Concrete Support for Families

Families whose basic needs (for food, clothing, housing, and transportation) are met have more time and energy to devote to their children’s safety and well-being. When parents do not have steady financial resources, lack a stable living situation, lack health insurance, or face a family crisis (such as a natural disaster or the incarceration of a parent), their ability to support their children’s healthy development may be at risk. Families whose economic opportunities are more limited may need assistance connecting to social service supports, such as housing, alcohol and drug treatment, domestic violence counseling, or public benefits.

Partnering with parents to identify and access resources in the community may help prevent the stress that sometimes precipitates child maltreatment. Offering concrete supports also may help prevent the unintended neglect that sometimes occurs when parents are unable to provide for their children.

When needed services do not exist in your community, work with parent advocates and community leaders to help establish them. Parents who go public with their need usually find that they are not alone. The fact that a parent is willing to publicize a cause may mobilize the community. Parents who are new to advocacy may need help connecting with the media, businesses, funding, and other parts of the community to have their needs heard and identify solutions.

How Workers Can Help

- Teach families about calling “2-1-1” (if available in your community) to find resources to meet a specific need or learn more about organizations that support families in their community.
- Support parents in learning how to navigate service systems, ask for help, and advocate for themselves to receive needed support.
- Encourage families to organize a clothing swap or babysitting co-op in their neighborhood.

Words to live by: Strong families ask for help when they need it.

How Programs Can Help

- Connect parents to economic resources, such as job training and social services.
- Serve as an access point for health care, child care subsidies, and other benefits.
- Provide for immediate needs through a closet with extra winter coats and a direct connection to a food pantry; facilitate help from other parents, when appropriate.
CBCAP State Example: California Department of Social Services

High Sierra Family Services in Sierra County, CA, uses CBCAP funding from the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to strengthen families by providing concrete supports. The agency offers a food pantry, children’s closet, transportation vouchers, and emergency utility and rental assistance as well as information to link parents with other community agencies, programs, and resources.

After using the food pantry and other concrete support programs, families have reported that they are more comfortable accessing other programs at the center. By using the food pantry, free telephone, computer access, and emergency rental assistance, at least one family was spared unnecessary eviction and was able to eat and stay in their home until unemployment benefits began.

For more information:

Robert Bradshaw, M.P.A.
Manager, Prevention Network Development Unit
Office of Child Abuse Prevention
916.651.6811
Robert.Bradshaw@dss.ca.gov
http://www.cdss.ca.gov/Child-Abuse-Prevention

- Help families access crisis services, such as a shelter for women who have experienced domestic abuse, mental health services, or substance use counseling, by helping families make initial calls and appointments, assisting with transportation, and providing the name of a contact person in addition to a phone number.
- Link parents with service providers who speak their language or share a similar background, when available.
- Train staff to listen for family stress and initiate positive conversations about family needs.
- Let parents know about all available community resources, so they may select what is most appropriate for their needs.