



Prevention Mindset Institute: *Embracing Prevention Across Systems*

Our Focus is on Families and Children – What Do Families Need and How Should Systems Change?

The PMI 3-2-1 newsletter shares three ideas, two quotes, and one question to ponder. We thank Teresa Rafael, Executive Director of the Children's Trust Fund Alliance, for editing this issue.

FRIENDS and our PMI partners rotate editing each edition. The format, 3-2-1, is based on James Clear's newsletter that shares ideas related to developing effective habits, drawing from his book, Atomic Habits.



Three Ideas:

Idea #1 The COVID-19 pandemic, economic recession, and recognition of the role of systemic racism in driving disparate outcomes for families of color have accelerated momentum toward reshaping the social safety net. While numerous policies and initiatives designed to promote improvements have emerged in the area of child welfare, promoting the well-being of children and families requires that we address challenges far upstream of child protective services. Just as we recognize that the role of emergency rooms is not to prevent but to triage and treat acute, severe problems, responsibility for the prevention of child maltreatment lies beyond the child welfare system alone...It is more efficient and cost effective to provide families with the supports they need to have stable and supportive homes for their children than to raise them in a system that has fallen short of achieving positive outcomes...Misperceptions and values about poor families and the historical separation of child protective services from the mechanisms of financial support have resulted in vast and pervasive disagreements about the optimal role of direct financial support to families...The child welfare system cannot accomplish this shift alone. Whether child welfare system involvement represents the culmination of family stressors and unmet needs or the inadequacy of existing pathways to obtain support to preempt risk, addressing system shortcomings will require a multidimensional approach... These are all concerns that should be addressed by other systems—those best equipped to support well-being. These include local health departments, schools, local mental health departments, and sister human services agencies like housing and benefits. Shared accountability is critical for a well-being system to work, and it cannot be accomplished without major reforms to mandated reporting laws and the reporting process.

Weiner, D.A., Anderson, C., & Thomas, K. (2021). System transformation to support child and family well-being: The central role of economic and concrete supports. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

Idea #2 Each of us must come to care about everyone else's children. We must recognize that the welfare of our children and grandchildren is intimately linked to the welfare of all other people's children. After all, when one of our children needs lifesaving surgery, someone else's child will perform it. If one of our children is threatened or harmed by violence, someone else's child will be responsible for the violent act. The good life for our own children can be secured only if a good life is also secured for all other people's children.

Lilian Katz

Idea #3 Access to basic necessities — housing, food, clothing, medical and behavioral health care services, legal representation, transportation, and early care and education — is fundamental to the well-being and economic success of every family. Providing these types of tangible resources can strengthen both families and communities by avoiding and de-escalating crises, reducing parental stress, increasing access to safe housing and reliable childcare, and ensuring children have the material items they need to thrive. Research on the use and effects of economic supports — and how they can prevent families from coming to the attention of a child protection agency — continues to grow. Studies show that supporting families to access and receive adequate and effective economic supports can prevent family separation, decrease time to permanency for children who have been removed from their parents, decrease the risk of subsequent abuse or neglect, and enhance child and family well-being.

Casey Family Programs, Transforming Child Welfare Systems, 2022, https://www.casey.org/media/22.07-QFF_TS-Economic-Supports_fnl.pdf



Two Quotes:

1. "As parents, the hardest thing in the world to face is not being able to meet the needs of our children and having to ask for help. We go back and forth in our thinking – should I pick up the phone and ask for help? Will you judge me for asking? Are you going to call child protective services? All we want to do is provide for our children."

Kimberly Mays, Parent and Social Services Worker, Washington State Office of Public Defense

2. "Change is more often a rapid transition between two stable states than a continuous transformation at slow and steady rates. . . Change occurs in large leaps following a slow accumulation of stress that a system resists until it reaches the breaking point."

Stephen Jay Gould



One Question:

What would our communities look like if those who lived there and the systems serving them all worked together to ensure that families and children had economic supports when needed and opportunities to grow and thrive?