strengthening families
A GUIDEBOOK FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS
REVISED SECOND EDITION

strengthening families
THROUGH EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL POLICY

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JULY 2007
The Center for the Study of Social Policy acknowledges the many people who participated in making this guidebook possible.

The early care and education programs that opened their doors and their programs for nearly two years of ongoing poking and probing into their work contributed the most. Their years of careful improvements in their programs have created outstanding communities of care for the children and families they serve. The information contained in this guidebook is drawn from their work, whether they are specifically listed in every instance or not.

A number of staff from the exemplary programs reviewed drafts of the guidebook and made extensive suggestions to make it more useful to practitioners: Deb Campbell from Sauk Rapids–Rice Early Child and Family Education, Judith Baker from South of Market Child Care, Sue Harding and Donna Bailey from Addison County Parent/Child Center, Gail Nelson from the Carole Robertson Center, Blanca Enriquez from the Region 19 ESC Head Start, Maggie Sprattmoran from Leelanau Children's Center, Maryalice Howe representing Ft. Belvoir Children and Youth Services, Saundra Hathaway from FACES, Laurel Kloomok from Early Childhood Mental Health project, and Nancy Seibel from Zero to Three. Lina Cramer contributed her vast program expertise to a thorough review of the self-assessment forms.

Board members, staff, and conference participants from several national organizations contributed ideas and suggestions to the project from the beginning: the National Alliance of Children's Trust Funds, Child Welfare League of America, Family Support America, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the National Child Care Association, the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, Prevent Child Abuse America, state leads for the Community Based Family Resource Program, and USA Child Care.

Members of the Advisory Committee for Strengthening Families through Early Care and Education made many contributions far beyond their official duties, offering substantive suggestions all along the way. Their names are listed below.

Other colleagues listened, argued, and made the project better: Helen Blank from the Children's Defense Fund; Charles Bruner from the Child and Family Policy Center; Barbara Kelley Duncan from Starting Early Starting Smart; James Harrell, former head of NCCAN; Bruce Hershfeld from the Child Welfare League of America; Robert Hill from Westat; Kristin Moore from Child Trends; Carol Wilson Spigner from the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Work; and Joyce Thomas from the People of Color Leadership Institute. Mark Ginsberg, Marilou Hyson, and Mari Olson from NAECY; Matthew Melmed and Nancy Seibel from Zero to Three; and Judith Jones, Lori Levine, and Doug Vaughn from Free to Grow have been invaluable supporters and collaborators as fellow grantees of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation.

Deborah Daro from the Chapin Hall Center for Children contributed significant information and analysis about child abuse and neglect prevention to lay the groundwork for the project. Carol Horton's literature review and analysis of protective factors linked to reductions in child abuse and neglect has provided the research underpinning for this new approach to child abuse and neglect prevention. Finally, Strengthening Families would not be what it is without the expertise, hard work, and infectious enthusiasm of Sharon Lynn Kagan from Columbia University's Teachers College.

**ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR STRENGTHENING FAMILIES THROUGH EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION**

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Early childhood professionals have known for decades that they play an important role in protecting and nurturing young children and promoting their social and emotional development. In addition to the role they can play with all parents and children, there is evidence to suggest that an early childhood program that reaches out to parents also may be the best child abuse and neglect prevention strategy.

In 2001, the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) began seeking a strategic, feasible approach to child abuse and neglect prevention that:

- Was systematic
- Was national in scope
- Would reach large numbers of very young children
- Would have an impact long before abuse or neglect occurred

CSSP started with an exploration of the role early care and education centers can play in preventing child abuse and neglect. Over the course of a two-year investigation, CSSP:

- Identified protective factors known to reduce child abuse and neglect
- Conferred with national early childhood, family support, and child abuse and neglect prevention advocates and experts
- Developed tools for identifying and learning from programs that intentionally build protective factors
- Located, through nominations from national experts, a diverse pool of promising programs to investigate
- Collected survey data on approximately 100 programs nationwide
- Convened focus groups with more than 250 parents in programs nationwide
- Visited 25 exemplary programs, interviewing staff and observing their interactions with parents and children
- Identified 21 programs for continued study and networking

Through this process, CSSP uncovered a host of strategies that early care and education programs use to support and strengthen families and to provide special help to those that may be at risk of abuse and neglect. Over and over again, parents described the dramatic role programs played in shaping how they responded to their children, viewed their children, and responded to parenting challenges. They gave many examples of programs working intensively to help them get through a crisis, keep a roof over their heads, or deal with difficult life transitions. This guidebook reflects what was learned from these parents and staff, which can be useful to early care and education programs of all types.
Section 1 lays out the framework for the Strengthening Families approach, including the unique role early care and education programs can play in preventing child abuse and neglect through use of a “protective factors” model. It also offers tips to help programs begin integrating child abuse and neglect prevention activities into their existing work, including ways to initiate conversations with staff and parents.

Section 2 details the strategies used by the programs studied to build protective factors. It also includes a self-assessment tool to help any early care and education program implement these strategies.

This guidebook reflects what was learned from these parents and staff…

Exemplary Early Childhood Programs Studied

- Fairfax/San Anselmo
- Early Childhood Mental Health
- South of Market Child Care
- Carole Robertson
- Children of the Rainbow
- City of Albuquerque
- Region 19 ESC
- PACT
- Maui Economic Opportunity
- Sauk Rapids
- Educare
- Sheltering Arms
- Montclair Pre-K
- Calvary BiLingual MCC
- Ft. Belvoir
- Leelanau
- Haitian ECE
- Addison County
- Lenox Hill
- FACES
- Palm Beach County HS
• Section 3 describes specific programmatic elements that enhance the ability of early care and education programs to prevent child abuse and neglect. Some of these elements are widely available and others are unique to enriched early childhood programs or special settings. It contains stories of how some programs have implemented the various elements.

• Appendix A includes contact information for the exemplary programs included in the project. Detailed descriptions of the programs and other supplementary project materials are available at www.cssp.org.

• The remaining appendices offer useful resources and tools on preventing child abuse and neglect, conducting family assessments, and working with mental health consultants, as well as a bibliography of the research literature underlying the protective factors approach.

Endnotes

1. The terms “early care and education” and “early childhood” are used interchangeably to refer to programs—such as Head Start, childcare, preschool, and other child development programs—that provide ongoing, daily childcare to children ages zero to six. For purposes of this work, only center-based or center-linked programs were studied.

2. Each program’s work building protective factors was assumed to occur in the context of maintaining a “high quality” early childhood program as defined by national standards. To determine quality standards, CSSP staff either asked for NAEYC accreditation or asked programs to fill out a short supplementary survey to determine their quality standards.
A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT PREVENTION

The Strengthening Families approach seeks to create a child abuse and neglect prevention framework that can help program developers, policymakers, and advocates embed effective prevention strategies into existing systems.

It begins with shifting the focus of child abuse and neglect prevention efforts from family risks and deficits to family strengths and resiliency. The reluctance of families to participate in programs that identify them as “at risk” is well documented and amounts to a significant barrier in interventions designed to reduce abuse and neglect. A more universal, evidence-based model built on promoting resilience is much more attractive to parents and, therefore, could be an effective way of reaching many more families long before a risk of child abuse or neglect emerges.

Strengthening Families’ second goal is to create a widespread understanding of what all kinds of programs and providers can do—and in some cases already do—to promote healthy child development and reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect. Research shows that early childhood programs in particular can serve as an effective “early warning system” to immediately and effectively address risky situations, and that strong early childhood programs can be enhanced to incorporate child abuse prevention strategies—in addition to their traditional role of promoting healthy child development.

WHY FOCUS ON EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION?

CSSP chose to focus on early care and education programs for this project because they represent the only systematic way to reach a large number of very young children (children younger than kindergarten age). The uniquely close relationship between caregiver/teacher and parents of very young children, the daily opportunities for observation and learning with parents, the relationship between early childhood programs and other resources for parents of young children, and the fact that parents interact with these programs as “empowered consumers” rather than as clients or recipients of a service make this focus a promising universal strategy. Early childhood programs have the potential to:

• Reach large numbers of children and families

With the 1996 passage of the Welfare Reform Act, more parents of young children than ever are in the workforce and more young children are in some kind of childcare program. By recent estimates, nearly 60 percent of all children under age six are in care out of their homes for at least part of the day. For children birth to age three, the percentage is even higher: 75 percent. This includes care in for-profit and non-profit day care centers, state-sponsored preschool education, church-based programs, and Head Start programs. While early care and education doesn’t reach all families with young children, it is the only system that reaches a large proportion of young children and their parents on a daily basis.
• Establish intimate and trusting relationships with families

Early care and education providers are able to establish special relationships with children and families for a number of reasons. First, while contact with parents is often brief, its daily nature provides an opportunity to develop strong relationships over time and to reach out right away when parents appear to be stressed or in need of extra support. Second, most programs are located in the communities where participating families live and are staffed by community residents, thereby providing opportunities for relationships to be reinforced by regular contact outside their walls. Finally, the very nature of early care and education—a system in which parents and providers work in partnership to ensure the safety and optimal development of children—provides an unparalleled opportunity for parents to share intimate concerns and hopes for their children.

• Provide parents with encouragement and education

In contrast to many human service settings where families under stress go to receive help, early care and education centers provide an opportunity for families to access support in a non-stigmatizing context. Parents who take their children to these programs on a daily basis act, as one practitioner put it, as “empowered consumers.” They are much more likely to accept assistance and advice from someone they have chosen themselves, whom they see every day, than to accept services offered only after problems emerge or they are identified as “at risk.” Early childhood programs are grounded in the principles of identifying children’s strengths and providing the encouragement that creates an open space for learning. This same philosophy, when applied to parents, creates an opportunity for staff to reach out to families in a non-threatening, non-judgmental way.

Early childhood programs are grounded in the principles of identifying strengths and providing the encouragement that creates an open space for learning.
• Act as an early warning and response system and intervene before abuse and neglect occurs

Young children from birth to age six are more vulnerable to child abuse and neglect than are older children, yet they and their families also have less regular contact with services or assistance that might help them. Home visitors, health care providers, family support programs, churches, recreational programs, and informal play groups contribute to shaping family life and promoting development for many families, but these resources are not consistently available to all families in all communities. A few states and selected individual centers have made early attempts to incorporate family support strategies into early education and care practice, and the research begun in this area has yielded promising results. For example, a recent evaluation of Early Head Start programs has shown improved parenting skills in mothers and a decrease in the use of harsh disciplinary techniques.1 However, linking child abuse and neglect prevention and early care and education is a relatively new idea, and most centers do not consider their work with families to be “child abuse and neglect prevention.”

• Build resiliency in children

For children who are not receiving adequate nurturing care at home, the work that early care and education programs do can be extremely important. The very existence of other caregivers in their lives and of opportunities for creative expression, growth of self-esteem, and exploration contribute to children’s resiliency. This can be critical both in cases where the level of abuse and neglect is sufficiently severe to warrant state intervention and in cases where it is not.

• Continue to receive increased resources and attention from the government

Early care and education programs are among the few human services systems receiving attention—and new resources—from all levels of government, as well as the private sector. Recognition of the importance of the early years in shaping a child’s developmental path and the increasing demand for childcare while parents are working have combined to create momentum for expanding the availability of early care and education for more families. States have invested heavily in expanding childcare services and in developing more preschool programs; these continue to be popular causes among legislators, even in a time of economic uncertainty.
Yet, the early childhood field continues to lack sufficient funding and resources. The increase in the number of children served has created new concerns about the quality of care and education that children are receiving. This climate has drawn attention to the content of training for teachers and other early childhood staff and the capacity of programs to provide both good care in the center and more effective outreach to parents. Yet for programs to more fully support children and families as envisioned in this project, all levels of government must commit to investing in an infrastructure of early care and education that will yield more high-quality programs.

A PROTECTIVE FACTORS APPROACH

For years, researchers have been studying risk factors for many social problems, including child abuse and neglect. This “risk factors” approach looks for characteristics that are common among families experiencing abuse and neglect—thus identifying families that might be “at risk” for abuse or neglect. In contrast, a “protective factors” approach looks for attributes that might serve as buffers, helping parents who might otherwise be at risk of abusing or neglecting their children to find alternate resources, supports, or coping strategies that allow them to parent effectively, even under stress. This is particularly important for parents who, as children, experienced abusive parenting.

“While the potential for severe negative consequences from childhood neglect exists, research is showing that “protective factors” may promote resilience among neglected children, enabling them to maintain healthy functioning in spite of the adversities they face. Protective factors can include individual characteristics such as intelligence, creativity, initiative, humor, and independence, or external factors such as access to good health care and a family's social support system, including alternative caregivers. The probability of “resilience” as an outcome increases when the number or significance of protective factors is sufficient to counteract the vulnerabilities or risk factors. In other words, if a child suffers from neglect (for example, his parents did not feed or clothe him adequately), he may not suffer long-term severe consequences if he also has protective factors such as a spirit of independence, creativity, or access to other caregivers.”

In keeping with the goal of focusing on strengths instead of deficits, the Strengthening Families approach uses a logic model for reducing child abuse and neglect based on building resiliency rather than reducing risk. An early scan of existing research revealed several protective factors linked to a lower incidence of child abuse and neglect. When these factors are present, child maltreatment appears to be less likely to occur.

Protective factors related to families include:

- Parental resilience
- An array of social connections
- Adequate knowledge of parenting and child development
- Concrete support in times of need, including access to necessary services, such as mental health

The protective factor related to children is:

- Healthy social and emotional development

This list of factors was determined after discussions with a national advisory panel and researchers and practitioners in the child abuse and neglect prevention, early childhood, and family support fields. The factors are not unique to this framework; they are addressed by many current child abuse and neglect prevention efforts. Prior to this study, they had not been used to describe prevention practices in early care and education programs. While the identified protective factors may also be linked to other positive
outcomes for young children, this study was concerned only with the link between the factors and a lower incidence of child abuse and neglect.

Although this approach builds on high-quality early care and education programs, adopting the broad goals of healthy child development and high-quality early care and education is not enough. High-quality care doesn’t necessarily reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect unless it includes specific strategies designed to work with families in particular ways. For example:

An effective universal strategy against child abuse and neglect must include an “early warning system” that can immediately and effectively address risky situations. Many high-quality early care and education programs do not serve this function well, even though they employ excellent child development strategies.

A focus on protective factors does not ignore the relevance of risk factors in identifying families at risk of abuse and neglect. Early care and education programs should be well aware of the risk factors correlated with abuse and neglect. Focusing on protective factors, however, is more consistent with a universal, early intervention approach to child abuse and neglect prevention because:

- Protective factors are positive attributes that strengthen all families, not just those at risk; thus, programming based on protective factors can reach families who are at risk without making them feel singled out or judged.

- Working with families based on risk generally requires risk assessment, which is beyond the scope of most early care and education programs. It also sets up a relationship with families dominated by stigma and a sense of failure.

- By focusing on protective factors—which are attributes that families themselves often want to build—programs develop a partnership with parents that encourages them to seek out program staff if they are in need of extra support. This can be an important way to help parents change or prevent behaviors or circumstances that may place their families at risk that they otherwise might be reluctant to disclose.

- When programs work with families to build protective factors, they also help families build and draw on their natural support networks which will be critical to their long-term success.

High-quality care doesn’t necessarily reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect unless it includes specific strategies designed to work with families in particular ways.
how early childhood programs help prevent child abuse and neglect

Excellent early care and education programs use common program strategies to build the protective factors known to reduce child abuse and neglect.

**QUALITY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION**

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
What follows is a summary of the research evidence for each of the protective factors. (The full document is available from CSSP or www.cssp.org.) It is not an exhaustive list of all possible protective factors linked to child abuse and neglect prevention but rather a reflection of the synergy found between the literature base and the actual practice of early care and education programs.

**REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON PROTECTIVE FACTORS**

**Parental Resilience**

Parental psychology plays an important role in both the causes and prevention of child abuse and neglect. Both a parent’s individual developmental history and his or her personal psychological resources are important (Belsky and Vondra 1989; Rogosch et. al. 1995). While studies show that approximately 70 percent of maltreating parents were abused and/or neglected by their own parents during childhood, they also demonstrate that the majority (approximately 70 percent) of parents who were maltreated as children do not maltreat their own offspring (Egeland et. al. 2002; Rogosch et. al. 1995; Steele 1997).

What best explains why these parents are able to break what is evidently a very powerful tendency toward the intergenerational transmission of abuse and neglect? The single factor most commonly identified in the child abuse and neglect prevention literature is development of empathy for the self and others through caring relationships with friends, intimate partners, family members, or professional therapists or counselors (Steele 1997; Higgins 1994). Parents who are emotionally resilient are able to maintain a positive attitude, creatively solve problems, and effectively rise to challenges in their lives—and are less likely to abuse or neglect their children. Higgins (1994) conducted in-depth interviews with 40 resilient adults who had experienced multiple, significant stressors in childhood and adolescence and found that the primary factor for their development into psychologically healthy, highly functioning adults was their capacity to “love well”—to develop caring personal relationships, engage in personally meaningful work (including parenting), and have faith in the positive potential of themselves and the world around them. This capacity, she believes, was sparked and nurtured through the experience of supportive caring relationships, including, but not limited to, those involving professional therapists.
Early childhood education programs can promote parental resilience in a variety of ways. First, they can provide a warm and welcoming environment to parents as well as children. This can be as simple as training staff to warmly greet parents each day and create opportunities for parents in the program to meet and develop relationships. For programs with more resources, it can include providing family support services on site. In addition, focus groups with parents demonstrated that the social and emotional development activities programs offer for children in the classroom can also have an impact on parents. In school, children learned about the importance of communication and the need to share feelings and to respect the feelings of others—these classroom lessons impacted the way parents thought about their own behavior.

Social Connections

Extensive evidence links social isolation and child maltreatment. While the causal link between the two are unclear, fewer adults in the household and fewer interactions with kin, along with little respite from the stress of parenting, are related to child maltreatment (Guterman 2000). The complex research on this topic points to the need to address both community-level factors that contribute to isolation and social fragmentation and individual family characteristics that prevent the development of strong, positive relationships. Researchers who study social connections point to how poor, dangerous neighborhoods characterized by low social trust and cohesion produce high degrees of family isolation and stress; families who live in these neighborhoods, consequently, experience high risk of child maltreatment. From this perspective, one effective way to combat isolation is to strengthen the social cohesiveness of troubled communities (Garbarino and Stocking 1980).

Research also shows that social networks create common norms about childrearing. Parents who have positive social ties to the parents of their children's friends are able to discuss childrearing issues with them and establish a consensus on shared standards, as well as sanctions for violating those norms. Parents who do not have these connections, in contrast, do not know whether they can trust the parents of their children’s friends to enforce the same standards. At the community level, the measure of parents’ social relationships helps to explain the quality of the neighborhood environment for children (Coleman 1988; see also Morrow 1999; Portes 1998; Sampson et al. 1999).
Other research demonstrates that it is the quality of social relationships that distinguishes maltreating from non-maltreating mothers. Beeman (1997) found that trust, reciprocity, flexibility, and a balance of independence and mutuality characterize the relationships of non-neglecting mothers. Neglecting mothers, in contrast, are more dependent on others and have relationships characterized by conflict and distrust. Another study found that mothers who abused their children received less emotional and concrete support from their relationships than did non-abusing parents (Coohey 1996). It is not the simple fact of social connectedness, then, that protects against child abuse and neglect, but rather relationships that are positive, trusting, reciprocal, and flexible, and that embody pro-social, child-friendly values. Research also suggests that parents at risk for child maltreatment may need an individualized set of supports to enable them to develop and maintain positive relationships (Sampson et al. 1999).

Early childhood programs strengthen social connections by creating a community space and opportunities for parents to connect with other parents in a comfortable environment. Parents see other parents regularly at pick-up and drop-off times, a routine that encourages relationships to develop over time. They also have an existing and immediate point of connection—children who are in the same program. Additionally, many programs serve as a conduit for a variety of social activities, from holiday celebrations to bowling leagues.

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

Mental health professionals who work with maltreating parents have observed that child abuse and neglect are often related to a lack of understanding of basic child development. In particular, parents who abuse their children commonly have inappropriate expectations of children’s abilities and respond to children’s behaviors in excessively negative ways. Common stresses of childrearing—such as colic, waking up at night, separation anxiety, exploratory behavior, negativism, poor appetite, or resistance to toilet training—may trigger harsh punishments or episodes of abuse (Reppucci et al. 1997).

Some well-known parenting education programs have been successful in helping parents gain parenting knowledge and skills that can prevent child abuse and neglect. The MELD parent support group model, which has been used by thousands of parents in 25 states, has been found to help mothers develop more appropriate expectations of their children’s abilities, increase their ability to be more aware of their children’s needs, and strengthen their understanding and ability to respond to those needs appropriately (Hoelting et al. 1996). Although there is no single, best approach to parenting education designed to prevent child abuse and neglect, research has identified a number of factors that are associated with strong programs. These include:
A program structure that offers long-term relationships between parents and program staff (two years or more), connects parents to additional support services, and creates support groups of parents with similar life experiences whose children are close to the same age.

Staffing patterns that feature dynamic leadership, peer facilitators (such as parents who have experienced life situations similar to those of group members), and ongoing staff training and supervision.

Interpersonal values that recognize the importance of developing trust between and among parents and staff, and of respecting individual and cultural differences.

An educational approach that consistently focuses on parents' strengths, emphasizes consistent decision making over time rather than quick fixes, and recognizes that the quality of interpersonal relationships is critical to any learning that may take place (Carter & Harvey 1996; Daro 2002; Hoelting et al. 1996; Reppucci et al. 1997).

These factors correspond well to the strengths and resources of high-quality early care and education programs, suggesting that they may be particularly well suited to support effective parenting education efforts.
Early care and education programs also have the potential to provide parenting information and education in a series of informal “teachable moments” that apply and reinforce positive parenting principles in an everyday context. In their daily contact with parents, staff can use children’s behavior and experiences in the classroom as an opportunity to raise difficult issues, provide advice and observation, or share strategies and ideas. The synergy between formal and informal learning that occurs in early childhood programs may be exceptionally effective in promoting the parental knowledge and understanding that protects against child maltreatment.

Support in Times of Need

Over the past several decades, the evidence about child maltreatment has shifted from focusing on parents’ psychological problems to a broader understanding that emphasizes the complexity of interactions among individual, familial, community, and cultural factors. Many programs serve families facing multiple stressors and multiple risks. A study of Head Start, for example, found that many families in the program face multiple stresses, including substance abuse, domestic violence, HIV/AIDS, unemployment, depression, and community violence. And poverty has consistently been shown to be the factor most strongly correlated with child abuse and neglect. The most recent National Incidence Study (NIS) of Child Abuse and Neglect (1996) found that “family income was significantly related to maltreatment rates in nearly every category of maltreatment.” Although researchers do not know precisely why this relationship exists, the leading theory is that while poor parents often experience high degrees of stress, they have low levels of material resources that could help them to cope effectively with it. In some cases, what appears to be neglect may simply be the direct result of lack of resources: for example, the single mother who must leave the house but can’t afford a babysitter (Pelton 1994). In other cases, parents’ lack of resources to meet their family’s basic needs may contribute to psychological states associated with neglect, such as depression and low self-esteem.

Research suggests that helping families access material resources and/or behavioral health services represent two promising intervention strategies to reduce child abuse and neglect. Early care and education programs are in an especially good position to provide these interventions, since they work with parents and children on a daily basis. Their connection with the everyday lives of low-income families enables staff to detect the development of high-stress or crisis situations and to connect parents with resources when they are most needed.
Children’s Healthy Social and Emotional Development

Research indicates that difficult child behaviors, such as defying parents or teachers, do not themselves cause maltreatment but are commonly part of an escalating cycle of negative parent–child interactions that may include physical abuse (Shonkoff and Phillips 2000; Ammerman 1991). Therefore, supporting children’s healthy social and emotional development can be considered a protective factor against child maltreatment, particularly physical abuse. Early childhood professionals report that it is increasingly common to see infants and young children whose attachment to a parent has been severely limited, disrupted, or arrested. These children are at risk for serious developmental problems, including difficulty in regulating their emotions, delays in speech and language development, and an inability to productively explore their environment. They are also more likely to develop emotional problems found among older children, adolescents, and adults, such as depression, anxiety, and behavioral disorders including substance abuse (Koplow 1996; Yoshikawa 1997). Extensive research demonstrates that high-quality early care and education programs can significantly help such children.

Social and emotional development is highly dependent on the quality of a young child’s primary relationships. Although all aspects of development involve a continuous interplay between “nature and nurture,” how caregivers respond to children’s emotional expression profoundly influences how they learn to process, understand, and cope with such feelings as anger, happiness, and sadness—feelings that are a fundamental part of the human experience. The quality of these primary relationships has a critical impact on children’s understanding of both themselves and others (Hyson 1994; Shonkoff and Phillips 2000). Early childhood programs’ impact on children’s social and emotional development happens in two ways: through social and emotional development activities with children in the classroom and by working with parents to help them build positive relationships with their children. Research shows very positive relationships between children’s participation in quality early childhood programs and virtually every social/emotional outcome that has been assessed, including self-regulatory behavior, cooperation with and attachment to adults, positive peer relations, social skills, and reduced conduct problems. Notably, the strongest effects of high-quality care are found among children from families with the fewest resources and under the greatest stress (Shonkoff and Phillips 2000).

Endnotes


2. Sources quoted in this section are listed and annotated in Appendix B.
DECIDING TO IMPLEMENT THE STRENGTHENING FAMILIES APPROACH

How can early care and education programs implement the Strengthening Families approach? The section provides tools to initiate conversations with staff, board or advisory committees, and parents in the program. These conversations are designed to help programs think through how to use this approach. The section also describes some simple first steps to make programs welcoming and supportive places for families under stress or in crisis.

LEARN MORE ABOUT CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Start by learning more about child abuse and neglect—its prevalence, warning signs, and impact on children and their development. Many people think about abuse and neglect only when they read a news story about a child who has been beaten or abandoned. These stories—while they play an important role in placing abuse and neglect in the public eye—tend to create a skewed picture of abuse and neglect. By focusing only on the most horrific cases of abuse and neglect, the news media send the message that this is an intractable problem and that all abusive or neglectful parents are monsters. In reality, child abuse and neglect encompass a range of actions and behaviors—from hitting and sexual abuse to inadequate supervision, failure to access medical care, or not keeping a child clean. Definitions vary from state to state, and how a child welfare agency will respond often varies within states. In 2001, allegations of abuse or neglect were made for approximately five million children. Approximately 903,000 of these children were found by child welfare departments to have been abused; 275,000 were considered to have been abused and/or neglected severely enough to warrant removal from their homes and placement in foster care. More than half of children who leave foster care are eventually returned to their parents (in 2001, 57 percent were returned to their parents).\(^1\)

Regardless of the type or severity of abusive or neglectful behavior, intervening early is an important part of protecting children. Researchers have documented the first few years of life as the time of greatest learning for children. If their early experiences are filled with rejection and a lack of loving attention, children learn quickly that they are unimportant or a source of tension for others. Brain research shows that neural pathways that control fear responses are over-activated among children who experience or witness violence. These children risk having difficulty in later life forming relationships, experiencing empathy, or trusting others. They are also more likely to be aggressive in their interactions and extreme in their attempts to get acknowledgement from others. Depression, underachievement in school, and social and emotional problems are common among children who have been maltreated early in their lives.

Young children are also the most vulnerable to being abused or neglected. Statistically, the younger a child is, the more likely he or she is to be maltreated. The leading cause of death in the first year of life is homicide. Of the 825,000 substantiated cases of child abuse or neglect in the United States in 1999, 14 percent represented children under one year of age; 24 percent
represented children from ages two through five. The National Center for Children in Poverty reports that young children are the fastest-growing group in the child welfare population—up 110 percent in the past 10 years.

CONVERSATIONS WITH STAFF
Before deciding to integrate prevention activities into early childhood programming, convene conversations with staff about the possibility of adopting this approach. Because classroom staff have the most day-to-day contact with parents, their support is essential. In the end, their relationships with parents will be central to building the type of supportive atmosphere needed for the Strengthening Families approach to work.

Discuss the Importance of Preventing Abuse and Neglect
Begin conversations with staff by discussing the facts about abuse and neglect and the importance of prevention. Appendix C offers some useful websites that feature documents that can be used as handouts for this discussion.

To start the conversation, try asking staff one or more of the following sets of questions:

• Have you ever been concerned that one of the children under your care might be at risk for abuse or neglect? What did you do? What worked, and what didn’t?

• Are you concerned about the parenting practices of any parents of children in your classroom? Describe a time when you tried to address a parenting issue with a parent. What worked? What didn’t?

• What resources and support would you need in order to effectively reach out to parents whose parenting practices you were concerned about? Would you be willing to do so? Why or why not?

Introduce the Protective Factors
Next, introduce the concept of protective factors and the role early care and education programs can play in preventing child abuse and neglect. Most programs already work to build protective factors in their day-to-day activities, whether or not they realize it. Using the factors to frame a discussion can help staff recognize the important work they are already doing to support families and encourage them to discuss how they can increase the intentionality of that work.
Page 15 includes a graphic representation of the protective factors, which you can use as a handout for this discussion. You might also want to ask the following questions:

• What is our center already doing to build each protective factor with families? What else could we do?

• How would working on building protective factors affect the work of staff members? What would be the benefits? What would be the difficulties?

• How might building these protective factors impact children in the program and their parents? How might they impact how parents relate to their children?

• How might building these protective factors affect the families staff are most concerned about?

• Look back over the list you made about what else the program could do to build protective factors among families. Ask staff members to rank their answers in relation to three questions:

  1. How helpful would it be to all families in the program?
  2. How helpful would it be to families staff are most concerned about?
  3. How easily could it be done without creating new burdens for staff?

• Identify a short list of actions your program could take to help build protective factors among participating families

CONVERSATIONS WITH PARENTS

Before implementing this new approach, a program will also need to talk with parents about what they need and want from the program. Framing these conversations can be challenging. Since building protective factors strengthens all families, beginning the conversation by discussing issues of child abuse and neglect can be counterproductive and misleading. Instead, start by assuring parents that the program wants to be more effective in supporting them. Let them know that all staff understand that parenting young children can be stressful, and that the program wants to make changes that will effectively respond to what causes them stress. Questions to ask might include:

• What is hard about being a parent?

• Are there ways our staff could help you deal with these challenges?

• The center wants to be a welcoming place for parents—where families feel comfortable asking for help. What are some of your ideas about how we can do that?

• We are particularly concerned when parents seem stressed, isolated, or overwhelmed. Do you have ideas about how we can reach out to parents at these times?

• We want to make it easy for parents to make connections with each other. How can we do that?
Build Connections with Other Community Service Providers

The relationships and daily contact early childhood program staff have with children and families can help identify issues that may need to be addressed and can open the door for families getting the support they need. The most stressed and at-risk families, however, will likely have needs beyond what the program can provide.

By developing a strong relationship with community service providers, early childhood programs can effectively connect families with what they need. Some first steps to take are:

• Learn from the families in the program about which providers in the community provide good services, and which do not.

• Identify a family support center or other community-based program that specializes in connecting families to needed resources and services, one that has a good reputation with families. Contact staff in that program. Find out if the program has a resource directory, and, if so, ask permission to use the directory. Invite the program’s staff to come in and talk with staff about the resource and referral process and how they work with families.

• Regularly bring in staff from community programs that provide various services and supports to talk with parents and/or staff. As these relationships develop, some providers may offer to provide on-site services to children and families. This can be an important first step in building families’ comfort with pursuing services themselves.

• Seek opportunities to get to know other service providers. Go to their events or offer help to them.

Developing a strong relationship with community service providers can make sure the program really connects families with what they need.
IDEAS TO HELP TAKE THE FIRST STEPS

The conversations convened with staff and parents should generate plenty of ideas for easy changes and first steps toward developing a welcoming space for families to help prevent abuse and neglect. In addition to incorporating their suggestions, early childhood programs may want to:

• Invite parents to stay once a week for donuts and coffee when they drop off their children in the morning, or for juice and a snack in the afternoon. Make sure staff are available for informal conversation. Such informal drop-in events send an important, welcoming message.

• Create a parent committee to determine the best ways to make the center a more supportive place for families.

• Plan, or support parents in planning, regular social events and activities that bring parents together—either in the center or at other locations. Potlucks or recreational events for parents and children are often successful first attempts.

• Encourage parents to organize activities to support each other, such as car pools, babysitting exchanges, or support groups.

• Create a bulletin board where parents can exchange information and get daily or weekly parenting tips.

• Engage parents as volunteers, either on a regular or occasional basis. Volunteer opportunities create a partnership environment in which parents and staff can develop relationships.

• Review orientation materials and procedures to make sure they clearly welcome parents to the program.

Endnotes

This section identifies the key strategies used by exemplary programs to build protective factors. It is written for programs committed to working with and supporting the parents of the children they serve. The program self-assessment materials in this section are applicable to early childhood programs of any size, budget, or structure, and most of the strategies described can be implemented without creating new staff positions, making significant changes to existing facilities, or raising additional financial resources.

The section contains self-assessment forms organized around the following strategies used by exemplary programs to support families:

1. Facilitate friendships and mutual support
2. Strengthen parenting
3. Respond to family crises
4. Link families to services and opportunities
5. Facilitate children’s social and emotional development
6. Observe and respond to early warning signs of child abuse or neglect
7. Value and support parents

Each part of the self-assessment includes a short introduction to the strategy with examples of how it has been implemented by exemplary programs observed during this study.

**USING THE SELF-ASSESSMENT FORMS**

**Working On-Line**

In addition to the forms in this guide book, a more versatile and powerful version of the self-assessment can be completed on-line. Please visit the Strengthening Families Through Early Care and Education website at www.cssp.org to access the on-line self-assessment. The on-line version provides reports that compile your responses, allows you to compare your program’s responses over time, and facilitates the process of creating an action plan.

**Timing**

Each self-assessment form in this chapter is focused on a program strategy. While the self-assessment forms may seem long at first, most have fewer than ten items. To make the process easier, the forms address specific practices; thus, multiple practice examples often appear under a given practice.

Begin by filling out the first form and evaluating the time it took to complete it before moving on to the next one. While the time it takes will vary from program to program and from form to form, on average, each can be completed in approximately 90 minutes.
Team

Convene a self-assessment team that represents a number of different perspectives at your program, including:

- Administrative staff/program director
- Early care and education teachers
- Family support staff (if applicable)
- Parents whose children participate in the program

Process

First, each member of the team should fill out the self-assessment forms individually. Next, convene the team to share and compare assessments. Discuss rating results that differ among various team members, giving them an opportunity to describe why they rated the practice the way they did and—if appropriate—to provide an example. Once everyone has had a chance to speak, give all team members an opportunity to re-rate the practice. It is not necessary for the entire team to come to consensus on every practice, but it is important that all team members understand each other’s perspectives.

Once the team has completed re-rating practices in question, highlight practice areas that a majority of the team rated as poor—these are areas to work on. Ask the team to evaluate whether each poorly rated practice should be addressed (1) immediately, (2) over time, or (3) not at all. Again, allow time for discussion and reevaluating when team members disagree. When the majority of team members identify items that should be addressed immediately, brainstorm to develop plans for doing so. Make sure to specify:

- The resource and staff hour costs
- The amount of time needed
- Who should be responsible
- Key steps toward implementation
PROGRAM STRATEGY 1:
FACILITATE FRIENDSHIPS
AND MUTUAL SUPPORT

Having a young child can be a profoundly isolating experience—or it can open up opportunities to connect with others. On one hand, new parents suddenly face changes in their lives that limit their free time, may prevent them from participating in activities they previously enjoyed, and make it more difficult for them to spend time with friends. On the other hand, parenting can also spur the development of new friendships and connections. Because parenting can be overwhelming, new parents are often eager to make new friends—especially parents going through similar experiences and whose children can be their child’s playmates. Early childhood programs can be conduits for parents to connect with others. This study identified a number of ways in which quality programs help to strengthen and support the development of strong bonds among participating parents.

The early care and education programs in this study offer opportunities for parents to get to know each other, develop mutual support systems, and take leadership. The activities they offer for parents include sports teams, potlucks, classes, camping and field trips, advisory groups, board leadership, and volunteer opportunities. These programs send messages of welcome and support to all the important people in the child’s life—including fathers and extended family members.

For isolated and vulnerable families, programs serve as a convener and bridge builder—encouraging families in their efforts to make connections and develop social support network. Exemplary programs work proactively with isolated families, drawing them into the social networks and activities available at the center. They invite them to social activities and play “matchmaker,” helping to link them with other parents who share their interests, have children with similar characteristics, or who can be mentors. They offer—or partner with other programs that offer—family support services, mental health consultation, support groups, or specialized parenting classes to help families develop new social skills and explore and address issues that contribute to their isolation.

For isolated parents, even the somewhat informal social setting of a childcare program can be daunting. High-quality programs welcome all parents and children equally, which sends an important message of inclusiveness and equal social value. This message is reinforced by policies such as asking parents to invite all children in a class to family parties or social activities. Staff of such programs may intervene in conflicts between parents to help reduce animosities and cliques, to ensure that small disagreements do not fester, and to enhance the understanding of cultural differences.
### SELF-ASSESSMENT FORM—PROGRAM STRATEGY 1

#### Facilitate Friendships and Mutual Support

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
<th>Comments and Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A comfortable space is available for families to meet informally</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>The program helps parents set up formal and informal support mechanisms, such as phone trees, car pools, babysitting co-ops, and play groups</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>The program connects families with similar interests, children’s ages, and circumstances (such as those with twins, parents of infants, or those who speak the same language)</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>The program provides opportunities for families to socialize and foster a sense of community through:</td>
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<td>a) Periodic events like coffee breaks and breakfasts</td>
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<td>b) Celebrations, graduations, and holidays</td>
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<td>c) Field trips and activities outside the center</td>
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<td>d) Events celebrating cultural customs, potlucks, and other opportunities for parents to share and learn about each other’s home lives and cultural backgrounds</td>
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<td>e) Affordable family activities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>f) Special programs for dads, grandparents, teen moms, and other caregivers</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>The program encourages and provides support for parent-organized social/educational events and activities, such as:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>a) Making information available on activities for parents to attend together outside the program—for example, gathering at playgrounds, fun fairs, or libraries</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b) Providing supports such as space, childcare, food, or other resources</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**

“I really enjoy the parent–child classes.”
**Facilitate Friendships and Mutual Support**

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
<th>Comments and Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The program offers opportunities for parents to talk with each other about:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>a) Typical challenges of parenting</td>
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<td>b) Stages of child development</td>
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<td>c) Expectations and norms about child rearing</td>
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<td>d) Sibling rivalry</td>
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<td>e) Balancing work and family</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Program staff reach out to isolated families by:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>a) Calling, sending notes, or making home visits</td>
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<td>b) Inviting them to the program’s social activities</td>
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<td>c) Offering support with transportation, childcare, or other barriers to participation in social activities</td>
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<td>d) Making special efforts to connect them with other families</td>
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<td>e) Connecting them with resources, such as mental health consultation, that can help them explore difficulties with forming social connections</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>The program models positive social skills and community building by:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>a) Welcoming all families to the program</td>
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<td>b) Inviting all children and families to parties or social events</td>
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<td>c) Helping to resolve issues among families</td>
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<td>d) Promoting understanding of different cultures and backgrounds</td>
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**Notes:**

“They provide me with an opportunity to meet other parents.”

—RONNIE’S MOM
PROGRAM STRATEGY 2: STRENGTHEN PARENTING

Early care and education programs are a natural place for parents to turn for parenting information and support. Parents know that staff see their children every day and will thus have some context for issues they want to ask about. Their day-to-day interaction with teachers and other program staff makes the program a convenient place for them to turn when they have questions or concerns. Finally, parents know that teachers work every day to help children develop and learn—they view teachers as knowledgeable experts.

The exemplary programs in this study offer many ways for parents to get support on parenting issues when they need it—including classes and support groups, opportunities to meet with teachers, family support workers or other staff, and lending libraries. They provide purposeful home visits from staff who have the required education, support, and supervision. Most importantly, they make sure information is convenient, easy, and there when the parent needs it—in other words, “just-in-time support.” A parent whose child is teething or acting out can talk with his child’s teacher that day, as opposed to waiting six weeks until the issue is scheduled as the topic of a parenting education class or during a parent-teacher conference. Just-in-time support also enables program staff to use children’s day-to-day classroom experiences as an opportunity to raise and discuss parenting and child development issues with parents. Every pick-up or drop-off becomes a “teachable moment” during which a child’s behavior can be highlighted and discussed, and parenting information and tips imparted. Staff and teachers exchange

At Sheltering Arms, parenting education is assumed to be taking place all the time—not as a separate activity that happens only in a class. However, the program also offers regular opportunities for formal education and information sharing on parenting and other issues.

During monthly parent meetings, parents identify areas in which they would like more information. The program then invites outside service providers to speak to parents about these issues and hard-to-learn skills. Other parents are also called upon to share their expertise. For example, one parent conducted a workshop on home ownership; as a result, another parent went through the process to become pre-approved for a home loan.

Family support coordinators are trained to provide parenting classes based on specific curricula, which highlight the ages and stages of child development. The classes offer parents guidance for dealing with children’s different behavioral stages and teach fundamental attitudes and skills necessary for parenting young children. They are available in English and Spanish, as is other parenting information. A Vietnamese translator is provided as needed.
both written and verbal information to parents on a regular basis, using such tools as daily logs to record child behavior, eating habits, and experiences during the day. When parents come to pick up their children, teachers tell them what the children did that day, raise any issues or concerns, and discuss ways the parents can reinforce at home what their children are learning in school—and vice versa. This can be an important opportunity for a daily health check and conversation about the child’s physical health, including how behavior could be linked to sleep patterns, feeding and general nutrition, or environmental issues.

Most exemplary programs have classroom designs or technology that allow parents to observe their children easily—windows installed into the walls or doors, video camera recordings, or one-way glass windows through which parents can observe their children in the classroom. Using such techniques, they create a space where it is easy for staff members to guide parents through observing their children in the classroom. In the focus groups for this study, both parents and staff described the importance of this opportunity for parents to understand their children’s behavior and respond to it more effectively. Parents especially appreciated when staff helped them to “notice their children being good.” Such guided observations provide a particularly powerful opportunity for parents who are concerned or frustrated with their children’s behavior to see them through another individual’s eyes and appreciate their strengths and capacities.

Quality programs also educate parents about discipline. In general, they are not directive about how parents should discipline their children within their own home, but they are very clear that hitting, spanking, and yelling are not appropriate in the center. They educate parents about the reasons behind these policies and offer them information on alternative disciplinary methods. They also provide parents with written materials on discipline and cover the topic in parenting workshops.

Finally, these programs pay particular attention to parenting education and support for families with children with special needs. Staff understand the stress that the initial identification of special needs in a child causes for a parent—and they reach out to families during this time to support them and help them address not only what they need to know to parent effectively, but also to deal with issues of guilt, anger, denial, and other emotions. In addition, they connect parents of children with special needs to relevant parenting resources, such as classes, support groups, specialists, and information on their children’s special conditions.

“They helped me see that my kid’s biting was normal behavior, but it’s not okay. They gave me many ideas to deal with it.” — KIMBERLY’S MOM
### Strengthen Parenting

1. Information on parenting is available through:
   - Books and videos in a resource library
   - Parenting classes and discussion groups
   - Regular postings on bulletin boards in public spaces
   - Take-home materials distributed regularly to parents
   - Opportunities for parents with similar concerns to come together and share
   - Specific information on such issues as Shaken Baby Syndrome, SIDS, scalding, toilet training, routine preventative health care, nutrition, and sleep patterns

2. Parenting information is available in the language spoken by families

3. Staff are knowledgeable about:
   - The parenting practices of different cultures and ethnic groups
   - Parent-child relationships, attachment, and bonding
   - Promoting positive relationships between siblings

4. Opportunities are created for parents to explore:
   - Cultural/ethnic expectations and practices about parenting
   - How they were parented
   - New parenting practices
   - Their relationship with their child(ren)
Strengthen Parenting

5 Teachers share parenting tips and discuss parenting issues with parents during:

   a) Pick-up and drop-off times

   b) Parent-teacher conferences

   c) Occasions when it appears that a parent is frustrated or stressed and needs support

   d) Times when they notice a parent having difficulty relating to or communicating with their child(ren)

6 The program offers or connects families to resources to strengthen relationships between adults, e.g., healthy marriage, communication skills for couples, parents and grandparents, co-parenting, etc.

7 Parents are invited to visit and observe their children in the classroom

8 Staff reinforce parental authority by:

   a) Learning about the parent’s expectations and limits for their child

   b) Supporting parents’ directions and/or decisions about their child

   c) Talking with parents in a respectful manner about how best to handle the differences in expectations regarding children’s behavior

   d) Being careful not to contradict a parent in front of the child or other children

9 Staff reinforce positive parenting by:

   a) Noticing when parents are attuned to their children’s needs or communicate effectively with their children

   b) Telling parents something positive about what their child has done each day

"We’re learning here. If you miss a workshop, you miss a lot.”
— JESSICA’S M O M
### Strengthen Parenting

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<th>Comments and Examples</th>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Staff spend time with parents when they are observing their children to help them recognize:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) Their child’s unique temperament, personality, communication styles, and cues</td>
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<td>b) Their children’s growth and development patterns</td>
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<td></td>
<td>c) Positive social skills and developmentally appropriate emotional behavior in their children</td>
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<td></td>
<td>d) Their child’s independence and abilities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>e) Activities they can use at home</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Information is provided on regular developmental challenges, such as bed wetting, potty training, appropriate discipline, eating, sleeping, and aggression</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Family activities provide opportunities to strengthen bonds between parents and their children—for example, listening to each other, playing together, and cooperative games, “feeling charades”</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Physical discipline (spanking or hitting) is not allowed in the center by staff or parents</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>When staff talk with parents about discipline, they:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) Explain why physical discipline is not allowed in the center</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b) Explain why the center uses the forms of discipline it does</td>
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<td>c) Provide information on age-appropriate discipline and reasonable expectations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>d) Offer ideas for alternate forms of discipline and how to recognize and reinforce desired/appropriate behavior</td>
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<td></td>
<td>e) Encourage parents to discuss discipline challenges they may have at home</td>
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</table>
Strengthen Parenting

15 When staff are concerned about parenting techniques or behavior, they:

a) Proactively and respectfully reach out to parents and share their concerns about the children or about the parents’ parenting practices

b) Acknowledge young children’s frustrating behavior and recognize parents’ efforts

c) Connect parents to resources and supports that may help to address the parenting issues

d) Connect parents to other parents who can share/model positive parenting approaches

16 For parents with children with special needs, staff:

a) Connect parents with parenting materials and websites, support groups and play groups, and community resources specific to their children’s special needs

b) Check regularly with parents about parenting issues

c) Are sensitive to parents’ frustration, protectiveness, guilt, loss, and other related feelings, and acknowledge challenges

d) Support parents in developing appropriate developmental expectations for their special needs children

e) Check in with parents about the impact their children's special needs are having on family dynamics and parental stress

f) Are especially supportive at the time that special needs are initially identified

g) Provide speakers/resources for parents on topics of interest/concern

h) Ensure that parent-child activities are appropriate for families with children with special needs

Notes:
PROGRAM STRATEGY 3: 
RESPOND TO FAMILY CRISIS

In addition to their day-to-day contact between teachers and parents, the exemplary programs in this study offer extra support to families when they face illnesses, job loss, substance abuse, financial problems, and other issues. Staff are available to speak to family members that need help and, in some of the smaller programs, directors maintain an open-door policy so that anyone can come to them for help. Larger, more complex programs employ family support workers to respond to families in need. At one program, parents and staff alike know they can turn to “Dr. Mike,” the mental health consultant, with any problem. At all programs, parents know that if they have a problem, they can go to someone on staff for timely, sympathetic, and confidential support.

Staff at these exemplary programs are knowledgeable about community resources and available to help families get the services they need. They maintain strong collaborative relationships with other service providers within the community, so that they can make referrals to agencies they themselves know and trust. When they refer parents to services, they follow up with the parents to see whether or not they accessed the services suggested and, if not, to continue to help them resolve their problems. In addition to making referrals, they create internal resources to help families resolve crises. One program, for example, uses money generated from selling classroom pictures to maintain an emergency fund for parents. Another has a foundation-supported fund to which families can apply for emergency grants. Still others mobilize families to support each other in the event of a crisis, such as a death in the family, a fire, or another disaster.

“When there was a problem in my house and I separated from my husband, my daughter was crying all the time. They really helped me and they helped her. She doesn’t cry anymore.”

— CARMEN’S MOM
Palm Beach Head Start is one of 18 Head Start programs to participate in Free to Grow, a national alcohol, tobacco, and drug prevention initiative. Through Free to Grow, Head Start case managers (called “family service specialists”) identify circumstances that increase families’ risk of substance abuse, identify those families at risk, assess their needs, and determine appropriate interventions. The family service specialists receive special training to help them effectively serve families with the highest risk and develop and use skills in community building as an important component of prevention. Through the program, they learn how to coordinate interventions with a variety of other agencies to make sure that families receive the services they need; facilitate outreach to families along with family advocates; provide resources and referrals; and establish links with other service agencies for intensive case-management, substance abuse treatment, and other needed services and follow up.

Staff work together to identify when a family is in crisis and to make sure that the family does not fall through the cracks. They convene regular meetings in which they share information and review class lists to make sure there are no red flags that indicate a particular child or family might be in trouble. They monitor unexplained absences, failures to make payments, or signs of parental or child stress, and reach out to families about which they are concerned.

No staff member is alone when working with a family in a crisis. At some programs, staff team up to meet with parents in order to resolve problems or draft plans to address crises. At all high-quality programs, staff know how to respond effectively—and can turn to their supervisors and colleagues for information, ideas, and support. They have access to up-to-date information about community services and organizations to which they can refer families. And they are recognized and acknowledged for efforts to “be there” for families that go above and beyond their job descriptions.

Providing support in times of crisis takes an emotional toll on staff—model programs recognize that staff cannot create a supportive emotional climate for parents if they are not supported in dealing with their own issues. They encourage staff to take personal time if needed to care for themselves and give staff the same access as parents to resources for dealing with emotional problems—including mental health consultation, stress reduction opportunities (such as spa packages), and support groups.
### Respond to Family Crises

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<th>Excellent</th>
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<th>Poor</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
<th>Comments and Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Staff develop personal relationships with parents by taking time to get to know them individually—listening and learning about their interests, families, current activities, and hopes and expectations for their children</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>The message that parents can turn to staff in the event of a crisis is conveyed:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>a) Informally in the day-to-day interactions that staff have with parents—by listening, showing concern, and sharing their own personal challenges or desires</td>
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<td>b) Formally through outreach materials sent out when families enroll in the program</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>The program provides parents with information on the role of all staff members and which staff members can help them with particular issues</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Staff respond to family crises immediately by:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>a) Ensuring that a staff person is available at all times to help families needing crisis support</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b) Making space available for staff to meet with parents privately</td>
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<td>c) Ensuring that parents can talk with staff members with whom they are the most comfortable</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>The program offers a small emergency fund to assist families in crisis</td>
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**Notes:**
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<th>Not Applicable</th>
<th>Comments and Examples</th>
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<tr>
<td>6 The program maintains resource and referral links to such crisis services as:</td>
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<td>a) Food pantries</td>
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<td>b) Domestic violence services</td>
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<td>c) Shelters</td>
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<td>d) Respite care for children</td>
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<td>e) Alcohol and substance abuse services</td>
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<td>f) Mental health services</td>
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<td>g) Economic supports</td>
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<td>h) Legal assistance</td>
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<td>7 Staff know how to respond appropriately to family crises. Staff receive training on:</td>
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<td>a) Maintaining confidentiality</td>
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<td>b) Resolving conflicts</td>
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<td>c) Talking to families about difficult issues</td>
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<td>d) Recognizing such issues as domestic violence, depression, developmental delays, mental illness, chronic health problems, substance abuse, and other signs of imminent crisis</td>
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<td>e) Helping families make immediate and long-term plans</td>
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<td>f) Understanding the impact of family crises and/or loss on all family members—especially children—and how to respond appropriately</td>
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<td>g) Talking to parents about helping children in times of crisis</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respond to Family Crises</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8 If appropriate, staff mobilize other parents in the program to help out families in crisis</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 If parents bring up issues staff feel are beyond their ability, staff can refer them to a:</td>
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<tr>
<td>a) Supervisor</td>
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<td>b) Specialist with knowledge in the area</td>
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<tr>
<td>c) Cross-disciplinary staff team</td>
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<tr>
<td>d) Community resource</td>
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<td>10 Staff proactively respond to signs of parent or family distress by:</td>
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<tr>
<td>a) Expressing their concern and offering help</td>
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<tr>
<td>b) Offering to connect families to needed resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>c) Making themselves available to parents if they need to talk</td>
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<tr>
<td>d) Sharing information about a parent help-line or warm-line</td>
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<tr>
<td>e) Being sensitive and responsive to the impact of family stress on children</td>
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<td>11 Staff receive support when working with families under stress through:</td>
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<tr>
<td>a) Acknowledgement of their efforts</td>
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<tr>
<td>b) Supported opportunities to process their own emotional reactions</td>
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<td>c) Access to a mental health consultant</td>
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<tr>
<td>d) Time off if needed</td>
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Notes:
PROGRAM STRATEGY 4: LINK FAMILIES TO SERVICES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Exemplary early childhood programs recognize that a child’s well-being is grounded in the well-being of his or her family. Working with families to help them meet their health, social, psychological, economic, and career goals is an important part of the work they do. Because early care and education programs are places parents visit regularly, staff at these programs are in a good position to help families identify and access services.

The programs in this study all connected parents with such family-strengthening services as job training, educational opportunities, health care, and other essential services. A number of programs are embedded in a larger program—a settlement house, an economic opportunity program, a family support center, or a “one-stop shop center” that houses multiple services. Others bring in providers on an occasional basis to deliver services such as immunizations, screenings, or education on site. Parents benefit from this access, which connects them to services they might not otherwise know about or use. Connecting parents with services like mental health counseling also helps overcome the stigma that might otherwise keep them from accessing the service.

Regardless of how they structure these service links, programs make a deliberate effort to identify families’ goals and needs and to connect them to the services and supports that will help them meet those goals and needs. Many use a formal intake and assessment process with families when they enroll their children in the center, through which staff help families develop plans for reaching their goals. Staff then works with parents throughout the year to help them implement their plans. Smaller programs do this more informally, allowing family plans and service referrals to develop out of the day-to-day conversations staff have with parents.
### Link Families to Services and Opportunities

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<th>Excellent</th>
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<th>Poor</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
<th>Comments and Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td>The program develops family plans with parents that:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) Identify their interests, skills, needs, and goals for themselves and their children</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b) Identify services and opportunities within the program that may help them achieve their goals and use their skills and talents</td>
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<td>c) Identify other community resources and opportunities that may help them achieve their goals, continue their learning, and/or provide other avenues for involvement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>d) Are regularly revised and updated in conjunction with families</td>
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<td></td>
<td>e) Other:</td>
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<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td>Staff and parents have access to up-to-date information about services that are available in the community that includes hours of business, fees, location, eligibility, language capacity, etc.</td>
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<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td>When staff make referrals to outside services, they:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>a) Brainstorm with families about what resources would be helpful</td>
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<td>b) Help parents address barriers to utilizing services, such as lack of transportation or childcare, language difficulties, or fees</td>
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<td>c) Help them fill out paperwork that might help them access these services, for example, insurance and eligibility forms</td>
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<td></td>
<td>d) Follow up with families to see if they used the referral and ensure that they were satisfied with the services they received</td>
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<td></td>
<td>e) Try to make a personal connection between families and service providers</td>
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**Notes:**
“It’s a lifelong relationship with the parents and the kids. It’s been several years, but I still call Jane for resources.”

— M A R I A’ S M O M

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<tr>
<th>Link Families to Services and Opportunities</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
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<th>Poor</th>
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<th>Comments and Examples</th>
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<tr>
<td>4 The program actively builds collaborative links with other service providers in order to:</td>
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<td>a) Bring other services on site when possible</td>
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<td>b) Ease the referral process by ensuring the workers in different programs work together</td>
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<td>c) Share information with parents about resources</td>
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<td>d) Identify and fill gaps</td>
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<td>5 The program encourages parents to share information about community resources for families—such as toy exchanges, resale shops, play lots, family activities, and more formal services</td>
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<td>6 The program connects parents to opportunities that promote:</td>
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<td>a) Their continued growth and development</td>
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<td>b) Family enrichment, i.e., reading hours at the library, parent-child book groups, and cultural heritage events</td>
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<td>c) Healthy adult relationships and marriage</td>
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<td>d) Fathers’ involvement with their children</td>
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<td>e) Enrichment activities for children</td>
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<td>7 The program provides information and guidance on:</td>
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<td>a) Transition to school for children</td>
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<td>b) Parents’ and children’s educational rights and responsibilities</td>
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<td>c) The importance of parents staying involved with their children’s education and school</td>
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Notes:
PROGRAM STRATEGY 5:
FACILITATE CHILDREN’S SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Promoting children’s social and emotional development has long been considered central to early care and education programs. Most programs in this study used “Second Step,” “I Can Problem Solve,” or another curriculum focused on helping children to articulate their feelings and get along with others. What is less obvious is how the social and emotional development work done with children in the classroom affects relationships between parents and their children.

In focus groups for this study, parents were asked, “How has your child’s participation in this program affected you and the way you parent?” One of the most common first responses was that the child’s ability to articulate his/her feelings—a skill commonly taught through social and emotional development curricula—had changed how the parent viewed the child. Parents began to see their children as independent people with feelings, needs, and rights.

“The teachers model respect that is shared from teacher to child to parents. It makes us better parents.”
— JENNIFER’S MOM

At the Haitian Center Early Care and Education program in Dorchester, Massachusetts, emotional competence is a core value. “There are lots of examples of teenagers who are bright doing violent things. Researchers have shown that if a child is not nurtured emotionally, he doesn’t learn to deal with his own feelings,” says the center’s director, Nicole St. Victor. “We work with children to develop emotional skills, and this becomes the foundation for cognitive learning. Teaching ABCs is easy after that.”

The Haitian Center Early Care and Education program has developed its own multilingual and multicultural curriculum called “Creole Tet Ansnm,” which means “Connections.” Activities centered around teaching emotional competence are built into every lesson plan, regardless of the subject matter. Teachers keep journals of what works and what doesn’t, brainstorm with each other about how to teach each lesson from an emotional base, and use a tool they developed to evaluate the social and emotional competence of classrooms.

Parents invariably notice changes in their children’s behavior at home. “A mother came to me and said, ‘What do you do with the children here?’” recounts St. Victor with a smile. “She went on: ‘I smacked my daughter last night and she said to me, ‘When you are mad, Mommy, this is not what you do. You use your words. You don’t smack people.’” I explained, ‘That’s what we do here. We are teaching children to resolve problems peacefully. Your child is talking back to you, but that is exactly what we want. It means your child is carrying what we teach her in school into her life.’”

When children respect themselves, they will understand how to respect other people. When they feel powerful, they will not need to struggle for power. At the Haitian Center Early Care and Education program, children learn to behave well out of a feeling of responsibility and accountability to themselves and to the group. Staff at the center believe that this has important and far-reaching social implications. By helping four- and five-year-olds understand their feelings and develop skills for relating to themselves and to others, teachers and parents are consciously planting the seeds for a safer, more peaceful, and more vibrant democracy.
Many early care and education programs teach specific social and emotional skills in the classroom—such as sharing, cooperation, and taking turns—that make parenting easier and reduce the stress in families’ homes. This occurs whether or not there is a parenting education component in the social and emotional development curriculum. Some programs also help parents develop new disciplinary skills by carrying out children’s social and emotional development work in conjunction with parenting education curricula, such as “Magic 1, 2, 3.” Parents in this study seemed to value and use the new techniques they learned. The techniques helped parents expand their range of responses to their children’s challenging behavior.

For parents with particularly challenging children, the social and emotional work program staff do with children provides welcome added support. Parents can discuss their children’s challenging behavior with staff, learn from the strategies being used in the classroom, and place their children’s behavior in the larger framework of children’s social and emotional development. At the exemplary programs in this study, staff offer individualized support—directly or by referral—to help parents deal more effectively and lovingly with their children’s challenging behavior. They convey to parents that their children are lovable and loved and help parents “catch their children being good.”

In addition to using formal social and emotional development curricula, many programs use arts activities to encourage children’s social and emotional expression. These activities serve as a bridge to draw parents in and engage them in thinking about their children’s social and emotional development. One program in this study employs a local mental health provider to provide art therapy classes for parents and children together. Through art, children can literally illustrate difficulties they are having in their lives, and their creations often serve as an invitation for staff to discuss concerns with parents. Another hosts monthly children’s performance events that foster parents’ participation in the program and engage them in parent-child activities.

Because families often differ significantly in their cultural expectations of children’s social and emotional development, programs make sure that all social and emotional development activities are compatible with families’ culture. Concepts such as a child’s need to separate from the parent or the importance of independent thinking have significant cultural components. Programs create opportunities to discuss children’s social and emotional development with parents so that home and center efforts are aligned and mutually reinforcing. This also encourages both program staff and parents to examine their assumptions and expectations and to reconcile them, providing important opportunities for growth on both sides.
Facilitate Children's Social and Emotional Development

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<td>1</td>
<td>The program uses a social and emotional development curricula for children that:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>a) Is culturally sensitive to the families it serves</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b) Encourages children to express their feelings</td>
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<td>c) Encourages sharing, taking turns, and cooperative play</td>
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<td>Staff receive training on:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>a) Fostering children's social and emotional development</td>
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<td>b) Recognizing developmental delays</td>
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<td>c) Recognizing behavioral / emotional problems</td>
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<td>d) Impact of loss or trauma on behavior</td>
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<td>e) Sensory awareness and integration</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>The program introduces parents to social and emotional development by:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>a) Informing parents of the importance of supporting children's healthy social and emotional development—and its connection to success in school</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b) Helping parents understand age-appropriate social and emotional skills and behaviors</td>
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<td>c) Providing opportunities to discuss social and emotional issues with parents within a cultural context</td>
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<td></td>
<td>d) Encouraging parents to be aware of their children's social and emotional development</td>
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<td></td>
<td>e) Offering parents ideas on how to foster a child's social and emotional learning at home</td>
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<td></td>
<td>f) Teaching about children's social and emotional development in parenting classes and informal discussions</td>
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“The children say, ‘Use your words.’ That’s what they hear at school, and they sure have learned how to use them!”
— TIFFANY’S MOM

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<tr>
<th>Facilitate Children’s Social and Emotional Development</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
<th>Comments and Examples</th>
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<tr>
<td>4 Parents have opportunities to observe their children interacting with other children and teachers in the program</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Staff make sure that parents understand how their child(ren)’s positive relationships with teachers positively impact their own relationship with their child(ren)</td>
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<td>6 Staff coach parents about how to interact effectively with their children (listening; appreciating ideas, efforts, and feelings; creating a non-threatening environment)</td>
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<td>7 Staff encourage children to express their feelings through words, artwork, and expressive play</td>
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<td>8 Staff model behavior toward children that encourages social and emotional expressiveness</td>
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<td>9 Staff understand and respect the relationships and attachments that children form in the classroom by:</td>
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<td>a) Providing children the opportunity to say goodbye to classmates or teachers who are leaving the program</td>
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<td>b) Helping children process class and / or staffing changes</td>
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<td>c) Communicating any staff or classmate changes to parents</td>
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<td>d) Intentionally helping new children integrate into the classroom</td>
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<td>10 If staff are concerned about a child’s social and emotional development, they:</td>
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<tr>
<td>a) Discuss concerns with the child’s parent(s)</td>
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<td>b) Connect the family to resources that can support the child’s social and emotional development (such as play therapy, mental health services, or parenting classes)</td>
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<td>c) Help the parent(s) develop strategies for addressing the issue at home</td>
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Facilitate Children's Social and Emotional Development

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>11 Staff have access to a mental health consultant to help them:</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
<th>Comments and Examples</th>
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<tr>
<td>a) develop positive approaches to individual children</td>
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<td>b) determine what additional resources and or training they may need</td>
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<td>c) talk with parents about their child(ren)'s development, needs, or challenges</td>
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Notes:
PROGRAM STRATEGY 6:
OBSERVE AND RESPOND TO EARLY WARNING SIGNS OF CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT

Day-to-day interactions between staff, children, and parents provide an important opportunity for program staff to identify concerns early and intervene immediately. Rather than focusing simply on mandated reporting, the exemplary programs in this study all train and support staff to observe children carefully and respond at the first sign of any difficulty. They use such indicators as frequent absences, missing payments, late pick-ups, or signs of parental stress as opportunities to proactively reach out to families and connect them with family support or other services. Most perform daily health checks on children that not only capture any signs of physical abuse but also help to identify more subtle signs of neglect. Staff are also attuned to signs of neglect such as failure to follow up on medical advice; lack of appropriate nutrition and nurturing; missing preventive health visits and services (screenings and immunizations); failure to seek treatment for untreated cavities, oral infections, and oral pain; and misuse of over-the-counter or prescription medications. When issues are identified, their response is immediate and helpful—with staff expressing concern for families and offering to help them solve any problems they may be experiencing.

When staff see signs of possible neglect, they intervene proactively with parents, explaining the legal definitions of child abuse and neglect, helping to connect them to resources, explaining the impact that the issue could have on their children’s development, and stressing that the issue needs to be addressed. They follow up regularly with these parents to send the message that the issue is important and needs to be addressed—and continue to be available to help and support them as they resolve the problem. They also conduct home visits as a way to reach families who might be at risk of neglecting their children.

When staff have serious concerns, they follow protocols for reporting child abuse or neglect to provide continuity and support for families who are the subject of reports. Parents at several of the programs in this study told personal stories of how the programs had helped them alter situations that were dangerous for their children. That these parents continue to be involved with the programs demonstrates the effectiveness of this approach. Maintaining strong relationships through reporting of child abuse and neglect is not always easy. Yet teachers and staff at these programs remain supportive even when met with initial hostility. Their willingness to keep reaching out—even to parents who are hostile or angry—is an important reason why parents view them as a support and resource, rather than a policing agent.

“They connected us to a behavioral therapist we have now been seeing for five years.”

— STEPHEN’S MOM
For more than 50 years, the Jane Boyd Community Center in Cedar Rapids, Iowa has offered a high-quality preschool experience for children of low-income parents. A basic philosophy guiding the preschool is the importance of parents in the educational process. To that end, teachers do much more than teach. They always visit the child’s home before s/he is enrolled and they follow up with additional visits if problems arise with the child or family. In addition, the Center nurtures connections between parents, teachers, and children by hosting celebrations throughout the school year. And, every month, mothers, fathers, and children meet for a “first book” experience where supper is provided, parents are helped to select and read books to their children, and families work together on craft projects. Says Dorothy Peterson, preschool director “Upwards of 60 people attend these meetings, with fathers participating as actively as mothers ... Most families linger over supper and spend time getting to know one another, offering advice, and just sharing experiences.”

What makes the Jane Boyd Center unique is its participation in the nationally known model, Community Partnerships for Protecting Children. Initiated in four pilot sites across the U.S. in 1997, including Cedar Rapids, more than 40 states are implementing Community Partnerships as a way to reduce child abuse and neglect. Community Partnerships engage child welfare agencies in changing their practice; develop networks of neighborhood services; and provide a hub like the Jane Boyd Center that offers a friendly open door for families and depends on an inclusive partnership of resident, service providers, and child welfare agencies to govern its work.

Like other Community Partnership sites, child protective services (CPS) workers are housed at Jane Boyd, offering consultation to preschool staff if concerns related to child maltreatment are identified. Peterson notes “Having CPS here has helped us to better understand what to look for if we are concerned about a child. CPS staff also know about our program and often refer families to us. We have a strong alliance with them.”

If a family is struggling with problems that pose risk to their children, center staff readily offer a planning process integral to the Community Partnership approach to help alleviate such problems. This “family team meeting” brings the family, its support system, and various agency representatives together to work out a plan that will help the family progress and keep their children safe. Many families involved with the preschool have benefited from participating in family team meetings. “Our parents make us what we are,” says Peterson. “They know we are their allies and that they and their children are accepted and cared for here ... they are our backbone.”
### Observe and Respond to Early Warning Signs of Child Abuse or Neglect

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<td>1</td>
<td>When parents enter the program they are informed of:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>a) Staff’s status as mandatory reporters</td>
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<td>b) What constitutes abuse and neglect within the state</td>
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<td>c) The program’s protocols regarding child abuse and neglect</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>All staff are trained to recognize early signs of child abuse and neglect</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Staff monitor the following signs that a family may be under stress, including:</td>
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<td>a) Physical signs (such as bruises), acting out, distress, challenging behavior, fearful behavior, inappropriate language/behavior (such as sexual acting out), or other child symptoms</td>
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<td>b) Unusual parental behavior at pick-up or drop-off times</td>
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<td>c) Repeated unexplained absences</td>
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<td>d) Repeated late pick-ups</td>
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<td>e) Missed payments</td>
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<td>f) Divorce, job loss, or other family crises</td>
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<td>g) Parents’ acknowledgement of stress or problems</td>
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Notes:
### Self-Assessment Form—Program Strategy 6 (continued)

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<th>Observe and Respond to Early Warning Signs of Child Abuse or Neglect</th>
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<td>4 When a family is experiencing extreme difficulties but there is no sign of imminent harm to the child or other family members:</td>
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<td>a) Staff work with the family to discuss concerns and appropriate actions</td>
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<td>b) At least one staff member reaches out to the family to address the issues causing concern</td>
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<td>c) Staff attempt to connect the family to resources that can help address the issue, including such intensive services as respite care, shelters, or emergency crisis services</td>
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<td>d) Staff continue to support the family and monitor the situation daily until the situation is resolved</td>
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<td>5 All staff are trained on the impact of loss and trauma on children and how to respond appropriately</td>
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<td>6 All staff are trained to follow the program’s protocols for reporting child abuse and neglect</td>
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<td>7 Staff are oriented to the state’s child welfare reporting guidelines and understand how cases are generally handled once a report is made</td>
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Notes:
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<th>Poor</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
<th>Comments and Examples</th>
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<td><strong>8.</strong> When staff must file a child welfare report, they:</td>
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<tr>
<td>a) Coordinate with investigative authorities to ensure that actions and interactions with the family support and do not hinder the investigation</td>
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<td>b) Strive to be calm, caring and supportive during the reporting process</td>
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<td>c) Provide fair and accurate information on the concerns that led to the child welfare report, as well as family strengths</td>
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<td>d) To the best of their ability, answer questions that the family may have regarding the reporting process and how the child protective services system typically responds</td>
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<td>e) Explain their status as mandated reporters and the goal of keeping children safe</td>
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<td>f) Offer to support families by answering questions, connecting them to resources they may need, and providing a listening ear and friendly advice</td>
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<td><strong>9.</strong> Program staff help families find suitable respite care and/or emergency crisis services</td>
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<td><strong>10.</strong> If a child is placed in custody, staff:</td>
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<td>a) Maintain contact with the parent</td>
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<td>b) Advocate for the family with the child protective services system, when possible</td>
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<td>c) Help the parent(s) connect with resources to help reunite them with their child</td>
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<td><strong>11.</strong> The program helps families navigate the child welfare system by:</td>
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<tr>
<td>a) Helping them get the help they need</td>
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<td>b) Helping maintain stability for children</td>
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<td>c) Collaborating with child welfare caseworkers</td>
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PROGRAM STRATEGY 7: VALUE AND SUPPORT PARENTS

Positive relationships with parents are the foundation of program efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect. Quality early childhood programs treat parents respectfully and partner with them on their children's education. Staff make parents feel welcome by:

- Reaching out individually to each and every parent
- Connecting parents who need supports with others who can provide help
- Involving parents in decisions about their children and about the program
- Setting aside space and time for parents in the program

In focus groups, parents repeatedly described how important it was that when they entered the program, everyone they met went out of their way to welcome them and make them feel like an important part of the community. Again and again, parents described staff as “family” and the program as “home.” Many small gestures added together help to create a nurturing environment where parents feel they can come to staff with issues or problems. When parents know and trust staff, they are more likely to reveal problems, such as feelings of frustration or domestic violence, and ask for assistance.

Quality programs create ways to help parents feel at home in their space—sending the message that it is a place not just for children, but for the entire family. They accomplish this through regular parent-specific activities, dedicated parent spaces, volunteer opportunities, or just creating an environment where parents feel comfortable and welcome, where they want to linger during pick-up and drop-off times. They create clear opportunities for parents to contribute to the program, to their child’s learning, to other parents, and to the community. Programs have found that when parents’ efforts are noticed, valued, recognized, and rewarded, they receive the message that they are important to the program. Programs reach out proactively to parents who seem most in need of encouragement and support, offering them opportunities to volunteer and to participate in children’s activities.
To strengthen the relationships between parents and staff—which are essential to programs’ ability to connect with parents—exemplary programs support, train, and supervise staff as they learn to implement this strategy effectively. They involve supervisors in many day-to-day activities and make sure they are accessible to staff and parents. Good programs encourage teachers to take initiative in their relationships with families and address concerns when they arise, knowing that they have support from supervisors and their colleagues within the program. They recruit male staff members to send the clear message that men are an important and valued part of children’s lives and a significant source of loving care. They also recruit staff who are bilingual and who reflect families’ cultural and ethnic backgrounds, to create an environment where families’ cultural and linguistic identities are honored.

The commitment of programs to care about and support parents serves as an important model to parents as they go about raising their own children, especially for parents who themselves may not have been adequately nurtured when they were children. The experience of being cared for in a relationship is an important factor in helping parents who may have been abused as children to break the cycle of abuse and develop new patterns with their own children. Often, these parents are struggling with a host of issues associated with abuse and neglect, including alcohol or substance abuse, domestic violence, or depression. While early childhood program staff cannot be expected to provide individual or family psychotherapy, they can connect families to the services they need—and offer caring supportive relationships that promote parental resiliency.

“The teachers make one-on-one connections between the parents. They’ll say to you, ‘This parent is going through the same thing you are.’ It’s so important being able to talk to other parents who are going through the same things.”

— JASON’S MOM
“It’s like a big family,

Value and Support Parents

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<th>Excellent</th>
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<th>Poor</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
<th>Comments and Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Parents are active in making decisions about their children’s education</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Staff recognize and affirm the central role of parents in their child’s life</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Staff get to know parents individually and regularly inquire about how they are doing</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Staff get to know all family members by name</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Parents have opportunities to volunteer and contribute to the program</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Parents have opportunities to share skills, talents, and cultural traditions with children and other parents</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Staff recognize and value parent contributions</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Staff are accepting and supportive of diverse family constellations, i.e. single parents, grandparents, foster parents, gay/lesbian couples, etc.</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Parents have regular opportunities to engage in activities in the center’s physical space</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Parents have opportunities to participate in:</td>
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<td>a) Parent-only social activities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b) Support groups</td>
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<td></td>
<td>c) Activities designed to relieve stress, such as spa days, date nights (parents’ night out), or exercise classes</td>
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<td>d) Activities that promote healthy adult relationships, marriage, co-parenting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>e) Other:</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>The program offers specific activities for fathers, mothers, and other family members</td>
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Value and Support Parents | Excellent | Fair | Poor | Not Applicable | Comments and Examples
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12 The program offers specific activities that get fathers involved | | | | | 
13 Parents have opportunities to discuss how they were parented and how it affects the way they parent | | | | | 
14 Parents are connected to resources that help them explore different ways of parenting, including:
   a) Parent education groups | | | | | 
   b) Counseling | | | | | 
   c) Support groups | | | | | 
   d) Mentors/coaches | | | | | 
   e) Sisterhoods/brotherhoods | | | | | 
   f) Faith-based activities | | | | | 
   g) Other | | | | | 
15 Staff provide emotional support and encouragement to parents | | | | | 
16 Staff do not blame parents for children's challenging behaviors | | | | | 
17 Staff recognize parents' growth and efforts | | | | | 
18 The program provides parents opportunities for:
   a) Personal growth—such as attending conferences or special events and collecting and sharing information of interest to other parents | | | | | 
   b) Leadership development | | | | | 
   c) Input into programmatic decisions | | | | | 
   d) Input into staff hiring and training | | | | | 
Notes:
The most important factor in implementing the Strengthening Families approach in early care and education programs is to send the clear and consistent message that the program cares about whole families, not just children. The supportive relationships their staff form with parents stem from a common interest in the children's well-being, are nurtured by a genuine interest and concern for all family members, and are strengthened by their responsiveness and ability to offer parents help when they need it. They respect parents and include them in the life—and leadership—of the center.

To the extent that programs become communities, they build value systems and norms. The norms in exemplary childcare centers include respecting every person and making sure that children have what they need. When problems occur, they are resolved through discussion and negotiation, with patience and respect. Children (and in some cases their parents) learn how to interact with each other and others in this way, building and demonstrating social, emotional, and communications skills.

This section describes key elements of exemplary programs that contribute to strengthening families and preventing abuse and neglect. In addition to employing the strategies described in the self assessment in the previous section, exemplary early childhood programs:

- Build a respectful staff culture
- Support parents as leaders
- Customize their physical space
- Engage men and
- Form relationships with child welfare personnel

For each program element described in this section, practice lessons are drawn directly from surveys; observation; and discussion with staff, partners, and parents in the exemplary programs studied. Complete summaries of each program can be found at www.cssp.org. Following descriptions of how exemplary programs are tips to help programs create their own climate of support.

It is possible to implement the above program elements in all early childhood programs. This study also found several programming components in exemplary programs that may not be feasible for all programs:

- Family support services
- Mental health consultation
- Support for families with children with special needs

While these are key components of quality early childhood programming, they may be challenging for programs to support without additional funding. Some of the programs in this study have access to these additional services because they are part of a system such as Head Start; others are part of active community collaborations or are embedded in larger agencies that offer multiple programs; still others have sought and found funding specifically to help them better serve high-risk families. Even some of the lowest-budget programs in the study are able to offer many of these services through donations of volunteer time and creative ways of staffing and structuring.
BUILD A RESPECTFUL STAFF CULTURE

A supportive and flexible atmosphere can have a profound effect on strengthening bonds between parents and children and providing social support for families. Creating a culture that is inclusive, respectful, non-violent, supportive, and empowering is the foundation for other programmatic efforts. At exemplary programs, staff leaders create this culture through a series of intentional decisions—from hiring choices to program policies—and are then able to implement other strategies that build protective factors for children and families. Staff members view the center as their own community and work hard to develop, with families, community standards and norms of inclusiveness, safety, and non-violence. They model the warmth and commitment to cultural competence and cross-cultural understanding that they want to pervade the atmosphere. Staff leaders develop personal relationships with families, teachers, and other staff members, and they model flexibility and commitment—going the extra mile for families who need it.

The atmosphere for staff at the Addison County Parent/Child Center is a model of support and flexibility—which is one reason why many stay employed here for long periods of time or return after a period of additional schooling or other work. The center follows a co-director model that ensures teamwork from the top and the presence of a director on site almost all of the time. While staff are hired for their particular expertise, such as social work or childcare, they work cooperatively and rotate such tasks as food preparation, transportation, and childcare—a system that enables all staff members to form relationships with parents. One third of the staff are male, providing children with examples of males in various nurturing roles and reinforcing their understanding that each person’s role is important to the overall functioning of the family.
Create Flexible Staff Roles

At the heart of programs’ work to strengthen families are relationships—and the most important one is between parents and staff members. One of the keys to the effectiveness of the Strengthening Families approach is parents’ ability to turn to staff members they know and trust with questions, problems, or frustrations. Often that staff member is the child’s teacher, but sometimes it is another teacher, the center’s director, the bus driver, the cook, the receptionist, or the janitor. At exemplary programs, parents are encouraged to develop relationships with multiple staff members. Lines of power and authority are flexible enough that every staff member feels she has the authority to be there for parents as needed.

Tips for Programs

• Provide cross training to ensure that all staff members—from educators to family support workers—are comfortable and capable of responding to family members in crisis who come to them for support.

• Use substitute teachers, teacher’s aides, and staff teams to ensure that staff members respond to families in a timely manner.

• Encourage staff to try different roles within the program. This way parents can see staff in a variety of different contexts. This is especially important in building parent relationships with staff members who provide services that are more likely to be viewed as stigmatizing—such as mental health consultation.

With more than 270 staff members at Region 19 ESC Head Start in El Paso, Texas, the challenge of communicating with and managing staff might seem overwhelming. But in El Paso, the program has risen to the challenge with vision and surprising innovation. The vision is one of teamwork and personal responsibility: The leadership of Region 19 believes that all staff members are vital to achieving the goal of an excellent program and that everyone is responsible for what happens at their site. Staff job descriptions and performance appraisals reflect this responsibility. It took two years for the program to transition from a more traditional management structure to the team approach and during this time, all staff were cross-trained in the content areas so that they would be fully aware of different staff roles and comfortable working across disciplines. For example, top administrators rode the bus with bus drivers, cooked in the kitchen with cafeteria staff, worked alongside the maintenance crew and interacted with teachers and specialists. Now, team members watch carefully what is happening in all aspects of the center and they are empowered to pitch in to resolve any difficulties they see. Teams are maintained and strengthened by training sessions and staff development opportunities—both formal and informal. As one staff member said, “Hearing it over and over again in different ways is the only way to do it.”
Team-up to Support Information Flow

Because multiple staff members can and will interact with a single family, staff at exemplary programs work together and share information. In this model, the role of early childhood teachers is expanded. Teachers do not operate autonomously and in isolation, interacting with only the children in their classes, but rather, they are part of a team. When they run into problems, they call on their colleagues to brainstorm solutions. When they have concerns about a child or a family, they talk to those on staff who know the family best, drawing on the expertise of mental health consultants, experts on special needs issues, family support workers, and other specialists attached to the center.

Tips for Programs

• Create cross-disciplinary teams (including early childhood educators, family support staff, and specialists) that regularly discuss the children and families within the program and identify concerns.

• When staff are particularly concerned about a family, use a team-staffing model to provide assistance. All staff members who work with the family should meet to discuss their impressions and coordinate strategies for reaching out to the family.

• If a family has multiple or serious challenges, offer to partner with them to seek solutions and invite them to include others who they think can help. This creates an open, supportive, respectful atmosphere and can help families resolve sensitive issues in a way that does not make them feel judged or blamed.

“The commitment of staff is amazing. I have learned so much from staff. They always let the kids know they are important.”

—KYLE’S DAD
Offer Supportive Supervision

Supportive supervisory relationships are key to staff confidence and comfort in their role with families. Staff need to feel supported and trusted and they need to be able to get help when they need it. In three of the programs studied, supervisors’ offices are dispersed throughout the program’s space so that staff know there is always a supervisor within reach. In all of the programs, supervisors meet regularly with staff, both one-on-one and in a group setting. Supervisors demonstrate their commitment to continuous improvement with ongoing staff training sessions and development opportunities—and several also provide training for other early childhood programs.

Tips for Programs
- Make sure supervisors are easily available to staff, either through an open-door policy or through regular presence within the classroom.
- Use structured staff development plans to ensure that staff members continue to grow, learn, and develop their skills. Connect these plans to formal training opportunities, credentialing, and mentoring and supervisory relationships that help staff expand their skills.
- Invest in training. Access to training opportunities—both for staff as a whole and to help individuals meet specific learning goals—is essential.
- Make supervisors available to parents, and create opportunities for supervisors to develop their own relationships with parents.
- Create regular opportunities for staff to meet for supervision, either alone or as a group.

Build Staff Relationships

Staff credibility with parents rests on the ability of all center staff to trust and communicate with one another. Exemplary centers consciously work to develop a team spirit with their staff, including good communication, camaraderie, joint problem-solving skills, and understanding protocols and procedures. They try to provide staff with the same type and quality of support they offer to parents and work hard to make sure that staff have time to meet together and work as a group. One of the programs studied uses parent substitutes during nap time so that all staff can meet together in the director’s office. At another, program staff meet one Saturday every quarter. Yet another closes for one afternoon each month for staff to meet.

Tips for Programs
- Pair staff in mentoring or supportive relationships.
- Create dedicated time and structure for all-staff meetings.
- Make explicit efforts to address staff dynamics—for example, bring in mental health consultants to help build inter-staff communication and camaraderie.
- Hold inclusive, participatory forums to solve problems and resolve conflicts when they arise.
In 1998, Carole Robertson launched a welfare-to-work training program in response to national welfare reform legislation. The program offered three months of job readiness and occupational skills training and a six-month paid internship in the center’s classrooms—with the goal of creating career opportunities for community residents. The results? Full-time, living-wage jobs (with full benefits) and self-sufficiency for more than 40 families. Program interns were eligible to apply for the 60 entry-level positions open at the two new facilities that the Carole Robertson Center opened in 2000 and 2001, and 40 residents became employed at the center through this program, more than half of whom have reached their four-year employment anniversary and 12 of whom have gained their child development associate (CDA) credential and received promotions and raises. All have earned at least six college credits in early childhood courses, and many have earned more than 18.

For program graduates without the basic skills to move beyond entry-level employment, the center offers customized remedial English, adult basic education, GED courses, and ESL courses to give them the opportunity to climb the career ladder. All Carole Robertson Center employees receive extensive staff development opportunities, including enrollment in four on-site college courses a year, a customized CDA credential program, specialized training in music and art, First Aid and CPR training, tuition reimbursement, and opportunities to attend national conferences.

Hire from the Community

Parents who have had good experiences with early childhood programs and who have developed their leadership skills with the center’s support can be excellent ambassadors for the program and can become highly reliable, effective staff members. Hiring staff from within the community enhances a program’s knowledge and awareness of local issues and events and is a concrete way of “walking the talk.” When, for example, a Head Start center in this study hired a father who formerly worked as a doorman at a local hotel to run a parenting program and to work with fathers, the program reinforced its philosophy with action.

Hiring from the community also cements trust between neighborhood parents and a center’s leadership and helps to ensure that the staff reflects the diversity of the community. When parents see staff members who look like them, speak the same language, and have similar backgrounds, they are more likely to trust them and the program.

Tips for Programs

- Create opportunities for parents to volunteer in the classroom as teacher’s assistants and in other childcare-providing roles.
- Partner with a local training organization to offer training programs for parents and community members as well as to provide them with referral information about other training opportunities and community resources.
- List job postings on program bulletin boards and in newsletters and take-home materials for parents,
as well as in local newspapers, at grocery stores, and at other places where community members go.

**Support Parents as Leaders**

Center directors and other administrative leaders at exemplary programs are committed to sharing power with parents and staff. Their leadership styles and organizational structures are inclusive, respectful, and honor different perspectives, ideas, and points of view. In both formal and informal ways, parents whose children attend these centers are integral and active decision makers, serving on advisory councils and holding positions on the boards of directors. Staff respect parents; they make it easy for parents to say what they need. All of the programs in this study also have parent advisory or governance boards that give parents additional opportunities to weigh in on programmatic decisions.

**Support Parents as Leaders within Their Families**

A very clear way to support parents as leaders is to recognize and acknowledge their leadership within their own families. While exemplary programs understand their role in teaching and providing input to parents, they also recognize parents as the key decision makers about their children and their children’s education. Their staff use parent–teacher conferences, home visits, and frequent conversations at pick-up and drop-off times to make sure that parents are well informed about their children’s progress and engaged in guiding and shaping their paths. When there are conflicts between the parents’ and the program’s vision for children, program staff engage parents, explaining their point of view and giving parents an opportunity to explain theirs. They do not undercut parents or their authority. If they have parenting feedback for parents or tips for different ways to interact with their children, they provide them privately and respectfully.

**Tips for Programs**

- Ask parents to set goals for themselves and their children when they enroll their child in the program. Encourage teachers to brainstorm with parents about how to help them achieve these goals.

- Provide parents with tips on how they can reinforce learning in the home. Offer them feedback and encouragement about what children are learning at home.

- Create private spaces and opportunities for staff to meet with parents to address parenting issues.
Support Parents as Leaders within the Program

Good programs also create structured ways for parents to take leadership roles within the program and its community of parents. This helps the program to ensure that it is responsive to parent needs. Exemplary programs have a parent governance or advisory body that meets regularly and provides input on programmatic decision making. Parents on these boards are the most active in planning and creating opportunities to incorporate parent support into the programming. Most programs also offer parents multiple opportunities to volunteer. This not only sends the message that parents are valued as important contributors, but also provides another opportunity for parents to interact with their children and with staff at the center. Parent contributions are acknowledged by staff, both personally and at public events, in newsletters, or in postings or bulletin boards.

Tips for Programs

• Create a parent governance board or advisory body.
• Provide volunteer opportunities for parents. These might include serving as a teacher’s aide in a classroom, reading to children or leading a special activity; baking or providing resources for program events; or helping with building maintenance or decorating.
• Schedule regular parent appreciation events such as award dinners and thank you ceremonies, to acknowledge parent contributions.
• Create a fund to support parent-led events or activities that contribute to the community of the program.

Support Parents as Leaders within the Community

Effective programs also play a role in encouraging parents to take leadership in the broader community. Encouraging this type of leadership is an important way to help parents create a sense of efficacy and control over their environment. It also provides an avenue for parents to work toward making the community a better place for children and families.

Tips for Programs

• Bring in outside speakers to discuss issues in the community that affect children and their families.
• Regularly post information about community meetings and opportunities to get involved with community issues.
• Convene parents in small groups to discuss community issues and potential solutions.
• Provide space and support for groups of parents who want to take on a community issue.
CUSTOMIZE THE PHYSICAL SPACE

In exemplary early care and education centers, the physical layout and interior design of the space contributes to the effort to reduce child abuse and neglect. The centers in this study differed greatly from each other in setting and in architecture. One was housed in portable units, another in a multi-story building on a busy urban street. Two were designed and built specifically as early care and education centers. What all had in common was their use of physical space to communicate to parents and other visitors the importance of keeping children safe and nurturing their development.

Create a Welcoming, Safe Space for Parents

One of the key features of the centers profiled in this study is that they actively and intentionally foster relationships between program staff and the parents of children who attend their programs. Their ambiance contributes to the relationship-building process in concrete ways. For example, they typically include space for parents to:

• Attend classes or workshops
• Sit and talk with one another and/or with staff
• Share food
• Attend social events
• Drop in and visit with staff or with their children
• Observe their children playing with other children or learning in a classroom

The Educare Center—located on Chicago’s South Side across from the Robert Taylor Homes, a housing project known for its crime and violence—was founded to create a safe haven for children in a dangerous community. The center evolved from an earlier child development program, The Beethoven Project, located on one floor of the housing project. At that site, the windows were made of bullet-proof glass and children were not allowed to play outside because the playgrounds and parks were considered unsafe. Children came into the program developmentally delayed because they were confined to their homes—parents were afraid for their safety.

Educare was developed to create a space in the community where children could be truly safe. The center is designed to look like a tiny village, with each classroom its own pastel colored house. Classrooms are clustered around a “village square”—an enclosed courtyard that provides a safe and protected place in which children can play. Staff and volunteers have taken great care to create a space that is safe, stimulating for children, and warm and welcoming for their parents.
When parents enter a program, it is particularly important that they immediately feel welcome. Parents described many of the centers profiled in this study as being “like an oasis.” They employ friendly, warm receptionists, and their décor reflects the neighborhood cultures. Their designs also communicate that staff understand the neighborhood norms and challenges, particularly with regard to safety. In neighborhoods where there is gang activity, for example, programs address parents’ concerns for their child’s safety while also creating environments that feel welcoming and create a sense of community. For example, the architecture of the Educare Center described in the sidebar on page 67 creates an internal courtyard that feels cozy while keeping children safe. The Calvary Bilingual Multicultural Learning Center and the South of Market Child Care Center have created stunning outdoor playgrounds—both located several stories above the ground.

Use Observation Spaces

All of the exemplary programs profiled in this study have configured their space so that staff and parents can observe children in class. All have glass windows into classrooms from hallways, and a number use video cameras in the classrooms. Such observation spaces are an explicit child abuse prevention strategy to ensure that children are always in view—but they also have several other benefits. They allow staff and parents to observe children’s behavior together and enable staff to demonstrate alternative approaches to handling challenging behavioral problems or to show parents what might otherwise be difficult to communicate. And they enable parents to compare their children’s behavior with that of other children of similar age, which can help them recognize their children’s behavior as either developmentally delayed or age appropriate.

Tips for Programs

• Create a parent committee to oversee the design and furnishing of a “parents’ room” and to provide input on décor for the broader program.

• To maintain safety as well as parents’ dignity, monitor who comes into and out of the program in a way that makes parents feel they are being welcomed rather than watched. Train reception staff to warmly welcome parents and visitors to the program.

• Hold parent-specific events in various parts of the program space, such as a coffee hour in the lunch area or a picnic in the outside play area. This helps to give parents a sense of ownership and comfort in the entire center, not just their children’s classrooms.
Observation Space Allays Concerns about Gender Roles

Lucy Martinez was horrified that her three-and-a-half-year-old son, Guillermo, wanted to dress up in her clothes at home. She came to the center furious because, her son told her, that’s what they did in school. Staff explained that many costumes were available in the dramatic play area of the classroom and that it was normal for children to dress up in clothes of the opposite gender.

Mrs. Martinez watched her child’s classroom through the one-way glass window and saw many children dressing up in different costumes. Staff spoke to her about her concerns and about the developmental process of exploring gender roles. Mrs. Martinez was able to gain insight not only into her son’s behavior, but also into her own. Staff agreed to make sure there were plenty of attractive “male” costumes as well as “female” ones.

Programs also use observation areas to help train staff and build teams to nurture children’s social and emotional development. For example, teachers and mental health consultants concerned about children’s challenging behavior can watch children and discuss strategies for addressing their issue together. Or, mental health consultants may use observation areas to teach staff how to set up imaginative, therapeutic play situations to help children enact “what happened” when they can’t verbalize the information.

Observation spaces contribute to a feeling of “transparency” and inclusion—nothing that the center does with children is private or secret. Parents are included in all of the early care and education activities, and they can check on their children at any time without interrupting what’s happening in the classroom. Having many eyes on both teachers and kids contributes to certainty that children will not be abused while in the program.
Tips for Programs

• If the program is currently in the design phase, be creative—set small windows into the walls, use glass doors, or otherwise create ways for parents to observe without being visible to children in the classroom.

• If the program cannot make structural changes, use video cameras to record activities. They are a low-cost alternative that can serve many of the same purposes as real-time observations.

• Set aside time for knowledgeable staff members to guide parents through the observation process.

• If the program provides parenting education classes, integrate observations into the class experience.

• Help parents think through the parallels between what they observe in the classroom and how their children behave at home.

Create a Flexible Space for a Range of Activities

Exemplary programs strive to make their space as flexible as possible, allowing for a full range of activities to support children and families. They look at spaces from a parent’s perspective. They ask: Is the space welcoming? Does it encourage parents to come into the classroom? Is there a place for parents to talk with the teacher that is outside of the hustle and bustle, but that still allows the teacher to keep an eye on the children? Is it easy for the parent to navigate the space? These programs also create an environment that can accommodate community events.

Tips for Programs

• Provide a comfortable room where a staff member can meet privately with a parent.

• Create space for staff to meet away from parents and children.

• Make sure that childcare rooms include furniture, equipment, and toys that can accommodate parents and children together.

• Have a large space for events that bring together all of the families within the program.

• If you are in the process of building or renovating, consider rooms with moveable walls and other ways to create space that can be flexibly used for multiple purposes.

• Survey parents about ways they may want to use the program’s space after hours.
ENGAGE MEN

Childcare centers are not typically places where men feel welcome, included, and part of the community. In the U.S., less than one percent of childcare workers are men, and there has been some debate in the past regarding whether or not having male teachers in early childhood settings contributes to child sexual abuse. Traditionally, many of the activities for parents at childcare centers have been geared toward mothers. In the exemplary early childhood centers visited for this project, however, one of the most striking commonalities is the presence of men—both male staff members and family members. At these centers, fathers and grandfathers participate in a range of activities, largely because men on staff develop relationships with them. The centers are welcoming places, and part of their spirit of inclusiveness is demonstrated by opportunities for men to participate.

Calvary employs ten male teachers, all of whom are role models for young fathers in the program. The high number of male teaching staff at the center reflects a commitment to creating an open and welcoming space for men—and to encouraging male models of nurturing and caring. When the program first started hiring male teachers, it was met with resistance from both staff and parents. But the program directors helped to overcome this initial resistance by educating families and staff about the importance of male involvement. The results can be seen at the end of the day when a surprising number of young fathers can be seen in the hallway coming to pick up their children.
Recruit Male Staff Members

The programs in this study find, hire, and retain male staff members. They conduct extensive outreach in the community and spread the message within the program—both to staff and parents—about the positive impact of hiring men as program staff. Program leaders outwardly support male staff members—an especially important approach when there are only a few male staff members or no history of having men on staff. Involving men in a number of different roles at these centers increases the opportunity for children to communicate their needs to different people in their lives. Some children do not have positive, consistent relationships with men in their day-to-day lives. Interacting with male teachers, caregivers, and other male program staff can help them gain familiarity with men who are nurturing. For some children, this reduces fear and encourages interaction. Finally, employing men is an important way to engage fathers and other male caretakers in the program, who may be more comfortable talking with male staff than with female staff members.

Tips for Programs

• Convene a meeting with existing staff to talk about people’s attitudes about male staff members. If there is resistance, create ongoing opportunities for conversations with staff about the importance of male nurturing and having men on staff.

• Make a conscious effort not to reinforce stereotypes with the work that male and female staff members are asked to do.

• Because many fewer men than women work in the early childhood field, hiring male staff members will require assertive outreach. Reach out to fathers in the program who seem particularly active and good with children.
Include Fathers and Male Nurturers

Exemplary programs make specific efforts to reach out to and engage fathers and other male family members, whether they are a child’s primary caretaker or not. These programs play a pivotal role in enhancing communication between parents by bringing developmental and safety issues to the attention of both parents. In cases where parents don’t live in the same household and don’t have an amicable relationship, the centers’ role as an advocate for children becomes extremely important. It provides otherwise rare opportunities for both parents to focus on the children, express their concerns and care for the children to one another and teachers and other staff, and work together on resolving issues.

Fairfax–San Anselmo Children’s Center emphasizes the role fathers play in their children’s lives. A monthly breakfast is attended by all men who are involved in the lives of children who participate in center programs—fathers and children eat together, then the men do work around the center, have discussions, or plan such activities as the center’s annual camping trips. In discussions, the center uses the “Becoming a Father” curriculum, written by the center’s former director, Stan Seiderman. The center has eight to nine male staff, who act as positive role models to the children and make fathers feel more comfortable at the center. Single mothers are particularly grateful for the male role models their children see at the center.
Tips for Programs

• Plan father-friendly activities that attract men to the program. These might include traditionally male activities, such as sports events; opportunities for men in the program to get to know each other, such as a fathers’ breakfast; or opportunities for fathers to explore parenting, such as father-child activity nights.

• Create an advisory committee of fathers and male staff members to plan and organize events that are of interest to men.

• Create clear policies to involve both parents, including practices to engage non-custodial parents. Inform parents of these policies when they first come to the program.

• Encourage fathers to come to the center regularly to pick up or drop off their children, attend parent-teacher conferences, or participate in regular events. Include them in invitations that go out and welcome them when they come.

• While it is important to create some activities designed to specifically appeal to men, design the bulk of parent activities to appeal to both sexes.

Support Male Nurturing

Research has shown that one of the attributes of a successful, non-violent family is role flexibility—especially gender roles. This means that family members expect to share responsibilities when necessary, even if they are not consistent with traditional gender roles. Exemplary programs don’t assume what activities moms or dads perform, but give complete information to both parents and respond equally to parents’ questions. They show both little boys and girls examples of both men and women in nurturing roles. They break down stereotypes about fathering and mothering, showing both parents that they are equally equipped to nurture children. Programs often help fathers develop stronger relationships with their children by expanding both fathers’ and mothers’ ideas about what it means to be a good dad. Through these strategies, exemplary early care and education programs model a central aspect of successful family functioning.
Tips for Programs

• Endorse male nurturing through staff modeling, pictures, program materials, and fathering classes.

• Promote the notion of a “good dad” as a multi-faceted one, and encourage fathers to pay attention and talk to their children, to show affection to their children, and to be present in their children’s lives in meaningful ways.

• Put fathering within a cultural context. Fathers may need sensitive help in aligning their cultural expectations of a father’s role with providing loving attention to their children. Rely on staff with experience in fathers’ cultures to help identify and support cultural strengths, and encourage open discussions about the roles of fathers across cultures.

• Support and honor men who play an active nurturing role. It can be hard for fathers when they are the only man in a parenting education class or at a children’s performance. Encourage these men by providing positive feedback, making sure there is a male staff presence, and acknowledging their commitment to their children.

• Convene conversations for participants, both women and men, and staff members to discuss their views on the role of men—within the family and the childcare setting.

FORM RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILD WELFARE AGENCIES

Early childhood centers are required by law to report suspected incidents of child abuse and neglect to the state agency responsible for investigating such claims. Making a report of abuse or neglect can result in a potentially adversarial and inherently difficult situation for all involved. Program staff often fear that reporting problems will drive the family away from the program, which may make things worse at home by increasing isolation and reducing available resources. Many staff are also concerned that the child welfare agency will not be able to provide services and support that will help the family adequately resolve the issue. These concerns can put staff in a triple bind, being mandated to report incidents, wanting to protect the child, but anxious not to exacerbate the situation by leaving parents and children without support.

“There aren’t any concerns or disagreements that aren’t dealt with right away.”
—JESSICA’S DAD
Build Parent and Staff Awareness of Child Welfare Issues

Exemplary early childhood programs create a common understanding and awareness of child welfare issues—and the impact of different types of abuse and neglect on children’s growth and development. They work with child welfare agencies to create a common community of caring for children, ensuring that staff and parents understand the continuum of behaviors that might adversely affect a child—including which behaviors carry a significant risk of harm and require program staff to make a child welfare report. Clearly communicating up front what constitutes a reportable offense allows staff to more easily maintain relationships with parents if a report of abuse or neglect has to be made. In addition, when parents understand the state’s definition of child abuse or neglect and are knowledgeable about procedures of both early childhood programs and child welfare agencies, they may be better able to prevent child abuse or neglect within their families.

The programs in this study frame the issue of child abuse and neglect within the larger context of behaviors that can have a negative impact on a child’s growth and development. This helps to create less stigmatizing opportunities for program staff to intervene with families as soon as they become concerned about a parent or a child. All of the programs provide training to staff on child abuse and neglect, covering such topics as: what constitutes abuse or neglect in their state, protocols for reporting suspected cases of abuse and neglect, what happens to a family once a report is entered, and what the program’s protocols are regarding reporting. A few also offer training sessions for parents on child welfare issues. In a number of these cases these were the best attended of available parent training sessions. In general, these programs are located in communities where there are high rates of child welfare involvement. Many participating families have had experience with the child welfare system—either because they have had a child placed in the system, are a foster care provider, or know someone who has had a report made against them. Understanding the child welfare system is important to these families. When programs provide such information, families trust the staff as potential allies, should they ever become involved in the child welfare system.
Tips for Programs:

• Provide written information from the beginning about the program’s role in reporting child abuse and neglect, and what protocols are followed when a report is made.

• Offer sessions for parents early in each year that include information about child abuse and neglect: its definitions, its prevalence, and the program’s point of view about preventing it.

• Offer multiple opportunities for parents to ask questions and offer concerns about child abuse and neglect without fear of being stigmatized.
Build Relationships with Child Welfare Staff

Early childhood programs are part of the web of services available to young children and their families, as is the child welfare agency. Developing and using relationships with the child welfare agency can help staff learn about the resources available to local children and families and gain greater comfort in dealing with child abuse and neglect. A number of exemplary programs employ staff who formerly worked for child protective services (CPS) agencies. At these programs, these staff members serve as liaisons to CPS staff, at times using their existing relationships to cut through red tape and create concrete and supportive links between the programs and the child welfare department. In several programs, child protective services staff provide training to early childhood teachers and other program staff on identifying and responding to signs of abuse and neglect and they orient early childhood teachers to their protocols and procedures. Through such training opportunities, early care and education staff gain a better understanding of families’ experiences and rights within the child welfare system. They become stronger advocates for families and are better able to explain to families what will happen if a report needs to be made.

Programs also play major roles in providing stability for children and families who become involved with the child welfare system. In two of the programs in this study, the childcare center is used to maintain stability for children who have been removed from their homes. In these cases, CPS staff make placement decisions with an eye toward keeping children in their existing childcare program. In a number of cases, program staff also play active roles in “wrap-around” teams, service providers who work together to provide stability to high-risk families. Participating on these teams helps to ensure a sense of continuity and normality for families. For example, one program provides a space where other service providers can meet and work with families, creating a neutral and safe setting where families can access the services they need.
The State of Michigan makes local collaboratives responsible for coordinating services for children and families in counties. Leelanau County has one of the most active and successful of these collaboratives—hundreds of providers and citizens were involved in the original planning and design of the system, and, ten years later, more than 277 individuals and agencies continue to be involved. In similar collaboratives across the country, social service providers working with high-need families play the dominant role, with more mainstream partners like childcare providers playing a marginal one. In Leelanau County, however, the Leelanau Children’s Center plays an active and important role, not just at the front end—reaching families before they are in crisis—but also in supporting a number of high-risk families and families in crisis.

Center staff take part in county wrap-around teams that help coordinate resources to address families’ multiple needs. Participating in the collaborative helps childcare staff know where to refer families if the need arises, and helps them develop strong one-on-one relationships with other service providers. Because of these relationships, the early childhood staff can be more confident in the referrals they make to families. The center’s philosophy and the approach to working with children and families has also influenced the collaborative. For example, Leelanau Children’s Center’s conflict resolution and consensus decision-making models now have been adopted by the collaborative for its own use.

**Tips for Programs**

- Contact the local child protective services department and request information on: reporting protocols for both the state and locality, community training programs for staff and/or parents on child abuse and neglect, and any prevention-related initiatives the department is funding.

- Provide parents with orientation packets and, if possible, training on your program’s abuse and neglect reporting protocols and the types of concerns that warrant a report to child protective services.

- Support program staff who need to meet with child welfare staff about families who are involved with, or entering, the protective services system.

- Advocate strongly for “continuity of childcare” when child welfare staff are considering removing children from homes. Maintaining a consistent childcare setting can provide continuity and stability for children during a time of chaos in their lives.

- Become aware of and active with human service collaborative organizations in your community.
Report Suspected Abuse and Neglect

Contrary to popular mythology, early childhood programs can maintain positive relationships with families after making a report of abuse or neglect—depending on how they handle the situation. While reporting protocols vary from program to program, a common thread among exemplary programs is a commitment to reporting with versus reporting on families.

Tips for Programs

• Create a clear process that is shared with staff and parents both in the form of written materials and in person.

• In most programs, when a staff member is concerned that a child is at imminent risk of harm, they report this concern to their direct supervisor. Implement a policy where supervisors then discuss the concerns and strategize with the staff members who work closely with the family in question. In some cases, you may want to involve all staff members who work with the child and family.

• Document all concerns and take photos of physical signs of abuse or neglect. If an immediate report to your state’s child welfare agency is necessary, assign a staff member the child trusts to keep the child safe under her or his supervision until the report has been made.

• Consider involving parents in the process of making a report. When an immediate report is necessary, some programs call the parents and ask them to come to the center. Staff explain concerns about the child to the parents and re-emphasize the legal mandate that program staff must report such concerns to child protective services. They give parents an opportunity to respond, and help them brainstorm ways to resolve it. Then, they make the report. (Note: Before adopting this approach, check the mandated reporting protocols for your state or locality. Some child welfare agencies encourage this approach, while others do not. The following website allows you to search for the definitions of child abuse and neglect and laws governing reporting in your state: http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/general/statespecific/index.cfm. If parent involvement in the report might compromise the investigation, call the child welfare agency first and make your report either before or instead of contacting the parents.)

• When making a report, emphasize the family’s strengths, the family’s ideas and options for resolving the issue, and the role that your program is willing to play in supporting the family in its efforts to resolve the issue.
Advocate for Parents with the Child Welfare System

Because exemplary early childhood programs value their relationships with parents and families, their goal when a family becomes involved with the child welfare system is to work with both the family and the child welfare system to ensure the child’s safety and emotional stability. Being the subject of a child welfare report is extremely traumatic for a family—even when a child is not removed from the home, the process of being investigated and the stigma attached to allegations of abuse and neglect cause extreme stress. When children are removed, this stress is compounded by the disruption created in families’ lives and the emotional stress on both parents and children. Whenever possible, the programs in this study try to act as advocates for parents with the system.

At the Educare program in Chicago, staff encourage parents to report child welfare issues themselves, from the program, with a staff member present. Program staff make the initial call to an anonymous hotline. They provide no identifying information about the family but describe their concerns and get feedback from hotline workers about how the agency might respond. Staff then talk with the parents about the reporting process and urge them to self-report—arguing that it would demonstrate to the agency a willingness and commitment to work on the issue. Staff are present during the calls and, once parents have made their reports, provide their own perspectives to the child welfare workers taking the reports.
Tips for Programs

• A program’s advocacy for parents can begin during the reporting process. When making a report, strive to give a balanced picture of the family—including strengths as well as the issues causing concern. Describe resources that the family can draw on to address the situation or ensure the safety of the child. Emphasize the parent’s participation in the program and the role staff can play to help the family address the underlying issues and enhance safety.

• Support family members in their interactions with the child welfare system. This might include attending court with families, being present at meetings with caseworkers, or reviewing written materials with parents to ensure that they understand what is being required of them.

• When child welfare workers know there are caring professionals monitoring the situation on a daily basis—including the program’s staff—they are more likely to make a decision to keep a child in the home. Work with child welfare workers and families to develop plans that ensure the safety of children.
FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES

Exemplary early childhood programs work with families in ways that are family supportive in the general sense—respectful, culturally sensitive, and responsive to a range of family needs. A number of programs also identify and deploy staff to provide more comprehensive family support services, including those described below.

Family Assessments

A number of programs use a structured family assessment process when children enter the program. This assessment helps staff and families define both educational goals for children and goals for families and parents. In some cases, the process is in-depth and lasts for several hours, sometimes at families’ homes. The service helps staff understand families’ goals and ways the program can support them in meeting these goals. Generally, assessments are reviewed regularly, often on a quarterly basis, to monitor success in achieving goals and to develop new strategies. Appendix E includes sample family assessment tools used by one of the programs in the study.

Family Support Staff

A number of programs also have staff whose primary responsibility is to work with parents on family issues. These family support workers connect families to such resources and services as health care, employment training, government subsidies (such as food stamps), supplemental resources for their children, and transportation; offer one-on-one support and informal counseling when families ask for it; and provide information about parenting, family life, and child development. Their roles and responsibilities vary from program to program: One program assigns family support workers to classrooms to meet and greet families and to develop a sense of familiarity and trust with parents. Parents see them every day at pick-up and drop-off times, just as they do their children’s teachers. Several others have separate family support departments that parents can access whenever they need support. Some of the programs’ family support workers are paraprofessionals hired from the community. Others have master’s degrees in social work and are trained counselors. The common element: staff dedicated to working with and assisting the whole family.

“They’re very flexible about the money aspects. You can make payments on installation. They have sliding scales. They don’t ask for verification. They’re trusting and discreet.”

— TOMMY’S MOM
This systemic approach recognizes that crises in parents’ lives greatly affect the well-being of their children. Family support staff work one-on-one with families to: (1) connect them to services they need, (2) strategize and create plans to resolve ongoing issues that create stress (such as health problems, unemployment, or relationship issues), and (3) bolster parents’ networks of friendship and mutual support. The success of family support strategies depends on the quality of relationships between early childhood teachers and family support staff, who must work as a team, supporting each other and sending consistent messages to families.

Support Groups

Most of the programs in this study offer multiple support group opportunities, which encourage networking and mutual support among parents by creating a safe space for parents to talk about common concerns, share ideas, and learn from each other. (While program staff might not be available to talk with a family at two in the morning, another parent in a support group might!) These programs are creative about how they structure support groups: One sponsors Walk and Talk, a morning speed walk and discussion group for parents. Others provide support groups for families under stress, parents with special needs children, teen parents, single parents, and parents who were abused or neglected as children.
Parent Education Classes

While parenting education and child development information can be integrated in informal ways into the day-to-day work of any childcare program, many exemplary programs also offer parenting education classes varying in structure from single lectures that parents can attend as they see fit to multi-session classes. Some blend parenting education and support so that parents receive both parenting information and emotional support. And they are creative about designing classes to meet the needs of their most vulnerable families—for example, one program partnered with the local school for the visual arts to develop a program that integrates art therapy and parenting education.

Home Visiting

All of the programs in this study offer educational home visiting at the beginning and end of each school year at a minimum. This allows educators to meet with parents in their homes and to plan a child’s educational goals together. Most also offer more intensive family support home visiting to some families, in which a professional or paraprofessional family support worker meets with parents on a regular basis to address family issues and work on parent-child interactions. In general, such home visits are for families with multiple stressors, who are challenged by their children’s behaviors, or who request help with specific parenting strategies.

Connecting home visiting to early care and education programs results in a few important outcomes: First, the trusting relationship between parents and early childhood staff increases parents’ willingness to take part in the home visiting process. Parents are often reluctant to allow strangers into their home—isolated families who are struggling with parenting issues and home life perhaps even more so. Second, because home visiting is often initiated based on teaching staff’s experiences with families and awareness of their need for additional help, early childhood programs can connect the home visits to specific issues for which families need support. This helps make such visits feel more like welcome assistance and less like an intrusion into families’ lives.
MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATION

The importance of children’s health and mental health has been extensively researched and documented, and educators, clinicians, families, policymakers, and advocates have made great strides in increasing children’s and parents’ access to mental health services. Increasingly, early childhood programs are working with mental health consultants to help teachers and families to promote the emotional wellness of the young children they serve—which is critical to their healthy early development and later success in school. These consultants help teachers and families develop an increased awareness and understanding of their interactions with children and work with them to develop strategies that help children and families get “ready for school.” Appendix F includes a number of tools for working with mental health consultants, including a consultant job description.

The Calvary Bilingual MultiCultural Learning Center in Washington, D.C., has a partnership with the local chapter of Healthy Families America—a home visiting program designed to prevent child abuse and neglect. Through Healthy Families America, families are identified in the hospital at the birth of their child and are offered free home visiting services. The partnership between Calvary and Healthy Families America helps ensure that eligible at-risk families in Washington, D.C., have a childcare home as soon as they need one. The home visitors refer families to Calvary’s childcare program and, in some cases, continue to visit families after their children are enrolled. If home visitors see signs that the family is stressed or at risk of abuse or neglect, they can enlist Calvary staff in reaching out to families to address underlying issues—and vice versa. The strong collaborative relationship between the early care staff at Calvary and the home visitors helps to ensure smooth transitions from home into the childcare setting and to continue timely support for families.
Consultation with Teachers

Many of the exemplary programs in this study utilize mental health consultants as a resource and support for staff. The consultants help teaching staff understand and work with both children and parents to support children’s developmental, behavioral, and social/emotional needs: They work with teachers to solve problems and strategize about how to deal with common behavior issues that arise in the classroom. They observe children in the program and help staff determine what behaviors may indicate problems and what behaviors are typical for a developmental stage. They provide one-on-one advice to staff on how to work with particular children and how to broach concerns with parents.

When staff feel that the consultants understand and empathize with their feelings, they begin to trust and respect them. Without the key element of trust, even the most brilliant advice feels burdensome to overwhelmed, distraught teachers. With trust, however, teachers can put to use the information and understanding consultants have developed through observations of children in the program and interactions with their parents.

The Early Childhood Mental Health Project (ECMH) in San Francisco is a collaboration between Parents Place/Jewish Family and Children's Services (JFCS) and Day Care Consultants/Infant Parent Program at UCSF. The backbone of the program is the belief of all partners—mental health consultants, childcare staff, administrators, and families—that the best way to help young children is to provide teachers with the education and support necessary to address the needs of each child and family in their care. ECMH consultants provide an array of services, based on the needs and requests of site directors, teachers, and families: meeting with individual and groups of teachers, attending staff meetings, observing children in the classroom, meeting with directors, meeting with parents, providing on-site therapeutic groups, and referring families to additional services.

“When I first talked to the ECMH consultant, I was overwhelmed with relief. Because of her willingness to listen, her validation of my fears and frustrations, and especially her understanding of children’s feelings and sensitivities, she helped me to understand my child better. Then I was better able to see ways that I might help.”

—JFCS parent participant

“The ECMH consultant was a great help to me as a teacher. She helped me to identify issues concerning a student and she taught our staff what we should watch out for in a child’s development.”

—JFCS teacher

“One of the real benefits of ECMH is that my staff is much better at building parent–teacher collaboration—functioning as a team rather than as adversaries. This allows us to spend our energy on getting the child’s needs met, rather than on trying to assign blame.”

—JFCS director
Consultation with Parents

The most important relationship for fostering mental health for children in any early care and education program is between teachers and parents. When trusting relationships between parents and teachers are already established, introducing mental health consultation to parents is much easier. At quality programs, teachers and parents feel comfortable discussing worries or concerns that they may have about children, before consulting mental health specialists. Teachers work with parents to understand the reasons for a child’s difficulties and work collaboratively with them on behalf of the child.

Mental health consultation with parents often begins when consultants join regularly scheduled parent–teacher conferences. During these and other meetings with parents, mental health consultants provide timely support to parents as they try to understand their children’s behavior—or even deal with their own mental health issues. Consultants set aside specific hours convenient to families and provide one-on-one or family guidance or counseling. They also link families to necessary additional services. In a few programs, consultants also play a more informal role as listeners. Both parents and staff at one program, for example, felt they could turn to “Dr. Mike,” the mental health consultant—whether during a crisis or when they just needed to talk.

Help with Children’s Challenging Behaviors

Mental health consultation is becoming an increasingly important component of childcare. Over the past three decades, the number of children in childcare has jumped by 50 percent. Each day, five million children under the age of three are cared for by adults other than their parents. The number of children and families entering childcare with behavioral and learning difficulties and family challenges has also increased. Growing numbers of children are being expelled from childcare settings because their behavior is too difficult for teachers to handle. A number of programs in this study have enrolled—and committed to—children with unsuccessful experiences in as many as four or five childcare settings.

Caring for children who exhibit difficult behavior is stressful for both parents and teachers. Parents of children whose behavior is challenging may find it harder to get respite from family, friends, or even paid providers. Moreover, they may internalize the messages sent to them from other adults that their children are bad, failing, or unlovable. Mental health consultants work with these families and teachers to understand the meaning of behavior and to develop on-site interventions in the natural classroom environment of childcare. They often provide direct interventions in the form of intensive case consultation and case management, on-site therapeutic playgroups, shadowing, and play therapy.
Consultation with Programs

Mental health consultants often play an important role in building the quality of programs and contributing to their infrastructure plans. Their aim when consulting with programs is to improve the quality of care for all children by improving the quality of relationships within a childcare center’s community. They address center staff and administrators’ concerns about organizational structure and other programmatic issues that affect the quality of their relationships with children. They offer advice to program managers on supporting effective adult relationships, specifically those influencing organizational functioning. How adults within a childcare program treat one another is a crucial factor in the overall quality of care. In three of the programs, consultants worked to build staff cohesiveness and develop mechanisms that enable staff to deal with conflicts, enhance communication, and generally build a climate of cooperation.

At Sauk Rapids–Rice Early Childhood Family Education Program in Minnesota, interdisciplinary behavior assessment teams develop plans for children with challenging behaviors—based on conversations with teachers and parents and observations of children at the program and in their homes. Parents, childcare providers, and teachers implement the plans and, in the process, learn more about the course of specific behaviors. The teams also train community caregivers and educators of young children in an attempt to make systemic changes in understanding and responding to young children with challenging behaviors.
SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Children with special needs are at increased risk of abuse and neglect. Their parents often become frustrated by the extra care and attention they require and may not fully understand or have unrealistic expectations of their special needs. They may feel guilty and incompetent. Exemplary programs go the extra mile to support these children and their families.

Support for Parents at the Time Special Needs Are Identified

When their children are identified as having special needs, parents often experience a high degree of stress and can exhibit symptoms of denial, guilt, anger, and confusion. They can be confused and overwhelmed by the process of evaluating their children for special needs and understanding the meaning of the results. Exemplary programs are particularly supportive to families during this process. A number employ disabilities coordinators who work with families to deal specifically with issues that arise when children are first identified as having special needs and throughout their involvement with the program.

“I have three children with very complex special needs. Before I came here, my kids were kicked out of a for-profit childcare program. Staff assured me that it wouldn’t happen here. They worked with me to help me learn how to work with my kids. They learned how to operate all of the special equipment my children need. They have written grants to ensure that they have the resources on site to care for my kids. I would not be working today if it were not for this program.”

— IMANI’S DAD
Access to Resources that Help Parents Support Special Needs Children

Staff at early childhood programs play an important advocacy role in helping parents with special needs children—who often feel overwhelmed by their day-to-day care—access the supports they need. They help parents navigate special education systems, make sure that their children receive the assessments they need to gain access to services, and help them meet concrete needs, such as obtaining wheelchairs and getting access to physical therapists.

Care for Special Needs Children in Settings with Other Children

A few of the programs in this study have the resources to integrate special needs children into their standard classrooms, either on a full- or part-time basis. One program also plans special events and activities so that special needs children can be included. Parents of special needs children in these programs described how important it was to them for their children to have these opportunities. This, in turn, helps parents gain perspective on their children’s special needs. The atmosphere also helps parents become less protective of their children and, in some cases, teaches them that their children are capable of doing much more than they thought possible.

The FACES program in Brunswick, Georgia, co-locates a number of important early childhood resources. Among these are Georgia’s statewide preschool program and Leaps and Bounds, a special early care and education program for children with disabilities and developmental delays. By co-locating these resources, FACES provides meaningful opportunities for integrating children with special needs into a standard preschool environment at a very young age—either through special activities or part-day enrollment. Parents of special needs children are able to place them in a mainstream setting, while knowing that resources and supports to meet their special needs are available right around the corner. The arrangement helps increase parents’ confidence that their children can interact in the broader world and, in some cases, shows them that their children have skills and capabilities of which they weren’t aware.
Early childhood professionals have known for decades that they play an important role in protecting and nurturing young children and in promoting their social and emotional development. What many are now learning is how the work they do can strengthen healthy bonds between parents and children and contribute to preventing child abuse and neglect (CAN). Through studying early childhood programs that do this well, the Center for the Study of Social Policy has identified a positive new approach to preventing child abuse and neglect that can—and should—be widely replicated. This approach is accessible to all early education programs with relatively small changes in what they already do every day. Recent polls by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) have shown that early care and education (ECE) professionals agree, and wish to increase their participation in reducing child abuse and neglect by working more effectively with parents. This guidebook, and the materials that have been produced as part of this study, put a new set of tools in the hands of early care and education professionals.

The Strengthening Families through Early Care and Education approach holds great promise for improving the well-being of all of America’s young children, but especially for those children vulnerable to the results of family crises, parental illness, or a parent’s lack of knowledge or support. In order to achieve its full potential, the Strengthening Families approach needs to meet several significant challenges.

First, the early childhood field will be required to revise its mission to include reaching out to parents as part of its fundamental purpose. Although many early care and education programs (like those highlighted in this guidebook) view parents as essential partners in promoting healthy development for children, others do not. In recent years, the importance of parental engagement has been well-documented, and studies such as the one behind Strengthening Families have underscored the need for programs to support families more effectively. While the interest in engaging parents seems to be there, the various measures of accountability for early childhood programs, including individual and program licensing, professional development, quality ratings, and expectations of children’s readiness for school, are not based on any expectation that programs have a responsibility to parents. Correcting this oversight will take awareness, effort, and negotiation throughout local, state, and national systems.

Second, connections between the child welfare system, child abuse prevention efforts and the early childhood system will need to be significantly strengthened at every level, from national organizations and strategies all the way to individual centers’ interactions with their local child protective workers. While early care and education programs are mandated reporters for child abuse and neglect and staff are generally trained annually about reporting requirements, staff in many programs are unaware of ways to identify and respond to early signals that might prevent the need for a report. Likewise, child protection staff are often unaware of the role that early care and education providers can play in keeping children safe and supporting their families’ efforts to provide the best possible home environment. As the programs in this study demonstrate, there are many ways early childhood programs can be effective partners with child welfare,
but these are the exception rather than the rule. Awareness, staff training, and incentives for relationship building on both sides of the potential partnership would help bridge the gap.

Finally, efforts to build an adequate infrastructure for early care and education need to be increased. A sufficient number of high quality programs capable of reaching out to families and building strong connections with child welfare agencies will only happen through increased attention and resources devoted to improving the whole system.

As Sharon Lynn Kagan, Ed.D, writes in “Advancing Child Abuse and Neglect Protective Factors: The Role of the Early Care and Education Infrastructure” (a paper commissioned as part of this project and available at www.cssp.org) the infrastructure that supports early childhood programs must be stronger in order to achieve healthy child development and school readiness as well as to contribute to safe, nurturing relationships between parents and children.

“Attention to the quality of early childhood programs, the early childhood infrastructure, and the early childhood system is critical for those concerned about CAN and about linkage between ECE and CAN prevention. If ECE programs cannot deliver quality services, there is no possibility that they can address the protective factors with the requisite attention and intensity... Stated directly, quality ECE programs are the foundation for a CAN prevention agenda and a quality infrastructure is the foundation for quality programs. One is not possible without the other.” (Kagan p.12)

According to Kagan, strengthening the early childhood system to implement the Strengthening Families approach will involve bolstering eight key infrastructure components:

• quality programs;
• a child- and family-based, results-driven system;
• parent, community, and public engagement;
• individual licensing for staff;
• improved professional preparation;
• program licensing;
• adequate funding and finance; and
• governance, planning, and program accountability.

Ultimately, building a strong infrastructure for an early childhood system will require societal commitment, advocacy, and support.

The Strengthening Families approach is a potentially powerful one, both for the early childhood education field and for child abuse and neglect prevention efforts. In order to advance this agenda, those who embrace it must join together to meet the challenges to widespread implementation. Individual programs can make a big difference by demonstrating in their own communities their commitment to serving families, strong partnerships with child welfare agencies, and local efforts to improve the early childhood infrastructure. Joining together, early childhood programs and child abuse and neglect prevention advocates can make a huge difference for children, their families, and communities across the nation.
APPENDIX A: EXEMPLARY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS STUDIED

Addison County Parent/Child Center
126 Monroe Street
Middlebury, VT 05753
802-388-3171
Contact: Donna Bailey or Sue Harding, Co-Directors
sueharding@sover.net

Calvary Bilingual Multicultural Learning Center
1420 Columbia Road, NW
Washington, DC 20009
202-332-4200
Contact: Beatriz Otero, Executive Director
bbotero@cbmlc.org

Carole Robertson Center for Learning
2020 W. Roosevelt Road
Chicago, IL 60608
312-243-7300
Contact: Gail Nelson, Executive Director
nelsong@crcl.com

City of Albuquerque Child Development Program
2200 University Boulevard, SE
Albuquerque, NM 87106
505-767-6500
Contact: Jorja Armijo-Brasher, Division Manager
jabrasher@cabq.gov

Children of the Rainbow
3078 L Street
San Diego, CA 92102
619-615-0652
Contact: Gale Walker, CEO
galerwalker@childrenoftherainbow.com

Early Childhood Mental Health Project/Parents Place
1710 Scott Street
San Francisco, CA 94115
415-359-2454
Contact: Laurel Kloomok, Director of Parents Place
laurelk@jfcs.org

The Educare Center/Ounce of Prevention Fund
122 S. Michigan, Suite 2050
Chicago, IL 60603
312-922-3863
Contact: Harriet Meyer, Executive Director
hmeyer@ounceofprevention.org

Fairfax-San Anselmo Children’s Center
199 Porteous Avenue
Fairfax, VA 94930
415-454-1811
Contact: Linda Nackerud and Heidi Tomsky, Co-Directors
lnackerud@comcast.net

Family and Children Educational Services (F.A.C.E.S.)
3400 Norwich Street
Brunswick, GA 31520
912-267-4229
Contact: Sue Williamson, Principal
williamson@mail.glynn.k12.ga.us

Fort Belvoir Child and Youth Services Program
9655 Belvoir Road, Building 1001
Fort Belvoir, VA 22060
703-805-2813
Contact: Sally Haskell, Director
sally_s_haskell@belvoir.army.mil

Haitian Center Early Care and Education
12 Bicknell Street
Dorchester, MA 02121
617-436-2348
Contact: Nicole St. Victor, Director
nicole_victor@ccab.org

Leelanau Children’s Center
111 N. Fifth Street PO Box 317
Leland, MI 49654
231-256-7841
Contact: Maggie Sprattmoran, Director
leechild@traverse.com
APPENDIX A: EXEMPLARY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS STUDIED

Lenox Hill Neighborhood House, Youth and Family Services
331 East 70th Street
New York, NY 10021
212-744-5022
Contact: Marian Detelj, Director
mdetelj@lenoxhill.org

Maui Economic Opportunity Program
99 Mahalani Street PO Box 2122
Wailuku, HI 96793
808-249-2988
Contact: Lynn McNeff, Director
lyn.mcneff@meoinc.org

Montclair Community Pre-K
49 Orange Road
Montclair, NJ 07042
973-509-4500
Contact: Eve Robinson, Executive Director
erobinson@montclairprek.com

Palm Beach County Head Start
3323 Belvedere Road, Building 501B
West Palm Beach, FL 33406
561-233-1600
Contact: Carmen Nicholas, Director
cnichola@co.palm-beach.fl.us

Parents and Children Together:
Early Head Start/Head Start
1485 Linapuni Street, Suite 105
Honolulu, HI 96819
808-847-3285
Contact: Ruthann Quitquit, President & CEO
adminrquitquit@pacthawaii.org

Region 19 ESC Head Start Program
11670 Chito Samaniego
El Paso, TX 79936
915-790-4600
Contact: Blanca Enriquez, Director
benriquez@esc19hs.net

Sauk Rapids-Rice Early Childhood Family Programs
Early Childhood Center
901 First Street South
Sauk Rapids, MN 56379
320-255-8910
Contact: Deborah Campbell, Director
deb.campbell@isd47.org

The Sheltering Arms
Child Development and Family Support Centers
350 Centennial Olympic Parkway Drive, NW
Atlanta, GA 30313
404-523-2767
Contact: Diane Bellem, Director of Family Support
dbellem@shelteringarmsforkids.com

South of Market Child Care, Inc. (SOMA)
790 Folsom Street
San Francisco, CA 94107
415-820-3500
Contact: Judith Baker, Executive Director
judith@somacc.org

This article reviews the literature on the significance of child characteristics in the incidence of physical abuse. It focuses in particular on three issues: 1) childhood factors that may precipitate abuse, 2) the contribution of handicapping conditions to abuse, and 3) the role of the child in the maintenance of abuse. The evidence does not indicate that child characteristics are an important cause of abuse. Although retrospective studies suggest a link between certain child features (e.g., prematurity, low birthweight, handicapping conditions) and maltreatment, the studies are too methodologically flawed to prove that these factors independently cause abuse. It is likely that the “difficult” child characteristics observed in abused children are most often a result, instead of a cause of maltreatment. It is possible, however, that certain child characteristics cause vulnerable parents to move from being at-risk to engaging in abusive behaviors. There is considerable evidence that certain child characteristics contribute to the maintenance of abusive relationships, once they have begun.


This article reports on a study of the social support and social network relationships of neglecting and non-neglecting low-income, single, African American mothers. This study found few differences in the characteristics of their social networks, but found key differences in their perceptions of their relationships and interactions. Non-neglecting mothers approached relationships with a balance of independence and mutuality, and had interactions characterized by trust, reciprocity, and flexibility. Neglecting mothers were more dependent on others, and had interactions characterized by conflict, distrust, and lack of mutuality. The author suggests that interventions designed to prevent child maltreatment by strengthening parents’ social supports should focus not only on making resources available for more social support, but also on developing the interpersonal skills that will enable them to build mutually satisfactory relationships with members of their social networks.


This chapter presents a theory about individual differences in parenting based on a comparison of maltreating and non-maltreating parents. Existing theory and research on child maltreatment focuses on three general influences on parenting: 1) the parent’s individual developmental history and personal psychological resources, 2) the child’s temperament and individual characteristics, and 3) social sources of stress and support. The authors consider whether one of these can explain parental functioning across the entire continuum of parenting, from sensitive and responsive to dysfunctional and maltreating. They conclude that while there are multiple determinants of parental behavior, a parent’s developmental history and personality are the most important. These personal and psychological factors affect other key factors, such as how a parent copes with a challenging child, the quality of his or her interpersonal relations, and the nature of his or her occupational experience. Consequently, they exert the most overall influence on parenting behavior.


This short essay provides an introduction to parenting groups, focusing on their role as parenting education and family support mechanisms. In 1995, Carter (1995) estimated that there are over 100,000 groups of parents that meet during any given year. The figure includes time limited parenting education groups that meet for 8-16 sessions, open-ended weekly or bi-weekly parent-child groups, groups of participants in ongoing childcare or early intervention programs that meet monthly or quarterly, members of therapeutic or self-help groups focused on parenting issues, and parents who come together for a single workshop or discussion. In all this diversity, the authors argue that the common threads that make parenting groups important are their ability to help parents to overcome isolation, develop peer support systems, and create learning communities. The success of parenting groups, they contend, depends far more on the quality of interpersonal relationships and the processes of interaction that develop in the group, rather than on any particular substantive content. Other factors that contribute to strong parenting groups include voluntary participation, a minimum duration of 6-8 meetings over as many weeks, a
flexible curriculum that responds to participants’ interests and needs, and well-trained, regularly supervised facilitators.


This important article is widely viewed as having sparked the recent surge of interest in the concept of social capital in academia and beyond. Coleman develops the concept of social capital as a means of balancing older theories that use either social context or individual self-interest to explain human behavior. Social capital facilitates certain actions on the part of individuals and/or groups. It is neither a property of individuals nor physical goods; rather, it is a set of human relationships. Important functions of social capital include establishing 1) the level of trust needed to facilitate productive social exchange, 2) a means of exchanging information that facilitates action, and 3) effective community-level norms and values. Coleman applies this theory of social capital to an analysis of the family, and uses it to show the likelihood that high school students will drop out of school, given the social capital of the family system. He argues that the social capital that is important for child and youth development does not reside solely within the family, but also exists at the community level.


This article reviews the evolution of the understanding of social isolation over the previous three decades of research, and develops a new definition of the term, which is applied to a study of 300 maltreating and non-maltreating low-income mothers. Specifically, Coohey considers social isolation in terms of 1) the structural characteristics of parents’ social networks (i.e., size and frequency of contact), 2) parents’ perceptions of whether their networks provide them with adequate support, and 3) whether they have actually received supportive resources from network members in the past. Coohey found that all of the studies reviewed agreed that maltreating parents do not feel adequately supported by members of their social networks. There is no evidence to indicate, however, that they actually receive less support than their non-maltreating counterparts. In her own research, Coohey found that maltreating parents were not socially isolated, as all had at least eight important network members, and over 100 network contacts per month. They did, however, receive less tangible and emotional support than non-maltreating parents. The author hypothesizes that this pattern results from the history of interaction between maltreating parents and the members of their social networks.


This chapter summarizes the collective strengths of current prevention efforts and highlights new directions advocates might pursue in response to recent changes in family dynamics and social policy. It begins by briefly outlining the theoretical frameworks that have shaped the development of prevention programming. Particular attention is paid to the impact different forms of maltreatment have had on the design and replication of specific prevention strategies. It then summarizes the key program models emerging in the field and the empirical evidence regarding their relative effectiveness. Finally, the chapter outlines the challenges facing prevention advocates and offers suggestions on how new strategies might be developed.


This chapter examines the intergenerational transmission of child maltreatment. Using data from a longitudinal study of high-risk children and their families, the authors estimate that 45 percent of parents who were maltreated as children maltreat their own offspring. When parents who experienced harsh physical punishments that did not meet the criteria for child protection are included, 70 percent experience significant problems with their own parenting. The authors review the research literature on intergenerational maltreatment in order to discover what might work to break this pattern. They conclude that non-repeaters tend to have had an emotionally supportive relationship with a caring adult during childhood and/or be in an intact long-term stable relationship with a partner as an adult. They were also more likely to have been in psychotherapy as adolescents or young adults. The authors believe that the experience of a caring relationship and/or therapy enabled
these parents to break through their emotional disassociation with their own childhood pain, develop empathy for themselves, and then empathize with their own children. They suggest that interventions and/or prevention mechanisms aimed at breaking the intergenerational cycle of maltreatment include a mental health component, initially focused on helping parents develop an understanding of their own childhoods, and then integrating that knowledge into their everyday conceptions of themselves and their children.


This edited volume is based on the premise that child abuse and neglect should not be considered to be simply the result of individual parental pathologies. Instead, child maltreatment must also be viewed as a product of the difficult social environments in which many abusive and neglectful parents live. In particular, it is social and economic deprivation that generally turns at-risk parents into actual maltreaters. Parents that are socially isolated and economically struggling are much more likely to lack the ability to cope with life stressors that tend to precipitate child maltreatment. Consequently, policies and programs designed to reduce CAN must go beyond individualistic therapies to embrace the development of strong social networks, neighborhoods, and communities.


Early home visitation services have long been considered one of the most promising strategies to prevent child maltreatment. These services generally begin shortly before, during, or after the birth of a child, and are designed to support the development of positive child-parent interaction patterns that will last into the future. This book reviews the development of early home visitation services, and presents best practice principles that have been empirically linked with positive outcomes for families. Chapter Seven focuses specifically on how early home visitation services can best facilitate the development of strong supports among at-risk families to prevent CAN.


This beautifully written, emotionally arresting book considers how children who suffered through horrible childhoods, with multiple family problems and severe parental psychopathology, grew up to become mature, psychologically healthy, highly functional adults. Written by a Harvard-trained clinical psychologist, it is based on an eight-year series of in-depth interviews with 40 adults who had been identified by clinicians as exceptionally resilient. The author believes that the primary factor that explains this resiliency is the capacity to “love well”: that is, to develop and maintain caring personal relationships, engage in personally satisfying and meaningful work (including parenting), and have faith in the positive potential within themselves and the world around them. Higgins concludes that this capacity to love well is not a predetermined characteristic, which one is either born with or not. Rather, it is something that is sparked and/or cultivated when individuals who have suffered tremendously in childhood become engaged in supportive, caring relationships. The book concludes with a discussion of how therapy can play an important role in this process, with recommendations from resilient adults who have gone through the therapeutic process for those engaged in clinical practice.


Since 1973, MELD and its affiliates have provided group-based parenting education to thousands of parents in 25 states. MELD is a national, not-for-profit family support agency headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota whose mission is to strengthen families in critical periods of transition. The MELD model brings together groups of parents who have similar needs, provides them with pertinent information, and helps them develop into supportive peer groups. MELD has developed programs to meet the needs of eight targeted populations, including teenaged mothers, young fathers, parents of children with special needs, parents who are deaf or hard of hearing, Latino and Hmong parents, and adult parents. Essential components of all programs include peer facilitators; long-term service availability; blending information and support; addressing the concerns of the group, parent, and child; a persistent focus on parent strengths; an emphasis on problem-solving and decision making; and ongoing training and technical assistance for volunteers and professional staff. Evaluations of the MELD model have found that it has helped parents to reduce isolation; develop appropriate knowledge, attitudes, and skills related to childrearing; and make positive choices for themselves and their families.

This book was written for early childhood professionals, including educators, students, caregivers, teachers, or administrators working in ECE programs. It combines theory, research, and anecdotal material, with many specific applications for practitioners. Part I provides a general introduction to the significance of emotions in ECE programs. It describes the historical evolution of professional thought on this issue and reviews recent theory and research on early emotional development. Part II applies this theory and research to specific issues in early childhood education. After presenting an overview of the emotion-centered curriculum, it presents specific teaching goals and strategies for an emotion-focused early childhood program.


This edited volume is written for early childhood professionals who want to create ECE programs that facilitate the integration of emotional, social, and cognitive learning. In particular, it is addressed to educators and therapists who are working with highly stressed, emotionally fragile, and developmentally arrested preschoolers. Part I presents examinations of emotional issues within the context of early childhood development. Part II provides teachers and clinicians with techniques designed to make adult-child relationships in preschool strong and therapeutic. Part III provides a conceptual framework for teachers interested in developing emotionally based curriculums, and provides lesson plans with activities that support healthy emotional development. Part IV focuses on special populations of children who may present a confusing developmental picture to parents, teachers, and therapists. Finally, Part V considers how ECE professionals can address the needs of families in their programs.


The purpose of this paper is to promote a greater understanding of what is known about the financial costs of child maltreatment and encourage continued examination and comparison of these costs with the benefits of prevention. The paper begins with a discussion of the factors that make up the total cost of child maltreatment, including negative impacts on children and society. It provides estimates of direct costs incurred by the child welfare system, as well as the judicial, law enforcement, health, and mental health systems. In addition, it estimates the indirect costs, or long-term economic consequences of child maltreatment. These include the costs to society of special education, mental health, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, welfare dependency, domestic violence, homelessness, juvenile delinquency, and adult criminality. Finally, the paper highlights findings from selected studies that have conducted cost-benefit and cost-of-failure analyses.


In this chapter, Pelton argues that since poverty is by far the most powerful factor known to be correlated with child maltreatment, it makes sense to focus prevention efforts on 1) reducing poverty, 2) increasing low-income parents’ ability to cope with the stresses of poverty, and 3) providing these parents with the material supports necessary to help improve their home environment to make it as safe as possible for children. Although it is not understood precisely why poverty produces an increased incidence of CAN, a leading theory is that living in poverty substantially increases parental stress, which may weaken self-control and provoke the discharge of hostile, aggressive impulses towards children. At the same time, attempting to raise children in an extremely difficult, impoverished environment may lead to neglect as parents lack the material resources to pay for needed childcare or basic necessities and/or experience psychological problems such as depression, hopelessness, and despair. Pelton criticizes the existing research for failing to study whether providing poor parents with material supports may reduce the incidence of CAN, and presents some evidence which suggests that this represents a promising strategy.

This article provides a critical review of the origins, definitions, and recent uses of the concept of social capital. The growing consensus of the literature is that social capital can be understood as “the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures.” In the sociological literature, social capital has been primarily examined as a source of social control; family support; and, most commonly, benefits received through extra-familial networks (e.g., access to employment). Although social capital has been studied in terms of its socially positive functions, Portes emphasizes that it is important to recognize its more problematic aspects. Specifically, social capital can function as a means of excluding “outsiders,” put excess claims on group members, restrict individual freedoms, and maintain “downward leveling norms.” Portes argues that social capital is most usefully applied to studies of individuals, families, and small groups, and loses its analytic power when applied to large communities, regions, or nations.

Reppucci, N. Dickon, Preston A. Britner, and Jennifer L. Woolard (1997), Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect Through Parent Education (Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.)

The authors of this book were commissioned by the Virginia Department of Social Services to conduct an independent assessment of the Department’s parenting programs aimed at preventing child abuse across the state. The researchers studied 25 parenting program sites, most of which offered parenting education components. The book provides a broad understanding of the field of parenting education programs designed to prevent CAN. It includes a concise review of what is known and not known regarding the potential of parenting education and family support programs to prevent child maltreatment. It reviews the literature regarding various approaches to parenting education, areas of focus (e.g., parenting knowledge versus stress and support), and the widely used published curricula. The authors also provide an extensive discussion of evaluation issues designed to help researchers and practitioners develop better programs. The book concludes with a report on lessons learned from the Virginia evaluation, and recommendations for a national policy agenda.


This chapter succinctly synthesizes the theoretical and research literature on maltreating parents. The authors begin with a brief review of the historical evolution of understanding and definition of child maltreatment in Western industrialized society. The bulk of the chapter explains the role of parental dysfunction and psychopathology in CAN. The authors embrace the dominant ecological model of child maltreatment, which stresses the interrelationship of individual, familial, community, and cultural factors in causing child maltreatment. They focus, however, on the causes and characteristics of individual-level parental psychopathology, examining cognitive, affective and behavioral patterns that have been found to by typical of maltreating parents. The authors contend that a parent’s own childhood experience is the primary determinant of their later parenting behavior. In particular, maltreating parents are highly likely to have experienced abuse and neglect in their own childhoods. The authors discuss the developmental consequences of childhood abuse and neglect, and the factors that help to prevent or terminate the continuation of a cycle of maltreatment.


These researchers found that residential stability and concentrated affluence predict the existence of collective childrearing norms, as well as the mutual sharing of advice, material goods, and information about childrearing. Concentrated disadvantage, in contrast, is associated with sharply lower expectations for shared child control.


This volume is the product of a two-and-a-half year project during which a committee of 17 individuals evaluated and integrated the current science of early childhood development. Focusing on the period from before birth to kindergarten entry, it explains how early experience affects all aspects of development, ranging from
brain maturation to cultural values. The book emphasizes that the long-standing "nature versus nurture" debate should be considered passé, as "human development is shaped by a dynamic and continuous interaction between biology and experience." Chapter topics include acquiring self-regulation, communicating and learning, making friends and getting along with peers, the developing brain, nurturing relationships, family resources, childcare, neighborhood and community, and promoting healthy development through early intervention. The book concludes with an in-depth discussion of recommendations designed to apply current knowledge of early childhood development to the goal of promoting the health and well-being of all young children, as well as maximizing the potential of the nation's human capital and democratic institutions.


This essay considers whether the many different types of therapeutic interventions that have been used with the wide variety of perpetrators of child maltreatment have any important characteristics in common. The author argues that the key to all successful treatment is providing an environment that opens up new channels of growth, development, and maturation, which were blocked and distorted in the perpetrator's early formative years of life. In particular, therapy needs to be oriented towards helping the perpetrator develop 1) empathetic understanding and awareness; 2) mature, independent judgment and self-efficacy; 3) the capacity to engage in reciprocal, caring relationships; 4) the ability to experience the everyday, adequate pleasures of life; and 5) an awareness of and resistance to the tendency to repeat negative childhood patterns. Effective therapy accomplishes this by providing the experience of a safe, caring relationship, which perpetrators of child maltreatment commonly lacked in childhood. The author concludes that the only way to keep children safe is to help perpetrators develop their capacity to love both themselves and others.


This monograph presents promising strategies developed by Head Start programs to better meet the changing and intensifying mental health needs of Head Start children, families, and staff. Chapter 1 explains why it is critical to expand and strengthen mental health services in Head Start. Chapter 2 presents mental health strategies focused on staff development. Chapter 3 focuses on new ways of engaging families, particularly those with the most complex set of stresses. Chapter 4 describes those few programs whose mental health strategies include strong connections to the larger community, either through collaborations around integrated services, or as part of efforts to address problems such as substance abuse. Chapter 5 discusses a variety of relevant issues, including assessment, gaps in research, financing needs, and training and technical assistance. Chapter 6 summarizes lessons learned, as well as recommendations and implications for the future at the program, community, state, and national levels.
Publications


Internet


Center for Early Childhood Leadership—
National Louis University
The Center is committed to providing training programs and technical assistance to center directors to improve their management skills and the quality of services to children and families. The Center's training initiatives support the professional development of new and experienced center-based program directors, college instructors, consultants, and other leaders in the field of early childhood education. The Center is infusing family support strategies into its training programs.
http://www2.nl.edu/twal/

Child Welfare League of America
Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) is the nation's oldest and largest membership-based child welfare organization. It is committed to engaging people everywhere in promoting the well-being of children, youth, and their families and in protecting children from harm. Since 1986, its National Child Day Care Task Force has been committed to improving the quality of child day care services for all children. It has been prominent in advocating for better federal policies and adequate funding to ensure a comprehensive child day care delivery system that is accessible and affordable to all parents and that is of high quality.
http://www.cwla.org/programs/daycare/quality.htm

Children's Defense Fund
The mission of the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) is to Leave No Child Behind® and to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start, and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. CDF advocates for the children of America who cannot vote, lobby, or speak for themselves. CDF’s Child Care Division strives to give children a head start in life and to ensure that they are safe and secure while their parents work. Its Child Welfare and Mental Health Division supports American families so they can better nurture and protect their children; avoid crises; and promote permanent, loving families.
www.childrensdefense.org

Committee for Children / Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum
Committee for Children, a nonprofit organization, is a leader in social and emotional learning and violence prevention. They produce curricula, such as Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum which teaches empathy, impulse control, problem solving, and anger management. This website also contains research on social and emotional development issues.
http://www.cfchildren.org/default.shtml

The Fatherhood Project
Founded in 1981, The Fatherhood Project®—a national research and education project that is examining the future of fatherhood and developing ways to support men's involvement in child rearing—is the longest-running national initiative on fatherhood. Currently under the auspices of the Families and Work Institute, the project produces books, films, consultation, seminars, and training that present practical strategies to support fathers and mothers in their parenting roles.
http://www.fatherhoodproject.org/

Free to Grow: Head Start Partnerships to Promote Substance-free Communities
Free To Grow (FTG) identifies the best ideas and practices in the field of prevention in general, and substance abuse and child abuse prevention in particular, and applies them to the crucial early years. Free To Grow brings together broad based community partners to support locally tailored, integrated approaches to strengthening families and communities. Program strategies target the young child’s overall environment, not the child. Its website contains prevention strategies and that Free To Grow is adapting to strengthen families and neighborhoods at its grantee sites throughout the country.
www.freetogrow.org

APPENDIX D: RESOURCE ORGANIZATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING FAMILIES THROUGH EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION
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National Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds
The National Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds initiates and engages in national efforts that assist state Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds in strengthening families to prevent child abuse and neglect. This includes promoting and supporting a system of services, laws, practices, and attitudes that supports families by enabling them to provide their children with a safe, healthy, and nurturing childhood. Members of the National Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds are catalysts for the development of community-based child abuse and neglect prevention programs in their states. They are also incubators for innovative new programs and services related to strengthening families to prevent child abuse and neglect.

www.msu.edu/user/millsda

National Association for the Education of Young Children
The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is the nation’s largest and most influential organization of early childhood educators and others dedicated to improving the quality of programs for children from birth through third grade. Founded in 1926, NAEYC celebrated its 75th anniversary with over 100,000 members and a national network of nearly 450 local, state, and regional Affiliates. NAEYC Affiliate Groups work to improve professional practice and working conditions in early childhood education and to build public support for high quality early childhood programs. NAEYC publishes a journal called Young Children which contains articles on topics of interest to early childhood professionals.

The Professional Development Division of NAEYC is dedicated to sustaining excellence and supporting innovation in early care and education. To do this, the Division’s work focuses on the improvement of professional preparation and development for individuals who care for and educate children, birth through age eight. Recently, NAEYC has embarked on a new project: Supporting Teachers, Strengthening Families which is helping early childhood educators prevent harm to children while they are strengthening children's social and emotional development. The Division collaborates with NAEYC’s Communications/Policy Development Division and with NAEYC’s National Academy for the Accreditation of Early Childhood Programs to influence policies and practices that benefit young children and their teachers.

http://www.naeyc.org

National Center for Children in Poverty
The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research and policy organization at Columbia University. Its mission is to identify and promote strategies that prevent child poverty in the United States and that improve the lives of low-income children and families. Concentrating on the links between family economic security and child development, it researches policies that promote three goals:

- Economically secure families
- Children entering school ready to succeed
- Stable, nurturing families

Its early care and learning advocacy recognizes that young children need healthy family relationships and quality early care and learning experiences.

www.nccp.org

National Center on Fathers and Families
Established in 1994 at the Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania, NCOFF is an interdisciplinary policy research center, dedicated to expanding the knowledge base on father involvement and family development, and informing policy designed to improve the well-being of children. NCOFF works to strengthen practice in family-serving programs by engaging practitioners in targeted conversations, information dissemination, and collaborative activities.

http://www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu/

National Child Care Information Center
The National Child Care Information Center (NCCIC) website contains information about starting a child care center including basics of design considerations and licensing requirements. NCCIC is sponsored by the US Department of Health and Human Services to be a national resource that links information and people to improve the child care delivery system so that all children and families have access to high-quality comprehensive services.

http://www.nccic.org/faqs/starting.html
APPENDIX D: RESOURCE ORGANIZATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING FAMILIES THROUGH EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

National Head Start Association
Head Start has been an innovator and champion of parent involvement and family support in early childhood education settings for many years. The association sponsors leadership institutes, produces publications, and advocates for policies that recognize the importance of families and social and emotional skill development as part of early childhood programs.
http://www.nhsa.org/

National Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families
This is the national individual membership organization whose mission it is to build the skills of practitioners working to increase the responsible involvement of fathers in the lives of their children. NPNFF’s publications, conferences, training events, technical assistance, and advocacy work foster communication, promote professionalism, enhance collaboration, and strengthen the practice of individuals working with fathers and fragile families.
http://www.npnff.org/

Ounce of Prevention Fund
The Ounce of Prevention Fund was responsible for the development of the Educare Center (which started in 1986 in an apartment in the Robert Taylor Homes housing project and moved in early 2000 to its own site, designed by architect Stanley Tigerman). Its website contains information on Educare replication and about designing a state-of-the-art early care and education center.
http://www.ounceofprevention.org

Parent Services Project
Parent Services Project is dedicated to promoting the health and well-being of children, families and communities by developing and expanding quality family support and parent involvement services in early care and education settings. Its specialty is integrating family support into early education settings through training, technical assistance, and education.
http://www.parentservices.org/

The Research and Training Center on Family Support and Children’s Mental Health
The Center is dedicated to promoting effective community-based, culturally competent, family-centered services for families and their children who are, or may be affected by mental, emotional or behavioral disorders. This goal is accomplished through collaborative research partnerships with family members, service providers, policy makers, and other concerned persons.
http://www rtc.pdx.edu/

SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) Mental Health Information Center
http://www.mentalhealth.org/child/childhealth.asp

Center for Mental Health Services / Child and Adolescent Mental Health
The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services offers a number of resources, information, and links to programs on children's mental health. It also offers links to technical assistance, training and research centers on children’s mental health.
http://www.mentalhealth.org/publications/allpubs/KEN95-0010/default.asp

I Can Problem Solve Curriculum
This curriculum helps children learn to resolve interpersonal problems by teaching them the problem solving skills of perspective-taking, recognition of people's potential motivations for behavior, sensitivity to the existence of a problem as interpersonal and its causes, and listening and awareness skills. These and other prerequisite skills enrich children's ability to generate alternative solutions to real-life problems, anticipate potential consequences to an act, and plan sequenced steps to a stated interpersonal goal (means-ends thinking). Information about the curriculum as a model program is available on the SAMSHA website.
http://modelprograms.samhsa.gov/promising.cfm?pkProgramID=101
**Wheelock College**

This educational institution’s mission is “to improve the quality of life for children and their families.” Wheelock carries out this mission by providing graduate and undergraduate programs as well as ongoing education for professionals, contributing to the knowledge of professionals in the field, generating and sharing new knowledge, and influencing the development of social policy. The mission of the College is sustained by its academic programs, course offerings, and involvement in the life of the surrounding community, as well as research, curriculum development, and professional activities. Its child and family studies program offers concentrations in birth to three development and intervention; child life and family-centered care; child development studies; family, culture and society; and family support and parenting education.

http://www.wheelock.edu/

**Zero to Three**

Since 1977, Zero to Three’s multi-disciplinary focus has brought together infant and family professionals, uniting the fields of medicine, mental health, research, science, child development, and education. One of its main emphases are to support early childhood workers and to foster professional excellence through training and related activities such as publications. The site is fully searchable. One of Zero to Three’s most important contributions to professional development is its publications on reflective supervision and developing staff relationships and relationships with families.

http://www.zerotothree.org
The following sample family assessment tools appear courtesy of Sheltering Arms Child Development and Family Support Center

**SAMPLE ENROLLMENT APPLICATION AND EMERGENCY FORM**

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<th>Street Address</th>
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**PERMISSION TO PICK UP** Legal Custody Papers Must Be On File to Deny a Parent Permission to Visit or Pick Up Their Child.

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### CALL IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY

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<th></th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
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Name of public or private school child attends, if any:

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<td>Yes</td>
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Does your child have allergies to food, insects, and medications, other?  

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<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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If yes, please list allergies or write none.

Is your child currently required to take prescribed medication on a daily basis for a chronic condition?  

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<td>Yes</td>
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If yes, please specify:

Are there any special procedures required in caring for your child?  

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<td>Yes</td>
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If yes, please specify:

Does your child have physical problems, mental disorders, mental retardation or other developmental disabilities, which would limit participation in the programs and activities? If yes, please specify:

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Date of Most Recent Physical (Health Check)  

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Date of Most Recent Dental Exam (2,3,4 year olds)  

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Immunization Next Due Date  

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Date of Most Recent Ear, Eye, Dental Exam/Form 3300 (3-4 year olds)  

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Child’s Primary Care Physician  

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Insurance or Medicaid Name  

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In case of accident, injury or serious illness and the Sheltering Arms staff are unable to reach me, I give my permission to them to secure medical attention and if necessary, to contact the doctor listed above for medical records and/or treatment.

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Parent signature  

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This center uses the following medical facility in case of emergencies  

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FSC Signature  

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Parent Signature  

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**FAMILY EMPOWERMENT PLAN**

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<th>Name of Child</th>
<th>Parent's Name</th>
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<th>Child's Birthday</th>
<th>Child's Nickname</th>
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Family Strengths

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**IDEAS FOR FAMILY GOALS:**

safety, housing, food, education, literacy, culture, arts, recreation, parenting, balancing work and family responsibilities, advocacy, community linkages

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<th>GOAL</th>
<th>TIMELINE</th>
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Resources Needed:

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FSC Signature

Parent Signature
Early Childhood Mental Health Project
1710 Scott Street
San Francisco, CA 94115

**Contract Job Description**

**Job Title:** Mental Health Consultant

**Job Summary:** Under the supervision of the Director of Parents Place, the Mental Health Consultant provides consultation to childcare centers as part of a grant-funded project to enhance childcare services for children birth to five years old and their families. The Consultant understands the mission of JFCS and works within the Agency’s resources to achieve goals.

**I. Primary Duties and Responsibilities**
1. Provides case-centered consultation to teachers with questions or concerns about children at the center.
2. Observes children in the childcare setting to assess functioning, relationships with teachers and other children, and “fit” in the program.
3. Meets on-site or at home with families to complete assessments, provide developmental guidance and referrals, including linkage to clinical services.
4. Meets regularly with childcare staff individually and in groups to discuss individual children.

**II. Programmatic Consultation**
5. Observes the childcare setting to become familiar with the program offered to children.
6. Meets regularly with the childcare staff and the site director to address programmatic concerns, as requested.
7. Provides consultation to center staff on programmatic issues that affect the quality of care provided to the children, as requested.
8. Discusses effective mechanisms of working with parents, as requested.
9. Assists staff to build and maintain productive collegial relationships with one another, as requested.

**III. Clinical Services**
10. Provides responsive, clinical services to families, as indicated.
11. Provides case management services as needed and collaborates with schools and community agencies as indicated.
12. Facilitates parenting groups and workshops at childcare centers and at other sites as requested.

**IV. Primary Duties and Responsibilities**
13. Maintains up-to-date records.
15. Participates in the Project evaluation, as requested.
16. Represents the Project in the community, as requested.
17. Complies with all standards of performance set by the Agency of employment and the Training Program.
18. Completes other tasks as assigned.