

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: CREATING A SUCCESSFUL ACTION PLAN

For states to create a professional development approach that will support their Strengthening Families™ efforts, they must have an action plan that describes appropriate goals and steps to achieving them. Below, we will (1) define a Strengthening Families professional development approach, (2) describe goals for professional development that can be included in a state's action plan, and (3) provide guidance based on lessons states learned as they pursued each of those goals.

Definition

The quality of the relationship between early childhood program staff and families and children depends in great measure on those who deliver the services. Hence, staff development is vital to building the capacity and expertise in the Strengthening Families approach. Professional development here is defined as those activities that help to build skills and shift practice among early care and education staff toward a family strengthening approach. Professional development strategies that support a Strengthening Families approach should both build a broader knowledge of family strengthening and impart specific information about how early care and education providers can build protective factors with families.

Action Plan Goals

- Develop or provide training on Strengthening Families to staff in programs implementing the approach
- Identify existing family strengthening training available to the staff of early care and education programs
- Infuse family strengthening into the state's in-service infrastructure for early childhood
- Infuse family strengthening into professional coursework in early childhood education

Guidance on Meeting Goals

Goal 1: Develop or provide training on Strengthening Families to staff in programs implementing the approach

A number of existing training curricula are available for states to use as models for training staff in ECE programs implementing Strengthening Families. States should first explore these existing models prior to developing a new training approach. Many of the models described below provide training of trainers and are willing to work with states to adapt and tailor curricula to their specific needs.

- Three states used Zero To Three's [Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect: Parent-Provider Partnerships in Child Care](#) (PCAN) curriculum, which focuses on building

strengthening families

THROUGH EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

is a research-based, 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
- Children's healthy social and emotional development

Through the Strengthening Families Initiative, more than thirty states are shifting policy, funding and training to help early childhood providers build protective factors with families. Many states are also using the Strengthening Families approach to integrate state prevention strategies, strengthen families in the child welfare system, and engage parents and communities in building protective factors. For more information, visit cssp.org/doris_duke

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relationships between parents and early childhood teachers. It includes the Strengthening Families logic model of the five protective factors and seven program strategies, and prepares trainers to guide child care professionals in adopting proactive strategies in their programs to strengthen families and prevent child abuse and neglect. Strengthening Families Wisconsin used funding from five agencies to train a team of five trainers in the model. Both Arkansas and Missouri will be joining 11 other states in the ZERO TO THREE's [State Partnerships for Prevention Project](#), which integrates the PCAN training and curriculum into state-level child abuse prevention initiatives via consultation to state leadership teams.

- The [Midwest Learning Center for Family Support](#), part of the Strengthening Families Illinois leadership team, has developed a series of [training curricula](#) to support states implementing Strengthening Families. These include: a training manual and trainer of trainers curriculum on the [protective factors](#), and training on [recognizing and responding to signs of family stress](#) and on [communicating with families](#).
- Strengthening Families Illinois also used [Stronger Together](#), a nationally field-tested curriculum developed by the [Parent Services Project](#) (PSP) to train all its network sites implementing Strengthening Families. The training is designed to build the capacity of early childhood caregivers to support the well-being of young families. PSP is building a national network of trainers on the Stronger Together curricula. These trainers not only will be trained in Stronger Together, but will continue to be connected by a web of support and information sharing so that they can both contribute to and learn from a field of experts with regular on-the-ground experience using the curricula.
- The [Parents As Teachers National Resource Center](#), part of the Strengthening Families Missouri leadership team, has developed a PowerPoint presentation for Strengthening Families trainers to use, and has integrated the protective factors into their training for Parents As Teachers home visitors.
- Strengthening Families Rhode Island developed a 16-hour [training](#) on the protective factors framework that was reviewed and edited by graduate-level ECE Leadership students and faculty at Johnson & Wales University. This core training is an eight-session series focusing on the five protective factors and seven program strategies. The series was created to help ECE programs better understand the concepts and elements of the Strengthening Families approach. Johnson & Wales School of Education may offer CEUs and college course credit for the training.

Goal 2: Identify existing family strengthening training available to ECE program staff

States also should examine whether training already being used within the state can help ECE program staff to develop their family strengthening skills. By using the protective factors — or program elements — as a framework, states can identify

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existing training opportunities that will support staff in ECE programs in implementing a Strengthening Families approach.

- Strengthening Families New Hampshire used this approach to identify a number of existing professional development training opportunities already being offered in the state that could be used to enrich the work of staff in its pilot sites.
- Both Wisconsin and Illinois encouraged Strengthening Families programs in their states to take advantage of available trainings related to mental health consultation — one of the program elements.
- Strengthening Families Wisconsin also participated in an effort to align the core competencies for professionals serving children and families in the state. This would help to connect the protective factors with core trainings across fields.
- Strengthening Families Arkansas asked all five of the state's Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies (a primary provider of in-service training to early childhood programs) to evaluate the training that they currently provide and identify ways in which they align with the five protective factors.

Goal 3: Infuse family strengthening into the state's in-service infrastructure for early childhood

Perhaps the most important in-service training partners in states are the CCR&Rs. They support early care and education providers by offering low-cost or free training in diverse topics like health and safety, child development, and sound business practices. Their trainings also often are tied to the state accreditation system for early childhood. Because CCR&Rs have a professional development relationship with early care and education programs within the state, they can both serve as a good diffusion network for Strengthening Families trainings and for ongoing support to ECE programs as they implement their Strengthening Families action plans.

- Strengthening Families Alaska will be using CCR&Rs statewide to embed Strengthening Families protective factors into CDA Level One training.
- Strengthening Families Illinois is developing memoranda of understanding with Illinois' resource and referral agencies (16 total) to provide Strengthening Families-based training on protective factors, recognizing and responding to signs of family stress and collaborating with child welfare agencies.
- Strengthening Families Arkansas will invite all five CCR&Rs to participate in a training of trainers on Zero To Three's [Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect: Parent-Provider Partnerships in Child Care \(PCAN\)](#) curriculum. The state initiative hopes that CCR&Rs will not only offer this training to child care professionals in their areas, but also facilitate the use of the Strengthening Families self-assessment in programs which they serve in their individual areas. Materials that have been developed through the Arkansas Strengthening Families program are made

CHILD CARE RESOURCE AND REFERRAL AGENCIES

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available to all CCR&Rs for distribution, including its initial “A Walk Upstream” kick-off campaign.

- Strengthening Families Wisconsin’s professional development approach centered on training and supporting CCR&Rs to provide training and support to local early care and education programs on the protective factors and the Strengthening Families model. Child care resource and referral agencies delivered two-hour trainings on the protective factors to a wide variety of participants across the state, including ECE staff, child welfare staff, family childcare providers, parents and other stakeholders. CCR&Rs also provided tailored follow-up support to their Strengthening Families training, including dinners for center directors to discuss progress and changes in practice; staff visits for assisting in self-assessment and developing improvement plans; assistance in completing CEU paperwork; incentives to complete the self-assessment, and additional trainings for introducing committed centers to potential community partners. CCR&Rs were supported in this work by small grants from the Department of Workforce Development. Overall, through this approach, Strengthening Families Wisconsin reached all 2,000 licensed child care centers with its information and engaged 812 Centers with two-hour Strengthening Families trainings.

Goal 4: Infuse family strengthening into professional coursework in early childhood

Building Strengthening Families into certification approaches and college and university education in early childhood education has the potential to influence early those who are demonstrating a long-term commitment to the field. Pilot states made great headway in making these types of linkages.

- The Child Development Associate (CDA) credential is a universal milestone for early care and education professionals. Two states, Alaska and Arkansas, have made strides in integrating Strengthening Families into the training needed for a provider to get their CDA credential in their state. In Alaska, the CCR&Rs will incorporate the protective factors in the CDA trainings they provide statewide. Arkansas developed a **crosswalk** that maps the Strengthening Families self-assessment to CDA competency goals, functional areas and specific examples of the CDA candidates’ desired behaviors and evidence of internalized learning. The tool will enable CDA instructors to use the Strengthening Families principles and the self-assessment as a teaching tool to meet and address specific requirements of the CDA curricula, especially those that apply to the candidates’ work with families.

Both Strengthening Families New Hampshire and Strengthening Families Alaska have focused attention on the initiative into university and college preparation for early childhood professionals.

PROFESSIONAL COURSEWORK

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- Alaska's approach is multifaceted. Faculty at two Alaska universities are integrating Strengthening Families into early childhood and social work courses, and early childhood practicum students are encouraged to use the Strengthening Families self-assessment in their early care and learning placements. University of Alaska – Anchorage early childhood development classes have partnered with one local pilot site to plan and execute Family Nights. A BSW practicum student has been placed in one of the pilot programs to focus on the Strengthening Families framework, and there is considerable interest among early childhood and social work faculty in expanding the model's use. The distance education faculty reviewing the scope and sequence of the AAS degree will consider including protective factors in the coursework.
- New Hampshire started by developing a crosswalk between existing early childhood coursework and the protective factors and used this as a tool for initiating conversations with college faculty. Two of 14 colleges have integrated Strengthening Families into their early childhood education courses, and the results will be monitored in practicum and employment settings. ECE college classes ranging from five to 26 students were taught in 12 presentations on the Strengthening Families framework.