



HELP ME GROW

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

Strengthening Families is a research-informed, cost-effective strategy to increase family stability, enhance child development and reduce child abuse and neglect. It builds five protective factors:

- Parental resilience
- Social connections
- Knowledge of parenting and child development
- Concrete support in times of need
- Social and emotional competence of children

Through the Strengthening Families Initiative, more than thirty states are shifting policy, funding and training to help programs working with children and families build protective factors with families. Many states also use the Strengthening Families approach to inform state prevention strategies, strengthen families in the child welfare system and engage parents and communities in building protective factors.

CONNECTING *HELP ME GROW* AFFILIATES AND STATE STRENGTHENING FAMILIES™ EFFORTS: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR STATES

Strengthening Families efforts provide a cross-systems framework for family support and capacity building in more than 30 states. State initiatives are led by cross-system leadership teams generally representing a diverse set of disciplines, including early childhood, child abuse and neglect prevention, child welfare and public health. In most states, Strengthening Families is being implemented broadly in settings as diverse as early childhood centers, family support programs, parenting programs and other venues that serve young children and their families. Connecting to these leadership teams provides an opportunity to place the *Help Me Grow* affiliate work in the context of broad cross-disciplinary thinking about how to leverage existing systems to support families and prevent abuse and neglect.

At the programmatic level Strengthening Families provides a framework and set of tools to help any environment that supports young children and their families enhance their capacity to build protective factors that promote optimal development and prevent abuse and neglect. For states implementing *Help Me Grow*, Strengthening Families materials and tools can be used to help build a more comprehensive family support strategy that will complement their existing work. Existing programs implementing the Strengthening Families approach in states may also be an important resource for *Help Me Grow* affiliates. These programs are already working with families in a strengths-based, capacity building way and may be an important resource to families who need additional supports

Visit the Strengthening Families website (www.strengtheningfamilies.net) to learn more about efforts going on in specific states, or to download tools and resources to support Strengthening Families implementation within a program.



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Help Me Grow (HMG) is a proven, efficient and effective system that assists states in identifying children birth through age 8 at risk for developmental or behavioral challenges, and connecting families to community-based programs and services. The success of *HMG* is built on four core components and three structural requirements:

Core Components:

1. Child health care provider outreach
2. Family and community outreach
3. Centralized telephone access point
4. Data collection and analysis.

Structural Requirements:

1. An organizing entity
2. A strategy for expanding statewide over time
3. The implementation of a continuous quality improvement plan

The Commonwealth Fund and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation funded creation of the Help Me Grow National Center and nationwide expansion. As of 2012, the *HMG* national affiliate network consists of 16 states.

The National Center supports affiliates' building statewide systems and embedding *HMG* within a larger, national early childhood system.

Visit the *Help Me Grow National website* (www.HelpMeGrowNational.org) to learn about *HMG* efforts in your state and to watch the *HMG* video: "Making the Connection: Help Me Grow The Connecticut Experience."

HOW THE STRENGTHENING FAMILIES PROTECTIVE FACTORS FRAMEWORK SUPPORTS *HELP ME GROW* SYSTEMS

Help Me Grow (HMG) connects families with young children to community-based services and support. Through the *HMG* system, statewide partners and communities are mobilized to build collaboration across service sectors, including child health care, early care and education and family support. Ongoing data collection and analysis helps *HMG* state affiliates identify gaps in and barriers to services. The *HMG* philosophy and model align well with the Strengthening Families mission and protective factors.

Parental Resilience: *HMG* fosters parental resilience and family strengths by meeting families where they are and partnering with them in identifying and prioritizing issues. Families are helped to recognize early signs of developmental/behavioral risks and to successfully find needed programs and services. Parents become better equipped to respond effectively to family crisis situations.

Social Connections: Through *HMG* care coordination, families are linked to a wide array of formal and informal services and supports such as family events, children's play groups, parent/family networks and educational programs. These experiences all help to facilitate mutual support, friendships and partnerships.

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development: *HMG* supports families as their children's first observers, teachers and advocates for optimal healthy development. Through a variety of informational materials and community resources, families acquire knowledge and skills related to child development, behaviors and milestones. Families are further assisted in using observational tools and effective parenting strategies to best support their children.

Concrete Support in Times of Need: The *HMG* system connects families to services, programs and opportunities where they live. Care coordinators build relationships with families, helping them understand available resources, how to access them, specific questions to ask and, if needed, assistance with completing service application packages. *HMG* further acts as a care coordination service for child health care, early care and education and family support providers, thus promoting an ongoing cycle of concrete support.

Social and Emotional Competence of Children: *HMG* care coordination and service referrals are provided for children and families at every level of need: developmental, behavioral or social-emotional problems, Birth to Three, Title V special health care needs and special education. By linking families to community-based programs such as child care, Head Start and family resource centers, *HMG* supports positive early learning and peer socialization experiences that strengthen children's social-emotional abilities, school readiness and school success.