

CENTER FOR THE STUDY
OF SOCIAL POLICY'S

strengthening families™
A PROTECTIVE FACTORS FRAMEWORK



Strong Families





About Strengthening Families™

Strengthening Families is an effort to help families give their children what they need to thrive. It's about taking advantage of your unique strengths as a parent and ensuring you have the skills and supports you need to make sure your child — and your family as a whole — is safe, secure and happy.

Strengthening Families is built around five “protective factors.” Protective factors help families succeed and thrive, even in the face of risk and challenges. This booklet offers a few suggestions about how you can build on your own family's strengths and offer support to other families when they need it.

We hope you will find this booklet helpful.



The Strengthening Families Protective Factors

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Parental Resilience

(Be strong, not stressed)

2

Social Connections

(Get and give support)

3

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

(Learn more so you can parent better)



4 Concrete Support in Times of Need

(Get help when you need it)

5 The Social-Emotional Competence of Children

(Help your child manage feelings and relationships)



Think about your own family and other families you know. Some of these protective factors are probably strengths, and some you might need more assistance with at times. That's completely normal.

All families go through times when they need more support. Some of us get that from extended families, faith communities or neighbors. Others may rely more on formal programs. Either way, being intentional about taking care of yourself and getting the help and information you need can help keep you and your family strong.



Parental Resilience

Be Strong Even When You Are Stressed!

Resilience is the process of managing stress and functioning well even when things are difficult.

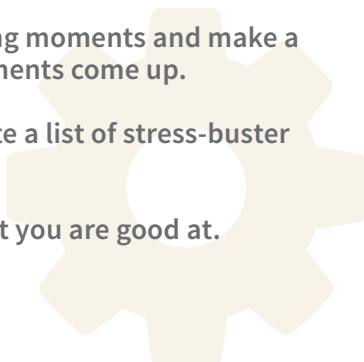
Being resilient as a parent means:

- ▶ Taking care of yourself and asking for help when you need it.
- ▶ Feeling good about yourself and hopeful about your future.
- ▶ Planning for the future and for what you will do in situations that you know are challenging for you.
- ▶ Not allowing stress to get in the way of providing loving care for your child.
- ▶ Taking time to really enjoy your child and what you like about parenting.



Parental Resilience Tune-Up Tips

- ▶ Write down all the things you love to do with your child and think of ways you are going to make more time to do them.
- ▶ Identify your most challenging parenting moments and make a plan for what you will do when these moments come up.
- ▶ What helps you feel less stressed? Create a list of stress-buster activities to use on those difficult days.
- ▶ Make time each day to do one thing that you are good at.



Social Connections

Get and Give Support!

Sometimes being a parent can be very stressful. It's easier to handle parenting challenges when we have positive relationships with family, friends and neighbors. Having a network of caring people in our life helps us feel secure, confident and empowered — and this helps us become better parents.



Build a strong social support system by:

- ▶ Focusing on the relationships where you feel respected and appreciated
- ▶ Being willing to accept help from others and looking for opportunities to help them back
- ▶ Building your skills and comfort in reaching out to others, communicating, resolving conflict and doing all the other things that help to keep a friendship strong
- ▶ Building your network so you have multiple friends and connections to turn to



Social Connections Tune-Up Tips

- ▶ Take time to reconnect with old friends. Pick up the phone or send them a text, email or card.
- ▶ Join a community group (for example, a library book club, a volunteer organization or a religious group). It can be a great way to meet new people.
- ▶ Reach out to parents who have children the same age as your own child – maybe you could even plan a play date or a school carpool group.

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

Learn More So You Can Parent Better!

There is no such thing as a perfect parent, but knowing what to expect does make the job a lot easier.



Knowledge of parenting and child development helps us:

- ▶ Know what to expect as your child grows and how you can best help her learn and thrive.
- ▶ Use new skills to help your child be happy and healthy.
- ▶ Recognize your child's unique needs
- ▶ Understand how to respond in a positive way when your child misbehaves.

By learning what our children need to do their best, we can give them the best start in life, enjoy parenting more and build strong, healthy families.



Parenting & Child Development Tune-Up Tips

- ▶ What do you do well as a parent? Make a list of your parenting strengths.
- ▶ Write down at least one thing you want to learn about parenting each of your unique children. Next, brainstorm people who could help you learn those things.
- ▶ Make plans to sit down with the people who could help the most. Your child's doctor and child care provider are great people to talk to.
- ▶ An important part of being a great parent is staying involved with your child's school experiences. Make a point to have regular conversations with your child's teachers or child care providers.

Concrete Support in Times of Need

Get Help When You Need It!



All families go through tough times. However, knowing where to get help in the community can make things a lot easier.

It is important that we as parents:

- ▶ Know what help is available.
- ▶ Ask for help when we need it.
- ▶ Get what we need to keep our families healthy and safe.
- ▶ Help others when possible.

When our families' basic needs are met, we can spend less time worrying and more time helping our children learn and develop. Have you ever felt embarrassed to ask for help? Take some time to remember how you feel when someone else asks you for help. It can be hard to be the one asking, but everyone needs help sometimes. Not only is there nothing wrong with getting help when you need it, but getting the help you need for yourself and your child is part of being a good parent.



Concrete Support Tune-Up Tips

- ▶ Practice being your and your child's advocate. What are some ways you can engage with your child's school (or another service you use) to be sure your child gets what he needs?
- ▶ Learn more about what is available in your community. Do some research on-line, spend some time looking at community bulletin boards at your park or the library, go visit a program that serves as a hub or connection point for community resources, or talk with other parents. You may be surprised at what is available.
- ▶ Help someone else get what they need. Helping others not only feels good, but it makes it easier for us to also ask for help when we need it.
- ▶ Don't give up. Sometimes it is not as easy to get help as you would think. Service systems can be hard to understand and work with. It can get discouraging, so be kind to yourself.

Social & Emotional Competence

Help Your Child Manage Feelings and Relationships!



Helping children develop social-emotional competence allows them to manage their emotions and build healthy relationships with their peers and adults.

As parents, the things we do to model and help our children learn these skills makes a huge difference. We can help our children develop these skills by:

- ▶ Responding warmly and consistently to your child
- ▶ Teaching your child the words they need to express how they feel
- ▶ Allowing your child to express their emotions
- ▶ Being a role model: show your child how to be kind and how to interact positively with other people



Social & Emotional Competence Tune-Up Tips

- ▶ Give your child attention for making the right choices. Be sure to notice and compliment friendly behaviors, like sharing, taking turns and being polite.
- ▶ Make a list of the things that can frustrate your child. Sit down and talk with them and make a plan for how they can respond the next time the situation happens.
- ▶ Take some time to sit down and read a children's book with your child. Talk about how the characters are feeling throughout the story. This can help your child to learn about feelings and emotions.
- ▶ Create regular routines for checking in on how everyone in the family is feeling. Ask each family member to say the best thing that happened or something that was hard or upsetting and how they handled it.



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