

# strengthening families

THROUGH EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

I L L I N O I S

## What is Strengthening Families Through Early Care & Education Illinois?

Illinois is one of seven states to be selected through a nationwide RFP process to pilot a new, proven, cost-effective strategy to prevent child abuse and neglect. The strategy involves early childhood centers working with families to build protective factors around children (see right). Strengthening Families Illinois is a collaborative initiative bringing together more than 30 partner organizations and state agencies from the child welfare, child abuse prevention, and early childhood fields as well as parents and community leaders. Rather than starting a new program, these partners are integrating existing strategies to prevent child abuse and neglect primarily through early care and education programs.

## What's special about this approach?

With funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the Center for the Study for Social Policy set out in 2002 to develop a strategic, feasible approach to child abuse prevention that would be systematic and national, reach large numbers of very young children, and have impact long before abuse or neglect occurred. Their research revealed that proven, positive results take place when early childhood centers build these protective factors around children.

## What are the goals of the initiative?

- To increase awareness that strengthening families is central to quality child care
- To increase the number of early childhood programs that are working to prevent child abuse and neglect by building protective factors around children
- To improve working relationships among early childhood systems, child welfare systems, and child abuse prevention programs and initiatives
- To infuse Strengthening Families ideas and practices in state-level decision-making on early childhood, child welfare, and child abuse prevention

## Who is involved?

Convened by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, Strengthening Families Illinois is a collaboration among more than 30 agencies, organizations, and individuals working with young children and their families across the state (see over).

## Protective Factors

Two years of groundbreaking research from the Center for the Study of Social Policy have revealed a set of protective factors that prevent child abuse and neglect. These five factors, along with a sixth added by Illinois early childhood experts, guide the work of Strengthening Families Illinois. The protective factors are:

1. Parental resilience
2. An array of social connections
3. Knowledge of parenting and child development
4. Concrete support in times of need
5. Children's social and emotional development
6. Healthy parent-child relationships

The five factors form the basis for Strengthening Families Through Early Care & Education initiatives in seven states: Alaska, Arkansas, Illinois, New Hampshire, Missouri, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin. For more information, visit [www.cssp.org](http://www.cssp.org).

## Partners

The list of partners is growing constantly and includes:

- Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (Convener)
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- Action for Children
- Caregiver Connections
- Carole Robertson Center for Learning
- Chapin Hall Center for Children, University of Chicago
- Chicago Children's Museum
- Chicago Department of Children and Youth Services
- Chicago Safe Start/Department of Public Health
- Chicago Metro Association for the Education of Young Children
- Chicago Metropolitan 2020
- Chicago Public Schools
- Childcare Network of Evanston
- Child Care Resource & Referral Agency at John A. Logan Community College
- Children's Home and Aid Society of Illinois
- Crittenton Centers
- Community Mennonite Early Learning Center
- El Valor
- Erikson Institute
- Illinois Center for Violence Prevention
- Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership
- Illinois Dept. of Human Services
- Illinois Family Partnership Network
- Illinois Federation for Families
- Illinois Head Start Association
- Illinois Network of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies
- Illinois State Board of Education
- Illinois Violence Prevention Authority
- John J. Egan Urban Center, DePaul University
- McCormick Tribune Foundation
- McHenry Cty. Youth Service Bureau
- Metropolitan Chicago Information Ctr.
- Midwest Learning Center for Family Support, Family Focus, Inc.
- Ounce of Prevention Fund
- Partnership for Quality Child Care
- Prevent Child Abuse America
- Prevent Child Abuse Illinois
- Rockford Public Schools
- Tom Thumb Community Child Care Ctr.
- University of Illinois Extension
- Voices for Illinois Children

Nationally, partner organizations are the National Association for the Education of Young Children, Zero to Three, and the National Alliance of Children's Trust Funds.

### How long will it last?

From January 2005 through June 2007, partners will lay the foundation for work that is self-sustaining and institutionalized across systems.

### What results can we expect in Illinois after two years?

- More than 60 early childhood centers statewide are engaged in 6 local learning networks and implementing the Strengthening Families approach
- Promising practices to promote healthy social and emotional development and build resiliency in children and their families exist in more than 50 child care centers across Illinois
- 80 percent of licensed early childhood centers are aware of the connection between protective factors and preventing child abuse and neglect
- Family strengthening training is both more available and more utilized by early childhood programs and child welfare agency staff
- DCFS caseworkers routinely include placement in quality early childhood education programs in service plans for children 0 to 5 entering the system (both intact and foster families)
- State agencies including the Illinois Department of Human Services, Department of Children and Family Services, and State Board of Education are working together to integrate Strengthening Families ideas and practices in their programs and services

### How can we implement the strategies?

If you are involved in an early childhood center in Illinois, you can join a learning network and get free training and resources to help you implement the protective factors. To find out how, or to get involved as a parent or child welfare professional, contact us using the information below, or visit [www.strengtheningfamiliesillinois.org](http://www.strengtheningfamiliesillinois.org).

### Who are the main contacts for the initiative?

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**To learn more, visit: [www.strengtheningfamiliesillinois.org](http://www.strengtheningfamiliesillinois.org)**