

Levers for Change: Implementing and Sustaining Strengthening Families in States and Counties

Implementing Strengthening Families at a state, county or local level requires engaging the programs and services that already provide support for children and families as partners. States participating in the Strengthening Families National Network have found three key “levers for change” are critical for fully realizing the promise of Strengthening Families.

Using very small investments, these levers can create incentives, capacity and significant momentum to encourage local programs and service systems to use the Protective Factors Framework. The levers create a systemic, scalable and sustainable opportunity to implement the Protective Factors.

The three levers for change are: ▪ Parent partnerships ▪ Professional development ▪ Policy and systems

Parent Partnerships

Leadership from parents at every level ensures that program and practice strategies (a) are responsive and relevant to all kinds of family needs and choices (b) model the relationships among families, service providers, and community resources that can promote the best possible partnership to support children’s development and (c) engage parents as active partners. Partnerships work best when many parents are consistently involved as decision-makers in program planning, implementation and assessment.

Starting points for implementing successful parent partnerships:

- Reach out and partner with existing parent organizations
- Create and maintain prominent leadership roles for parents
- Continually assess what motivates parents to engage in program leadership
- Provide leadership training and support for parent leaders to participate
- Create opportunities for parents to engage with other parents in understanding and using the protective factors in their own families
- Designate specific resources for parent engagement, participation and leadership

Professional Development

Infusing the Protective Factors Framework into training for all people who work with children and families helps build a workforce across disciplines with common knowledge, goals and language. Professionals at every level, from frontline workers to supervisors and administrators, should get training tailored to their roles with a consistent message focused on Strengthening Families.

Starting points for using professional development to implement Strengthening Families:

- Provide orientation and training on Strengthening Families at professional conferences and meetings
- Offer the Protective Factors Framework to current training providers to leverage existing training capacity

- Integrate Strengthening Families research and Protective Factors Framework into university, college, continuing education and certificate programs
- Incorporate Strengthening Families concepts into new worker training
- Develop online training and distance learning opportunities
- Reinforce training with follow-up support, such as reflective supervision and ongoing mentoring

Policies and Systems

Strengthening Families can serve as a platform for coordination across diverse initiatives since it’s based on research used by different disciplines and focuses on goals held in common by several departments and agencies. The Protective Factors Framework provides a bridge for promoting optimal child development AND preventing child abuse and neglect. Regulations and procedures that govern everyday practice are one avenue for creating and reinforcing linkages across agencies using Strengthening Families as a basis for their work.

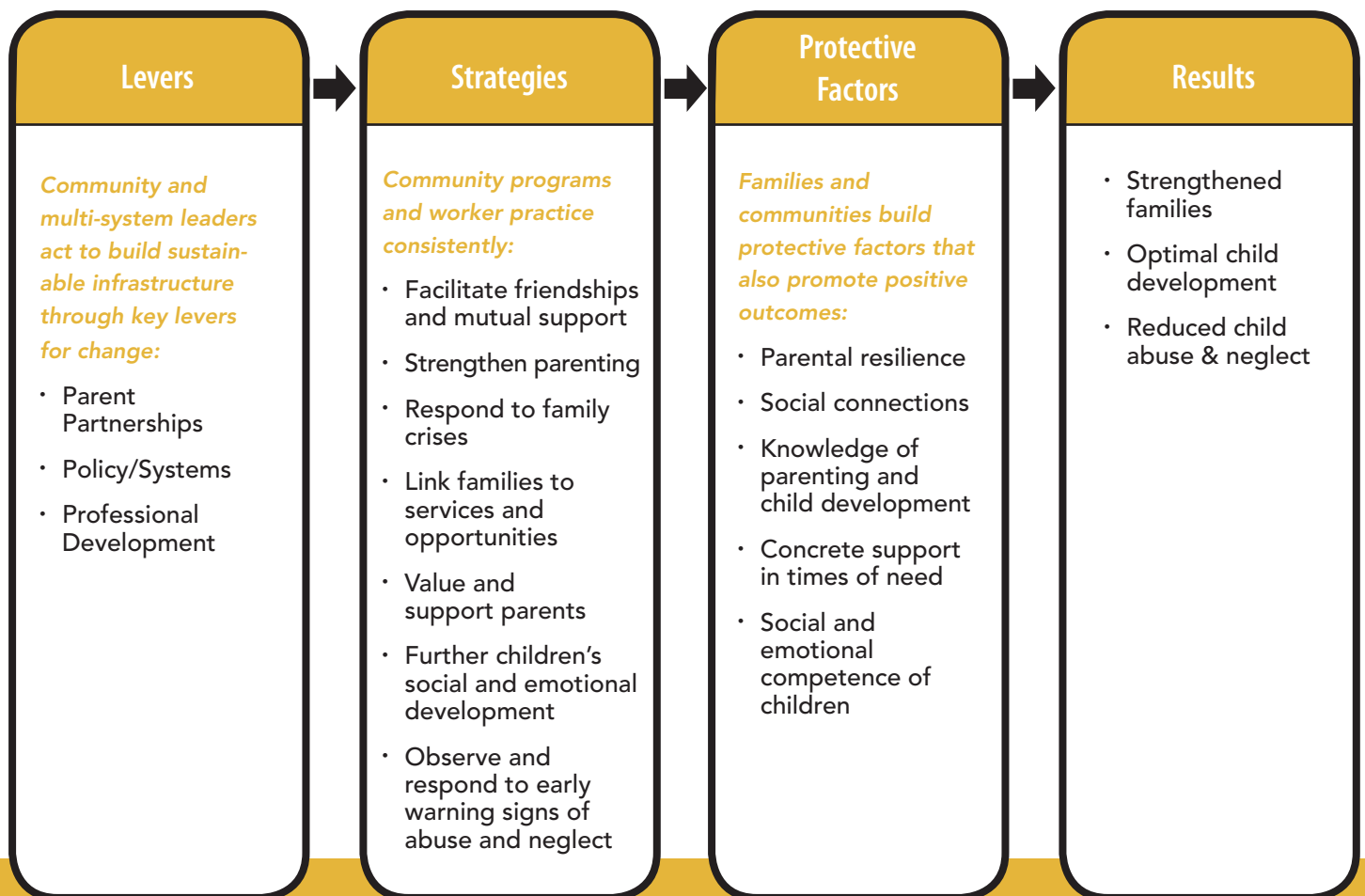
Policy and systems strategies for building collaboration:

- Engage multidisciplinary partners responsible for improving child outcomes and preventing maltreatment in Strengthening Families state leadership
- Use the Protective Factors Framework to define a shared set of desired outcomes for families across systems and disciplines
- Link Strengthening Families to cross-systems planning efforts as a way to implement common language and common goals
- Adapt contracting methods for funding and assessing programs to include a focus on Protective Factors
- Revise job requirements, performance reviews and performance contracts to reflect the Strengthening Families approach to working with children and families

Mobilizing partners, communities and families
to build family strengths, promote optimal
development and reduce child abuse and neglect

The Strengthening Families Approach

- Benefits ALL families
- Builds on family strengths, buffers risk, and promotes better outcomes
- Can be implemented through small but significant changes in everyday actions
- Builds on and can become a part of existing programs, strategies, systems and community opportunities
- Is grounded in research, practice and implementation knowledge



A New Vision

Families and communities, service systems and organizations:

- Focus on building protective and promotive factors to reduce risk and create optimal outcomes for all children, youth and families
- 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