

Social Connections

Parents with a social network of emotionally supportive friends, family, and neighbors often find that it is easier to care for their children and themselves. Most parents need people they can call on once in a while when they need a sympathetic listener, advice, or concrete support. Conversely, research has shown that parents, who are isolated, with few social connections, are at higher risk for child abuse and neglect.

Some parents may need to develop self-confidence and social skills to expand their social networks. Helping parents identify resources and/or providing opportunities for them to make connections within their neighborhood or community may encourage isolated parents to reach out. Often, opportunities exist within faith-based organizations, schools, hospitals, community centers, and other places where support groups or social groups meet.

Sharing Strategies and Resources to Strengthen Social Connections

If parents express an interest in making social connections, you may want to offer suggestions, information, or services. Sometimes, parents will not identify a lack of social connections or emotional support as an issue. Instead, they may be concerned about a child's behavior problem or their own depression. In addressing the parent's concerns, you can also provide information about how these needs might be met by connecting with others (e.g., a support group for parents with similar issues). You can also provide general information on how expanding social connections can reduce isolation and support parents.

Consider sharing the following things:

Benefits of a broad social network

- Helps ease the burden of parenting
- Models positive social interactions for children and gives children access to other supportive adults
- Provides support in crisis
- Offers opportunities to help others

Ways to broaden a social network

- Overcome transportation, childcare, and other barriers – for instance, taking a bus or carpool to a play group or joining a babysitting co-op to meet other parents and have occasional childcare
- Access community resources, especially those with which the parent has some experience (a church he or she attended, a Head Start program where the child is enrolled, a cultural center that offers services in the parent's native language)
- Join a parent's group or play group in the neighborhood, or start a new group

And if a group does not already exist...

Some neighborhoods and communities provide ample opportunities for neighbors to come together and friendships to develop. In other cases, agencies and organizations may welcome help in starting groups that bring families together for mutual support. These groups might start as an outgrowth of a widely recognized need in the community, such as new families that have just moved to the area or concerned citizens working against community violence. Community involvement is critical for these groups to be sustained over time. As a service provider, your role might be to bring individuals together (including parents), providing a meeting place, or simply encouraging a community leader to establish a group to meet a particular need.

**ChildHelp Pee Dee
24 Hour Toll-Free Helpline
1-866-867-9857
Parenting is tough. Asking for help doesn't have to be.**



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