

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES WASHINGTON: STATE PROFILE

Infrastructure

Washington's Strengthening Families initiative was an active effort until 2016. The Washington Strengthening Families Collective dissolved and is currently in a state of reformation as of spring 2021. We envision creating a space where all parents, communities, and providers who are interested in protective factors can gather to share information and collaboratively support efforts statewide.

The previous initiative worked to steward integration of the Strengthening Families approach and the Protective Factors Framework into statewide systems, communities, and norms through collaboration and innovation. The hope in reinvigorating this effort is that all of Washington's communities, systems, and organizations will come to focus on building protective and promotive factors to reduce risk and create optimal outcomes for children, youth, and families.

Parents, community members, family support organizations, and Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF) will lead the reforming of our Washington Strengthening Families initiative. In addition to those listed, we will be working closely with our Community Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) efforts.

Parent Partnerships

The initiative focuses on collaborating with parents, caregivers, and other adults engaged in the lives of children to enhance leadership activities, raise community voice, and foster trusting relationships. Cultivating parent partnerships continues to be a priority for our state and is incorporated through home visiting, community based child abuse prevention, funding decisions, Protective Factor Framework training, DCYF Parent Advisory Group, and the Community Café Collaborative.

Deepening Knowledge and Understanding

The Protective Factors Framework had been and continues to be incorporated into multiple systems and resources across our state. This includes independent advocacy, promotion and training, the King County Best Starts for Kids Initiative, Community Café, and the Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention work.

Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework presentations are done throughout the state at conferences that target family support professionals, home visitors, and child care providers. The presentations are provided by professionals in the field who have significant experience or training in the Protective Factors Framework.

The presentations provided are tailored to the audience and maintain the integrity of the Strengthening Families approach through the utilization of CSSP resources and materials. Washington State has 39 trainers trained in Bringing the Protective Factors to Life and one trained in Families Thrive which incorporates the Youth Thrive Framework.

Strengthening Families

Strengthening Families™ is a research-informed approach to increase family strengths, enhance child development and reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect. It is based on engaging families, programs and communities in building 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

Using the Strengthening Families framework, more than 30 states are shifting policy and practice to help programs working with children and families focus on protective factors. States apply the Strengthening Families approach in early childhood, child welfare, child abuse prevention and other child and family serving systems.

Nationally, the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) coordinates Strengthening Families and works with more than a dozen national partner organizations and federal partners to create a new vision in which communities, families, institutions, service systems and organizations:

- Focus on protective and promotive factors
- Recognize and support parents as decision-makers and leaders
- Value the culture and unique assets of each family
- Are mutually responsible for better outcomes for children, youth and families

Implementation Checklist

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| Strengthening Families is used in state or local early childhood systems planning efforts | ✓ |
| Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) efforts include a focus on protective factors | ✓ |
| Strengthening Families is integrated in a Quality Rating and Improvement System for early care and education | ✓ |
| Strengthening Families is included in the state's Home Visiting Plan | |
| Strengthening Families is being implemented in the child welfare system | |
| Strengthening Families efforts are linked to work to advance equity, anti-racism, and social justice | |
| The state's work around Adverse Childhood Experiences includes a focus on protective factors and positive childhood experiences | ✓ |

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Shifting Practice, Policies and Systems

A six-hour introductory class on the Protective Factors Framework is included in the Professional Training Series that is required for Level 2 participants in Early Achievers, the state Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). Intended for childcare center directors and family childcare primary providers, trainings are offered free of charge by Child Care Aware agencies throughout the state along with support to complete childcare program assessments. In the Early Learning Plan, Strengthening Families is a specific strategy for fostering supportive relationships among parents, families, caregivers, early learning professionals and schools. The approach is a recommended practice of many of the plan's other strategies as well.

The Community Café Leadership Team (CCLT) stewards an approach that sparks leadership to develop relationships necessary to strengthen families. Meaningful conversations are the mechanism used to develop bonding and bridging social capital for families throughout the socio-ecological model. This approach is currently being used in neighborhoods, early learning and childcare settings, Tribal centers, schools, faith-based organizations, and social service systems. The CCLT is comprised of parents, youth, and community organization allies who volunteer their time. The team also coaches parents and organizations in the use of community building strategies such as building partnerships with parents, Appreciative Inquiry, the World Café technology, and implementing the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework within the cultural context in their community.

The Protective Factors Framework is the foundation of the Department of Corrections Community Parenting Alternative (CPA) program and continues to be integrated into other avenues of their family work.

Ensuring Accountability

The Strengthening Families initiative alongside the Community Café Collaborative (CCC) have established theories of change that guide actions and provide a basis for evaluation efforts. The CSSP State Leads participate in the Strengthening Families National Network webinars and resources alongside other national organizations that focus on the Protective Factors Framework. The CCC continues to use an appreciative inquiry framework in its evaluation process.

Evolving Work

The demand for Community Cafés continues to grow across the state and the country. There are now Community Café leadership teams led by parents in two states, and newly forming teams in two additional states. Washington parents are considering how to best respond to the interest, and to maintain a statewide community of Café practitioners who want to learn and share together despite being separated by geography. A parent member of the Community Café Leadership Team is participating on the state Essentials for Childhood Steering Committee.

The Strengthening Families initiative will be working to support and expand training opportunities as our network grows.

The Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework is a guiding orientation for all of the prevention work embarked on by the Department of Children, Youth & Families through the Strengthening Families Washington Team. This influences all areas of practice on the team including relationships with community, contracting, and evaluation decisions.