

# Protective Capacities

## Cognitive Protective Capacities

Cognitive protective capacity refers to *knowledge, understanding, and perceptions* contributing to protective vigilance. Although this aspect of protective capacities has some relationship to intellectual or cognitive functioning, parents with low intellectual functioning can still protect their children. This has to do with the parent recognizing she is responsible for her child, and recognizing clues or alerts that danger is pending.

*Cognitive protective capacities can be demonstrated when the parent:*

- articulates a plan to protect the child
- is aligned with the child
- has adequate knowledge to fulfill care-giving responsibilities and tasks
- is reality oriented; perceives reality accurately
- has accurate perceptions of the child
- understands his/her protective role
- is self-aware as a caregiver

## Behavioral Protective Capacities

Behavioral protective capacity refers to *actions, activities, and performance* that result in protective vigilance. Behavioral aspects show it is not enough to know what must be done, or recognize what might be dangerous to a child; the parent must *act*.

*Behavioral protective capacities can be demonstrated when the parent:*

- is physically able
- has a history of protecting others
- acts to correct problems or challenges
- demonstrates impulse control
- demonstrates adequate skill to fulfill care-giving responsibilities
- possesses adequate energy
- sets aside her/his needs in favor of a child
- is adaptive and assertive
- uses resources necessary to meet the child's basic needs

## Emotional Protective Capacities

Emotional protective capacity refers to *feelings, attitudes and identification* with the child and motivation resulting in protective vigilance. Two issues influence the strength of emotional protective capacity: the attachment between parent and child, and the parent's own emotional strength.

*Emotional protective capacities can be demonstrated when the parent:*

- is able to meet own emotional needs

- is emotionally able to intervene to protect the child
- realizes the child cannot produce gratification and self-esteem for the parent
- is tolerant as a parent
- displays concern for the child and the child's experience and is intent on emotionally protecting the child
- has a strong bond with the child, knows a parent's first priority is well-being of the child
- expresses love, empathy and sensitivity toward the child; experiences specific empathy with the child's perspective and feelings

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## Questions the judge can ask.

- Has the parent demonstrated the ability to protect the child in the past under similar circumstances and family conditions? (*Behavioral Protective Capacity*)
- Has the parent arranged for the child to not be left alone with the adult/parent maltreater or source of danger? (This could include having another adult present aware of the protective concerns and able to protect the child). (*Cognitive and Behavioral Protective Capacity*)
- Is the parent intellectually, emotionally and physically able to protect the child given the threats? (*Cognitive, Behavioral and Emotional Protective Capacity*)
- Is the parent free from needs which might affect the ability to protect such as severe depression, lack of impulse control, or medical needs? (*Behavioral and Emotional Protective Capacity*)
- Does the parent have resources to meet the child's basic needs in light of the other changes the court is expecting from the family? (*Behavioral Protective Capacity*)
- Is the parent cooperating with the caseworker's efforts to provide services and assess family needs? (*Cognitive and Behavioral Protective Capacity*)
- Does the parent display concern for the child's experience? Is the parent intent on emotionally protecting the child? (*Emotional Protective Capacity*)
- Can the caregiver specifically articulate a feasible, realistic plan to protect the child, such as the maltreating adult leaving when a situation escalates, calling the police in the event the

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restraining order is violated, etc.?) (*Cognitive Protective Capacity*)

- Does the caregiver believe the child's report of maltreatment and is he/she supportive of the child? (*Emotional Protective Capacity*)
- Is the caregiver capable of understanding the specific threat to the child and the need to protect? (*Cognitive Protective Capacity*)
- Has the caregiver asked the maltreating adult to leave the household (if applicable)? (*Behavioral Protective Capacity*)
- Does the caregiver have adequate knowledge and skill to fulfill parenting responsibilities and tasks? (This may involve considering the caregiver's ability to meet any exceptional needs that the child might have). (*Cognitive and Behavioral Protective Capacity*)
- Is the caregiver emotionally able to carry out a plan and/or to intervene to protect the child (caregiver is not incapacitated by fear of maltreating adult)? (*Behavioral and Emotional Protective Capacity*)
- Do the caregiver and child have a strong bond and does the caregiver demonstrate clearly that the number one priority is the safety and well-being of the child? (*Behavioral and Emotional Protective Capacity*)
- Even if the caregiver is having a difficult time believing the other adult would maltreat the child, does he or she describe the child as believable and trustworthy? (*Emotional Protective Capacity*)
- Does the caregiver believe that the problems of the family (including current CPS and court involvement) are not the child's fault or responsibility? (*Cognitive and Emotional Protective Capacity*)