

Strengthening Families™ Self-Assessment Tool for Community-Based Programs

Program self-assessment is a key implementation strategy for Strengthening Families™. It helps programs compare their practices with what was learned from a national study of exemplary practice that supports families to build protective factors, which lead to improved outcomes for children. These five protective factors are described in the sidebar.

Organized around the five protective factors, the actions described in the tool can be carried out in a variety of community-based programs such as family support and strengthening and parenting education programs, health care settings, community centers, and others. (Complementary self-assessment tools are also available for home visiting programs, early care and education centers, and family child care providers.) The tool shows how the Strengthening Families™ protective factors can be supported through “small but significant changes” in program practice. An additional section addresses how to respond to suspected child abuse or neglect.

CSSP strongly recommends that programs create an assessment team representative of various perspectives on the program, including:

- Administrative staff and/or program director
- Direct service staff
- Parents who participate in the program (or whose children participate in the program)

Each team member completes the assessment individually, taking an average of about 90 minutes. The team then meets together to discuss and develop a consensus version. Alternatively, the team working together as a group can complete one assessment without completing individual self-assessments in advance.

Once the agreed-upon self-assessment is completed, the team can enter it online in the Strengthening Families Evaluation Portal, provided by Mosaic Network: www.strengtheningfamiliesevaluation.com. This allows the team to print reports showing strengths and areas for improvement, as well as links to parent and staff surveys. For more information, visit: www.strengtheningfamilies.net.

Strengthening Families™ is based on engaging families, programs, and communities in building five protective factors. The approach promotes everyday actions that can be taken in any child- and family-serving setting to build each protective factor:

Parental Resilience

- Demonstrate in multiple ways that parents are valued
- Honor each family’s race, ethnicity, language, culture, history, and approach to parenting
- Encourage parents to manage stress effectively
- Support parents as decision makers and build decision making and leadership skills
- Help parents understand how to buffer their child during stressful times

Social Connections

- Help families value, build, sustain, and use social connections
- Create an inclusive environment
- Facilitate mutual support around parenting and other issues
- Promote engagement in community

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

- Model developmentally appropriate interactions
- Provide information and resources on parenting and child development
- Encourage exploration of parenting issues or concerns
- Provide opportunities to try out new parenting strategies
- Address parenting issues from a strength-based perspective

Concrete Support in Times of Need

- Respond when families are in crisis
- Provide information and connections to community services
- Help families develop skills to identify needs and connect to supports

Social and Emotional Competence of Children

- Help parents foster child’s social and emotional development
- Model nurturing support
- Include social and emotional development activities in programming
- Help children develop positive cultural identity and interact in a diverse society
- Respond proactively when social or emotional development needs support