

For Immediate Release
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New Study Explores Use of Protective Factors in Pediatrics as a Tool to Help Families Buffer the Effects of Toxic Stress on Young Children

Farmington, CT – In a report released today, CHDI and the [Help Me Grow® National Center](#), a program of Connecticut Children’s Office for Community Child Health, summarize findings from a study examining the feasibility and effectiveness of training pediatric primary care providers to promote child and family resilience using a protective factors framework. The study found that pediatric practices were able to promote protective factors among families with infants and toddlers to support optimal child development and buffer the negative effects of toxic stress. Results of the study were published today in CHDI’s IMPACT report, [Building Resilience in Young Children: Experiences Promoting Protective Factors in Six Pediatric Practices](#).

“Protective factors are known to mitigate the negative long-term outcomes that arise from repeated exposure to adversity. The findings in this report will help guide pediatric practices, health administrators, and policy makers to prevent and address toxic stress and improve child and parental resilience and health outcomes,” said Jeffrey Vanderploeg, President and CEO of CHDI.

“A young child’s physical, social-emotional, and intellectual development is significantly shaped by their environment and relationships with caregivers,” said Abby Alter, senior associate for early childhood initiatives at CHDI and co-author of the IMPACT report. “Many families with young children experience poverty, violence, mental illness, and other potentially toxic stressors that can impede their ability to provide a healthy, nurturing environment. Research shows the presence of protective factors helps families promote healthy development, buffer toxic stress, and increase their child’s resiliency.”

The five protective factors are part of the [Center for the Study of Social Policy’s](#) Strengthening Families™ initiative, and include: parental resilience; social connections; knowledge of parenting and child development; concrete support in times of need; and social-emotional competence of children. In 2018, the Help Me Grow National Center partnered with CHDI to train child health providers to promote the protective factors framework, with support from a quality improvement activity. **Help Me Grow offers a unique model** to support and test the dissemination of the protective factors in pediatric settings by offering seamless access to helpful community-based services. The six participating pediatric practices in Connecticut, California, and Vermont were recruited from the Help Me Grow affiliate network. The project was funded by a grant from The JPB Foundation.

“Pediatric primary care is an ideal venue for promoting the protective factors because it is a universal service used by nearly all families, who often look to their pediatricians for guidance and expertise in child development,” said Erin Cornell, associate director of the Help Me Grow National Center and co-author of the IMPACT report. “After seeing the success of this project, we hope to further disseminate the protective factors throughout the Help Me Grow national network.”

One of the conclusions of the report was that pediatric providers are most effective in promoting the five protective factors when this work is implemented as part of a comprehensive system for addressing the medical and social determinants of health. The Help Me Grow system provides this structure by emphasizing a strengths-based and multi-generational approach to health promotion, early detection, and connection to services.

[Download](#) a copy of the IMPACT, *Building Resilience in Young Children: Experiences Promoting Protective Factors in Six Pediatric Practices* at www.chdi.org.

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