

# Strengthening Families: Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development<sup>1</sup>

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Parenting is a tremendous responsibility full of many moments of joy. But sometimes the rapid rate of a young child's growth and development can leave parents feeling a little overwhelmed. This *Strengthening Families Series* highlights six factors that promote positive parenting and protect against stressors and frustrations that can lead to harsh parenting: Parental Resilience, Social Connections, **Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development**, Concrete Support, Social and Emotional Competence, and Nurturing and Attachment. Each of these protective factors offers families and children some defense against distress. However, together they combine to create a solid foundation of knowledge, parenting skills, and support that can help families thrive during everyday circumstances as well as persevere during times of stress or crisis (1).

## Overview

Children grow and learn at different paces, often reaching milestones before parents realize it. Parents who understand why their children behave the way they do are more capable of directing their children to the desired behavior, and they can apply positive parenting methods and discipline that are developmentally appropriate and effective. Also, by learning about development, parents can see that they are not alone; most parents face the same challenges.

As most parents will recognize, the list of topics that parents need to master is almost endless, starting before birth and extending all the way to adulthood. Parents should be

knowledgeable of child development stages, constructive discipline, positive communication, and a whole array of other parenting issues. Parenting is a lifelong exercise in learning that requires the ability to find answers to your pressing questions. Rather than trying to answer all of the questions parents might have, this fact sheet will focus on the ways in which parents can explore their own parenting and find information and solutions that work for them.



## Looking at Your Own Parenting

Knowledge of parenting and child development is critical to *all* parents. However, most parents seek out specific information when they are struggling with specific questions or concerns. As a starting point, try to specifically identify

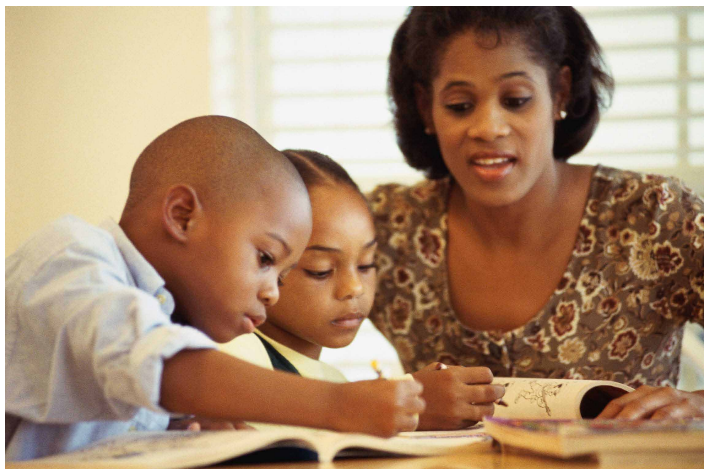
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your challenge and explore what knowledge will help you address your situation.

- What is the challenge you are struggling with? What seems to be the root cause?
- Are you familiar with the basics of child development and how to effectively guide children's behavior?



- Have you set clear expectations for appropriate behavior? Are your expectations realistic given your child's temperament and developmental stage?
- How are you currently handling the situation? What is working and what is not? How does your child respond to your approach? What are some possible solutions that you may not have tried?
- Do you have friends or family members who can provide guidance and advice? Are any of your friends struggling with the same issue? What sources of information can help you address the issue?

If you find you don't have the answers to some of these questions, you can begin to seek information that will help you better understand your child's developmental needs and suggest possible solutions.

## Resources and Information

There is an enormous amount of information available on child development and parenting. Given all of the resources out there, parents need to be selective in their choice of resources.

### Talk with Your Spouse or Partner

If you have a partner, it is important to talk about your parenting struggles and work together to address the issues.

Parents who are united in their parenting approach will usually be more effective.

### Ask Friends and Family

Friends, neighbors, and family members can be excellent sources for parenting information (see *Strengthening Families: Social Connections*, available at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fy1244>). Many parents rely on others who have parenting experience to figure out some of the tougher issues of parenting. Be sure to ask for advice from parents whom you trust and respect and who share some of your core values. Through conversations with others you can usually identify some new parenting approaches that may be helpful.

### Seek Community Resources

Most communities have a variety of resources to assist and support parents. In many communities, you can dial 2-1-1 to access local information on resources and supports available to families. You may also ask other parents about resources they may know about, including parenting classes, home visiting programs, Moms' Clubs, and more.

### Search for Helpful Books

The following guidelines will help you evaluate the quality of books on parenting (2):

- *Does the book present a set of rigid rules or simple formulas that promise parents success?* If so, be cautious about the resource.
- *Is the author an expert on the subject at hand?* It is especially important to match the author's experience with the content (for example, a pediatrician writing about health issues, a teacher writing about educational issues).
- *Is the information in the book based on theory, research, or clinical experience?* Good resources are based on more substantial information than just opinion.
- *Does the book assume a traditional family structure and middle-class values?* Good resources should speak to a variety of cultures and family structures.
- *Does the author address only the child's needs or are adult needs also considered?* Resources should acknowledge that parents need to be healthy and supported in order to do the best job of raising their children.
- *Are the child and the parent both portrayed in a positive manner?* Parenting resources should not go to extremes in

blaming parents or children for their situation and should offer some reasonable hope for progress and success.

## Find Internet Resources

In the age of the Internet, there is bountiful information available on virtually every topic, including parenting. The challenge is not finding information (you will find more than you can ever read), but filtering the information to that which you can really trust. The guidelines for books listed above can also be useful in reviewing the quality of Internet resources. We recommend the following sites as excellent starting points for parents:

- **211 Florida** – By dialing 2-1-1 on your telephone, or by visiting <http://www.211florida.org/index.htm> online, you can access your local resource and referral system, which can help you identify local parenting programs and resources.
- **Born Learning** – This site, sponsored by United Way Worldwide, highlights the importance of early child development and provides a variety of resources for parents. <http://www.bornlearning.org>
- **Center for the Study of Social Policy: Strengthening Families** – This site provides comprehensive information related to protective factors. <http://www.cssp.org/reform/strengthening-families>
- **Child Welfare Information Gateway: Protective Factors** – This site presents an overview of protective factors and serves as a clearinghouse for related resources. <http://www.childwelfare.gov/can/factors/protective.cfm>
- **Healthy Children (American Academy of Pediatrics)** – This site provides advice and resources from pediatricians on a broad range of parenting and child development topics. <http://www.healthychildren.org>
- **Parenting 24/7** – This site, created by University of Illinois Cooperative Extension, is an excellent resource for “raising children and managing family life.” <http://parenting247.org>
- **Strengthening Families Federal Resource Guide** – This resource guide provides an overview of all of the protective factors and includes resources for parents. <http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/guide2011/guide.pdf>
- **University of Florida Extension Publications (EDIS)** – The EDIS website is a comprehensive, single-source repository of all current UF/IFAS numbered peer-reviewed

publications. UF/IFAS [academic departments](#) develop and maintain a collection of publications available for universal free distribution on the World Wide Web and through the Florida Cooperative Extension Service [County Offices](#) and [Research and Education Centers](#) statewide. Publications that address the needs of children in Florida are accessible to all at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topics/families/children.html>.

- **Zero to Three Parenting Resources** – The “parenting resources” section of this website has practical resources for parents. <http://www.zerotothree.org/about-us/funded-projects/parenting-resources>

## Summary

As you encounter the joys and pains of parenting, it is important to know that you are not alone. You can lean on friends, family members, and other resources to help you gain information to assist you in your parenting.

## Endnotes

- (1) This work is based on the framework developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy, with more information available at <http://www.cssp.org/reform/strengthening-families>.
- (2) Martin, C., & Colbert, K. (1997). *Parenting: A Lifespan Perspective*. New York: McGraw-Hill, p. 21.