

OVERVIEW of PROTECTIVE FACTORS for ADULT and CHILD SURVIVORS of DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

“When a flower doesn’t bloom, you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower.”

Alexander Den Heijer

Sometimes when children, adults, and families are experiencing challenges or traumatic events, we try to fix them instead of collaborating with community stakeholders to fix the conditions, events, or circumstances that contribute to poor outcomes (i.e., risk factors). Intentionally and actively working to address various conditions, events, and circumstances in ways that help to support the well-being of children, adults, and families is what *building protective factors* is all about.

Protective factors are conditions and characteristics that eliminate or reduce the impact of risk factors AND promote healthy development and well-being. Stated another way, protective factors are conditions and characteristics of *individuals, interpersonal relationships, communities, and the larger society* that are associated with decreased chances of negative outcomes and increased chances of positive outcomes. Better outcomes for children, adults, and families will be achieved if protective factors are built in all human domains: individual, interpersonal, community, and societal.

Helping children, adults, and families build protective factors requires:

- Small but significant changes in practitioners’ everyday actions that focus on individual, family, or community conditions and characteristics.
- Shifts in policies, systems and partnerships that prioritize and promote those changes.

Why are protective factors important for adult and child survivors of domestic violence?

As a result of domestic violence (DV), adult and child survivors may become cut off from family and friends, begin to doubt their ability to take care of themselves or their children, and lose hope for a better future. These harmful impacts of domestic violence are exacerbated when survivors are also experiencing poverty, systemic racism, discrimination, food or housing insecurity, and other stressors.

When child welfare staff, DV practitioners, educators, faith leaders, treatment providers, community residents and leaders, and others intentionally and actively focus on building protective factors in addition to reducing risk

Domain	EXAMPLES OF PROTECTIVE FACTORS
Individual	positive self-esteem; problem-solving skills; success at school or work
Interpersonal	responsive and helpful social supports; good friends/peer group
Community	accessibility of resources and services; robust networks within cultural groups
Societal	policies that promote equitable child outcomes; positive media images

factors, adult and child survivors are more able to draw upon their personal, family, and community strengths and resources to address the challenges they are experiencing, and to do better in school, work, and life.

What are key protective factors for adult and child survivors of domestic violence?

Five protective factors can help to reduce the effects of domestic violence on adult and child survivors, support survivors’ personal growth and development, and build a family and community environment that promotes well-being for survivors. Protective factors for survivors of domestic violence are:

1. Safer and more stable conditions
2. Social, cultural, and spiritual connections
3. Resilience and a growth mindset
4. Nurturing parent-child interactions
5. Social and emotional abilities

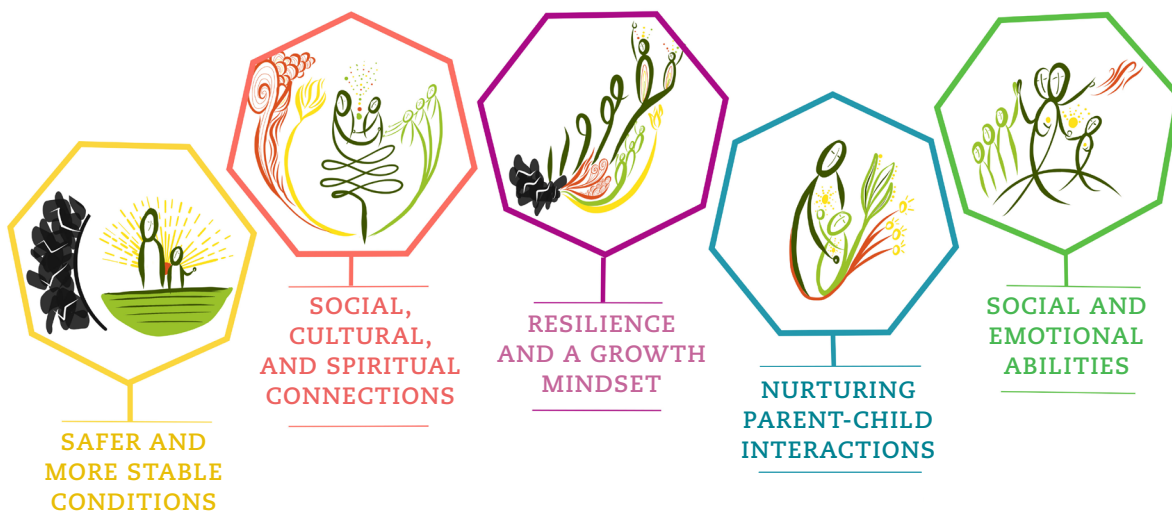
How does building one protective factor help to build another protective factor?

Protective factors for survivors of domestic violence are interrelated. This means that experiences, interventions, or environments that strengthen one of the protective factors for adult and child survivors can help to build another protective factor. For example:

- Survivors’ strong social connections create opportunities to establish safer and more stable conditions.
- When survivors experience safer and more stable conditions, they have increased opportunity and capacity to manage other aspects of their lives, which strengthens their belief in themselves. This is the basis of resilience.
- Having resilience helps to reduce the stress survivors experience. Less stress can contribute to more nurturing parent-child interactions.
- Nurturing parent-child interactions can strengthen social and emotional abilities in both the parent and child.

See <https://dvchildwelfare.org/resources/issue-brief-on-the-protective-factors-for-survivors-of-domestic-violence/> for more information on protective factors.

THE FIVE KEY PROTECTIVE FACTORS



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