

**What We Know: Families thrive when protective factors are robust in their lives and communities.**

Using the Strengthening Families Approach, more than 30 states are shifting policy, funding and training to help programs working with children and families build protective factors with families. Many states and counties also use the Protective Factors Framework to align services for children and families, strengthen families in the child welfare system and work in partnership with families and communities to build protective factors. For more information and many tools and options for implementation, visit [www.strengtheningfamilies.net](http://www.strengtheningfamilies.net).

Nationally, Strengthening Families is coordinated by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) and supported by national partner organizations including:

- Child Welfare Information Gateway
- The Finance Project
- FRIENDS National Resource Center
- The National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds
- Parents As Teachers
- United Way Worldwide
- ZERO TO THREE

## The Protective Factors Framework

Five Protective Factors are the foundation of the Strengthening Families Approach: parental resilience, social connections, concrete support in times of need, knowledge of parenting and child development, and social and emotional competence of children. Research studies support the common-sense notion that when these Protective Factors are well established in a family, the likelihood of child abuse and neglect diminishes. Research shows that these protective factors are also "promotive" factors that build family strengths and a family environment that promotes optimal child and youth development.

### Parental Resilience

No one can eliminate stress from parenting, but a parent's capacity for resilience can affect how a parent deals with stress. Resilience is the ability to manage and bounce back from all types of challenges that emerge in every family's life. It means finding ways to solve problems, building and sustaining trusting relationships including relationships with your own child, and knowing how to seek help when necessary.

### Social Connections

Friends, family members, neighbors and community members provide emotional support, help solve problems, offer parenting advice and give concrete assistance to parents. Networks of support are essential to parents and also offer opportunities for people to "give back", an important part of self-esteem as well as a benefit for the community. Isolated families may need extra help in reaching out to build positive relationships.

### Concrete Support in Times of Need

Meeting basic economic needs like food, shelter, clothing and health care is essential for families to thrive. Likewise, when families encounter a crisis such as domestic violence, mental illness or substance abuse, adequate services and supports need to be in place to provide stability, treatment and help for family members to get through the crisis.

### Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

Accurate information about child development and appropriate expectations for children's behavior at every age help parents see their children and youth in a positive light and promote their healthy development. Information can come from many sources, including family members as well as parent education classes and surfing the internet. Studies show information is most effective when it comes at the precise time parents need it to understand their own children. Parents who experienced harsh discipline or other negative childhood experiences may need extra help to change the parenting patterns they learned as children.

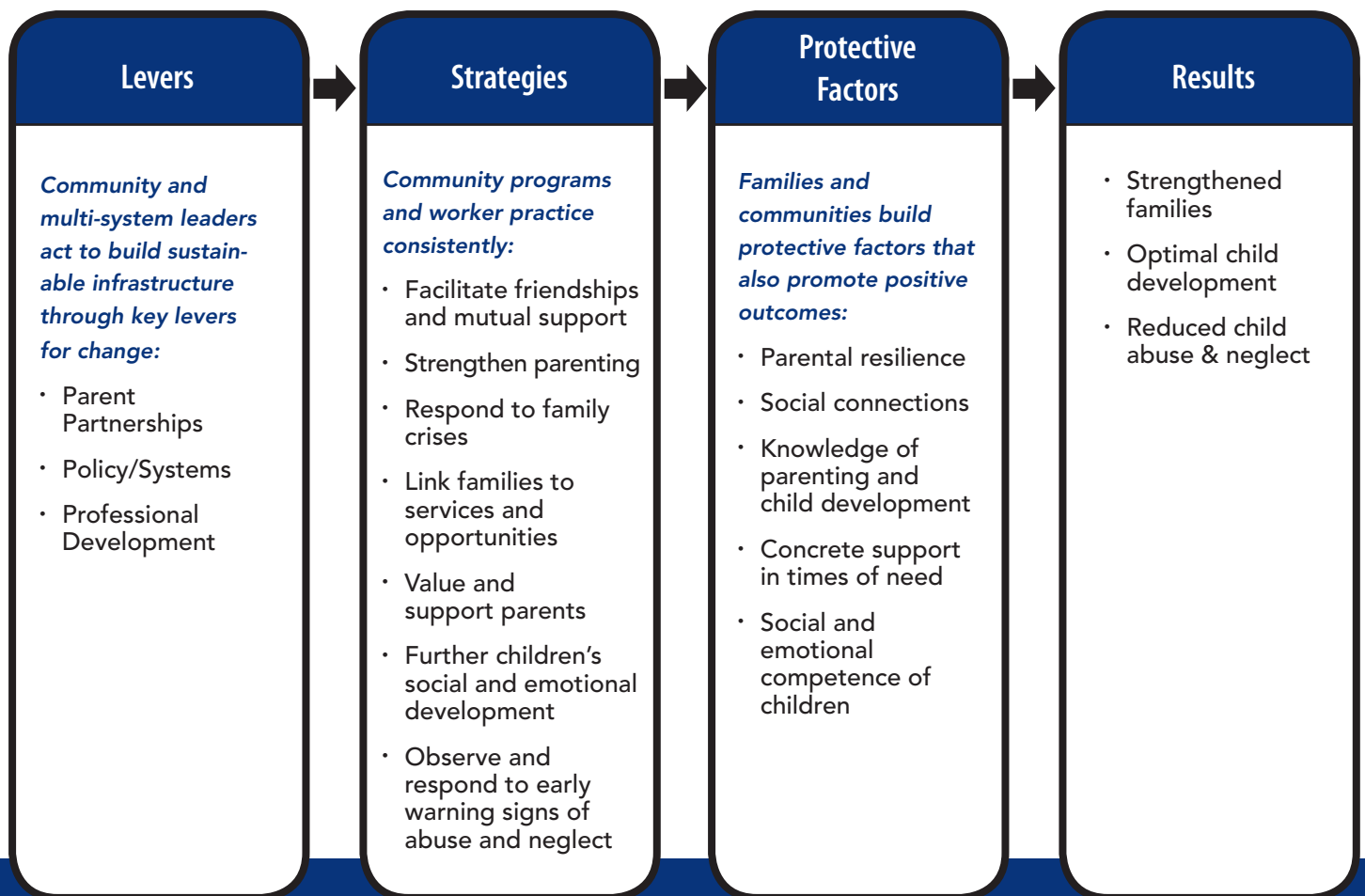
### Social and Emotional Competence of Children

A child or youth's ability to interact positively with others, self-regulate their behavior and effectively communicate their feelings has a positive impact on their relationships with their family, other adults, and peers. Challenging behaviors or delayed development create extra stress for families, so early identification and assistance for both parents and children can head off negative results and keep development on track.

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 a part of existing programs, strategies, systems and community opportunities
- Is grounded in research, practice and implementation knowledge



### A New Vision

Families and communities, service systems and organizations:

- Focus on building protective and promotive factors to reduce risk and create optimal outcomes for all 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