

# CONCRETE SUPPORT IN TIMES OF NEED

PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS

All parents need help sometimes—help with the day-to-day care of children, help in figuring out how to soothe a colicky baby, help getting to the emergency room when a bad accident happens, help in managing one's own temper when fatigued or upset. When parents are faced with very trying conditions such as losing a job, home foreclosure, substance abuse, not being able to feed their family or trauma, they need access to concrete support and services that address their needs and help to minimize the stress caused by very difficult challenges and adversity. **Assisting parents to identify, find and receive concrete support in times of need helps to ensure they and their family receive the basic necessities everyone deserves in order to grow (e.g., healthy food, a safe environment), as well as specialized medical, mental health, social, educational or legal services.**

When parents are faced with overwhelmingly stressful conditions they need to seek help, but for some parents asking for help is not an easy thing to do. It may be embarrassing for some parents because it feels like an admission of incompetence; that they don't know how to solve their own problems or take care of their family. Other parents may not seek help because they don't know where to go for help, or the services needed have a stigma associated with them such as mental health clinics and domestic violence or homeless shelters. **Thus, parents need experiences that enable them to understand their rights in accessing services, gain knowledge of relevant services and learn how to navigate through service systems.** Family and child-serving programs must clearly communicate to parents that seeking help is not an indicator of weakness or failure as a parent. **On the contrary, seeking help is a step toward improving one's circumstances and learning to better manage stress and function well—even when faced with challenges, adversity, and trauma. When parents ask for help, it is a step toward building resilience.**

When parents seek help, it should be provided in a manner that does not increase stress. Services should be coordinated, respectful, caring and strengths-based. Strengths-based practice is grounded in the beliefs that:

- It is essential to forge a trusting relationship between parents and service providers and among service providers working with the same families
- Regardless of the number or level of adverse conditions parents are experiencing, they have assets within and around them, their family and their community that can be called upon to help mitigate the impact of stressful conditions and to create needed change
- Parents have unrealized resources and competencies that must be identified, mobilized and appreciated
- Parents must be active participants in the change process and not passive recipients of services
- Parents must first be guided through, and subsequently learn how to navigate, the complex web of health care and social service systems
- In addition to addressing each parent's individual difficulties, strengths-based practitioners must understand—and work to change—the structural inequities and conditions that contribute to these difficulties

A strengths-based approach helps parents feel valued because they are acknowledged as knowledgeable and competent. They develop a sense of self-confidence and self-efficacy because they have opportunities to build their skills, experience success and provide help to others. Thus, access to concrete support in times of need must be accompanied by a quality of service coordination and delivery that is designed to preserve parents' dignity and to promote their and their family's healthy development, resilience and ability to advocate for and receive needed services and resources.

# CSSP'S PROTECTIVE AND PROMOTIVE FACTORS

The Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) works to create new ideas and promote public policies that produce equal opportunities and better futures for all children and families, especially those most often left behind. The foundation of all of CSSP's work is a child, family and community well-being framework that includes a focus on protective and promotive factors. Using an ecological perspective:

- **protective factors** are conditions or attributes of individuals, families, communities or the larger society that **mitigate or eliminate risk**
- **promotive factors** are conditions or attributes of individuals, families, communities or the larger society that **actively enhance well-being**

*Taken together, protective and promotive factors increase the probability of positive, adaptive and healthy outcomes, even in the face of risk and adversity.*

The **Strengthening Families™** and **Youth Thrive™** frameworks exemplify CSSP's commitment to identify, communicate and apply research-informed ideas that contribute to the healthy development and well-being of children, youth and families. As numerous studies affirm the importance of early childhood experiences in influencing adolescent and adult behavior, these frameworks provide a view of two interrelated phases of the lifespan developmental continuum: Strengthening Families focuses on families of young children (0-5 years old) and Youth Thrive on youth ages 11-26.

| The Strengthening Families Protective Factors                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | The Youth Thrive Protective and Promotive Factors                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parental Resilience</li> <li>• Social Connections</li> <li>• Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development</li> <li>• Concrete Support in Times of Need</li> <li>• Social-Emotional Competence of Children</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth Resilience</li> <li>• Social Connections</li> <li>• Knowledge of Adolescent Development</li> <li>• Concrete Support in Times of Need</li> <li>• Cognitive and Social-Emotional Competence in Youth</li> </ul> |

Parents, system administrators, program developers, service providers and policymakers can each benefit from learning about and using the Strengthening Families and Youth Thrive frameworks in their efforts to ensure that children, youth and families are on a path that leads to healthy development and well-being.