

FRIENDS National Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention  
*A Service of the Children's Bureau*



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## **PFS-2 FAQ**

### **1. What is the cost of the PFS-2?**

There is no charge. The PFS-2 and the original PFS were developed as part of FRIENDS' cooperative agreement with the Children's Bureau. Both are in the public domain. You may download and use the PFS-2 free of charge. The survey and associated materials can be found on the FRIENDS website: <https://friendsnrc.org/protective-factors-survey>.

### **2. Is the PFS-2 available in other languages?**

The PFS-2 has only been validated for use in English at this time. A culturally relevant adaptation of the PFS-2 for Spanish-speaking audiences is forthcoming. A validated Spanish adaptation (S-PFS)<sup>1</sup> of the original Protective Factors Survey (PFS) is available on the FRIENDS website (<https://friendsnrc.org/protective-factors-survey>).

### **3. Can we translate the PFS-2 into the languages spoken by the parents and caregivers we serve?**

Keeping in mind that the tool loses its validity and reliability once it deviates from the original, you still can make in-house translations. Here are some caveats:

- 1) We strongly recommend that the translation you make has been developed and vetted by fluent English speakers AND fluent speakers of the language into which you are translating the PFS-2.
- 2) Once you are satisfied that your translation accurately reflects the content of the PFS-2, and is understood by the families you serve, make sure you use the exact wording each time you administer the tool. If you find that your translation needs tweaking, go back and make the edits, but identify the version used for each record. Consistency in administration is as important as the tool you are using.
- 3) When you report results, state clearly that you adapted the PFS-2 by translating it. FRIENDS cannot vouch for the reliability or validity of your tool once it deviates from the original.

If you do make a translation, we ask you to consider sharing it with FRIENDS. We would like to have a bank of translations to share with others.

#### **4. Can the original PFS continue to be used?**

Yes – the original PFS continues to be a reliable and valid peer-reviewed instrument<sup>2</sup> that assesses multiple protective factors to prevent child abuse and neglect, and can continue to be used.

#### **5. Why was the original Protective Factors Survey (PFS) revised?**

Following several years of implementation by practitioners working in the field of child maltreatment prevention, FRIENDS determined that the instrument could be revised to clarify wording and reflect a broader range of attitudes and behaviors within the subscales, especially in the areas of concrete supports and social supports. Beginning in 2014, significant research was conducted to revise and improve the existing PFS in alignment with the most current research.

The revisions made on the PFS-2 include clarifying and rewording items, minimizing cultural bias, and collapsing the response categories. In addition to the traditional version of the PFS-2, a retrospective version of the survey is available (see *Why is there a retrospective version of the PFS-2?* below for more information).

#### **6. Why did you assign letters rather than numbers to the response categories?**

This was a measure for reducing a bias that may be associated with numbers. Respondents may consider a higher number a ‘better’ answer, and therefore provide what is perceived as the socially desirable response.

#### **7. Do we have to use the ‘Demographic Information’ or the ‘Program Information’ forms of the PFS-2?**

No. Use whichever items in the ‘Demographic Information’ or the ‘Program Information’ forms that make sense to your program. The program-specific and demographic items are not required for the validity of the scale; they are optional. However, we strongly recommend that the PFS-2 data be analyzed in reference to demographic data (e.g. race/ethnicity) and program data (e.g. hours of services received, types of services received). The survey items that are answered on the 5-point scale are the actual items that measure the protective factors and comprise the subscales.

#### **8. Should the PFS-2 be used to make decisions about placing a child in out-of-home-care or returning a child home from care?**

No. The tool was not designed for that purpose. It would be incorrect to use it for making decisions related to foster care placements. In the same respect, the PFS-2 should not be used as part of a psychological evaluation.

#### **9. Can the PFS-2 be used as a needs-assessment tool?**

Yes. If you use the traditional, true pre/post tool, you can identify specific protective factors you may wish to target. For example, you may see group scores from a parenting class that are low in concrete supports. You respond by strengthening the part of your curriculum that addresses helping families meet basic needs.

Another example could be a home visitor who is working with a parent who had low scores in social supports. In response, the home visitor might look for ways to help the parent develop supportive social networks.

Keep in mind that not all programs are able to match scores with individual respondents. Therefore, you would need to get a parent's consent before accessing their individual record.

#### **10. Are there cutoff scores identified in the technical material?**

No, there are no cutoff scores for the PFS-2.

#### **11. Why is there a retrospective version of the PFS-2?**

Simply put, when we don't know something, we tend to think we know more about that topic than we actually do – we don't know what we don't know. This means that it is likely that a participant may over-rate themselves when they first begin receiving services, which results in a ceiling effect at pre-test where scores are all very high and have no room for improvement. Furthermore, participants may be hesitant to answer survey questions when they first begin receiving services due to a lack of established trust with program providers, and uncertainty about how the survey information will be used; participants may over-rate themselves at pre-test to make a good impression and avoid judgment.

After receiving services, changes in respondents' knowledge or beliefs about an issue can lead them to score themselves lower on the post-test than they had on the pre-test, which can inadvertently make it appear that program services had little to no effect (response shift bias). Using a retrospective model reduces the likelihood of respondents over-rating themselves at the beginning of services, allows time for trust to be built between participants and providers, and may show more change.

This model also saves staff and participants time by administering the survey at one sitting, rather than two, and yields a 100% match between pre- and post-tests. Finally, the retrospective version offers a better solution for short-term, low-intensity services that may find collecting post-tests from participants difficult due to natural drop-off and attrition.

Due to the low likelihood that responses to the Concrete Supports subscale items will change over the course of shorter-term service delivery, the retrospective PFS-2 only measures these items at post-test. However, this subscale is valuable in assisting with case planning with clients or conducting needs assessments. Programs are encouraged to administer the Concrete Supports items as a true pre-test to gain insight into participants' needs. The Concrete Supports items are available as a stand-alone pre-/post-test and can be found on the FRIENDS website: <https://friendsnrc.org/protective-factors-survey>.

#### **12. How long after a parent begins a program should they be given the post-test? We are an open-ended parent support program; parents sometimes participate in our program for many years.**

Agencies should take theoretical considerations (e.g. estimated time for program impact) as well as logistical details (e.g. accessibility of clients) to determine the optimal time for survey administration. Additionally, programs should bear in mind the likelihood of participant drop-off, particularly towards the end of service delivery, in determining when to administer the post-

test. For example, a program that is delivering a 12-week-long parent education curriculum may choose to administer a post-test in Week 10 or 11.

Programs should also be aware that participants' abilities to recall their feelings or experiences prior to receiving services may be influenced by the length of services; longer-term or ongoing program services may benefit from using the traditional pre- and post-test version of the PFS-2 rather than the retrospective version to measure changes in family protective factors over time.

The retrospective version of the survey should only be administered after participants have received a minimum of 12 hours of services; administering the retrospective survey with fewer than 12 hours of service delivery will likely not show change.

### **13. Some items refer to “family” – is there a rule about the definition of family?**

Programs are encouraged to instruct participants to construct their own definition of family based on their personal circumstances. For example, participants may include children in the household who may not be directly related to the participant, or close relatives who may or may not live with the participant.

### **14. Why is there no subscale to measure Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development on the PFS-2?**

Knowledge of parenting and child development is a complex construct with many different components. There is reason to believe that respondents' self-reported level of parenting and child development knowledge is not an accurate reflection of true parenting knowledge, but rather captures confidence or tendency toward self-reflection – neither of which are understood to be true protective factors. Therefore, we believe that parents' knowledge and competence can be reflected in the attitudes and behaviors addressed in the other subscales. We recommend programs that deliver parent education services evaluate this component of their services using a tool specific to their curriculum and content.

### **15. Does FRIENDS have resources to help me find tools for measuring other protective factors, such as *Social Competency of Children and Youth* or *Knowledge of Parenting*?**

Yes, FRIENDS offers a compendium of annotated measurement tools to assist program staff explore measurement options. The compendium is searchable by domain and protective factors and can be accessed here: <https://friendsnrc.org/evaluation/logic-models/compendium-of-annotated-tools/>

### **16. The PFS-2 includes a *Caregiver/Practitioner Relationship* subscale. *Caregiver/Practitioner Relationship* is not listed on the ACF, CSSP, or CDC website as a protective factor. Why is it included in the PFS-2?**

While the Caregiver/Practitioner Relationship is not commonly identified as a protective factor, this subscale can help service providers better assess their ability to effectively engage with caregivers, and support improved service delivery. There is research that suggests that a supportive, understanding relationship between caregivers and practitioners positively affects parents' success in participating in services.

### **17. What are the psychometric properties of the PFS-2?**

The reliability of the PFS-2 is estimated using an internal-consistency measure, Cronbach's coefficient alpha, and all five subscales demonstrate acceptable internal consistency (0.59 – 0.82). Content validity, construct validity, and criterion validity were also examined and provide evidence that the PFS-2 is a valid measure of multiple protective factors against child maltreatment. For further information about the psychometric properties of the PFS-2, please contact the University of Kansas Center for Public Partnerships and Research ([cppr@ku.edu](mailto:cppr@ku.edu)).

### **18. Is the PFS-2 considered an evidence-based tool?**

Based on testing conducted to date, the PFS-2 is psychometrically sound and therefore can be considered evidence-based. The original PFS is listed in the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse (CEBC) as an evidence-based evaluation tool. Documentation has been submitted to the CEBC as they review tools for inclusion in their evidence-based registry. Please check the FRIENDS website or the CEBC website for updates.

For more information, see peer-reviewed articles related to the PFS-2:

Sprague-Jones, J., Counts, J., Rousseau, M., & Firman, C. (2019). The development of the protective factors survey: a self-report measure of protective factors against child maltreatment. *Child abuse & neglect*, 89, 122-134

Sprague-Jones, J., Singh, P., Rousseau, M., Counts, J., & Firman, C. (2020). The Protective Factors Survey: Establishing validity and reliability of a self-report measure of protective factors against child maltreatment. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 111, 104868