

## Healthy Families New York: Strengthening Families Through Protective Factors

Research has revealed that there are five Protective Factors that make up the foundation of a Strengthening Families approach. These Protective Factors are now also an integral part of our new Healthy Families America (HFA) Core training for Family Support Workers (FSWs). In this issue we explore what the factors are, and the exciting ways we are integrating them into our training and our work with families. We also bring you a case example of innovative work with Protective Factors from the Westchester County Healthy Families program.

We are very excited about a new regular feature we'll be including called *Ready, Set, Go*. Brette Wolff from the Healthy Families New York (HFNY) training team at Prevent Child Abuse New York (PCANY) will share a hands-on activity that home visitors can use with families. Almost everything you might need can be found in the families' homes.

As always, let us know what you think by sending a note to our editor at: [pbalmer@preventchildabuseny.org](mailto:pbalmer@preventchildabuseny.org).

Happy reading!  
-Pam Balmer

## The Research Corner

### The Long Term Effects of Healthy Families New York --- Revisiting Families After 15 Years

*Rose Greene, Director, Center for Human Services Research*

Starting in the year 2000, the Center for Human Services Research, in collaboration with the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, conducted a randomized controlled trial – the “gold standard” of research – that established Healthy Families New York (HFNY) as an evidence-based program. For the study, nearly 1,200 families who were eligible for HFNY were randomly allocated to either an intervention group (that received HFNY services) or a control group (that received only information and service referrals). The process of randomly assigning families to an intervention group or a control group ensures to a high degree of confidence that there are no systematic differences between the groups, and the resulting differences in outcomes can be attributed to the program.

Previously, we interviewed the families and collected administrative data at baseline (enrollment) and at the time of the child's first, second, third, and seventh birthdays. The research yielded significant positive findings in birth outcomes, parenting practices, child maltreatment, school readiness, and access to health care. Furthermore, cost benefit analyses demonstrated that HFNY generated immediate financial return, due to the program's success in preventing low birth weight newborns and the high associated medical costs.

The babies from the study are now 15 years old! While we already know HFNY produced positive effects and cost savings from pregnancy through the child's seventh year, we now have the

opportunity to assess the program's longer-term effects. We have begun the process of locating the families and plan to commence interviews in the fall. The study is designed to address such questions as:

- Do the early results sustain over time?
- What are the longer-term effects on children as they enter adolescence? Do they continue to demonstrate positive educational outcomes? What effect does the program have on problem behaviors such as delinquency and substance use?
- What are the longer life trajectories for families, such as employment, welfare dependency, health care, and family relationships?
- What are the potential cost savings associated with longer-term outcomes?

Previous research on nurse home visiting showed positive findings in a 15-year follow-up for both children and their families. These included decreased use of welfare, fewer maternal and child arrests and convictions, fewer children using illegal substances, and reduced school suspensions. However, this will be the first rigorous longitudinal evaluation of the Healthy Families America model, a program that uses trained paraprofessionals to conduct home visits. The research will be an important contribution to the field, providing evidence of the long-term impact of the HFA home visitation model.

# Table of Contents

In this Issue .....	1
The Research Corner .....	1
A Note from OCFS .....	2
The FAW Core Training .....	2
Protective Factors: Helping Families Meet the Needs of Their Children .....	3
The Roving Reporter .....	6
Ready, Set, Go!!! .....	7
The Book Corner .....	9
The 2014 Prevent Child Abuse America Conference .....	9
In the Next Issue .....	10
Letters to the Editor .....	10

## A Note from OCFS

Hello, Healthy Families New York. After a long winter and a chilly spring, it appears that summer is finally here. I know many of you are busy with participant graduations and other warm-weather activities. In the last few months, you have celebrated how important mothers and fathers are in their children's lives, held parent groups, breastfeeding classes, infant massage classes, and father's groups, and much more. In short, you are very busy supporting families to be the best parents they can be!



As you read this edition of the Link, I hope you will recognize some of the many ways your work contributes to strengthening families and building protective factors. In the course of a single home visit, staff work to build parental resilience, provide social connections, impart knowledge of parenting and child development, teach parents how to support to the social-emotional needs of their children, and provide or refer families to concrete support. Since we began in 1995, Healthy Families New York has recognized that these protective factors are the key to parent's success.

Thank you all for providing families with the tools they need to be great parents! Enjoy the warm summer months with the families you visit... and the families you live with!

- Bernadette

## The Family Assessment Worker Core Training



Training complete for the May 2014 FAW Core! On the last day, the team celebrated their accomplishments by showing off their original "Strength Glasses," representing their committed strength-based approach with Healthy Families New York.

*Pictured:*  
 1<sup>st</sup> row: Brette Wolff, Phyllis Bunter, Marivette Contes  
 2<sup>nd</sup> row: Iris Vasquez-Rojas, Cyndie Hackett, Amanda Sayles, Ali Buendia  
 3<sup>rd</sup> row: Crystal Belizario and Lenny Giardino

# the Link

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# Protective Factors: Helping Families Meet the Needs of Their Children

Ethelena Bailey Persons, PCANY

Researchers, policy makers, and the media have focused considerable attention on the problems of families and how some are failing to meet the needs of their members. Much less attention has been paid to strong, healthy families and the characteristics that make them successful. Understanding the “secrets” of strong families is useful to human service professionals as they plan intervention programs designed to help families. The extent to which the characteristics of healthy families are skills that can be taught has implications for policy development and intervention programs. Information on family strengths is also useful to professionals seeking to improve family life (1).

There is considerable knowledge about the basic needs of children and what it takes to meet those needs. Families can be helped to identify the strengths they already possess, as well as the areas they need to strengthen in order to increase their chances of successfully meeting the needs of their children. The Healthy Families New York (HFNY) approach to serving families has always been strengths-based, family-centered, and supportive of parents in nurturing their children and setting meaningful goals. More recently, we have strengthened our approach and focus to ensure that program staff learn about and understand the protective factors and how to help families identify, build on, and promote those factors.

## SO, WHAT ARE THE FIVE PROTECTIVE FACTORS?

According to the Center for the Study of Social Policy (2), when protective factors are present in a family, the likelihood of abuse and neglect is diminished. Research also shows that these factors create healthy and optimal development of all children. The goal of the

*Strengthening Families*™ Protective Factors Framework was to create a national, systematic approach to prevention by supporting and partnering with the families of young children. The five Protective Factors are: Parental Resilience, Social Connections, Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development, Concrete Support in Times of Need, and Social-Emotional Competence of Children.

Strengthening Families is a research-informed approach that aims to increase family strengths, enhance child development, and reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect. It is based on engaging families, programs, and communities in building the five protective factors (2).

## HOW DOES HFNY BUILD AND PROMOTE PROTECTIVE FACTORS?

Nationwide, many programs, organizations, agencies and systems that serve children and families have incorporated the Strengthening Families approach into their practices and policies. HFNY has recently begun to emphasize increasing staff awareness of specific activities and strategies that build and promote protective factors. This focus, both in the program and in training, adheres to Healthy Family America’s (HFA) Best Practice Standards. Many of these strategies have been part of the HFNY approach since our program’s inception. Now we are more explicitly labeling the work we do and becoming more focused on the intentional use of these strategies. The Strengthening Families approach includes these five research-based protective factors within its framework. The importance of each protective factor is supported by research from several fields of study.

## 1. PARENTAL RESILIENCE

Being a parent can be a wonderful experience and it can be a stressful time, too. Common stressors include life changes, social and economic factors, personal histories, and social factors, among others. One resilience researcher, Dr. Mark Katz, summarizes resilience as “strength in the face of adversity (1).” Numerous researchers have concluded that the way in which parents manage stress is a better indicator than the stressor itself of how favorable the outcome will be for both parents and children(1). A parent who is able to recover from a difficult life experience, to manage stress and function well during challenges and adversity will be better able to provide nurturing attention to their children.

### HFNY Home Visitors promote Parental Resilience by:

- Demonstrating that parents are valued
- Building trusting relationships with families
- Honoring each family’s ethnicity, language, culture, history and approach to parenting
- Using reflective communication strategies like OARS (open-ended questions, affirmations, reflection, and summary)
- Using solution-focused approaches
- Supporting parents as decision-makers and helping to build decision-making and leadership skills
- Collaborating with parents and recognize their strengths
- Using Motivational Interviewing tools as a style of working with families
- Using knowledge of how people change
- Helping parents develop Family Goal Plans
- Creatively engaging families in the program

# Protective Factors *Continued*

## 2. SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

“No man is an island.” People need to feel connected to others in healthy ways that support them and their families. They need to be able to share life experiences, joys and the not-so-happy times with others as well. Everybody needs a Circle of Support. Parents who are able to build trusting relationships feel respected and appreciated. They have support from family, friends and neighbors, forming a network that meets personal and emotional needs.

### HFNY Home Visitors promote Social Connections by:

- Focusing on building and expanding the family’s social networks, and using the Family Goal Plan to help parents identify their circles of support
- Facilitating mutual support among parents
- Promoting engagement in the community and participation in community activities
- Providing program participant activities, such as parent groups, field trips, holiday and family day gatherings

## 3. KNOWLEDGE OF PARENTING AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Parents gaze at their newborn with fresh hope for new possibilities. They want their child to have the best of everything and they want her to be able to reach her full potential. Parents want to be the best parents they can be and, given the opportunity, are eager to learn how - especially new parents. When parents have good information, they can understand child development, brain development, and age-appropriate expectations for their children, and how to utilize effective child management techniques. They get a better idea of how to parent and are likely to feel more confident and competent in their role as parents.

### HFNY Home Visitors promote the Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development by:

- Addressing parenting issues from a strengths-based and culturally sensitive perspective
- Observing and discussing with parents developmentally appropriate interactions with children
- Encouraging parents to observe, ask questions, and explore parenting issues, and try out new strategies
- Providing information and resources on parenting and child development
- Using evidence-informed parenting curricula to strengthen the parent-child relationship
- Using developmental screens such as the ASQ and ASQ:SE
- Provide information on Early Intervention, lead screening, and setting up a medical home

## 4. CONCRETE SUPPORT IN TIMES OF NEED

Despite the best planning, sometimes things go wrong. Many parents experience disruptions in day-to-day activities, and sometimes families may face more difficult challenges such as loss of income or benefits, unstable housing, or personal, social or family situations that can negatively impact healthy family functioning. At those times, families need access to resources to maintain or restore family well-being. Parents who are open to getting help and information about relevant services and who are able to navigate through services systems are resourceful and more able to achieve emotional and financial security.

### HFNY Home Visitors promote Concrete Support in Times of Need by:

- Gathering information from the Kempe Assessment
- Providing information and connecting families to services and opportunities in the community
- Helping families to develop skills and tools they need
- Providing advocacy
- Responding immediately when families are in crisis

## 5. SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE OF CHILDREN

Teaching “reading, writing, and arithmetic” is one aspect parents concentrate on to have a well-developed child. Increasingly, parents are aware that children need to be confident and develop healthy self-esteem. Parents realize that even very young children succeed when they learn and develop social skills, are able to manage their emotions, and learn the difference between right and wrong. Parents learn to respond to the needs of children and learn to establish an environment in which children feel safe to express their emotions. Parents know that it is important to help their children learn to interact positively with others, communicate their emotions, and feel good about themselves (1). These dimensions of social-emotional competence do not evolve naturally outside the child’s social context. The course of social-emotional development—whether healthy or unhealthy—depends on the quality of nurturing attachment and stimulation that a child experiences. Numerous research studies show that a relationship with a consistent, caring and attuned adult who actively promotes the development of these dimensions is essential for healthy social-emotional outcomes in young children.

# Protective Factors *Continued*

## **HFNY Home Visitors promote the Social-Emotional Competence of Children by:**

- Gathering information from the Kempe Assessment
- Helping parents foster their child's social emotional development
- Observing and discussing nurturing care of children
- Inquiry and Observation of parent child interaction. HFA uses CHEEERS as a guide to observing for: parents' response to the baby's Cues, Holding, Expression- talking with baby, Empathy, the Environment, Reciprocity, or "the dance" between parents and child, and Smiles
- Using evidence-informed parenting curricula to strengthen the parent-child relationship
- Using What I Want for My Child to help parents establish and achieve goals for their children
- Administering developmental screens such as the ASQ and ASQ:SE
- Using reflective communication strategies, such as OARS, and solution-focused approaches

To see a case summary of how a HFNY program brings the Protective Factors to life, see text box below.

(1) Maria Kysan, Kristin A. Moore and Nicholas Zill (Child Trends, Inc.), *Identifying Successful Families: An Overview of Constructs and Selected Measures*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, May 1990

(2) <http://www.cssp.org/reform/strengthening-families/the-basics/protective-factors>

For More Information:

Center for the Study of Social Policy • 1575 Eye Street, NW Suite 500 • Washington, DC • 202-371-1565 [www.cssp.org](http://www.cssp.org); [www.strengtheningfamilies.net](http://www.strengtheningfamilies.net)

Integrated Strategies for Home Visiting Training Manual, HFA, Great Kids, Inc.

## **Using the Protective Factors in a Healthy Families New York Program**

*Fabiola Abreu, Program Coordinator, Westchester Healthy Families (WHF) at ANDRUS Memorial Services*

"Nurture hope in a child and the world flourishes." -ANDRUS

When I met the mother four years ago, she was 14 years old, her son was barely two weeks old, and I had only been a home visitor for two months. The mom had just finished her freshman year of high school, and having a baby had put a strain on her and her family in many ways. She made it very clear that she wanted to finish school and go to college, but now that she was a mother, she was not sure that she could meet these goals.

Balancing the demands of high school, family and her newborn son was stressful. During our home visits she often talked about how difficult it was doing her homework and caring for her son, and she shared that for the first time in her life she was struggling in her classes. And, she was experiencing the lack of sleep that all new mothers do.

In our program, we use a trauma-informed model of practice called Sanctuary®. Sanctuary® was developed in the early 1980s by Dr. Sandra Bloom and her colleagues Joseph Foderaro and Ruth Ann Ryan, and was created on the understanding that healing from trauma, stress and adversity requires the creation of an environment that promotes healing and has the ability to create buffers or protective factors for stress. I used these protective factors in my work with this young mother. We spent many home

visits discussing SELF (Safety, Emotion, Loss and Future). We created a safety plan to help her manage her emotions, processed the loss she felt from having to give up parts of her adolescence, and found healthy ways for her to cope with some of her traumatic childhood experiences. This created an opportunity for her to heal and become hopeful about the future.

Over the long term, we carefully tracked her goals and celebrated even the smallest successes. As time went on, she began to see that the future she had thought was impossible was becoming more and more certain. She discovered that she could be a nurturing, loving mom and not have to give up on her dreams.

Helping to instill hope and a sense that families have the power to create paths to a different future is essential in healing environments. Today, this mother has completed her first year of college, and ANDRUS was able to support her by providing a scholarship for daycare for her son. When I asked her recently to reflect on the challenges she had faced, she responded: "Had it not been for Healthy Families, I probably would have not been the same. I probably would not be as well-rounded. Healthy Families helped push me forward. Everyone knows I get judged for being a single mom, for being a young mom, considering I had him at 14 years old. With that support, it helped me through a lot. I probably would have quit soccer, I probably would have stop dancing. I have support from my family, I do, but it's that extra push that sometimes you need. Having my son go to the early learning center at Andrus, and me going to college, it kind of fell all into place. And all of that wouldn't have happened had I not been in the program."

# The Roving Reporter

From your work or your own experiences, what do you think contributes to resilience in families?



Hope and belief that the future can be different, and the ability to have a healthy buffer for chronic stress. Healthy Buffer = Protective Factors.

- Corine E. Lurry, Director, Westchester Healthy Families

Catching families doing well! The tendency is to point out the negatives and we are doing the reverse. That empowers families and sets our program apart from the rest.

- Yelida Saldivar, FSW, Westchester Healthy Families

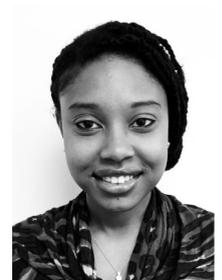


A joyful personality!

- Aida Gonzalez, Program Supervisor, Westchester Healthy

From what I have learned, I think focusing on strength-based approaches and communication contributes to resilience in families. By doing this with families, we are giving them the opportunity to see their own strengths so they can better manage their own problems.

- Fabella Decema, FSW, Safe Space Healthy Families Jamaica



From my experience, resilience comes from their responsibilities (children), some of their past experiences, their confidence/self-esteem, their support system (cheering on) and goals they have set and are determined to achieve (not necessarily in this order).

- Julianne Hoffman, FSW, Safe Space Healthy Families Jamaica

Sometimes when I read the Kempe assessments and see families have so many challenges, I think about how resiliency comes when they have someone they can turn to for support. That's what I see makes the difference for families.

- Stephanie Tong, Program Supervisor, University Settlement Healthy Families



I think building trust with the family helps them get through challenges and be resilient.

- Tracy Cauvil, FSW, Safe Space Healthy Families Jamaica

The support system that they have in place around them, whether that is their family, or if it is community-based supports.

- Sarah Scorson, Program Manager, Healthy Families Ontario



Resilience is a quality when an individual who's been punished or put down in life is able to get up, rise up and be stronger. From my work with families and my own experience I find the love and dedication that people have for their families contributes to this amazing resilience. The hope and desire to provide your family, especially your kids, with the opportunities that you were denied growing up gives you the strength and courage to overcome any obstacle in your life.

- Isabel Guerra-O'Reilly, FAW Ulster County Healthy Families



# Ready, Set, Go!!!

Brette Wolff, PCANY

The incredible work in the field with HFNY programs and families has inspired our Link team to include a new feature: *Ready, Set, Go!!!* which will highlight an interactive activity that will further take us from theory to practice! We invite you to make the activity your own, but hope it inspires you as much as we inspire one another in this work!

## How to make a "Protective Factors Pinwheel"



The beautiful weather of this season brought sunshine and light breezes (sometimes more like gusts) to pinwheels planted around the state. After seeing the pinwheels spin in the wind and reflecting on protective factors and family resilience, it seemed perfectly fitting to have the first *Ready, Set, Go!!!!*

activity section focus on creating our own protective factors pinwheels.

This activity can be used for staff meetings and in the home! With a focus on colors, cause and effect, and fine motor skills, this activity is a wonderful and fun way to promote healthy child development and the parent-child interaction!!!

### MATERIALS

- 12 x 12 construction paper
- Crayons, markers, colored pencils, etc.
- A bendable straw (try to find colored straws)
- Sticky tape
- Hole punch
- Scissor (safe for children if possible)
- Sticky tack or masking tape to use to taper off the end of the straw so that the pinwheel does not fall off

### STEP 1: Ready...

For this step you will want to make a list of four words, phrases, or pictures that represent for the parent(s) and/or family:

1. A joy I have \_\_\_\_\_
2. The name of someone important to me \_\_\_\_\_
3. One thing that helps me when I feel challenged \_\_\_\_\_
4. One thing I love about my child(ren) or I look forward to doing with my child(ren) \_\_\_\_\_

Note: Have a conversation first and then invite the parent(s) and/or family to add this word or phrase to each point of the pinwheel (see step h).

Note: Invite conversations about culture and father figures as well as other family members and the community!

### STEP 2: Set...

Below you will find instructions on how to make a paper pinwheel without a pin\*. Feel free to add your own creative touch!

**A.** Fold your square in half at the corners both ways and unfold.



**B.** Cut slits from the corners  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way in towards the middle.



**C.** At each of the four corners, punch a hole in the left point only so you have four holes.



# Ready, Set, Go!!!

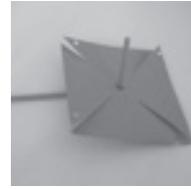
**D.** Punch a hole in the center of the square.



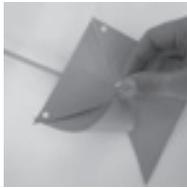
**E.** Take a bendy straw and bend it to a right angle.



**F.** Slot the piece of card over the short end of the straw.



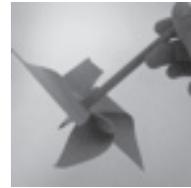
**G.** Pull one point to the center of the card and thread the hole over the straw. Tape down.



**H.** Repeat until all four points are joined in the center  
ADD: The Protective Factors words, pictures and/or designs from Step 1 on each point.



**I.** Remove the straw and widen the holes with a pencil so the wheel will spin easily.



**J.** Replace the wheel on the straw and stop it from falling off the end with a piece of plasticine (sticky tack, tape, etc.)



## STEP 3: Go!

Have fun and feel free to email some photos of your own protective factors pinwheel or variations at your program! Check back on the HFNY website to see pinwheels on display!

\* Activity adapted from <http://www.activitybucket.com/creative-crafts/pinwheel-with-no-pin>

## The Book Corner

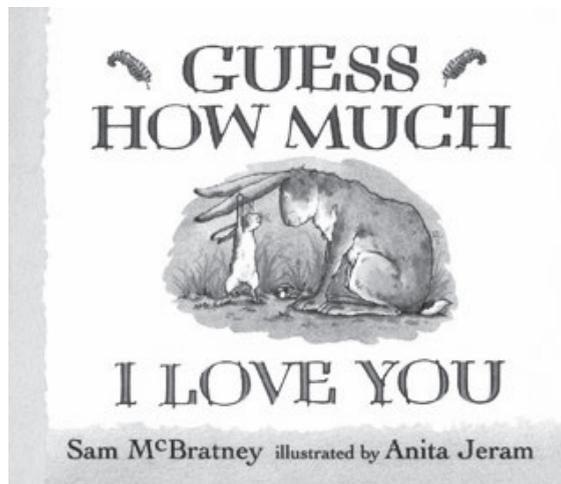


Image from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com)

### **Guess How Much I Love You**

Written by Sam McBratney & Illustrated by Anita Jeram

This is my favorite children's book and was the first book that my daughter had in her library. It is a touching story about Little Nutbrown Hare and Big Nutbrown Hare as they debate which one of them loves the other more. They talk about loving the other as "high as they can jump," "all the way to tips of their very long ears," and to various far away destinations. Little Nutbrown becomes discouraged that Big Nutbrown's love is bigger than his, as Big Nutbrown has longer ears and can jump much higher, until Little Nutbrown says "I love you right up to the moon." Big Nutbrown seems to accept the defeat and so Little Nutbrown is satisfied that he is the one who loves the other the most. Yet, when he is soundly asleep, Big Nutbrown whispers into Little Nutbrown's ear, "I love you right up to the moon...and back."

This is a great book for promoting bonding. I like that it doesn't label the hares as a child with a mother or father, so it is appropriate for all kinds of

caregivers. It creates an opportunity to talk about emotions, sparks conversations, and creates phrases that your children love to say and hear. I get the warmest feeling remembering my daughter repeating to me, "I love you right up to the moon...and back."

*Submitted by Holly Kipp, FSW, Healthy Families Clinton County*

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## The 2014 Prevent Child Abuse America Conference

Healthy Families New York was well-represented by both programs and Central Administration at the 2014 Prevent Child Abuse America conference in Jacksonville, Florida.



From L to R: John Heck, Tom Dwyer, Bernadette Johnson & Julianne Hoffman



From L to R: Julianne Hoffman & Chris Deyss

# theLink

Summer 2014



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Children &  
Family Services  
Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor  
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## *In the Next Issue Celebrating 20 Years!*

We'll be celebrating the 20th Anniversary of Healthy Families New York by taking a stroll together down memory lane. We'll think about where we've been and where we'd like to see ourselves going over the next 20 years!

## *Letters to the Editor*

We want to know what you think! What thought or question or idea did the Link spark for you? Help the Link editors satisfy their curiosity, and perhaps start an interesting conversation while you're at it. You can send your Letters to the Editor to Pam Balmer at [pbalmer@preventchildabuse.org](mailto:pbalmer@preventchildabuse.org). Thanks!

*Today you are you,  
That is truer than true  
There is no one alive  
Who is youer than you.  
-Dr. Seuss*