

# STRENGTHENING FAMILIES: EXPLORATION OF ELEMENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL IN-HOME SAFETY PLANNING LEARNING COLLABORATIVE



## AUGUST 2024 UTILIZING STRENGTHS AND PARENT/CAREGIVER PROTECTIVE CAPACITIES

Current practice lacks a formalized structure indicating how Child Welfare Professionals assess for Parent/Caregiver Protective Capacities and expectations or how to use or document them. However, there is progress to be made despite an absence of formal directions. One of the barriers to identifying and utilizing protective capacities is bias. Start with “self” and normalize that it’s hard. It’s hard to talk about what’s going well when there has been or there’s likely to be abuse or neglect in a home. We feel responsible for protecting minors who cannot protect themselves, and we can sometimes feel angry towards the people responsible for caring for children that are struggling behaviorally, cognitively and/or emotionally to keep their children safe.

### Examples of biases that likely impact safety planning:

**Anchoring Bias:** Relying too heavily on an initial piece of information. We often begin the CPS process with an incident of maltreatment.

**Availability/Selective Attention Bias:** Making decisions based only on immediate information. Child welfare is often faced with time constraints limiting the amount of time to spend with families.

**Cognitive Fixation:** Fixation on the common way of doing things, and not the potential alternatives. There are limitations of what services and supports counties can provide and budgets to pay attention to.

**Confirmation Bias:** Identifying, interpreting, favoring, and recalling information that supports prior beliefs or values. Child welfare has already determined a child to be unsafe. Does finding protective capacities cause us, or others, to question that decision or our involvement with a family? How can both dangers and protective capacities be present at the same time?



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## Overcoming Bias to Utilize Protective Capacities

**Re-train our brain:** Treating the bias like a bad habit that needs breaking. It takes time, attention and will-power to create new habits.

**Self-Reflection:** Taking time to think about past experiences and how they may contribute to bias. Reflecting on any negative thoughts or feelings that surfaced during interactions when safety planning. Examining your own values on a personal and professional level to reflect on where you have faced challenges or barriers and where you may be able draw strength.

**Finding feedback and support:** Feedback from others, like peers or your supervisor, can provide a different perspective. The reason it's called "implicit" or "unconscious" bias, is that it's not intentional and we may not even be aware of it. Others may be able to see what we don't.

## Working with Families to Discover Protective Capacities to be used on a Safety Plan

The same technique of self-reflection can be used with parents. Focus on time periods in which danger is not present. Reflect on what is happening behaviorally, cognitively and/or emotionally during these times and circumstances.

**Collateral Contacts and Family Teaming:** Seeking feedback from others can provide valuable insights that the parents may not be aware of, as well as support your decisions about using protective capacities that existed prior to the involvement of child welfare. An outside perspective about what has been working well for a period prior to intervention is extra advantageous if you're still working on engaging to build trust with parents.

Making connections and expanding on protective capacities. Are there behaviors, ways of thinking, or emotions towards parenting and/or the child that can be highlighted during periods of time even when the child is unsafe, and a safety response is needed? Is there a particular behavior, thought process or emotion the parent demonstrates in one area that is potentially applicable to another area?



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## Reflection on Content

Knowing what Parent/Caregiver Protective Capacities are, how to assess for them, and how to utilize them are three different things. How clear are you in taking all three steps during safety planning? Are you able to identify barriers to this becoming regular practice on every safety plan?

## Action Item

Consider an active safety plan (protective plan, safety plan, delinquency plan) and periods of time when parents are safely managing the children and household on their own. What are the protective capacities that are active during this time ensuring that safety is occurring without child welfare intervention? Have these been communicated as non-negotiables?