



# Massachusetts Home Visiting Initiative

*A Department of Public Health led state agency collaborative*

[www.mass.gov/dph/homevisiting](http://www.mass.gov/dph/homevisiting)

## Introduction to Strengthening Families: An Effective Approach to Supporting Families





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## Learning Objectives

- ❑ Understand the key elements of the Strengthening Families Five Protective factors – a foundation for programs that support families.
- ❑ Know the “seven key strategies” that programs can use to support the development of protective factors with families
- ❑ Identify ways that home visiting supports the development of protective factors in the families.



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## What is Strengthening Families?

- Developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy
- An approach to working with families based on evidence that when five key protective factors are present:
  - We can prevent child abuse,
  - AND**
  - We can promote optimal healthy growth and development of children.



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## What is Strengthening Families?

The Strengthening Families Program (SFP) is a nationally and internationally recognized parenting and family strengthening program for all families. SFP is an evidence-based family skills training program found to significantly reduce problem behaviors in children and to improve social competencies. Child maltreatment also decreases as parents strengthen bonds with their children and learn more effective parenting skills.

SFP illustrates how existing services for children and families can be linked and supported to build five protective factors shown by existing research to reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect and to enhance optimal child development.

The five protective factors are important  
for the healthy development of all families.



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## Five Protective Factors

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



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## 1. Parental Resilience

- The ability to cope and bounce back from all kinds of challenges
- Building parental resilience can affect how a parent deals with stress
- Involves creatively solving problems, building trusting relationships, maintaining a positive attitude, and seeking help when needed
- Resilience develops within the context of trusting relationships

*“Be strong and flexible”*



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## 2. Social Connections

- ❑ Friends, family, neighbors and other members of a community provide emotional support and concrete assistance to parents.
- ❑ Addresses social isolation ... which can lead to child abuse and neglect.
- ❑ Positive social connections:
  - Reinforce positive norms about parenting
  - Provide assistance in times of need
  - Serve as a resource for parenting information or help solving problems

*“Parents need friends”*



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## 3. Concrete Support in Times of Need

- ❑ Accessing supports and services that reduce stress from a family crisis, a condition such as substance abuse, or a lack of resources.
- ❑ Ensuring the basic needs of a family are met (food, clothing, shelter, safety).
- ❑ Connecting families to services they may be reluctant to accept (e.g. domestic violence, substance abuse counseling, mental health, etc.)

*“We all need help sometimes”*



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## 4. Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

- Having accurate information about raising children and appropriate expectations for their behavior help parents better understand and care for their children.
- It is important that information is available when parents need it and that it is relevant to their lives, including cultural considerations about parenting and child development.
- Parents whose own families used harsh discipline techniques or parents of children with developmental or behavioral challenges or special needs often require extra information and support.
- Parents are more likely to learn from people they trust and feel respected by, particularly when they are struggling
- Parents learn by education, modeling, and coaching

*“Parenting is part natural, part learned”*



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## 5. Social and Emotional Competence of Children

- ❑ A child's ability to interact positively with others, self-regulate, and effectively communicate his or her emotions has a great impact on the parent-child relationship.
- ❑ Challenging behaviors increase the risk for abuse ... working with children early to keep their development on track helps keep them safe.
- ❑ Children who have greater social and emotional competence have more positive interactions and can put their feelings into words rather than behaviors which helps parents be more responsive and less likely to yell and hit.
- ❑ Early education and care programs provide added benefits.

***“Children connect and relate to their world”***



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How do **programs** support the development of these protective factors in the families you serve?





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## Seven Key Program Strategies

- Facilitate friendships and mutual support
- Strengthen parenting
- Respond to family crises
- Link families to services and opportunities
- Value and support parents
- Facilitate children's social and emotional development
- Observe and respond to early warning signs of abuse or neglect



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How do **home visitors** support the development of these protective factors in the families you serve?



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## Home Visitor Strategies

- Help participants goal set and plan for challenges
- Provide and link participants with concrete support in times of need
- Encourage positive parent-child interaction and model positive child interactions
- Provide knowledge of child development and reflect positive practices that are observed in home visits
- Observe and respond to early warning signs of abuse or neglect
- Provide tools and encourage parents to foster healthy emotional development in children.