

Observe and Respond to Early Warning Signs of Family Stress

Why is it important?

Adversity and ongoing stress can greatly impact the well-being of parents and children's early development, especially when that stress becomes toxic. Children living in poverty, or who are exposed to violence, or experience the loss of a significant caregiver, are more likely to experience future health, emotional, and educational issues. By monitoring levels of stress and supporting the resilience of families, you can lessen the impact of stress and ensure families have the resources and supports needed to overcome obstacles and maintain their resilience.

Fill out the self-assessment below based on your interactions with families

		I do this	I don't do this	I'd like to try this
1.	I monitor the following signs that a family may be under stress including:			
	a. Physical signs (such as bruises), acting out, distress, challenging behavior, fearful behavior, or inappropriate language/behavior (such as sexual acting out).			
	b. Unusual or withdrawn parental behavior.			
	c. Repeated missed appointments or unexplained absences.			
	d. Divorce, job loss, or other family crises.			
	e. Statements made by parents that they are overwhelmed or feeling hopeless.			
2.	When a family is experiencing extreme difficulties but there is no sign of imminent harm to the child or other family members:			
	a. I work with the family to discuss concerns and appropriate actions.			
	b. I help families think about alternative solutions when they are out of ideas.			
	c. I reach out to the family to address the issues causing concerns.			
	d. I attempt to connect the families to resources that can help address the issue including intensive services respite care, shelters, or emergency crisis services.			
	e. I continue to support families and monitor the situation daily until the situation is resolved.			
3.	I am trained to follow to the programs protocols for reporting child abuse, neglect, and navigating the child welfare system.			
4.	I ensure parents are informed of:			
	a. My status as a mandatory reporter.			
	b. What constitutes abuse and neglect within the state.			
5.	I assist parents in helping their children cope with stress by:			
	a. Providing reassurance by keeping their children's daily routines intact i.e., bedtime, mealtime, etc.			
	b. Helping parents determine how much information to share with children about current stress or challenge.			
	c. Encouraging children to name and express their feelings.			

Based on your responses how do you observe and respond to early warning signs of family stress? _____

What item do you feel would be difficult? Why? _____

In the table below, create a plan for an activity or practice for observing and responding to early warning signs of family stress. (Note that the self-assessment you completed may give you an idea. Refer to the Sample Action Plan at the end of this section.)

PROPOSED ACTIVITY/PRACTICE:			
Steps	Time Frame	Owner(s)	Supplies needed
OUTCOMES: (What were your results? Number of parents attended, engagement level of parents, did parents interact with each other, etc)		SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT:	

SAMPLE ACTION PLAN

PROPOSED ACTIVITY/PRACTICE: Cultures in our Classroom			
Steps	Time Frame	Owner(s)	Supplies needed
Notify the administrator and set the date of the event.	July 12 th	Lead- Angie Assistant-Bob Administrator - Candy	cups plates plastic silverware napkins tablecloths arts and craft supplies Drinks Snacks Decorations
Inform parents/encourage parents to share cultural customs.	July 14 th	Lead-Angie	
Create a sign-up sheet.	July 17 th	Assistant-Bob	
Plan activities.	July 21 st	Lead-Angie	
Purchase supplies (refreshments).	July 26 th	Administrator- Candy	
Host event.	July 28 th	Lead- Angie Assistant-Bob Administrator- Candy	
OUTCOMES: <i>(What were your results? Number of parents attended, engagement level of parents, did parents interact with each other, etc.)</i> Parents talked to one another and found similarities with cultural customs. 4 families shared their cultural foods. 7 families attended with 11 children in total. 2 families scheduled play dates with their children.		SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT: Include other leads and their participation in the event. Personally call all families to invite them to the event and bring something to represent their culture. Send out reminder calls the day before. Plan icebreaker activity.	