

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

strengthening families

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ARKANSAS

Partners

Arkansas' State Leadership team includes:

- Arkansas Children's Trust Fund
- Arkansas Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Initiative
- Central Arkansas Association for the Education of Young Children
- HIPPI (Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters)
- Arkansas Health Start State Collaboration Project
- Arkansas Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Initiative
- Arkansas DHS, Division of Children and Family Services
- Arkansas Commission on Child Abuse, Rape and Domestic Violence
- Arkansas DHS, Division of Childhood and Early Childhood Education
- Arkansas Dept. of

Arkansas Strengthening Families Initiative is led by the head of the state's Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (AECCS) Initiative and the head of the state's Children's Trust Fund. The Leadership team for the initiative is an integrated part of the broader leadership team for AECCS and the two planning processes are fully integrated.

Key aspects of the state approach include:

- Piloting the Strengthening Families approach in six (6) selected early care and education programs in the state.
- Creating a parent involvement toolkit for early childhood education programs. Integrating key elements of the approach into existing pre-service and in-service training opportunities for early childhood and/or child welfare professionals within the state.
 - Infusing Strengthening Families into higher education curriculum planning for CDA and equivalent training for family service workers
 - Creating a professional development plan for ECE workers that integrates protective factors
- A public education and media campaign aimed at building awareness and support for the initiative.
- Assist the Arkansas DHS, Division of Children and Family Services in increasing the number of children in child protective services and foster care who participate in high quality early care and education programs and home-based services by 10% each year.

Exciting things happening right now:

- "A Walk Upstream" video currently airing on Arkansas Educational Television Network documenting the problem of child abuse in Arkansas, and introducing the preventive strategies of the ***Strengthening Families Initiative***.
- Six "Promising Practices Programs" have been selected to lead the Arkansas ***Strengthening Families Network***.
- Full day of pre-conference activities for the Arkansas

Strengthening Families Network planned at the Arkansas Early Childhood Association conference in October.

- Series of monthly conference calls for all early care programs in the Arkansas ***Strengthening Families Network***, designed to assist programs in implementing SFI strategies, and to complete the self-assessment.