Children’s emerging ability to form bonds and interact positively with others, self-regulate their emotions and behavior, communicate their feelings, and solve problems effectively has a positive impact on their relationships with their family, other adults, and peers. (Within the ACYF conceptual model, these are referred to as individual-level protective factors.) Parents and caregivers grow more responsive to children’s needs—and less likely to feel stressed or frustrated—as children learn to tell parents what they need and how parental actions make them feel, rather than “acting out” difficult feelings.

On the other hand, children’s challenging behaviors or delays in social-emotional development create extra stress for families. Parenting is more challenging when children do not or cannot respond positively to their parents’ nurturing and affection. These children may be at greater risk for abuse. It is important to identify any such concerns as early as possible and to provide services to children and their parents that facilitate healthy development.

How Workers Can Help*

- Ask parents to share an experience that typically makes their child sad, frustrated, or angry. Explore what the child does when feeling those emotions, how the parent responds, and how the child responds to the parent. Help parents identify opportunities to support their child in using words and skills to cope with strong emotions.

- Engage parents and children in a game or art activity that helps children learn to express themselves in ways other than words.

- Create a lending library of picture books about coping with different emotions for parents to read with their children.

How Programs Can Help

- Use both structured curriculum and informal interaction to teach children to share, be respectful of others, and express themselves through language.

- Include discussions about the importance of feelings in programming for children and parents.

- Create and post a chart that describes which social and emotional skills children typically do and do not possess at different ages.

**Words to live by:** Children get along better with others when they have words to express how they feel.

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*Some activities adapted from the Center for the Study of Social Policy’s Strengthening Families Protective Factors Action Sheets at https://www.cssp.org/reform/strengtheningfamilies/about/body/ProtectiveFactorsActionSheets.pdf.*
CBCAP State Example: North Carolina Division of Social Services

The North Carolina Division of Social Services (NC DSS) funds Incredible Years (IY) programs for families with children ages 3–12 years by blending various funding streams, including CBCAP. The programs provide child care, transportation, meals, and incentives to facilitate participant recruitment and retention.

IY is an evidence-based program that fosters healthy development in young children by strengthening parenting competencies and promoting effective strategies for managing children’s challenging behaviors. Parents and caregivers attend weekly group sessions for 14 to 16 weeks to practice skills that promote children’s academic, social, and emotional skills. Parents learn the very basics of parenting: playing with their children, offering praise and rewards, creating household rules and setting limits, and using positive discipline strategies.

The long-term goals of the IY parent program include strengthening families by preventing delinquency, substance use, and violence. NC DSS requires all IY grantees to use formal technical assistance and implementation fidelity support provided by Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina to ensure the best possible outcomes for children and families.

An independent evaluator found statistically significant results in all outcomes, including decreasing harsh discipline, decreasing inconsistent discipline, increasing appropriate discipline, increasing positive parenting, increasing clear expectations, decreasing the frequency of child’s problem behaviors, and decreasing the degree to which caregivers/parents perceive the child’s behavior as problematic.

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- Provide art programs that allow children to express themselves in ways other than words.
- Foster ongoing engagement and communication with parents about their children’s social and emotional development and the actions the program is taking to facilitate it. Children often take home what they are learning at school.
- Encourage and provide opportunities for parents to share resources with each other and exchange ideas about how they promote their children’s social and emotional development.
- Take timely action when there is a concern—this might include asking another experienced teacher or staff member to help observe a child, talking with the parent, or bringing in a consultant.