Common Ground
One Approach, Many Adaptations

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

• Benefits ALL families
• Builds on family strengths, buffers risk, and promotes better outcomes
• Can be implemented through small but significant changes in everyday actions
• Builds on and can become part of existing programs, strategies, systems and community opportunities
• Is grounded in research, practice and implementation knowledge
In the beginning....
PURPOSE: REDUCE CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT STARTING WITH CHILDREN 0-5

• The very highest rates of abuse and neglect occur for children under 4. This age group is a third of all children entering foster care and who are likely to stay the longest.

• The brain’s primary architecture is developing in years 0-5, when family stability, skills and knowledge have the greatest impact on development.

• Adverse experiences at an early age create lifelong risk for multiple problems; mitigating these traumas early is most effective.
PRAGMATIC STARTING POINTS

- Find out what reduces child maltreatment, to point toward what programs should be building
- Assume that all families are included
- Start where families already have comfortable relationships, e.g. child care
- Build on existing programs and strategies; don’t invent a new model
What we know: Families thrive when 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
Small but significant changes

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

**Strengthened Families**

**Optimal Child Development**

**Reduced Child Abuse & Neglect**

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL POLICY'S strengthening families™
A PROTECTIVE FACTORS FRAMEWORK
KEY PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS

• Mental health consultation
• Social emotional/conflict resolution curriculum
• No expulsions
• Fathers welcome
• Consistent staff communication
• Parent leadership
What happened next: A surprising leap from programs to policy
A FEW BRAVE INNOVATORS

- Alaska
- Arkansas
- Illinois
- Missouri
- New Hampshire
- Rhode Island
- Wisconsin
VITAL NATIONAL PARTNERS PROVIDED “LEGS”
Parent leaders, state agencies and local programs quickly adapted the framework -- beyond child abuse prevention for young children -- 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
STRENGTHENING FAMILIES NATIONAL NETWORK

NATIONAL ALLIANCE
of
CHILDERN’S TRUST & PREVENTION FUNDS

Parents as Teachers

United Way

Build

Zero to Three

The Finance Project

Center for the Study of Social Policy’s strengthening families A Protective Factors Framework
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
NEW “FAMILY VALUES”

• Recognition of importance of families
• Diminishing stigma and labeling
• Acknowledging diversity among families
• Reducing the distance between professionals and families
• Partnerships among services and between services and people are essential
• Everyone has a role and can play it!
www.strengtheningfamilies.net

Judy Langford
Center for the Study of Social Policy
judy.langford@cssp.org
Questions?