

strengthening families

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What is Strengthening Families through Early Care & Education

Strengthening Families is a new, proven, cost-effective strategy to prevent child abuse and neglect. The strategy involves early childhood centers working with families to build protective factors around children (see right). The Strengthening Families approach is based on:

- A review of existing research in the field of child abuse and neglect
- A national study that led to the identification of 21 exemplary programs across the country
- Conversations with hundreds of experts in the field, researchers, practitioners and parents

Implementation in Seven States

Strengthening Families through Early Care & Education initiatives are now being implemented in seven states: Alaska, Arkansas, Illinois, New Hampshire, Missouri, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin. In each state a leadership team that includes representatives from child welfare, early care and education, and a number of state partners is implementing the initiative. Each state is being supported through technical assistance from CSSP staff and a national network of technical assistance providers. Over two years (Jan. 1, 2005 - Dec. 31, 2006), partners will lay the foundation for work that is self-sustaining and institutionalized across systems.

What are the goals of the initiative?

- To increase awareness that strengthening families is central to quality child care
- To increase the number of early childhood programs that are working to prevent child abuse and neglect by building protective factors around children and families
- To improve working relationships among early childhood systems, child welfare systems, and child abuse prevention programs and initiatives
- To integrate prevention planning among state agencies with a family-centered approach that includes early childhood

How can I implement Strengthening Families in my state/program?

The CSSP website contains a host of materials from self-assessment and implementation guides for programs to updates on strategies being pursued by pilot states. For more information visit www.cssp.org

Protective Factors

With support from the **Doris Duke Charitable Foundation**, the **Center for the Study of Social Policy** spent two years researching and identifying five protective factors that prevent child abuse and neglect. These are:

For adults:

- Parental resilience
- Social connections
- Knowledge of parenting and child development
- Concrete support in times of need

For children:

- Healthy social and emotional development

A number of tools are available for those who want to learn more about the protective factors approach.

- A literature review
- A self-assessment tool for early childhood programs organized around protective factors
- Handouts and descriptive tools on the protective factors

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ALASKA

Partners

Alaska's State Leadership includes:

- Office of Children's Services, Health and Social Services
- Alaska's Children's Trust Fund
- Teaching and Learning Support, Alaska Department of Education and Early Development
- Women, Children and Family Health, Division of Public Health
- Child Care Program Office, Division of Public Assistance
- Resource Center for Parents and Children, Prevent Child Abuse America Affiliate
- Child Care Resource and Referral Network
- System for Early Education and Development (SEED), University of Alaska Southeast

Alaska's Strengthening Families Initiative pilot was initiated and is being led by the Office of Children's Services within the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services.

Key goals of the state approach include:

- To highlight and expand the valuable role that early care and education programs play in their efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect
- To actively engage the early care and education community in becoming key stakeholders in carrying out child abuse and neglect prevention strategies
- To enhance collaboration between the Office of Children's Services, Child Protection Program staff and the early care and education community statewide
- To link early care and education and child protection programs systems change efforts into a cohesive plan for statewide implementation

Exciting things happening right now:

- Six early care and education programs are providing services as outlined in the Strengthening Families Initiative model. These programs include a large child care center managed by a church, a Montessori School, a Head Start Program in rural Alaska, a child care center located in a homeless shelter, a child care center serving 51% low-income families, and a child care program within a Boy's & Girl's Club. These programs are providing high

quality care and education for children, as well as providing families with social connections, parenting education, and resources and referrals as needed to reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect. The pilot programs are part of a learning community which meets monthly to discuss issues and resources.

Alaska is developing an evaluation agenda to document the impact of the pilot program.

The Leadership Team is:

- Facilitating discussion with key staff from early childhood programs and child protection services to look at ways to strengthen partnerships and options for integrating key elements of the approach into existing policies and procedures, and training opportunities.
- Working with early childhood training and education programs to use consistent vocabulary and goals regarding protective factors in their curriculum.
- Promoting the Strengthen Families model through presentations at conferences and workshops. In April of 2006, the state hosted the "Partnerships in Early Childhood" Conference. This was a significant cross training event for not only child protection and early childhood professionals, but also for early intervention staff, mental health providers, medical practitioners, and a variety of family support professionals. An entire track was devoted to family support. The Strengthening Families Initiative was highlighted; with keynotes presented by the national CSSP staff.
- Working to enhance collaboration between early childhood professionals and programs, child protection professionals and programs, child abuse and neglect prevention advocates and programs, private nonprofit family service agencies
- Working to expand the Strengthening Families principles statewide. This goal has been embedded in the Alaska Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Plan.