

# 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](http://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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## Missouri

### Partners

Missouri's State Leadership includes:

- The Departments of Social Services, Children's Division; Elementary and Secondary Education; Health and Senior Services; and Mental Health
  - Missouri Head Start State Collaboration Office
  - Prevent Child Abuse Missouri
  - Citizens for Missouri's Children
  - Association for the Education of Young Children, MO
  - Children's Trust Fund
  - Local Investment Commission of the Greater Kansas City Metropolitan
  - Metropolitan Council on Early Learning
  - Hawthorne Place Family Center
  - Community Partnerships for Protecting Children, MO
  - University of MO Center on Family Policy and Research
- State child care licensing, the child care subsidy program, Head Start/Early Head Start, accreditation facilitation programs, MO-AEYC training and TA programs, parent education programs and grant and incentive programs will all embed aspects of Strengthening Families into their work.
  - The Parents as Teachers National Center and other statewide home visiting models will serve as agents for infusing the Strengthening Families approach.
  - Infusion into education and professional development for child care providers through integration into: state-level core competencies for ECE staff; a state-wide 8-hour orientation for all new child care providers; Child Care Resource and Referral programmatic technical assistance; and statewide training/distance learning infrastructure for ECE professionals
  - Basic child development information will be included in training for Child Welfare staff.
  - Partnerships with the University of MO, Center for Family Policy and Research, and other state universities to support the evaluation and process improvement efforts linked to the Strengthening Families Initiative.

### Exciting things happening right now:

- Strengthening Families strategies have been incorporated into the state Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Plan (ECCS) as the primary infrastructure for parent involvement. This plan has been signed off on by the directors of all state agencies that administer early childhood funds and programs and will be presented to the governor appointed Early Childhood Coordinating Board as soon as final appointments are made and the board is convened within the upcoming months.
- Missouri's Children's Trust Fund was one of 9 states to receive a grant from the National Alliance of Children's Trust Funds to support its Strengthening Families project.
- Missouri was selected as one of 12 states to participate in "**Partnering with Parents: Preventing Abuse and Neglect**". This is a state of the art curriculum and train-the-trainer project developed by the national organization **Zero to Three** and issued in conjunction with NACCRRRA to assist early childhood programs in prevention methods including: 1) identifying parents/families who are undergoing stressful or difficult situations, 2)

approaching these parents in a non-threatening manner to offer support and resources, 3) providing information on brain development and the fact that interactions with adult caregivers during these early years lays the foundation for social emotional health and future learning potential, and 4) identifying and reporting abuse or neglect when it occurs. Final training and assessment occurred in July and the cadre of trainers and curriculum from this project will serve as a foundation for Missouri's Strengthening Families initiative. Money has been allocated in the Missouri Child Care Resource and Referral Network (MOCCRRN) budget for FY07 to train staff of the pilot sites in this curriculum.

- Fifty-seven programs have applied to be SFI pilot sites. Final reviews are currently in process to select 6 pilot sites across the state.
- The SFI protective factors have been incorporated, or are in the process of being incorporated, into a variety of early childhood programming and in state child welfare training curriculum including basic orientation for child care providers, start up/expansion grants for birth to three programs, Missouri Preschool Project grants and the "Moving On Together" curriculum for Pre-K programs, Stay at Home Parent grants, and Educare.
- Parents as Teachers National Center is embedding the protective factors in its international curriculum.
- A variety of individual sites and communities have begun incorporating the protective factors in their local programs.
- The Missouri Department of Social Services, Children's Division, has established an internal workgroup to determine how to embed the Protective factors in child welfare policy and other child welfare work.
- Missouri is currently in the process of adopting a statewide Quality Rating System (QRS). The Protective Factors have been imbedded in both the program and the administrative pieces of the QRS.