Common Ground
One Approach, Many Adaptations

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October 2011
Mobilizing partners, communities and families to build family strengths, promote optimal development and reduce child abuse and neglect.
THE STRENGTHENING FAMILIES APPROACH

• **5 Protective Factors**: Grounded in research, practice and implementation knowledge from several fields; provides links across multiple disciplines and service sectors.

• **7 Program Strategies**: Through small but significant changes in everyday practice, the SF approach builds on family strengths, buffers risk, and promotes better outcomes.

• **3 Levers for Change**: Building on existing strategies and systems, with powerful connections to communities and families.
In the beginning....
PRAGMATIC STARTING POINTS

• Start with what ALL families need to be successful.
• Outline what ALL kinds of programs and services should be building with families.
• Look for clues to success where families already have comfortable relationships, e.g. child care, family resource programs
• Build a new perspective into existing programs and strategies; don’t invent a new model
**WHAT DO FAMILIES NEED TO BE SUCCESSFUL?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic needs</td>
<td>Economic security, housing, health care, other necessary resources are in place</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internal resources</td>
<td>Education, expertise, and skills plus connections to extended family, neighbors, co-workers and friends</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive family climate</td>
<td>Nurturing parenting styles, effective communication and warm interactions among family members</td>
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<td>Self confidence</td>
<td>Sense of control over choices, being valued and able to make a difference; faith that all will be well</td>
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What we know: Families gain what they need to be successful when key protective factors are robust in their lives and communities.
FIVE PROTECTIVE FACTORS

PARENTAL RESILIENCE

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

KNOWLEDGE of PARENTING and CHILD DEVELOPMENT

CONCRETE SUPPORT in TIMES of NEED

SOCIAL and EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE of CHILDREN
Learning Network of Exemplary Programs

- Fairfax/San Anselmo
- Early Childhood Mental Health
- South of Market Child Care
- City of Albuquerque
- Children of the Rainbow
- Region 19 ESC
- PACT
- Maui Economic Opportunity
- Sauk Rapids Rice
- Carole Robertson Center Educare
- Leelanau
- Montclair Pre-K
- Lenox Hill
- Fort Belvoir
- Calvary Bilingual Multicultural Center
- Sheltering Arms
- FACES
- Palm Beach County Head Start
- Addison County
- Haitian CC
- Michigan
How programs help strengthen families, promote optimal child development and prevent child abuse and neglect

**Program strategies that:**

- Facilitate friendships and mutual support
- Strengthen parenting
- Respond to family crises
- Link families to services and opportunities
- Facilitate children’s social and emotional development
- Observe and respond to early warning signs of child abuse or neglect
- Value and support parents

**Protective Factors**

- Parental resilience
- Social connections
- Knowledge of parenting and child development
- Concrete support in times of need
- Social and emotional competence of children

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Small but significant changes
What happened next:
A surprising leap
from programs
to policy
A FEW BRAVE INNOVATORS

• Alaska
• Arkansas
• Illinois
• Missouri
• New Hampshire
• Rhode Island
• Wisconsin
Parent leaders, state agencies and local programs quickly adapted the framework to create a platform for linkages across service systems and a way of engaging informal opportunities for families.
FAMILIES TOOK LEADERSHIP

• “at risk” families ➔ all families

• risk factors ➔ protective factors/buffers to toxic stress

• prevention ➔ promoting strong families and healthy development
**Parental Resilience** = Be strong and flexible

**Social Connections** = Parents need friends

**Knowledge of Parenting** = Being a great parent is part natural and part learned

**Concrete Support** = We all need help sometimes

**Social and emotional development for children** = Help your children communicate and give them the love and respect they need
COMMUNITY CAFES - WASHINGTON

- Parental Resilience = Courage
- Social Connections = Community
- Knowledge of Parenting = Health
- Concrete Support = Freedom
- Children’s Social and Emotional Development = Compassion
This surprising “self-organizing” tipping point was quickly supported by key national organizations, nimble federal partners and a small amount of foundation funding.
FEDERAL PARTNERS

Administration for Children, Youth and Families: Children’s Bureau, Office on Child Abuse and Neglect
Administration on Children and Families, Office of Child Care and Office of Head Start
Maternal and Child Health Bureau (ECCS)
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), local Project Launch sites
Department of Defense, New Parents Program and Family Advocacy Program
A FEDERAL FRAMEWORK?

Interagency enthusiasm and structure
- Protective Factors Expert Panel
- Requests for Proposals
- Guidance for state plans (e.g. Early Learning Challenge grants)
- Military services for families

ACYF contract for Protective Factors framework to be developed within the next 18 months
STRENGTHENING FAMILIES NATIONAL NETWORK
LEVERS FOR IMPLEMENTING AND SUSTAINING STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

• Integration into policies and systems

• Professional development

• Real parent partnerships
Strengthening Families: Creating a New Normal

**Levers**

*Community and multi-system leaders act to build sustainable infrastructure through key levers for change:
  - Parent Partnerships
  - Policy/Systems
  - Professional Development

**Strategies**

*Community programs and worker practice consistently:
  - Facilitate friendships and mutual support
  - Strengthen parenting
  - Respond to family crises
  - Link families to services and opportunities
  - Value and support parents
  - Further children's social and emotional development
  - Observe and respond to early warning signs of abuse and neglect

**Protective Factors**

*Families and communities build protective factors that also promote healthy outcomes:
  - 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 child abuse & neglect

**A New Normal**

Families and communities, service systems and organizations:
- Focus on building protective and promotive factors to reduce risk and create optimal outcomes for children, youth and families
- Recognize and support parents as decision makers and leaders
- Value the culture and unique assets of each family
- Are mutually responsible for better outcomes for children, youth and families
www.strengtheningfamilies.net

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