

Introduction to Strengthening Families: A Protective Factors Framework

CENTER FOR THE STUDY
OF SOCIAL POLICY'S

strengthening families™
A PROTECTIVE FACTORS FRAMEWORK

Strengthening Families: Not Your Ordinary Initiative

- Implementing Strengthening Families is about:
 - small but significant changes in everyday practice
and
 - the shifts in policies and systems that allow/promote those changes in practice
- Implementation funds come from existing dollars
- All national implementation tools are available free of charge

Four big ideas behind Strengthening Families

Focus on protective factors

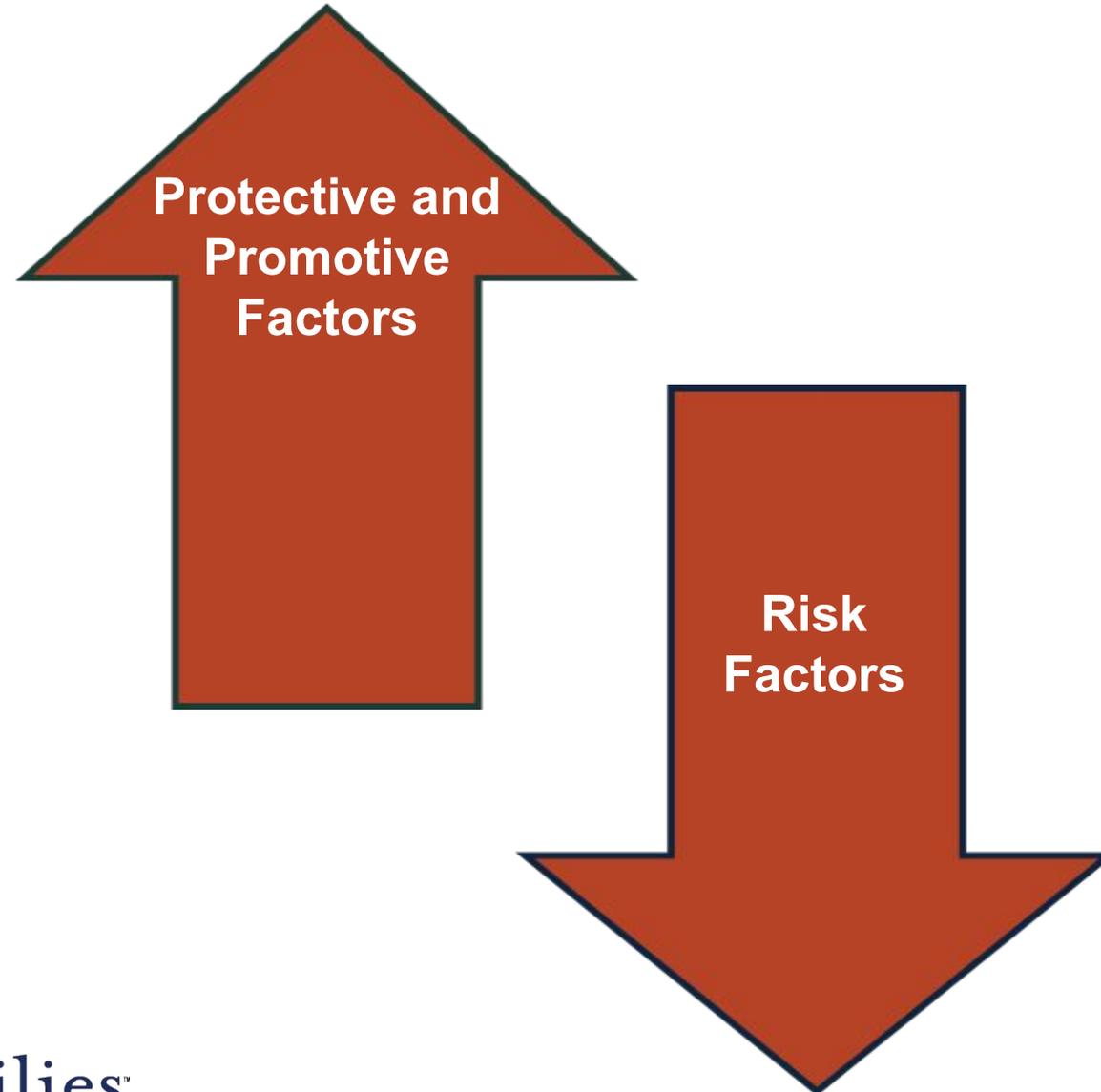
An approach, not a model

A changed relationship with
parents

Alignment with developmental
science

**Big Idea
#1**

Focus on protective factors



What we know:
Families gain what they need
to be successful when
key protective factors
are robust in their lives and
communities

Risk factors
are not
predictive factors
because of
protective factors

Family Protective Factors

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Parental resilience

Social connections

Knowledge of
parenting and child
development

Concrete support in
times of need

Social and
emotional
competence of
children

Protective & Promotive Factors

YOUTHRI
PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS FOR HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT

Youth resilience

Social connections

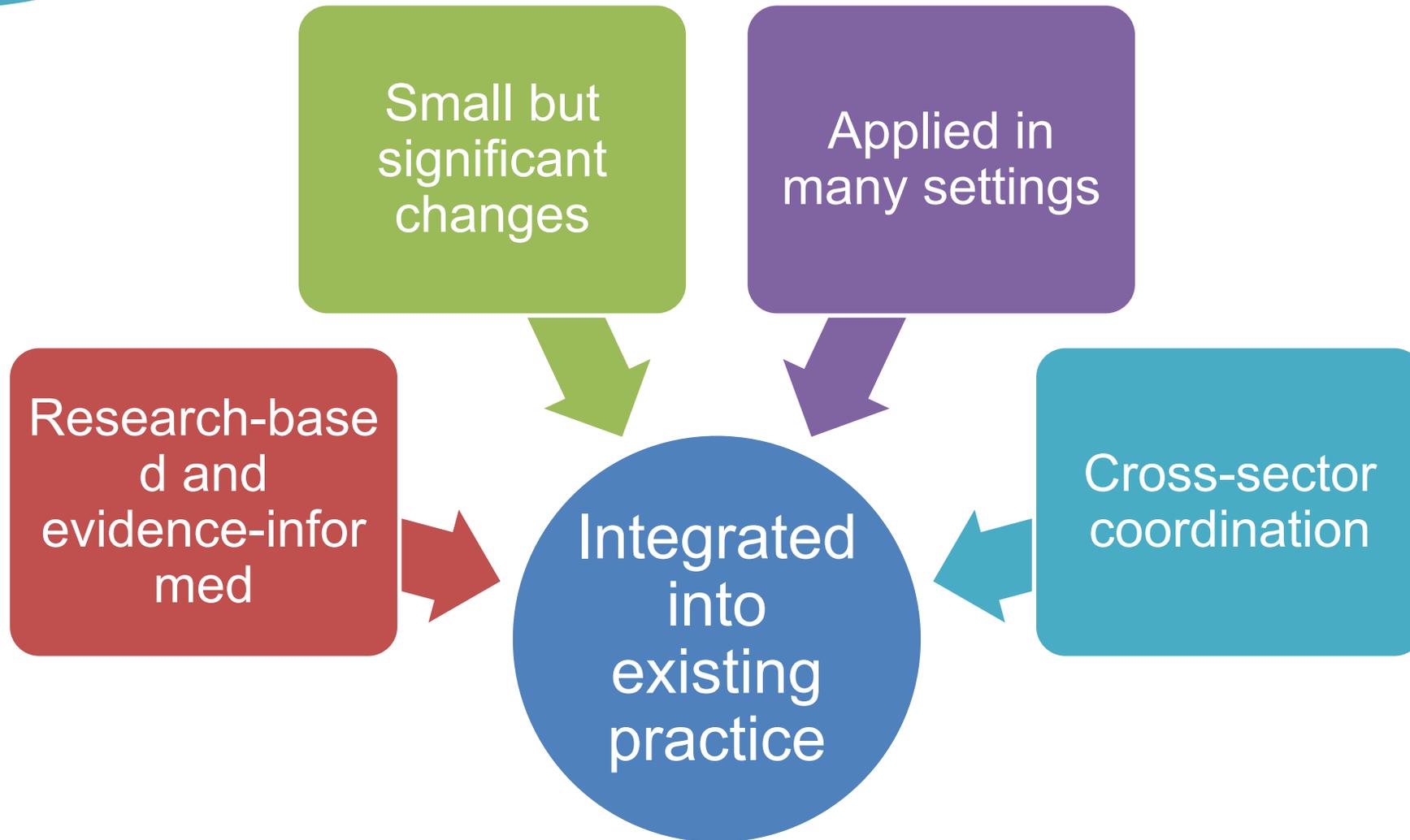
Knowledge of
adolescent
development

Concrete support in
times of need

Cognitive, social
and emotional
competence of
youth

**Big Idea
#2**

An approach, not a model





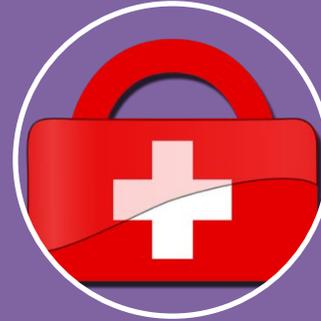
A family support system: What does it look like?



Light touch family support in the settings families are in every day



Connections to and support from dedicated family support resources



Connections to more intensive services when needed

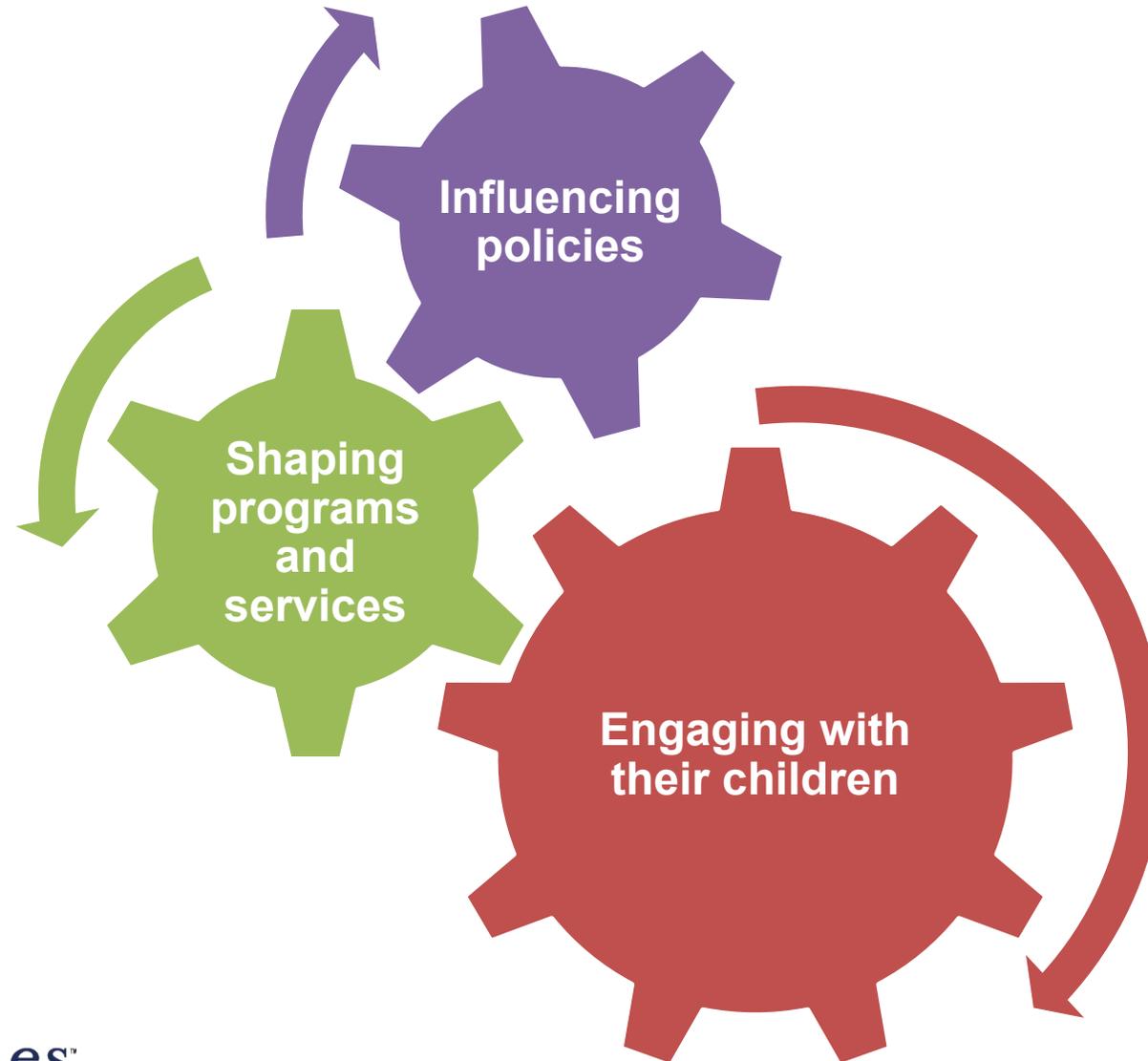


Navigation supports to help make the connections

← Common language and commitment to helping families build protective factors →

**Big Idea
#3**

A changed relationship with parents



Children don't grow up in
programs...

They grow up in **families**
and in **communities.**

**Big Idea
#4**

Alignment with developmental science

Importance of
early childhood
and adolescence

Role of nurturing
relationships in
brain
development

Effects of trauma
and adversity

A Protective/Promotive Factors Frame Across Development

When children are young, the family environment is very important. That's why Strengthening Families emphasizes parents' protective factors as a pathway to children's well-being.



STRENGTHENING FAMILIES PROTECTIVE FACTORS

- Parental Resilience
- Social Connections
- Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
- Concrete Support in Times of Need
- Social and Emotional Competence of Children



YOUTH THRIVE PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS

- Youth Resilience
- Social Connections
- Knowledge of Adolescent Development
- Concrete Support in Times of Need
- Cognitive and Social-Emotional Competence in Youth



As children grow, their own sense of self and experiences in family, peer, school and community contexts are very important. Youth Thrive emphasizes protective and promotive factors as a pathway to well-being during adolescence and in the transition to adulthood.



Family Protective Factors

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Parental resilience

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times of need

Social and
emotional
competence of
children

Parental resilience

Managing stress and functioning well when faced with challenges, adversity and trauma

What it looks like

Resilience to general life stress

- Hope, optimism, self confidence
- Problem solving skills
- Self care and willingness to ask for help
- Ability to manage negative emotions

Resilience to parenting stress

- Not allowing stress to interfere with nurturing
- Positive attitude about parenting and child

Parental resilience

Everyday actions

- 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

Positive relationships that provide emotional, informational, instrumental and spiritual support

What it looks like

- Multiple friendships and supportive relationships with others
- Feeling respected and appreciated
- Accepting help from others, and giving help to others
- Skills for establishing and maintaining connections

Social connections

Everyday actions

- Help families value, build, sustain and use social connections
- Create an inclusive environment
- Facilitate mutual support
- Promote engagement in the community and participation in community activities

Knowledge of parenting & child dev't

Understanding child development and parenting strategies that support physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional development

What it looks like

- Nurturing parenting behavior
- Appropriate developmental expectations
- Ability to create a developmentally supportive environment for child
- Positive discipline techniques; ability to effectively manage child behavior
- Recognizing and responding to your child's specific needs

Knowledge of parenting & child dev't

Everyday actions

- Model developmentally appropriate interactions with children
- Provide information and resources on parenting and child development
- Encourage parents to observe, ask questions, explore parenting issues and try out new strategies
- Address parenting issues from a strength-based perspective

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

What it looks like

- Seeking and receiving support when needed
- Knowing what services are available and how to access them
- Adequate financial security; basic needs being met
- Persistence
- Advocating effectively for self and child to receive necessary help

Concrete support in times of need

Everyday actions

- Respond immediately when families are in crisis
- Provide information and connections to services in the community
- Help families to develop skills and tools they need to identify their needs and connect to supports

Social & 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

What it looks like

For the parent:

- Warm and consistent responses that foster a strong and secure attachment with the child
- Encouraging and reinforcing social skills; setting limits

For the child:

- Age appropriate self-regulation
- Ability to form and maintain relationships with others
- Positive interactions with others
- Effective communication

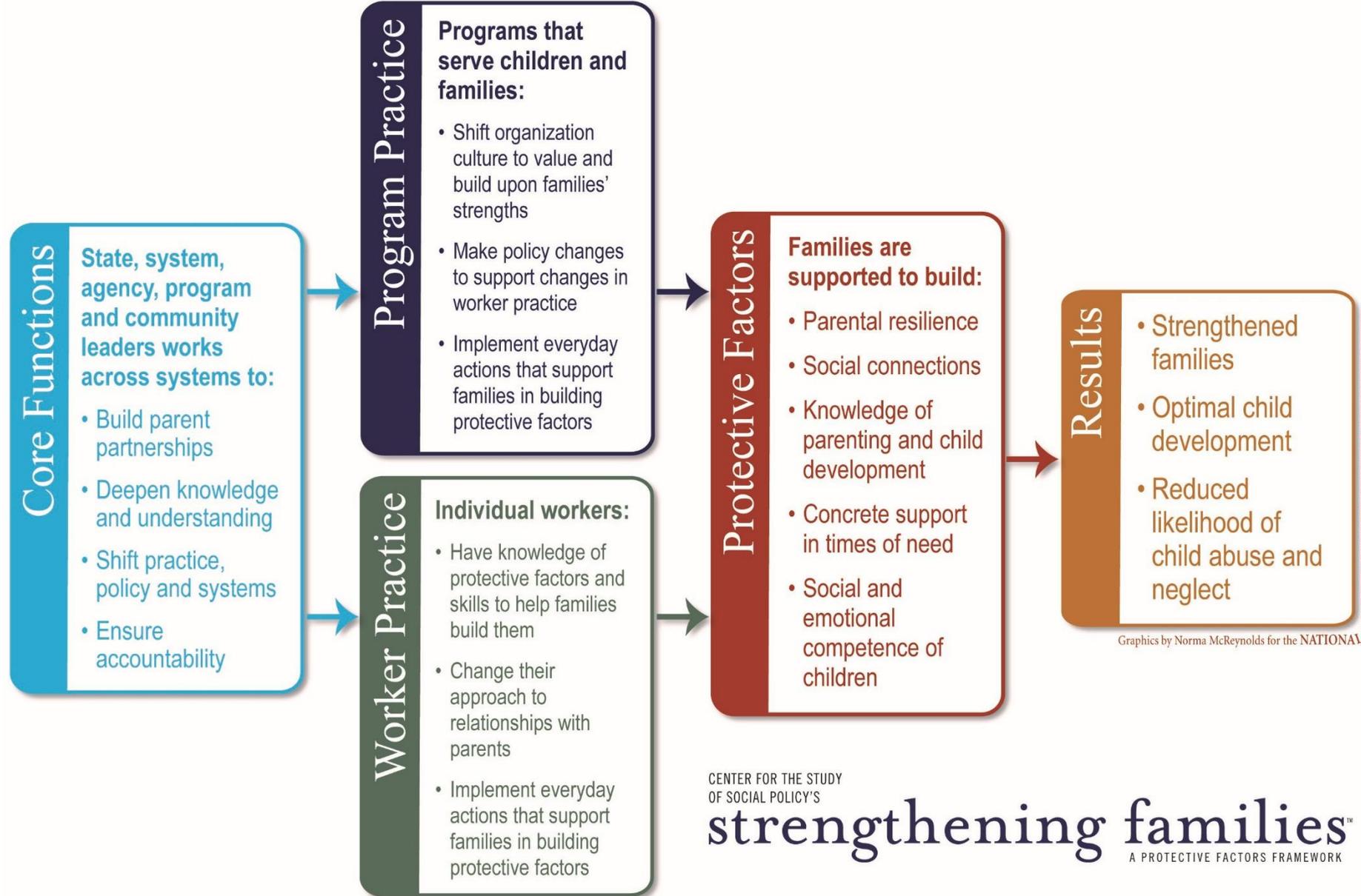
Social & emotional competence of children

Everyday actions

- Help parents foster their child's social emotional development
- Model nurturing care 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 needs extra support

The Pathway to Improved Outcomes for Children and Families

Strengthening Families™ Protective Factors Framework Logic Model



The Pathway to Improved Outcomes for Children and Families

Everyday Actions That Help Build Protective Factors

Everyday Actions

- 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

- 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

- 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 out new parenting strategies
- Address parenting issues from a strength-based perspective

- 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

- 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

Protective Factors

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

Many resources available at www.strengtheningfamilies.net

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PARENTAL RESILIENCE

Being a parent can be a very rewarding and joyful experience. But being a parent can also have its share of stress. Parenting stress is caused by the pressures (stressors) that are placed on parents personally and in relation to their child:

- typical events and life changes (e.g., moving to a new city or not being able to soothe a crying baby)
- unexpected events (e.g., losing a job or discovering your child has a medical problem)
- individual factors (e.g., substance abuse or traumatic experiences)
- social factors (e.g., relationship problems, feelings of loneliness and isolation)
- community, societal or environmental conditions (e.g., persistent poverty, or a natural disaster)

Numerous researchers have concluded that how parents respond to stressors is more important than the stressor itself in determining the outcomes for themselves and their children. Parents are more likely to achieve favorable outcomes if they are resilient. Resilience is the process of managing and functioning well even when facing challenges, adversity and trauma.

Some stressors parents face can be easily so that problems get resolved. For example, calling a relative or friend for help from school when a parent is away. But some stressors cannot be easily resolved. For example, parents cannot "fix" developmental disability, or a child who has suffered as a result of a crime-plagued neighborhood. Parents are resilient when they can call forth their inner strength to meet personal challenges and to their child, manage adversity, and to their families are able to see the effects of trauma and thrive given the unique characteristics and circumstances of their family. Demonstrating resilience increases parents' self-efficacy because they are able to see

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SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS

People need people. Parents need people who care about them and their children for well-being. When parents call on family and friends for support, they are more likely to have positive outcomes.

When parents believe that they have strong relationships with whom they share their uncertainties, they seek to help them. Parents who have strong relationships with whom they share their uncertainties, they seek to help them. Parents who have strong relationships with whom they share their uncertainties, they seek to help them.

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KNOWLEDGE OF PARENTING AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS

No parent knows everything about children. Parents who have a good understanding of child development and parenting strategies are more likely to have positive outcomes for their children.

- physical, cognitive, language, social & emotional development
- signs indicating a child may have a developmental delay and needs special services
- cultural factors that influence parenting practices and the perception of children's behavior
- factors that promote or inhibit healthy child outcomes
- discipline and how to positively impact child behavior

Gaining more knowledge about child development and developing greater skills in parenting are particularly important given the recent advances in the fields of neuroscience, pediatrics and developmental psychology. Scientists in these fields have provided much evidence of the critical importance of early childhood as the period in which the foundation for intellectual, social, emotional and moral development is established. Furthermore, numerous research studies show this foundation is determined by the nature of the young child's environments and experiences that shape early brain development.

Developing brains need proper nutrition, regularly scheduled periods of sleep, physical activity and a variety of stimulating experiences. Developing brains also need attuned, emotionally available parents and other primary caregivers who recognize and consistently respond to the needs of young children, and interact with them in an affectionate, sensitive and nurturing manner. Such care gives rise to the development of a secure attachment between the child and the adult. Young children with secure attachments develop a sense of trust, feel safe, gain self-confidence and are able to explore their environments because they feel they have a secure base.

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CONCRETE SUPPORT IN TIMES OF NEED

PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS

When parents are faced with overwhelming stressors, they need to seek help. For some parents, asking for help is not easy because they don't know where to go or who to ask. Parents who have a strong support network are more likely to have positive outcomes for their children.

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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 evidence-based approach, CSSP's work is organized into five protective and promotive factors:

- protective factors that contribute to the well-being of individuals, families, communities or the broader society
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SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE OF CHILDREN

PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS

Early childhood is a period of both great opportunity and vulnerability. Early childhood experiences set the stage for later health, well-being and learning. In the past, most of the focus was on building young children's academic skills in an effort to ensure they were prepared for school. However, in recent years a growing body of research has demonstrated the strong link between young children's social-emotional competence and their cognitive, developmental, language skills, mental health and school success. The dimensions of social-emotional competence in early childhood include:

- self-esteem - good feelings about oneself
- self-confidence - being open to new challenges and willing to explore new environments
- self-efficacy - believing that one is capable of performing an action
- self-regulation/self-control - following rules, controlling impulses, acting appropriately based on the context
- personal agency - planning and carrying out purposeful actions
- executive functioning - staying focused on a task and avoiding distractions
- patience - learning to wait
- persistence - willingness to try again when first attempts are not successful
- conflict resolution - resolving disagreements in a peaceful way
- communication skills - understanding and expressing a range of positive and negative emotions
- empathy - understanding and responding to the emotions and rights of others
- social skills - making friends and getting along with others
- morality - learning a sense of right and wrong

These dimensions of social-emotional competence do not evolve naturally. The course of healthy or unhealthy development—whether healthy or unhealthy—depends on the quality of nurturing attachment and stimulation that a child experiences. Numerous research studies show that a relationship with a consistent, caring and attuned adult who actively promotes the development of these dimensions is essential for healthy social-emotional outcomes in young children. Actively promoting social-emotional competence includes activities such as:

- Creating an environment in which children feel safe to express their emotions
- Modeling empathy
- Being emotionally responsive to children and setting clear expectations and limits (e.g., "People in our family don't hurt each other.")
- Separating emotions from actions (e.g., "It's okay to be angry, but we don't hit someone when we are angry.")
- Encouraging and reinforcing social skills such as greeting others and taking turns
- Creating opportunities for children to solve problems (e.g., "What do you think you should do if another child calls you a bad name?")

Children who have experiences such as these are able to recognize their and others' emotions, take the perspective of others and use their emerging cognitive skills to think about appropriate and inappropriate ways of acting. Conversely, research shows children who do not feel secure or show empathy may not be able to form secure attachments and may lack social-emotional competence. Numerous research studies show that early and appropriate interventions that focus on social-emotional development can help to mitigate the effects of negative experiences in ways that lead to improved cognitive and social-emotional outcomes.

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Ideas into Action