study of Social Policy (<http://www.cssp.org>).

If you are a neighbor, grandparent, friend or concerned citizen, you can donate time or money to an organization that serves families and children. Support friends who are parents by offering to take care of their child(ren) so they can have time to practice self-care. You also can listen to them, laugh with them, invite them on a walk, or provide support, guidance, meals and/or rides.

We can all help parents and caregivers raise healthy and happy children. Let’s work together to make Yolo County families strong!

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