Risk and Protective Factors

Some children who enter foster care will experience developmental and behavioral challenges. Other children show typical development or only minor problems. The appearance and extent of any problems depend on many factors. There are so-called "risk" factors or factors that increase the likelihood that the child will experience a developmental or behavioral problem. And there are "protective" factors, factors that mitigate or minimize the effects of "risk" factors.

"Risk" factors include:

1. genetic or familial factors
2. pregnancy factors
3. post-natal factors or things that the infant and child experience after birth.

Genetic and familial "risk" factors include:

- A family history of learning problems, ADHD, anxiety and depression or bipolar disorder.

Pregnancy factors include:

- Poor nutrition
- Maternal illnesses, such as HIV or AIDS, during the pregnancy
- Maternal use of alcohol, drugs, and medications during the pregnancy.

Post-natal factors include:

- Maternal depression
- Actual physical or sexual abuse
- Neglect from the child's caregivers
- Exposure to dangerous chemicals, such as when parents are involved in the manufacture of illegal drugs
- Poor nutrition or recurrent illnesses which may result from child neglect.

One good example of a **"protective"** factor is placement of a child in a stable, nurturing foster or adoptive home. Other protective factors include:

- A supportive relationship with an extended family member or a neighbor
- The child's inherent resilience or ability to withstand the effects of neglect or abuse.

A child's resilience may result from his or her intelligence or adaptability.

A good way to think of the effect of these "risk" and "protective" factors on a child's development is called the Transactional model. In this model, a child's development is understood as the result of the continuing interaction of these factors over time. This underlines the importance of making sure that children of all ages are living in caring, nurturing homes.