

Economic Stability

Economic security plays a crucial role in reducing stress, contributing to a sense of well-being, and fostering healthy parenting and parent-child interactions. When discussing the biggest challenges that put families at risk for child welfare involvement due to neglect, SFTCCC participants consistently pointed to 'poverty', its associated struggles, and the stress it generates as the key obstacles to family functioning and child well-being. Child neglect is more likely in families that are experiencing an overload of stress related to the weight of poverty, which can overload parents' abilities to provide the supportive relationships children need.

The Ripple Effects of Poverty on Parenting and Family Dynamics

Since the first roundtable, SFTCCC participants have identified poverty as the biggest challenge facing the families they work with, one that people working in family preservation programs feel like they lack tools to address. The stressors of poverty are complex and represent a constellation of challenges, from housing insecurity, economic shocks, lack of access to childcare, food insecurity, and navigating the benefits cliff.

While Wisconsin law states that family separation due to neglect should only happen for reasons other than poverty, economic insecurities are common among families with children entering the foster care system. Nationally, nearly **85%** of families investigated by CPS earn below **200%** of the poverty line. Children from economically insecure households are more likely to face maltreatment and neglect (Drake, 2014).

Poverty can lead to chronic stress, which negatively impacts parenting and parent-child interactions.

High levels of stress caused by poverty can result in parents becoming more irritable, less patient, and exacerbate mental health and substance use challenges. Parents experiencing financial strain may have limited time and resources to focus on their children's needs, affecting the quality of their interactions.

When parents are overloaded by the stressors of poverty, it can negatively affect their ability to engage in healthy parenting practices, it harms their mental health, child development, and well-being. This includes being less responsive to their child's needs, having difficulty setting boundaries, and exhibiting harsher discipline methods.

Breaking the Cycle: Supporting Family Economic Stability

To improve parent-child interactions and overall parenting, it is essential to address the root causes of poverty-induced stress and support family economic stability. This includes increasing access to resources such as affordable housing, healthcare, and education, as well as implementing policies to reduce income inequality.

Learning from innovative new initiatives in this space, broadening our network, and collectively advancing policy solutions are all opportunities for SFTCCC participants to contribute to moving forward. By creating a more supportive environment for families, we can help alleviate the stressors associated with poverty, thereby promoting healthy parenting and fostering stronger parent-child relationships.