ABOUT STRENGTHENING FAMILIES™ AND THE PROTECTIVE FACTORS FRAMEWORK

Strengthening Families™ is a research-informed approach to increase family strengths, enhance child development and reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect. It is based on engaging families, programs and communities in building five key protective factors:

- **Parental resilience:** Managing stress and functioning well when faced with challenges, adversity and trauma
- **Social connections:** Positive relationships that provide emotional, informational, instrumental and spiritual support
- **Knowledge of parenting and child development:** Understanding child development and parenting strategies that support physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional development
- **Concrete support in times of need:** Access to concrete support and services that address a family’s needs and help minimize stress caused by challenges
- **Social and emotional competence of children:** Family and child interactions that help children develop the ability to communicate clearly, recognize and regulate their emotions and establish and maintain relationships

At its heart, Strengthening Families is about how families are supported to build key protective factors that enable children to thrive. The five protective factors at the foundation of Strengthening Families also offer a framework for changes at the systems, policy and practice level – locally, statewide and nationally.

Using the Strengthening Families framework, more than 30 states are shifting policy and practice to help programs and providers working with children and families to take everyday actions that support parents to build their protective factors. States apply the Strengthening Families approach in early childhood, child welfare, child abuse prevention and other child and family serving systems.

The “Pathway to Improved Outcomes for Children and Families” on the next page articulates the core functions of Strengthening Families implementation which drive changes in program and worker practice to support families to build protective factors and improve outcomes. The lower graphic shows the everyday actions that can help families build each of the protective factors.
The Pathway to Improved Outcomes for Children and Families

**Strengthening Families™ Protective Factors Framework Logic Model**

**Program Practice**
- Programs that serve children and families:
  - Shift organization culture to value and build upon families’ strengths
  - Make policy changes to support changes in worker practice
  - Implement everyday actions that support families in building protective factors

**Worker Practice**
- Individual workers:
  - Have knowledge of protective factors and skills to help families build them
  - Change their approach to relationships with parents
  - Implement everyday actions that support families in building protective factors

**Core Functions**
- State, system, agency, program and community leaders work across systems to:
  - Build parent partnerships
  - Deepen knowledge and understanding
  - Shift practice, policy and systems
  - Ensure accountability

**Protective Factors**
- Families are supported to build:
  - Parental resilience
  - Social connections
  - Knowledge of parenting and child development
  - Concrete support in times of need
  - Social and emotional competence of children

**Results**
- Strengthened families
- Optimal child development
- Reduced likelihood of child abuse and neglect

**Everyday Actions That Help Build Protective Factors**
- **Parental Resilience**
  - Demonstrate in multiple ways that parents are valued
  - Honor each family’s race, language, culture, history and approach to parenting
  - Encourage parents to manage stress effectively
  - Support parents as decision-makers and help build decision-making and leadership skills
  - Help parents understand how to buffer their child during stressful times

- **Social Connections**
  - Help families value, build, sustain and use social connections
  - Create an inclusive environment
  - Facilitate mutual support around parenting and other issues
  - Promote engagement in the community and participation in community activities

- **Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development**
  - Model developmentally appropriate interactions with children
  - Provide information and resources on parenting and child development
  - Encourage exploration of parenting issues or concerns
  - Provide opportunities to try new parenting strategies
  - Address parenting issues from a strength-based perspective

- **Concrete Support in Times of Need**
  - Respond immediately when families are in crisis
  - Provide information and connections to other services in the community
  - Help families to develop skills and tools they need to identify their needs and connect to supports

- **Social and Emotional Competence of Children**
  - Help parents foster their child’s social-emotional development
  - Model nurturing support to children
  - Include children’s social and emotional development activities in programming
  - Help children develop a positive cultural identity and interact in a diverse society
  - Respond proactively when social or emotional development seems to need support

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