

## Documenting Early Relational Health in Patient Charts

The 2021 AAP policy statement, [Preventing Childhood Toxic Stress: Partnering With Families and Communities to Promote Relational Health](#), states that safe, stable, and nurturing relationships in early childhood are biological necessities to build resilience to mitigate adversity and lifelong health impacts. Pediatric health care professionals already ask about family and social history. Many also use strength-based, family-centered, and trauma-informed approaches. This resource is intended to improve documentation, data collection for improvement, and quality patient care.

“We learned eliciting family strengths leads to resiliency. A doctor does not have to know the answers or what to say. Asking the question and holding space for the response is therapeutic.” –  
Pediatrician, San Francisco, California

## What? Family Strengths and Protective Factors

To build resilience and buffer adversity, family strengths should be elicited and promoted, supported, or repaired during visits. Here are key approaches:

- **American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)** [Identifying Risks, Strengths, and Protective Factors](#)
- **AAP and Zero To Three** [Early Brain Child Development Well Child Grid](#)
- **Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP)** [Protective Factors Action Sheets](#)
- **Healthy Outcomes and Positive Experiences (HOPE)** [4 Building Blocks of HOPE](#)

## How? Customize Scripting Prompts

Before you get started, review [Common Factors Approach and HELP mnemonic](#). Consider asking a family advisor and patients for feedback. Review Bright Futures [Eliciting Youth and Parental Strengths and Needs tip sheet](#) for practice change tips.

### Bright Futures™ [Infancy](#) and [Early Childhood](#) Previsit Questionnaires and Visit Documentation Forms

- Do you have any concerns, questions, or problems that you would like to discuss today?
- What excites or delights you the most about your baby/child?
- Have there been major changes lately in your baby’s/child’s or family’s life?

### [New Mexico Three](#)

- Has anything stressful happened to you since the last time we met?
- If so, how did it impact your family? And how did you cope?
- Despite that, what’s going well for you?

### [Well Visit Planner®](#)

How are you and your family doing?

- Changes or stressors for you or your family
- Making sure you have somewhere/someone to turn to for emotional support
- Taking time for yourself, for your partner, for your other children
- Balancing responsibilities with your partner
- Issues related to child care

### [What Matters Most](#)

- What matters most to you?

“Asking about family strengths was a huge burden lifted from my shoulders. Before I felt like I had to undo ACEs (adverse childhood experiences) in each visit. Now, I can have a conversation and support what is going well with a family and know that is therapeutic and reduces the impact of adversity.” - Early Career Pediatrician, Clackamas, Oregon

## Where? Patient Chart Documentation

Documenting safe, stable, and nurturing relationships will vary depending on practice electronic health record (EHR) and workflows. In general, family strengths are documented in family and social history sections as well as in the visit and assessment plan. Here are some practice examples to consider. For technical assistance from clinical experts, email [screening@aap.org](mailto:screening@aap.org).

**Lewiston, Maine** – A pediatric practice uses Cerner EHR to capture family strengths and protective factors in the social history using the [Healthy Outcomes and Positive Experiences \(HOPE\) Framework](#)

### Emotional Health:

- Who is the person you can talk about your feelings with?
- How do you take care of yourself when you feel worried? Angry? Irritated? Sad?
- What always makes you feel better when you feel yucky?

### Engagement:

- Who is the person you can always ask for help?
- Where do you feel like you really matter?
- What activities/sports/groups do you love?

### Relational Health:

- Tell me a story about your family doing something amazing that you're proud of.
- How do you support each other when things are hard?
- What is your favorite family tradition?

### Environment:

- Where do you love to go?
- Where is your safe space?
- Do you have a place you can go safely for walks? Do you have a playground where the kids can safely play?

**Indianapolis, Indiana** – An entire health system of 7 practices (FQHC pediatrics and family medicine), updated their Epic EHR Well Child Templates to include a script customized from the New Mexico Three questions

What is your favorite thing about your baby? What makes you most proud of your child?  
Has anything stressful happened to you since the last time we met? If so, how did it impact your family?  
Despite that, what's going well for you?  
What matters most to you today?

**San Leandro, California** – A pediatric practice worked with their family advisor to create and refine a Smart phrase for their Epic EHR.

*Example:*

Lives with \*\*\*

Together, enjoys \*\*\*

Helps each other by \*\*\*

Community is \*\*\*