



# Selecting a Family Support and Strengthening Program Assessment Tool

*An Overview for  
Program Leaders and Funders*

## Developed by

*The Center for the Study of Social Policy*

*FRIENDS National Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention*

*The National Network of Family Support and Strengthening Networks*



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### Supporting Materials found at [www.friendsnrc.org/program-assessment](http://www.friendsnrc.org/program-assessment)

- Strengthening Families™ Self-Assessment Tool for Community-Based Programs
  - Strengthening Families Protective Factors
- Standards of Quality for Family Strengthening & Support Program Self-Assessment
- Understanding the Role of Program Assessment in Child Abuse Prevention: Tools for Peer Review and Beyond
- Why Program Assessment Matters
  - For Your Organization
  - For Funders
- Understanding Approach
- Two Scenarios

## Introduction

Those of us working in the field of family support recognize our continuing need and constant desire to improve our programming to benefit those who seek our services. One excellent way to realize this goal is through program assessment. Program assessment helps agencies review current practices, understand what is working and what is not, and move forward towards better services. This overview features three program assessment tools that are available to the field and is designed to help you understand which might fit best for your agency.

### At a Glance

#### ***Strengthening Families™ Self-Assessment Tool for Community-Based Programs***

*Helps determine how well a program is implementing strategies to strengthen families and outlines how protective factors can be supported through “small but significant” changes in practice.*

- **Tool Cost:** Free to download at <http://www.cssp.org/reform/strengtheningfamilies/2014/COMMUNITY-BASED-PROGRAM-SELF-ASSESSMENT.pdf>
- **Training:** Not required; available for free online; available in-person for varying fees
- **Time to Complete Tool:** 90 minutes for individual completion, plus minimum of 90 minutes for team debrief
- **Technical Assistance:** Online resources available; local and state entities may provide additional support
- **Data Tracking Support:** Online system available; generates reports and action plan; includes parent and staff surveys
- **For More Information Visit:** Center for the Study of Social Policy, [www.strengtheningfamilies.net](http://www.strengtheningfamilies.net)

#### ***Standards of Quality for Family Strengthening & Support***

*Can be used as a blueprint for implementing best practices; integrates and operationalizes family support principles and protective factors framework; measures quality of practice.*

- **Tool Cost:** Free to download after registering with the California Network of Family Strengthening Networks (CNFSN)
- **Training:** One-day in-person certification training strongly encouraged; varying fees up to \$100 per participant; check website for local availability
- **Time to Complete Tool:** Approximately 5-8 hours depending on program complexity and team size; conducted annually
- **Technical Assistance:** Online resources available; local and state networks may provide additional support
- **Data Tracking Support:** None available at this time
- **For More Information Visit:** CNFSN, [www.cnfsn.org](http://www.cnfsn.org)

#### ***Understanding the Role of Program Assessment in Child Abuse Prevention: Tools for Peer Review and Beyond***

*A resource for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) State Lead Agencies and their funded programs; internal or peer review process; each section designed to be a stand-alone tool.*

- **Tool Cost:** Free to download at <http://friendsnrc.org/program-assessment>
- **Training:** Available for CBCAP funded programs
- **Time to Complete Tool:** Varies by chosen sections
- **Technical Assistance:** Available for CBCAP funded programs
- **Data Tracking Support:** Access database available for download
- **For More Information Visit:** FRIENDS National Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP), [www.friendsnrc.org](http://www.friendsnrc.org)

## Family Support and Strengthening Program Assessments

The field of family support and strengthening shares a set of principles (see side bar) developed by Family Support America. The principles are based on the premise that primary responsibility for the development and well-being of children lies within the family, and that society helps to support families as they raise their children. Family support services support and strengthen parents to raise their children successfully, to become self-sufficient, and to take an active role in their communities.<sup>1</sup> This approach can be implemented in a wide variety of settings. Perhaps most prominently, family resource centers are organized around this approach. Many other service delivery systems such as early care and education, parent education, public and primary health care, libraries, public recreation services, child abuse prevention organizations, peer-delivered services, and schools also incorporate these principles and approach to practice.

In the past 10 years, the articulation and implementation of the research-informed *Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework* developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy has greatly strengthened the family support and strengthening field. This framework is based on engaging families, programs, and communities to promote optimal child development, and has been embraced widely in the fields of child abuse prevention, family support and strengthening, early care and education, home visiting, and child welfare. A second important development has been the creation and dissemination of *Standards of Quality for Family Strengthening & Support*, which operationalize puts into operation family support and strengthening practice. Additionally, a broad range of evidenced-based practices have emerged that demonstrate the efficacy of a strength-based, family-driven, community-based approach. These, along with an increased understanding of brain development and the importance of trauma-informed care, have validated the need for quality family support and strengthening programs.

Three national organizations, the *Center for the Study of Social Policy*, the *National Network of Family Support and Strengthening Networks*, and *FRIENDS National Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention*, have each developed program assessment tools for the field of family support and strengthening. These three assessments are designed to help programs reflect on their

### Principles of Family Support Practice

1. Staff and families work together in relationships based on equality and respect.
2. Staff enhances families' capacity to support the growth and development of all family members – adults, youth, and children.
3. Families are resources to their own members, to other families, to programs, and to communities.
4. Programs affirm and strengthen families' cultural, racial, and linguistic identities and enhance their ability to function in a multicultural society.
5. Programs are embedded in their communities and contribute to the community-building process.
6. Programs advocate with families for services and systems that are fair, responsive, and accountable to the families served.
7. Practitioners work with families to mobilize formal and informal resources to support family development.
8. Programs are flexible and continually responsive to emerging family and community issues.
9. Principles of family support are modeled in all program activities, including planning, governance, and administration.

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from *Family Support America and Standards of Quality for Family Strengthening & Support*

practices, measure quality, affirm strengths, and identify concrete strategies to improve practice. This is a significant step in ongoing efforts to define and promote effective, family-centered, strength-based practice.

The purpose of this paper, developed jointly by the three national partners, is to give program leaders and funders an understanding of how an organization may use these assessment tools in its continuous quality improvement efforts. It describes the tools, compares key elements, and provides training and technical assistance information. In addition, expanded online content details the different bodies of work and provides more detailed information along with scenarios illustrating application from program and funder perspectives.

### ***Who We Are – A Partnership of National Organizations***

The ***Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP)*** is a national nonprofit organization recognized for its leadership in shaping policy, reforming public systems, and building the capacity of communities. For more than 30 years, CSSP has worked with policymakers and communities across the country to improve the lives of the most vulnerable children and families. Its mission is 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. CSSP developed the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework and convenes the Strengthening Families National Network, bringing together those who are using the framework in their programs, systems, and communities. For more information, see [www.strengtheningfamilies.net](http://www.strengtheningfamilies.net).

Founded in 2011, the ***National Network of Family Support & Strengthening Networks*** is a membership-based organization comprised of statewide networks that focus on strengthening and supporting families. Each of these networks consists of two or more family resource centers or family strengthening organizations and together represent more than family support 2,000 programs. The mission of the national network is to connect statewide networks across the United States to promote quality practice, peer learning, mutual support, and effective policies and systems that support positive outcomes for children, families, and communities. Its vision is for a strong, cohesive national association of statewide family support and strengthening networks that collectively affect positive outcomes for children, families, and communities. The network adopted a shared set of standards for national implementation in 2013 to ensure that families are supported and strengthened through quality practice. For more information, see [www.cnfsn.org](http://www.cnfsn.org).

***FRIENDS National Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP)*** is a service of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. FRIENDS, an acronym for Family Resource Information, Education, and Network Development Service, is a federally mandated training and technical assistance provider for CBCAP State Lead Agencies. It provides training and technical assistance to build capacity in the full array of CBCAP program requirements, including outcome accountability, data utilization, parent leadership, evidence-based/evidence-informed practices, peer review, logic models, collaboration, and systems change. For more information, see [www.friendsnrc.org](http://www.friendsnrc.org).

## *Program Assessments*

All three program assessments are based on the family support and strengthening principles and integrate the protective factors

- *Strengthening Families™ Self-Assessment for Community-Based Programs* from the Center for the Study of Social Policy (to download the tool, click on self-assessments at [www.strengtheningfamilies.net](http://www.strengtheningfamilies.net))
- *Standards of Quality for Family Strengthening & Support Program Self-Assessment* developed by the California Network of Family Strengthening Networks and adopted by the National Network of Family Support and Strengthening Networks (to download the Standards and Program Self-Assessment Tool visit [www.cnfsn.org](http://www.cnfsn.org))
- *Understanding the Role of Program Assessment in Child Abuse Prevention: Tools for Peer Review and Beyond* from the FRIENDS National Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (to download the tool click Program Assessment under Outcome Accountability at [www.friendsnrc.org](http://www.friendsnrc.org))

## *Unifying Factors across the Tools*

Significant input from the field, at both state and national levels, contributed to the development of the assessments. Although each tool is unique, as highlighted later, the three have important commonalities. Each

- Is grounded in a strengthening and supporting families approach
- Incorporates a self-assessment process that includes input from a diverse cross-section of program staff and stakeholders
- Assesses the quality of a program's practices and identifies program improvement areas that support positive outcomes for children and families
- Generates data to support continuous quality improvement and action planning

In addition, each is available for free download; the website for each includes information on planning for and conducting a program self-assessment and using the collected data to action plan, as well as on various levels of training, technical assistance, and data processing support.



## Selecting a Program Assessment Tool

When it comes to selecting a program assessment tool, there may be no single “right” one for your organization. While there are similarities across the three tools, they vary in structure, focus, how data is processed, and available training and technical assistance support. In making a choice, consider what you are trying to achieve and how assessment fits into your general plan for evaluation.

Self-Assessment	Scaling	Training & Technical Assistance (T/TA)	Supporting Tools
<p><b>Strengthening Families™ Self-Assessment for Community-Based Programs</b></p> <p>To download tool, click on “Self-Assessments” at <a href="http://www.strengtheningfamilies.net">www.strengtheningfamilies.net</a>.</p>	<p>Each section starts with a description of the protective factor and core strategies to promote it.</p> <p>Items describing concrete actions and program policies are rated on a five-point Likert Scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Don’t Know) and an option for Not Applicable.</p> <p>Team members individually complete scores and then arrive at a consensus score.</p>	<p>Children’s Trust Funds and other local and state entities may be equipped to provide T/TA for Strengthening Families implementation and the self-assessment. Contact the Center for the Study of Social Policy for further information: <a href="http://www.strengtheningfamilies.net">www.strengtheningfamilies.net</a></p> <p>Contact Mosaic Network for TA on the database at <a href="http://www.strengtheningfamiliesevaluationportal.com">www.strengtheningfamiliesevaluationportal.com</a></p> <p>Free online training on Protective Factors Framework; in-person training and certification of trainers available for a fee: <a href="http://www.ctfalliance.org/training">www.ctfalliance.org/training</a></p>	<p><b>Strengthening Families Evaluation Portal.</b> Printed reports from online data system showing strengths and areas for improvement. In addition to the program assessment, parent and staff surveys. <a href="http://www.strengtheningfamiliesevaluationportal.com">www.strengtheningfamiliesevaluationportal.com</a></p> <p>Additional subject area-specific self-assessments for family child care, center-based early care and education, and home visiting. These and many other resources to support implementation are available at <a href="http://www.strengtheningfamilies.net">www.strengtheningfamilies.net</a>.</p>
<p><b>Standards of Quality for Family Strengthening &amp; Support Program Self-Assessment</b></p> <p>Download the tool at <a href="http://www.cnfsn.org">www.cnfsn.org</a>.</p>	<p>Each Standard includes pairs of indicators with descriptions of minimum- and high-quality practice. Minimum-quality indicators demonstrate basic application; programs build upon minimum to achieve higher quality. Tool provides a path for program to deepen and strengthen practice.</p> <p>Program identifies and records examples of its work and determines where it falls on the continuum of quality.</p>	<p>Certification Training for management and direct service staff includes how to use assessment tools. Note: individuals are certified rather than organizations, allowing staff to earn credentials that stay with them even if they leave the organization. Certification renewal trainings every 2 years.</p> <p>Training of trainers on the Standards. TA to conduct program facilitated self-assessment process.</p>	<p><b>Staff Self-Reflection Checklist:</b> A set of questions for staff to use as a daily reminder to implement the Standards.</p> <p><b>Standards Participant Survey:</b> A set of questions for program participants to indicate how well a program is meeting Standards from their point of view. This tool is available in English, Spanish, and Chinese.</p> <p><b>Standards of Self-Assessment Summary:</b> A summary of the data in an easy-to-read format.</p> <p><b>Standards implementation continuum diagram</b> for programs.</p>
<p><b>Understanding the Role of Program Assessment in Child Abuse Prevention: Tools for Peer Review and Beyond</b></p> <p>To download the tool, click on “Program Assessment” under “Outcome Accountability” at <a href="http://www.friendsnrc.org">www.friendsnrc.org</a>.</p>	<p>Each assessment includes a description of the topic area and listing of subscales rated on a five-point Likert Scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Don’t Know); some include Not Applicable.</p> <p>Programs choose which areas of the assessment to complete.</p>	<p>T/TA is available to CBCAP funded programs through FRIENDS.</p> <p>Contact your state assigned T/TA Coordinator for more information at <a href="http://http://friendsnrc.org/friends-services/state-assignments">http://friendsnrc.org/friends-services/state-assignments</a>.</p>	<p>An Access database for the assessment tools allows organizations to compile results and run reports. Learn more about this free resource at <a href="http://www.friendsnrc.org/program-assessment">www.friendsnrc.org/program-assessment</a>.</p>