

What Parents Say About...

Prevention Strategies that Work to Keep Families Together, Resilient and Strong

Proactive approach

Strengthening and supporting families to be resilient and to have sources of support is a proactive approach to prevent child abuse and neglect. During the past decade, there have been evaluation results demonstrating that communities are implementing prevention initiatives and are developing resources, supports and strategies that are targeted to prevent child abuse and neglect. Many prevention programs focus efforts on strengthening child and family protective factors such as...the promotion of positive interactions between children and parents, and the knowledge and skills parents need to raise healthy, happy children. (*Evidence Based Practice in Strengthening Families and Preventing Child Maltreatment*, National Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds, 2009)

The National Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds (Alliance) joined with the Casey Family Programs Birth Parent Advisory Committee (BPAC) to develop a series of issue briefs in collaboration with the Birth Parent National Network (BPNN). The BPAC and BPNN parents are speaking out to policymakers, leaders, service providers and other key stakeholders at the national, state and local levels about the critical need to focus on the prevention of child maltreatment and on supporting strong and healthy families and communities.

The term prevention is often defined as the act of ensuring that something negative does not happen. For this document, we also include acts that help keep families together, resilient and strong and support them in building their protective factors. In this issue brief, parents with life experiences related to prevention strategies share their perspectives about:

- 1 What works in prevention
- 2 Strategies that build partnerships and increase trust in parents

1 What works in prevention

We will be talking about prevention strategies that align with Casey Family Programs’ 2020 vision for change: Building Communities of Hope. This collective vision draws on the strengths of communities and local leaders to keep children safe and make families strong. If a community is healthy — if it is safe, supportive and rich with opportunities — then it will have the elements that children and families need to thrive. To achieve these communities based on hope and opportunity, we will need to work across systems to improve broader conditions that affect the health, safety and opportunities of children and their families. (<https://www.casey.org/2020-building-communities-of-hope>)



Parents identified some of the prevention strategies that were helpful to them and other parents in their neighborhoods. All of these prevention programs

What's inside

What works in prevention.....	1
Family resource centers.....	2
Parent mutual support groups.....	2
Parent education.....	4
Strategies that build partnerships and increase trust in parents.....	5
Integrating family wisdom into the prevention community.....	5
Using the Community Café approach to build partnerships.....	6
Conclusion.....	6
Additional resources.....	6

Examples of family resource centers

For examples of family resource centers in different locations, visit:

- **Family Success Centers in New Jersey** are funded by the New Jersey Department of Children and Families. The statewide network of Family Success Centers are one-stop shops that provide wrap-around resources and supports for families before they find themselves in crisis. <http://www.nj.gov/dcf/families/support/success/>
- **Magnolia Place Community Initiative (Los Angeles)** unites the resources of 70 county, city and community efforts to provide supports to 35,000 children within the 5-square mile/500 blocks of the Magnolia Catchment Area in Los Angeles. This initiative strengthens protective factors by increasing social connectedness, community mobilization and access to needed supports and services. <http://magnoliaplacela.org/>

The National Family Support Network

This organization connects statewide networks of family resource centers across the United States to promote quality practice, peer learning, mutual support and effective policies and systems that support positive outcomes for children, families and communities. <http://www.nationalfamilysupportnetwork.org/family-support-programs>

"I speak from my experiences as a father who shares identical challenges with many parents. One solution to keeping families strong is to re-think funding and support natural, informal community-based supports that can be offered through family resource centers."

Corey B., Birth Parent, Florida

incorporate strategies that help parents in building protective factors to enable them to parent more effectively, even under stress. The three programs include:

- Family resource centers
- Parent mutual support groups
- Parent education

This is not a comprehensive list. Parents highlighted many more prevention programs, including home visiting. A more lengthy document would be required to fully explore all of the valuable prevention strategies available.

Family resource centers

Family resource centers (FRCs) are known by many different names across the country, including family centers, family success centers, family support centers and parent child centers. They serve as welcoming and vital hubs of community services and opportunities designed to strengthen families. Their activities and programs are developed to reflect the specific needs, cultures and interests of the families served (<http://www.nationalfamilysupportnetwork.org/family-support-programs>). This model is a "one stop" shop for families to help them to build protective factors and provide them with a wide range of supports and resources such as:

- Referrals from a trusted source
- On site activities for children and families
- Concrete support such as diapers, food and clothing, etc.
- Peer assistance such as mutual support groups, parent partners and parents hired in staff roles
- Helping families increase their protective factors
- Informal/formal resources and supports

Corey B., a birth parent from Florida, was fortunate to have the opportunity to help develop a family resource center as an effective prevention strategy in his community. Corey explains, "I attended a number of community meetings and expressed my interest along with other parents about wanting a neutral place where we could meet with others who were going through the same struggles. We inquired as to whether an agency could support this neutral place. We explained that it would open the door for greater engagement of families. That idea led to the opening of a resource center for parents."

According to Corey, families are appreciated in the resource center. It is here that parents have easy access to supports that matter to them, such as childcare, diapers, transportation, haircut vouchers, clothes, parent support groups and back to school supplies and a greater connection to the community.

Corey says, "I've also learned that formal services are awesome. Yet, most families don't have resources to afford them. Keeping my family strong is largely due to having access to others who cared about us."

Local evaluations that have been conducted on Family Resource Centers indicate that parents gain new knowledge and improve parent child interaction skills. For more information, contact the National Family Support Network. Information about this network can be found in the box on the left side of this page.

Parent mutual support groups

Parent mutual support groups offer parents the opportunity to develop, practice and evaluate their own parenting skills in a supportive environment. Circle of Parents and the Parents Anonymous® Program are examples of national programs of parent mutual support groups. There are many variations across the country and they all include parent-to-parent interactions and opportunities to give and receive help.

- **Circle of Parents** groups provide a friendly, supportive environment led by parents and a trained group facilitator. According to Toni M., a birth parent from Colorado and a trained Circle of Parents group facilitator, this support group model provides a safe place where anyone in a parenting role can openly discuss the successes and challenges of raising children. In an evaluation of the Circle of Parents program in four states, the participants reported improved parenting practices and social functioning. Toni shared that Circle of Parents also offers specialized parent support groups designed to build protective factors in families in specific circumstances. Examples include: Recovery Support, Parents and Families affected by Substance Use and Parents and Families Impacted by Trauma. For example, Toni facilitates a Circle of Parents sober support group for parents in recovery. For more information on these specialized programs, visit <https://www.illuminatecolorado.org/>. For more information on Circle of Parents, visit circleofparents.org/.

- **The Parents Anonymous® Program** is an evidence-based family strengthening program that uses mutual support, parent leadership and shared leadership® to achieve personal growth, improve family functioning and achieve parental resilience. The Parents Anonymous® Program consists of a weekly support group for parents and caregivers and a separate group for their children and youth (0–18). The evaluations of Parents Anonymous® groups have demonstrated a diminished impact of risk factors and an increase in the participants’ resilience. Evaluation findings also demonstrated that parents were shown to have increased their ability to manage stress, reduced their social isolation and expanded their knowledge of child development. For more information on Parents Anonymous®, visit parentsanonymous.org.

Timothy P., a birth parent from Oregon, credits Parent Anonymous® for changing his life:

“I had never parented clean and sober before and the prospect of single parenting my daughter in her teens was intimidating. I first walked into a room with a Parents Anonymous® group when I was about six months clean and I immediately knew this was what I needed. There were all these other parents talking about the same concerns and challenges that I was dealing with as a father. Until that point I hadn’t realized that so many parents shared the same fears, doubts, hopes and dreams about raising their children. But here they were, sharing openly and giving each other support in the form of suggestions, advice and understanding. Right away I felt comfortable and have been attending this meeting for years. I’ve introduced this group to scores of moms and dads during this time and watched as we’ve all benefited in one way or another.”

“Circle of Parents is a place where parents can find and share support. The groups meet weekly, are free of charge and foster an open exchange of ideas, support, information and resources. Most groups have a free program for children as well.”

Toni M., Birth Parent, Colorado

“Parents Anonymous® taught me what it means to truly parent my daughter. The people there have embraced me and helped me fulfill my role as a father. It has truly been a life changing experience for me.”

Timothy P., Birth Parent, Oregon

“Without the POPS talk circle, I would have been lost and all alone.”
Jose L., Birth Parent, California

Another parent mutual support group that fathers have found to be effective is POPS (Paternal Opportunities Programs and Services):

- **POPS (Paternal Opportunities Programs and Services)** in San Diego operates the **Father’s Talk Circle**, a peer support group that provides a friendly, supportive environment for fathers and their children. According to Michael H., a birth father from California and executive director of POPS, the participants sit in a circle, courtesy rules are shared and it is led by one of the fathers. This is a confidential and safe place to openly discuss crises and challenges and successes of fatherhood. The talk circles meet weekly, are free of charge and foster an open exchange of ideas, support, information and resources. Although no formal research has been conducted on this model, parents report that that it works for them because it is empowering and insightful. For more information about this prevention resource, visit <http://www.sandiegopops.org/>.

Parent education

Parent education programs typically focus on developing positive discipline approaches, increasing knowledge of child development and promoting positive parent-child interactions. Two birth fathers, Jeremiah D. and Edwin D., share their perspectives about two different parent education models and how these models helped them.

“Through the Nurturing Fathers Program, I transitioned from a scared young father to being confident that I can nurture my children in different and better ways. It helped heal my pain about my own past while I learned to be the best dad I could be.”
Jeremiah D., Birth Parent, Washington

- **The Nurturing Father’s Program** teaches the importance of co-parenting, being a positive role model, using appropriate discipline and including fun and games. According to Jeremiah D., a birth parent from Washington, “The Nurturing Fathers Program helped redefine my idea of what a dad should be. I learned how to connect with my feelings and overcome some barriers preventing me from being a caring dad. This 13-week evidence-based class can help any guy build healthy relationships and understand child development.”

The Nurturing Father’s Program is an evidence-based program. It is listed on national registries as an adaptation of The Nurturing Parenting Programs (www.nurturingvalidation.com), and it has its own independent research studies. For more information on this model, visit, <http://nurturingfathers.com>.

- **24/7 Dad®** is the National Fatherhood Initiative’s exemplary fatherhood curriculum. It is used by thousands of organizations across the country to train fathers to be involved, responsible and committed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. 24/7 Dad® is an evidence-based program. For more information, visit <http://store.fatherhood.org/24-7-dad-programs/>.

Edwin D., a birth parent from Iowa, is trained as a facilitator on the 24/7 Dad® curriculum and provides training to other dads in Iowa. He shared his perspectives on the 24/7 Dad® parent education curriculum and how it helped him recognize his own special approach to parenting:

“The 24/7 Dad® program had a major impact on me in raising my 11-year-old son. I became a caring dad and also learned the important responsibilities of fatherhood.”
Edwin D., Birth Parent, Iowa

“This curriculum is a unique educational program designed to help fathers develop self-awareness, caring and compassion and a sense of responsibility in their parenting role. The program supports the growth and development of the man first and the father second. The curriculum promotes the development of

skills in caring for children and building relationships with the mother of their children. It is available for first-time dads or for fathers lacking vital skills and attitudes and also for more experienced fathers.”

② Strategies that build partnerships and increase trust with parents

Parents are more likely to use prevention resources when they are involved as partners with decision-makers in their planning, implementation, oversight and evaluation. And, this partnership helps ensure that the resources are implemented in ways that will most appeal to the parents who may need to use them. Corey B., a birth parent from Florida, shares how he first became involved as a parent advocate in the prevention community:

“As a single father with less than 2 years of sobriety, parenting a 13-month-old baby boy was tough. Oftentimes, I took out pay-day advances on a cook’s salary to make ends meet. My circle of friends was quite small. And my family lived far away. There were many days when I felt that I should just give up and lose hope. However, something deep inside of me kept me going. It was more than the love I have for my child. It definitely wasn’t because life was easy. I recall that I was taught early in life that when times get tough, I must show no emotions or weakness or even reach out to any system for help.”

Corey continues, “These were the days when I washed clothes at a local laundromat, obtained bus passes from the neighborhood churches and on Sunday traveled to clothing and food banks to ensure my child had ample food, diapers and groceries. When I look back on these moments, I realize that my network grew and informal services and other initiatives helped to support me.”

Integrating family wisdom into the prevention community

The National Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds defines evidence-based practice as a decision-making process that integrates the best available research evidence with family wisdom and professional expertise to choose a course of action. This definition places an emphasis on the process of selection of models, approaches and strategies that are based on awareness of the values of a given community, population or family. It incorporates family wisdom, which is the compilation of the experiences, cultural traditions and values and socially influenced norms and expectations that are influential on families’ behavior and on their participation and response to program or strategies.

Corey explains how his life experiences became valued and he grew to trust service providers:

“Years ago, I walked into an early learning environment in search of diapers. While there, a staff member reached out to me and my child with open arms. She recognized the early warning signs of child neglect and commended me for reaching out for concrete support in times of need (a protective factor that I later learned lots more about). My life changed from that moment. She recognized the value in me and in my life experiences as a parent and invited me to join a local planning meeting that would discuss many ways to involve parents in prevention services. This helped me to begin trusting service providers and reaching out for help. I also began to understand what it meant to build protective factors in my

Other parent education programs

Other parent education programs that parents have found to be effective include:

- The **Triple-P (Positive Parenting Program)** is an evidence-based parenting program with more than 30 years of ongoing research. Triple P gives parents simple and practical strategies to help them build strong, healthy relationships, confidently manage their children’s behavior and prevent problems from developing. For more information, visit <http://www.triplep.net/glo-en/home/>.
- The **Nurturing Parenting Programs** are family-centered, cost-effective and evidenced-based programs recognized by the National Registry of Evidenced-Based Programs and Practices (NREPP), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency (OJJDP), Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) and Child Welfare League of America (CWLA). Training is necessary to ensure proper implementation of the Nurturing Programs. Trainings are posted on the Nurturing Parenting website at <http://www.nurturingparenting.com/>.

“I’m a felon with a past termination of parental rights in another state and with an Adverse Child Experiences (ACEs) score of 8, yet my youngest son was never exposed to the child welfare system. It wasn’t a parenting class, a higher paying job, therapy or an in-home program that shaped who I am today. It was becoming a partner to the prevention community!”

Corey B., Birth Parent, Florida

Community Café preliminary findings

Some preliminary findings from the Community Café project *Building Parent Leadership and Strengthening New York State Families and Communities* show that a community café approach:

- Helps identify and strengthen community supports that engage and protect families;
- Builds parents' capacity to help their families thrive; and
- Builds community capacity to create action plans that address challenges affecting the social and emotional well-being of children and families.

(*NYS Parenting Education Partnership*, written by Robin Higa and Amber Huffstickler of the National Alliance for Children's Trust and Prevention Funds, Spring 2013, <http://ctfalliance.org/images/pdfs/NYS%20Community%20Cafe%20Mid-term%20Report.pdf>)

Building a prevention-oriented society

"By implementing a comprehensive protective factors approach, we move closer to a prevention-oriented society, where all sectors recognize the value of health and well-being for all individuals, families and communities...Effective early prevention efforts are less costly to our nation and to individuals than trying to fix the adverse effects of child maltreatment."

(2016/2017 Prevention Resource Guide: Building Community, Building Hope. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families Administration on Children, Youth and Families Children's Bureau https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/guide_2017.pdf)

family, increase my self-confidence and develop my leadership skills and abilities. Equally important, it provided this community-based organization with valuable input about what types of prevention services would be most beneficial to help our families thrive and support other families in the community."

Using the Community Café approach to build partnerships

The Alliance is the national home of the Community Café approach. The parents within the BPAC and BPNN network have found that using a Community Café approach can help build strong and meaningful partnerships and communication between parents and community members, help build protective factors and develop effective child maltreatment prevention strategies. This approach involves a series of guided conversations with parents and community members based on the Strengthening Families™ Protective Factors framework. These conversations are hosted by parent leaders who use the World Café technique (<http://theworldcafe.com/>), to increase community wisdom, build parent voice and facilitate action to improve families and communities. The process is designed, planned and implemented by parents, working with their community partners. The focus is on using the protective factors to frame discussion on issues of concern to the community. Meaningful conversations invite diverse perspectives, are culturally relevant to the community and are typically designed by people who live there. (*The Community Café Guide for Hosts: Changing the Lives of Children Through Conversations That Matter* <http://www.ctfalliance.org/images/pdfs/CafeGuide.pdf>)

Community Cafés are useful in any community, with any system and for multiple purposes where it is important to engage parents, community members and leaders in collective attention to the needs, strengths and opportunities in their community. For example, the Orange County Domestic Violence and Child Abuse Commission in Florida used cafés to gain a deeper understanding of the needs of Orange County parents and social service recipients and their recommendations on current and potential resources and strategies that strengthen families and prevent child abuse and neglect.

Community Cafés may be implemented in different settings such as family resource centers, neighborhood centers, schools, immigrant and refugee agencies, faith-based organizations, health departments or any agency that touches the lives of families and children. To view a video that showcases a Community Café in Alaska, visit <http://www.ctfalliance.org/alaskavideo.htm>.

Conclusion

We all have a shared responsibility to work together to build strong families and communities and prevent child abuse and neglect. We need to prioritize prevention strategies and have a wide range of prevention resources to respond to the diverse needs, values and cultural traditions unique to each community. Parents are critical partners in helping to identify ways to create strong, nurturing communities that are supportive of families. We believe the most effective prevention strategies can be developed when parents feel valued and are included in the planning, implementation and evaluation of community prevention strategies.

Additional resources

Additional resources that provide prevention information and strategies include:

- **The National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds (Alliance)** is the national membership organization for state children's trust and prevention funds. Their members collectively distribute more than \$200 million in funding each year to support a diverse array of evidence-based and innovative statewide and community-based prevention strategies. Find your local children's trust or prevention fund on the Alliance's website at <http://www.ctfalliance.org>. The Alliance supports these prevention strategies in the states with training, technical assistance and publications, which are available on the Alliance website.
- **The Children's Bureau** funds evidence-based and evidence-informed state and local prevention programs through its network of Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) state lead agencies. To locate the agency in your state, visit <http://friendsnrc.org/cbcap-priority-areas>.
- **The Child Welfare Information Gateway's Prevention Programs** webpage highlights a variety of programs that address child abuse and neglect: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/programs/>
- **Prevent Child Abuse America's** 50 chapters nationwide provide a number of evidence-based, state-specific programs to help individuals and communities prevent child maltreatment. Use Prevent Child Abuse America's map to find your state's chapter and website: <http://preventchildabuse.org/>
- **California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare's** mission is to advance the effective implementation of evidence-based practices for children and families involved with the child welfare system: <http://www.cebc4cw.org>

About the Birth Parent Advisory Committee (BPAC)

The **Birth Parent Advisory Committee (BPAC)** is a select group of parents from across the country that have a range of expertise and personal experiences within the child welfare system. They serve as strategic partners with Casey Family Programs and the Alliance. The BPAC members serve in a variety of leadership roles such as parent

mentors, policy advocates, grassroots organizers and organizational administrators. They utilize their advocacy skills to ensure that the voices of parents are heard in the development of policies and practices that affect families.

About the Birth Parent National Network (BPNN)

The **Birth Parent National Network (BPNN)**, is a national platform for birth parents to work in partnership with organizations and policymakers to share their life experiences and make recommendations to improve policies and practices that impact children and families. The goal of the BPNN is to strengthen and support families and improve outcomes for families at risk or involved with the child welfare system. Our growing network includes hundreds of parent and organizational members. If you

wish to make a difference locally, in your state or at the national level, join the BPNN. To learn more about this dynamic national network visit the BPNN website:

bpnn.ctfalliance.org

To join the BPNN, submit your membership application to:
bpnn.ctfalliance.org/applications

For questions, please email us at info@ctfalliance.org

