

## USING CAFÉ CONVERSATIONS TO BUILD PROTECTIVE FACTORS AND PARENT LEADERSHIP

A key element in many states' and communities' implementation of Strengthening Families has been the use of café-style conversations among parents and caregivers. Cafés are a method of facilitating meaningful, reflective conversations that promote leadership and collaboration. These gatherings, derived from the World Café model, bring community members together for a series of structured conversations that directly or indirectly address protective factors. Through participation in cafés, parents and caregivers build leadership and relationships as well as the protective factors that help to strengthen their families.

Cafés are characterized by:

- An informal, safe and inviting atmosphere with small tables arranged to mimic a café
- Very small groups (3 to 5 individuals) engaged in peer-based conversations focused around specific questions
- A structure that allows participants to move among café tables and converse with others through multiple rounds of conversations
- A peer host who has participated in an earlier café series and has received training or orientation in creating an inclusive café conversation—and in the case of cafés being used to support Strengthening Families work, is also familiar with the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework

The goal is to create an intimate environment where parents, caregivers and community members can share and support each other as a strategy for strengthening families.

Around the country, cafés designed to build parent leadership and protective factors have been held in a wide variety of settings.

Early care and education centers, community centers, faith communities, family support centers, community action agencies and schools are typical hosts of cafés. Cafés may be open to the general public in a city or neighborhood, or targeted to those who are affiliated with the hosting school, place of worship or community program.

Cafés may be used to strengthen existing relationships among members of a group, or to help community members form new relationships and cultivate a sense of community that may not already be in place. Cafés are generally offered in a series so that participants have a chance to get to know each other and explore issues in greater depth. (Café experts recommend holding a series of at least three connected cafés to have an effect on protective factors and parent leadership.)

Parents and caregivers participate in cafés in a variety of ways. Many parents first participate in one café series, then seek support or training to start hosting or co-hosting another series – and eventually step into roles of organizing cafés and/or training other parents. Café participation can be a gateway to greater leadership opportunities and the development of skills that parents then use in their communities, in their caregiving roles and in their paid work.

### 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.

For more information, visit  
[www.strengtheningfamilies.net](http://www.strengtheningfamilies.net).

## Café Models

Several distinct models of cafés have emerged from the Strengthening Families National Network. The two most prominent models are Parent Café and Community Café. While aspects of the approaches differ, there are common elements that are core to successful cafés regardless of the model implemented. A set of core elements are presented on pages 3-4 of this document, with fidelity indicators for each that describe what it looks like when that core element is in place. These core elements and fidelity indicators were developed by a group of café implementers convened by the Center for the Study of Social Policy in 2013. Anyone implementing cafés with the goal of helping parents build leadership and protective factors should ensure that their cafés meet the criteria described in the fidelity indicators for greatest likelihood of success.

### World Café

World Café is a method for “engaging people in conversations that matter,” with a set of design principles and a basic strategy for engaging people in small-group conversations. Cafés designed for parents to build protective factors are just one of many ways the World Café method has been adapted and used around the world.

Learn more about World Café: <http://www.theworldcafe.com/>

### Parent Café

The Parent Café model was developed by parent leaders as part of Strengthening Families-Illinois in 2007, and is now housed with Be Strong Families. Parent Cafés provide a safe, non-judgmental opportunity for parents and caregivers to build their protective factors while engaging in conversations about what it means to keep their children safe and families strong, while also building parent leadership. Parent Cafés are structured around questions related to each of the five Strengthening Families protective factors. Parent Café training, a fidelity framework, “Parent Café in a Box” and evaluation tools are available from Be Strong Families for those who would like to implement Parent Cafés. Evaluation data has been collected from over 4,000 Illinois Parent Café participants, with an evaluation report to be published soon.

Learn more about Parent Café: <http://www.bestrongfamilies.org/parent-cafes>

### Community Café

The Community Café model was developed by parent volunteers in Washington State and is now supported by a volunteer Community Café Leadership Team. Community Cafés are designed to respond to community needs and concerns as well as reflect the local community culture. Café questions may or may not directly address the Strengthening Families protective factors, depending on the topic selected by the organizers – but hosts use the Protective Factors Framework as a guiding framework. Through the process of organizing, hosting and/or participating in a Community Café, parents and caregivers build their leadership, resilience, social connections and other protective factors. The Community Café Leadership Team offers an online orientation kit and provides orientation and guidance to those who would like to organize and host Community Cafés.

Learn more about Community Café: <http://thecommunitycafe.com/>

### Caring Conversations

The Caring Conversations Café model was developed by ZERO TO THREE in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Human Services. The model is focused on building collaborative partnerships among parents and their young children’s providers. Through these collaborations, parents and providers learn from each other and support one another in providing nurturing, responsive care to the very young children in their lives. In having parents and providers participate in these Cafés, the hope is that all involved will gain an awareness and understanding of the protective and promotive factors that strengthen families.

The Caring Conversations Café Model Facilitators’ Guide is available for purchase as a downloadable product from: <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/657-caring-conversations-cafe-model-facilitator-guide>

## USING CAFÉS TO BUILD PROTECTIVE FACTORS AND PARENT LEADERSHIP: CORE ELEMENTS

Some aspects of café implementation will differ according to the model used and the needs of the community. However, there are common elements that must be in place for a café that is intended to help parents build their protective factors and leadership.

The following core elements and fidelity indicators were developed by a group of café implementers convened by the Center for the Study of Social Policy in 2013. Anyone implementing cafés with the goal of helping parents build leadership and protective factors should ensure that their cafés meet these criteria for greatest likelihood of success.

CORE ELEMENT	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE
<b>Cafes bring parents/caregivers and others together to build positive relationships with each other and to strengthen families and communities</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Parents and caregivers are the primary participants in Cafés <input type="checkbox"/> The Café and the majority of Café tables are hosted by parent leaders <input type="checkbox"/> Cafes are primarily organized in communities, by and for parents and caregivers, with service provider staff assisting as partners and allies
<b>Café themes and questions are relevant, generative, thought-provoking and appropriate to the prospective guests (participants)</b>	Individual Café Questions: <input type="checkbox"/> Are strengths-based <input type="checkbox"/> Are open-ended <input type="checkbox"/> Have no right or wrong answer <input type="checkbox"/> Are developed and/or chosen by a local planning group which includes potential participants
<b>Cafes are scheduled and structured to allow the space and time for meaningful conversations</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Cafes are held in series of at least 3 connected Cafés <input type="checkbox"/> Each Café lasts at least 90 minutes, with at least 15 minutes for each round of conversation
<b>All aspects of Café planning, communication and hosting are strength-based and involve parents/caregivers as leaders</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Guests and organizers communicate with equality and respect <input type="checkbox"/> Everyone is an expert (on their own experience) and everyone's voice counts. <input type="checkbox"/> Diverse perspectives are welcomed and honored <input type="checkbox"/> All contributions to making a Café successful are valued, recognized, and honored
<b>Cafes are safe places – both emotionally and physically – and safety is intentionally created and maintained by the group</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Cafés are hosted in environments that feel safe and welcoming, and are accessible to the community <input type="checkbox"/> Café settings reflect the culture of the people attending <input type="checkbox"/> Café hosts and table hosts know what to do if conversations become challenging

CORE ELEMENT	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE
<b>Cafes are built around meaningful conversations in large and small groups among people who may or may not know each other well</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Groups of 3-5 individuals participate in conversations at each café table <input type="checkbox"/> Participants are encouraged to mix into different groups for each round of conversation and to have conversations with people they don't know well <input type="checkbox"/> The café environment is designed to be physically inviting and intimate
<b>Harvests are a part of every café design</b>	Each Cafe Harvest: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is used to elicit, document and communicate group wisdom</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is an opportunity to focus on the original purpose of the café</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is made visible to the whole group and recorded in some manner</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is shared with the participants and with others in the community where relevant</li> </ul>
<b>All people hosting Cafes are prepared</b>	Café Hosts and Table Hosts have all received training on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The World Café Approach</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Setting up an inclusive, welcoming, respectful environment conducive to small and large group conversations</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Facilitation that creates space for every participant to speak</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Developing powerful questions</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How to harvest group wisdom</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Using Cafes to strengthen community partnerships and build leadership and communication skills</li> </ul>
<b>Cafes intentionally build Strengthening Families protective factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Questions directly or indirectly address the protective factors</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Hosts receive training on protective factors</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Cafes are linked to other protective factors building efforts</li> </ul>