strengthening families
self-assessment for family child care providers

PLEASE READ THIS INFORMATION BEFORE COMPLETING THE SELF-ASSESSMENT

When children grow and learn in loving and caring environments, they can do better in school and are more prepared for the future. Yet even the best parents need help to give their children the greatest chance at success. Home-based child care providers play an important role in protecting and caring for young children and in promoting their social and emotional development. Home-based child care providers who reach out to parents in different ways help parents to help their children grow and develop in a positive and healthy manner. Home-based child care providers who reach out to parents also help decrease the chances of child abuse and neglect in families.

The Strengthening Families Approach

The Center for the Study of Social Policy conducted extensive research that resulted in shifting the focus about child abuse and neglect prevention to *strengthening families* as a way of reaching families before a risk of child abuse or neglect occurs.

The Strengthening Families™ approach is based in the identification of five Protective Factors that reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect when they are present and robust in a family.

The Five Protective Factors

Parental Resilience

Parents maintain a positive attitude and have the ability to cope with, creatively solve, and bounce back from all types of life challenges.

Social Connections

Parents have a network of people, agencies, and organizations that provide emotional support and concrete assistance.

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

Parents understand what to expect at different stages of child development, effective parenting skills, and ways of finding help with specific developmental or behavioral problems.

Concrete Support in Times of Need

Parents have access to formal and informal services and support from social networks in times of family crisis.

Social and Emotional Competence

Parents work with children to help them learn to interact positively with others, communicate their emotions, and feel good about themselves.

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Strategies to Build the Protective Factors

All early care and education professionals—including family child care providers—can work to build the 5 protective factors in families by using the following 7 strategies:

1. Value and nurture parents
2. Facilitate friendships and mutual support
3. Strengthen parenting
4. Facilitate children's social and emotional development
5. Link families to services and opportunities
6. Respond to family crisis
7. Observe and respond to early warning signs of child abuse or neglect

The Strengthening Families Self-Assessment for Family Child Care Providers

The Strengthening Families Self-Assessment for Family Child Care Providers is written for family child care providers who want to work better with and support the parents of the children they serve. The Self-Assessment is organized around the 7 strategies listed above.

Family child care providers should use the Self-Assessment to review their current practices in order to determine which of their current practices are building the protective factors and which practices they need to work on.

All of the statements that follow describe different ways that providers can work to build the protective factors by using the 7 strategies. Respond to each statement by checking one of the following responses:

"I Do This"
"I Do Not Do This"
"I Want to Learn About the Value of Doing This."

The Self-Assessment takes 20-30 minutes to complete.

strategy one:
value and support parents

Different Ways Family Child Care Providers Can Value and Support Parents (Check one box)	I Do This	I Do Not Do This	I Want to Learn About the Value of Doing This	Comments
1 Have a warm relationship with each parent and with other members of the child's family.				
2 Keep information about children and families confidential.				
3 Interact daily with each child's parent, such as telling parents about the child's day, emailing photos, sharing a daily activity log, and other ways.				
4 Have a place in your home where parents can sit comfortably and talk with you.				
5 Offer treats like coffee or muffins at drop-off or pick-up time.				
6 Show respect for parents' points of view.				
7 Make an effort to honor parents' special requests for their children, such as providing vegetarian meals.				
8 Encourage parents to share skills, talents, and cultural traditions in the program.				
9 Show appreciation to parents for such things as participating in the program and making timely payments.				
10 Provide opportunities for parents to participate in stress-relieving family activities such as potlucks.				
11 Provide opportunities for parents to participate in stress-relieving activities for adults only such as date nights with partner, Moms' or Dads night out, exercise classes, etc.				
12 Encourage fathers and other male family members to feel comfortable and get involved.				
13 Encourage parents to attend child development, parenting, and self-improvement conferences, workshops, and trainings, and share information with others.				
14 Encourage parents to have input into decisions about the program.				
15 Make sure that staff, or others who may help out in the family child care program, have warm relationships with the children's family members.				

strategy two:
facilitate friendships and mutual support

Check one box Different Ways Family Child Care Providers Can Facilitate Friendships and Mutual Support	I Do This	I Do Not Do This	I Want to Learn About the Value of Doing This	Comments
1 Introduce parents to each other.				
2 Provide a welcoming space for parents to talk informally with each other.				
3 Allow time for parents to interact with each other and the provider at pick-up and drop-off times.				
4 Help parents find ways to communicate with each other, such as having a family directory.				
5 Connect parents who have same-age children, similar interests, and like circumstances, such as those who speak the same language.				
6 Create opportunities for parents to get to know all the children in the group.				
7 Plan ways for parents to come together, meet new people, and enjoy a sense of community, such as:				
a Periodic events like special breakfasts, potlucks, and family fun nights.				
b Celebrations, graduations, and other child-centered programs.				
c Field trips and other outings with parents as chaperones.				
d Events for parents to share and learn about each other's home life and cultural backgrounds.				
e Fun and affordable family activities, such as going bowling or to the zoo.				
f Special programs for dads and other male family members.				
g Meet and greet gatherings for new and old families.				
8 Facilitate the discussion in a group setting so each parent has a chance to talk.				
9 Share ideas for parents to get together outside of the family child care program, such as weekend activities like going to the playground or children's birthday parties.				
10 Reach out to isolated parents in different ways, such as:				
a Making special efforts to connect them with other parents.				
b Calling, visiting their home, or sending notes.				

strategy two:
facilitate friendships and mutual support

Different Ways Family Child Care Providers Can Facilitate Friendships and Mutual Support (Check one box)	I Do This	I Do Not Do This	I Want to Learn About the Value of Doing This	Comments
c Personally inviting them to social activities.				
d Helping arrange transportation or child care so they can participate in social activities.				
e Connecting them with resources such as mental health specialists who can help them explore their feelings of isolation.				
11 Model friendly behavior for parents and children by:				
a Warmly greeting parents and children at drop-off or pick-up.				
b Having children greet families upon arrival (saying “good morning”) & departure (saying “bye-bye”).				
c Including all children and all families in program events.				
d Encouraging parents to invite all children in the family child care home to their child’s celebrations.				
e Helping to resolve issues among parents that affect the program.				
f Promoting understanding of different cultures and backgrounds among families.				
12 Read about ways to increase parent engagement in the program.				
13 Participate in educational/training opportunities about ways to engage parents in the program.				

strategy three: strengthen parenting

Different Ways Family Child Care Providers Can Strengthen Parenting (Check one box)	I Do This	I Do Not Do This	I Want to Learn About the Value of Doing This	Comments
1 Talk with parents about the program's child guidance practices:				
a Explain why physical punishment (spanking or hitting) is not allowed by anyone in the family child care home including parents and family members.				
b Explain why verbal punishment (yelling and name calling) is not allowed by anyone in the family child care home including parents and family members.				
c Explain the child guidance techniques you model.				
2 Model warm and responsive interactions with children.				
3 Use appropriate child guidance techniques.				
4 Learn about parents' family/cultural/ethnic expectations and practices about parenting.				
5 Provide parenting information in the primary language spoken by parents.				
6 Discuss parenting and child development issues whenever a parent asks for information or it appears that a parent needs support.				
7 Discuss parenting and child development issues in a non-judgmental way.				
8 Share information on parenting and child development issues through:				
a Books/brochures/handouts/websites in a parent resource library.				
b Opportunities for parents with similar concerns to come together and share ideas and information.				
c Regular postings on bulletin boards and other ways, such as newsletters.				
d Take home materials.				
9 Provide opportunities for parents to learn about each others' cultural/ethnic parenting practices.				
10 Encourage parents to observe the family child care program.				
11 Encourage parents to discuss guidance challenges they may have at home.				
12 Provide information about:				
a Age appropriate expectations for the child's behavior.				

strategy three:
strengthen parenting

Check one box Different Ways Family Child Care Providers Can Facilitate Friendships and Mutual Support	I Do This	I Do Not Do This	I Want to Learn About the Value of Doing This	Comments
b Recognizing and reinforcing desired/appropriate behavior.				
c Alternate ways to respond to undesirable/inappropriate behavior.				
d Ways parents can encourage children to express their feelings appropriately at home.				
e Ways parents can encourage children to practice positive social skills at home.				
13 If concerned about a parent's parenting skills:				
a Reach out to the parent in a respectful way and share concerns about the child or about the parent's parenting practices.				
b Acknowledge that children's behavior can be frustrating and acknowledge parents' efforts to manage the child's behavior.				
c Acknowledge the parent's desire and effort to become a better parent.				
d Connect the parent to resources and supports that may help to address the parenting issues.				
e Connect the parent to other parents who can share or model positive parenting approaches.				

strategy four:
facilitate children's social and emotional development

Check one box Different Ways Family Child Care Providers Can Facilitate Children's Social and Emotional Development	I Do This	I Do Not Do This	I Want to Learn About the Value of Doing This	Comments
1 Recognize children's feelings, name them, and use teaching aids like books and puppets to help children understand feelings.				
2 Model how to express emotions appropriately, problem solve with words, and treat others with respect and kindness.				
3 Encourage children to express their feelings through words, artwork, expressive play, and actions.				
4 Encourage children to observe and listen to the feelings of others.				
5 Help children to name their feelings and problem solve using words.				
6 Encourage children to form friendships, engage in cooperative play, use polite language and manners, and respect differences in others.				
7 Encourage parents to observe their child interacting with other children in the family child care program.				
8 Help parents understand their child's social and emotional development by:				
a Informing parents of the meaning of social and emotional development.				
b Informing parents of the importance of children's social and emotional development.				
c Providing parents opportunities to discuss social and emotional issues within a cultural context.				
d Giving parents ideas on how to promote their child's social and emotional learning at home.				
9 If concerned about a child's social and emotional development:				
a Reach out to the parent in a respectful way and share concerns about the child's social and emotional development.				
b Connect the parent to resources that can support the child's social and emotional development, such as play therapy and mental health services.				
c Help the parent problem solve about how to address the issue at home.				
d Connect a parent to other parents who can share and model positive parenting approaches.				

strategy four:
facilitate children's social and emotional development

Check one box Different Ways Family Child Care Providers Can Facilitate Children's Social and Emotional Development	I Do This	I Do Not Do This	I Want to Learn About the Value of Doing This	Comments
10 Read about ways to promote children's social and emotional development.				
11 Participate in training opportunities about ways to promote children's social and emotional development.				

strategy five:
link families to services and opportunities

Check one box Different Ways Family Child Care Providers Can Link Families to Services and Opportunities	I Do This	I Do Not Do This	I Want to Learn About the Value of Doing This	Comments
1 Talk with parents about:				
a Their interests, skills, needs, and goals for themselves and their children.				
b Opportunities in the family child care program that may help them achieve their goals and use their skills and talents.				
c Other resources, websites, parents, and community opportunities that may help them continue to achieve their goals				
2 Encourage parents to share information about community resources with each other, such as toy exchanges, resale shops, playgrounds, and family activities.				
3 Provide access to up-to-date information about various resources and services that are available in the community.				
4 If there is a need to make referrals to outside services:				
a Brainstorm with parents about what resources would be helpful.				
b Follow-up with parents to see if they used the referral and, if so, were they happy with the services.				
c Make a personal connection between the family and the other service provider, if possible.				
5 If parents did not use the referral, help address barriers to following-up on services, such as transportation, language, child care, fees, and nervousness.				
6 Contact community service providers in order to:				
a Bring other services to the family child care home when possible.				
b Ease the referral process.				
a Share information with parents about resources.				
b Talk about ways to better work with agencies and access services.				

strategy six:
respond to family crises

Different Ways Family Child Care Providers Can Respond to Family Crises (Check one box)	I Do This	I Do Not Do This	I Want to Learn About the Value of Doing This	Comments
1 Develop a personal relationship with each parent by taking time to get to know them individually; listening to the parent; providing encouragement and support in a non-judgmental way; respecting confidentiality; and building trust.				
2 Let parents know that they can turn to you in times of crisis in the following ways:				
a By listening, showing concern, sharing some of your own personal challenges or desires.				
b By sharing materials and policies when families enroll in the program.				
c By considering reducing tuition or allowing for a delayed payment, if a parent is experiencing a financial crisis				
3 If appropriate, mobilize other parents in the program to help a family when a crisis occurs.				
4 Respond proactively to signs of parent or family distress by:				
a Expressing your concern and offering help.				
b Making yourself available to the parent if they need to talk.				
c Helping families make immediate and long-term plans.				
d Offering to connect the family to needed resources including parent help lines or other parents who have experienced a similar crisis.				
5 Maintain resource and referral linkages to crisis services such as:				
a Food pantries				
b Domestic violence services				
c Shelters				
d Respite care for children				
e Alcohol and substance abuse services				
f Mental health services				
g Economic supports				
h Legal assistance				

strategy six:
respond to family crises

	Different Ways Family Child Care Providers Can Respond to Family Crises (Check one box)	I Do This	I Do Not Do This	I Want to Learn About the Value of Doing	Comments
6	Respond to family crises as soon as possible by:				
	a Problem solving with the family about immediate needs and options.				
	b Calling on other parents, family members, emergency contacts, or others to step in at the family child care home or to help address the family's needs directly.				
	c Helping the family access appropriate community support services.				
7	Participate in training opportunities about ways to respond to families in crisis.				
8	Provide training to staff or family members who assist in the program so they know how to respond appropriately to family crises. Training is provided on issues such as:				
	a Maintaining confidentiality.				
	b Resolving conflicts.				
	c Talking to families about difficult issues.				
	d Recognizing problems such as domestic violence, depression, developmental delays, mental illness, chronic health problems, substance abuse, and other signs of imminent crisis.				
	e Helping families make immediate and long-term plans.				
	f Referring an issue to the family child care provider if a parent has a concern that a family or staff member feels is beyond their ability to handle.				

strategy seven:
observe and respond to early warning signs of abuse or neglect

Check one box Different Ways Family Child Care Providers Can Observe and Respond to Warning Signs of Child Abuse and Neglect	I Do This	I Do Not Do This	I Want to Learn About the Value of Doing This	Comments
1 Look for the following signs that a family may be under stress:				
a Child behavior such as acting out, distress, or challenging behaviors,				
b Unusual parental behavior at pick-up or drop-off.				
c Repeated unexplained absences.				
d Repeated unusual late pick-ups.				
e More missed payments than usual.				
f Divorce, job loss, or other family crises.				
g Parents acknowledge or show signs of stress.				
2 Observe how parents treat and talk with their child and the child's behavior around parents.				
3 Observe how children are dressed, how clean they are, if they are hungry, or if they are over-tired.				
4 Notice bruises and cuts on children and ask them how they got the bruises and cuts.				
5 Notice bruises and cuts on the children and ask the parents about them.				
6 Be aware of the state regulations regarding mandated reporters.				
7 Have a plan regarding how to report child abuse and neglect.				
8 Know how cases are generally handled once a report is made.				
9 When they enroll a child, inform all parents--verbally and in writing--about your status as a mandated reporter and the plan regarding handling suspected cases of child abuse and neglect.				
10 If a child protective services report needs to be made:				
a Notify parents that a report is being made, if possible.				
b Explain your status as a mandated reporter.				
c Explain the reporting process to the family and what they can expect in terms of a response from the agency.				

strategy seven:
observe and respond to early warning signs of abuse or neglect

Check one box Different Ways Family Child Care Providers Can Observe and Respond to Warning Signs of Child Abuse and Neglect	I Do This	I Do Not Do This	I Want to Learn About the Value of Doing This	Comments
d Try to be caring and supportive to parents during the reporting process.				
e Act as an advocate for families with the child protective services system.				
11 If a report does not need to be made or if the report ends up unsubstantiated, help find suitable respite care, emergency crisis services, home visiting, or educational supports for the family.				
12 If a child is placed in custody:				
a Maintain contact with the parent.				
b Advocate with the child welfare department if possible.				
c Help the parent connect with resources that will help them to get their child back.				
13 Read about child abuse and neglect prevention.				
14 Participate in training opportunities about child abuse and neglect prevention and mandated reporting.				