

strengthening families

THROUGH EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

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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NEW HAMPSHIRE

Partners

New Hampshire's State Leadership team includes:

- NH Division for Children, Youth and Families
- NH Children's Trust Fund
- NH Head Start Directors Association
- NH Head Start Parent Advisory Council
- NH Child Care Resource and Referral Network
- NH Division of Public Health Services
- NH Division of Community Based Care
- NH Technical Institute
- NH Association for the Education of Young Children
- Early Learning New Hampshire
- University of New Hampshire
- Community Bridges

New Hampshire's Strengthening Families Initiative was initiated and is being led by New Hampshire's Division for Children, Youth.

Key aspects of the state approach include:

- Piloting the Strengthening Families approach in selected early care and education programs in the state, then using the pilot programs as trainers and mentors for other programs.
- Enhancing collaboration between early childhood professionals and programs, key state programs providing services to young children and their families, child abuse and neglect prevention advocates and programs, private nonprofit family service agencies.
- 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.
- Developing a research agenda to document the impact of the pilot.

Exciting things happening right now:

- Several early care and education professional organizations and other statewide training programs have agreed to link to each others' website training calendars, to work toward the development of a centralized web-based training calendar and to meet to develop a co-sponsored series of trainings on supporting the social and emotional needs of young children and their families.
- A matrix of the courses required by the 13 colleges and universities that offer early childhood education degrees has been developed and was matched with the Strengthening Families Initiative principles, strategies, elements and methods developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy. This matrix is the basis for discussions with each Early Childhood Education Department Chair regarding curriculum content in their required courses. A Faculty Forum will be held in January for all faculty in Early Childhood Education programs to provide training and support for integrating Strengthening Families into their required courses.
- New Hampshire's SFI Exemplar Programs are partnering with the NH Children's Trust Fund and its local grantees to enhance their supports to families with young children. The 10 Exemplar Programs have instituted a wide variety of supports from facilitating friendships and mutual support through volunteering at a community faire to enhancing direct support to families through the addition of a family support worker.

- The 10 Exemplar Programs will be extending their work into the broader child care community by hosting information exchange evenings with their local child welfare offices this fall.
- The website training calendar project has nearly completed its wish list for the development of an Early Childhood Training Organizations Web Ring. Potential web developers will present their proposals this fall. We are seeking funding to support this project.
- We are developing a guidebook for early childhood providers to prevent, recognize and report child abuse and neglect. The task force has identified material and the 1st draft will be presented in July.
- We will continue visiting institutions of higher education to provide information and materials for including SFI in their early childhood education courses. At the end of the year, we will gather Early Childhood Education Department Chairs for a forum to enhance how they embed SFI in their required early childhood education courses.
- The SFI self-assessment has been included in the matrix for the new tiered quality reimbursement system for child care centers in New Hampshire
- The new edition of the Early Childhood Professional Development Guidebook has enhanced emphasis on training early childhood professionals to provide supports to families that prevent child abuse and neglect