

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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Rhode Island

Partners

Rhode Island's State Leadership includes:

- RI Kids Count
- RI Department of Human Services - Child Care Office
- RI Department of Children, Youth and Families
- RI Department of Health - Successful Start
- RI Department of Education – Early Childhood Services
- Connecting for Children and Families
- Prevent Child Abuse RI
- RI Parent Information Network
- United Way of RI
- Brandeis University – Heller School
- Child Care Support Network

In Rhode Island Strengthening Families was initiated by Rhode Island Kids Count—the agency responsible for tracking indicators on child wellbeing across the state—and is co-lead by Prevent Child Abuse Rhode Island. Rhode Island is balancing a statewide strategy that includes pilots, policy changes and systemic shifts in training and resources available to early childhood with the opportunity to go deep in one community—Woonsocket, where close to 30% of all children live in poverty and there is the highest rate of child welfare involvement in the state.

Key aspects of the state approach include:

- Creating a peer-to-peer learning network among strategically selected pilot sites state-wide.
- “Training the trainers” to understand and incorporate the SF approach into existing professional development opportunities.
- Implement a mental health consultation model statewide.
- Creating a community-wide system of relationships and linkages that support the integration of the Strengthening Families approach into standard practice for programs working with young children and their families in Woonsocket.

Exciting things happening right now:

- Outreach and engagement of 70 DCYF licensed child care centers located throughout the state of Rhode Island
- Integration and embedding of the Strengthening Families Initiative philosophy, principles, and strategies within the existing Early Care and Education Training entities such as: Comprehensive Services, CHILDSPAN, Child Care Support Network, Head Start Child Care Collaboration Project, Early Learning Standards, Successful Start, Prevent Child Abuse RI, etc...
- Coalition building within the communities of Woonsocket and Washington County
- Integration of the Strengthening Families Initiative into the RI Early Childhood Systems Plan – Successful Start. Goal # 3 is the implementation of SFI in Rhode Island.
- Building parent leadership at the state leadership level as well as within the participating child care sites
- Engagement of multiple stakeholders and funding partners
- United Way of RI commitment to be a funding partner and planning participant
- RI project evaluation conducted by the Heller School at Brandeis University