

strengthening families

THROUGH EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

What is Strengthening Families through Early Care & Education ?

Strengthening Families is a new, cost-effective, doable 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 complete review of previous research in the field of child abuse and neglect and family resiliency
- A national research study of 21 exemplary early childhood programs across the country
- Interviews with hundreds of experts in the field, researchers, practitioners and parents

This extensive information gathering identified a number of small but significant changes that can be made in early care and education programs that will significantly protect children and strengthen families.

What are the goals of the initiative?

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

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. A leadership team that includes representatives from child welfare, early care and education, Children's Trust Funds, parents and other state partners is leading the implementation in each state. 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 ongoing implementation that is self-sustaining and institutionalized across systems.

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

The protective factors emerged from deliberations of a [national advisory panel](#) and researchers in the child abuse prevention, early childhood and family support fields and extensive review of the research [evidence](#) on resiliency and child abuse and neglect. These factors are not unique to Strengthening Families; they are addressed by many current child abuse prevention efforts. A protective factors approach has the [advantages](#) of being doable, affordable, and able to reach millions of children. It helps programs, policymakers, and communities see what needs to be built with families instead of focusing only on what needs to be changed.

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Tools You Can Use

- Newsletter—Updates on the initiative
- [Informational Brochure](#) Brief synopsis of Strengthening Families Through Early Care and Education
- [Power Point Presentation](#)
- [Handout](#) Describes the Protective Factors Framework
- Descriptions of the [exemplary programs](#) studied
- Monographs on [program elements](#) that build protective factors against child abuse and neglect:
 1. [Family Support Services](#)
 2. [Promoting Children's Healthy Social and Emotional Development](#)
 3. [Staff Leadership to Create Relationships that Protect Children](#)
 4. [Mental Health Consultation Including Men](#)
 5. [Use of Physical Space](#)
 7. [Relationships with Child Welfare Agencies](#) — This resource will be added soon.
- A [program handbook and self-assessment tool](#) for programs that are interested in enhancing their ability to support and strengthen families.
- A [commissioned paper](#) and [executive summary](#) by Sharon L. Kagan, Ed.D. on Advancing Protective Factors Recommendations for early childhood infrastructure improvements that would allow early childhood programs to more effectively build the protective factors and reduce child abuse and neglect
- [Literature review](#) (54 pgs, 1.41 mb) by Carol Horton, Ph.D, on protective factors and their links to reducing child abuse and neglect
- Voices: Short articles by program staff, policy makers, parents and others

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. They provide resources and guidance for programs and individuals to:

- Implement Strengthening Families within a particular early care and education program
- Advocate for resources or support for the strengthening families approach at a state level
- See how Strengthening Families ideas apply within other programmatic contexts

What's happening right now:

- Wisconsin Strengthening Families is using its state pilot as an opportunity to review the knowledge and competencies of all those working with children and families in the state with an eye toward a comprehensive training system.
- SF Arkansas, in partnership with its public television station will be creating a television special focused on reframing the way that we think about child abuse and neglect and using many of the Strengthening Families concepts.
- SF New Hampshire has just selected 10 exemplary programs to serve as pilot sites for the SF approach.
- SF Illinois has announced that the funds received from the state income tax check off to prevent child abuse and neglect will be used to support training and technical assistance for Strengthening Families pilots in all regions of the state.
- Rhode Island SF has identified one community (Woonsocket) to implement strengthening families in all early childhood programs in that community, in conjunction with other concentrated child abuse prevention efforts.
- SF Missouri has drawn together a very large implementation team with representation across all state agencies and organizations that touch young children.
- All states are working on professional development strategies, tracking and evaluation, and improved linkages between child welfare and early childhood.