The majority of professionals and paraprofessionals who enter into the field of early childhood, understand and truly believe that the work we do with young children and their families is important and valuable. Even as the research about early attachment, the importance of the early formative years, promotion and prevention and early intervention and treatment has begun to catch up with these beliefs, it is not always easy to explain or describe what we actually do and how it makes a difference.

Home Visiting is a program strategy which integrates promotion and prevention services. WHO defines promotion as “the process of enabling people to increase control over, and improve their health” (World Health Organization, 2002). In general, promotion services are universal and encourage and aid social-emotional wellness through relationship building and support, education and screenings. The New Mexico Home Visiting Program Standards state that Home Visiting specifically promotes “safe, nurturing relationships between young children and their caregiver… and child well-being”.

As Home Visitors, through the lens of promotion, we look at the child and parent relationship and the child’s development in terms of maximizing potential and avoiding missed opportunities. We promote child development through teaching parents and caregivers about milestones, helping them to form realistic expectations, and aiding them in feeling prepared for what comes next. We promote strong and healthy attachment by assisting parents and caregivers in seeing the ways that they are already connecting with their child(ren) and building on their strengths. Through our use of screenings such as the PICCOLO, SSI, and Reflections on Parenting, we help parents
and caregivers to identify areas where they might have an opportunity for growth that could impact outcomes for their child and/or their family, and enable and empower them to meet their personal goals. Arguably, one of the most important things that we do is give parents a template and experience of being truly seen, understood and celebrated, so that they can, in turn, provide this same experience to their child(ren) (what we refer to as the Parallel Process). There are an endless number of different ways that Home Visitors can promote these, and many other things, within their work with families.

While promotion focuses on maximizing potential, prevention attempts to keep something from happening. Prevention services identify and reach out to families in order to reduce the risk of developing social-emotional or mental health problems. New Mexico Home Visiting focuses specifically on “prevent[ing] adverse childhood experiences” (Child, Youth and Families Department, 2015) by identifying risk-factors through screenings, making referrals to appropriate services, and supporting and fostering resiliency and protective factors.

As Home Visitors, through the lens of prevention, we look at the child and caregiver’s relationship and the child’s development in terms of safety and danger, aiming to minimize the potential negative effects and in turn enhance positive outcomes. We can help parents to take a look at the ways in which their current circumstances, surroundings, and/or actions may or may not impact their child and/or their relationship with their child. Through our use of screenings such as the EPDS, Relationship Assessment Tool, ASQ and ASQ-SE, we are able to work with parents to identify areas of potential or actual risk, offer and connect these families to resources and assist them in identifying ways in which they can create different options, and ideally outcomes, for themselves and their child(ren). By offering parents and caregivers education, community connections, and support, we are providing them with an important opportunity to feel empowered and more in control of their situations.

Home Visiting’s combination of promotion and prevention services, offered universally to parents, has a significant impact on child and family outcomes. According to the Child and Family Research Partnership, Home Visiting programs “help parents provide safe and supportive environments for their children, and over time, families and home visitors build strong relationships that lead to lasting benefits for the entire family” (2015). They go on to explain that research has shown that when families receive Home Visiting services; Moms and babies are healthier, children are better prepared for school, children are safer, and families are more self-sufficient (Child and Family Research Partnership, 2015). So, next time that someone asks you what you do, don’t be shy, tell them “I make a difference in the lives of children and families!”.  

Questions to encourage discussion and reflection…
  - What does it mean to you be a home visitor?
  - In what ways does the way you work with families involve promotion? And prevention?
What are some of the benefits of home visiting that your families have reported to you or others?
What are the impacts that you see on children and their families who receive services with your program?

References/Additional Resources


