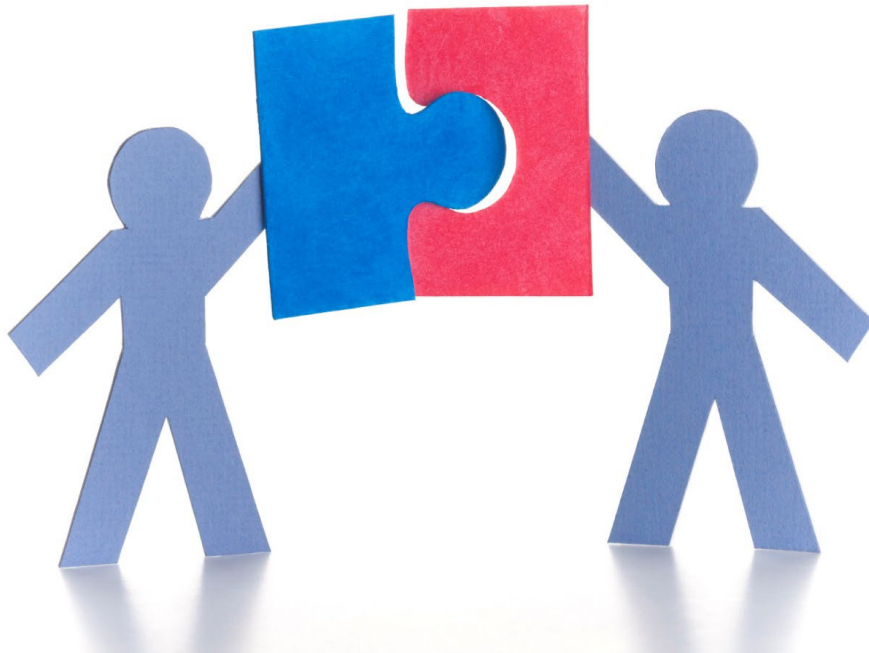


# Introduction to Strengthening Families

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# Agenda for Tonight:

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6:30-6:40 – Review the Strengthening Families Framework

6:40-7:30– Practice Component & Everyday Actions

7:30-7:40 - Break

7:40-8:00 – Family Partnerships

8:00-8:20 – Signs of Stress, Trauma and Toxic Stress

8:20-8:30 – Reflection, Questions & Feedback

Strengthening Families  
is for ALL families.

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# Three Key Points:

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- Our goal is to **protect families from being overwhelmed by stress in their lives**, thereby decreasing the likelihood of child abuse and neglect.
- The Protective Factors are also called Promotive Factors because they **promote the best possible outcomes** for children, families and communities.
- *Strengthening Families* is not something we do to someone else or a program we work on a family. **Every individual and family already has the Protective Factors** and our job is to notice, name and explain them in our daily work.



Parental resilience

Social connections

Knowledge of  
parenting and child  
development

Concrete support in  
times of need

Social and emotional  
competence of  
children



# Practice Component

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## Group Practice - Sharing

Part 1: In Partners, Choose one or two questions in each protective factor to discuss with one another. Allow time for each person to share.



# Practice Component

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Individual Practice – Identifying

Part 2: On the ideaz board, identify at least one every day action for each protective factor



# Discussion

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- Why do you think we including this personal activity in this training?
- How can sharing stories help us identify our own strengths? Why would that be helpful in our relationship with others?
- We can learn about the Protective factors from people who have them. What can we learn about the Protective Factors from situations in our lives where they were not modeled for us?





# Application

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- What are you already doing that helps the families you work with recognize and / or build protective factors?
- Which of the Protective Factors are you most conscious of in your workplace? Which could you make an effort to increase?
- Is your school's culture "strengths-based"? Do you regularly and intentionally look for strengths in your colleagues and families and help build upon them.

# Communication with Families

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What?

When?

Where?

Why?

How?

# Family-Centered Communication

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- Ensuring program documents are available in home languages of all families in the program
- Reviewing enrollment forms and other documents to ensure they use language like “parent/guardian” and never “mother/father” to be inclusive to families of all family compositions
- Talking to individual families about the best ways to share information with them (phone, notes in backpack, email, Zoom, using an interpreter, etc.)
- Ensuring any screenings or evaluations include family involvement




# Having Difficult Conversations

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When there are differences between our personal or program values and the values of families, it can sometimes require difficult conversations. When you need to engage in a difficult conversation with a family, ground yourself in the following ideas:

- Families are a child's first and most important teacher
- Families have a right to decide what is best for them and for their child, even if it is not consistent with our personal or programmatic values
- Active listening and listening to understand (not listening to respond) are strategies to build understanding .
- Responding to a situation with curiosity and a desire to understand helps maintain a more neutral and comfortable space for conversation
- Everyone has their own unique set of values and beliefs – values are rarely “good” or “bad” but can often be different from one person to the next.




Your daily interactions with families can help them to build their resilience and their belief in themselves as families and capable decision-makers. You can:

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- Projecting a positive and strengths-based approach to all families
- Support families as key decision-makers for their families and provide opportunities for decision making that affects the program or community
- Encourage families to take care of themselves, particularly during stressful times
- Normalize the fact that parenting is stressful and help the family plan proactively about how to respond to stressful parenting situations
- Validate and support good decisions

**Parental Resilience**




You can help families to think critically about their social network and how they could utilize it more effectively, as well as the skills and tools they need to expand it. The following strategies may assist you in engaging families in developing social connections:

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- Model good relational behavior and use your interactions with families as an opportunity to help families develop stronger relational skills
- When engaging the family's broader network in teaming or other supports, be sensitive to the quality of existing relationships and help the family identify supporters in their network who will contribute positively
- Invite families to events where they can get to know each other – with or without their kids – and reach out especially to those families that may be socially isolated
- If there are specific issues that serve as barriers for the family in developing healthy social connections such as anxiety or depression, encourage the family to address them

**Social Connection**




As a professional working with families, your role is not just to provide referrals to needed services, but to identify any barriers the families may have in accessing those services. Helping families overcome those barriers is crucial to ensuring that their concrete needs are met. Such help may entail:

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- Encouraging help seeking behavior
- Working with the family to understand their past experience with service systems and any stigma they attach to certain services
- Helping the family to navigate complex systems by explaining eligibility requirements, filling out forms or making a warm handoff to an individual who can help them negotiate getting access to the services they need
- Helping the parent understand their role as an advocate for themselves and their child
- Giving families opportunities to help meet concrete needs of other families in the program or the community, to encourage reciprocity

**Concrete Support in  
Time of Need**




Each contact you have with the family provides an important opportunity to link them to parenting resources, provide child development information and model and validate effective caregiving. You can:

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- Connect families to parenting education classes or home visiting as appropriate for their situation
- Model appropriate expectations for the child
- Engage families in dialogue when their expectations are not in line with the child's developmental phase
- Underline the importance of nurturing care to help the family in valuing the importance of their own role
- Provide “just in time” parenting education: crucial information a family needs at the time when parenting issues arise.
- Help the family identify a series of trusted informants that they can turn to when they need parenting information

**Knowledge of Parenting  
and Child Development**





It is important to increase the family's awareness of the importance of early relationships and of their role in nurturing their child's social-emotional development by:

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- Providing concrete tips and resources to families to help them build their skills
- Modeling developmentally appropriate interactions with children that help them to recognize and manage their emotions and build other social and emotional skills
- Connecting families to resources that can help support their children's social-emotional development—these might be simple (such as classes like Second Step, or books and games that help children to name or recognize their emotions) or more intensive (such as mental health counseling)
- Staying attuned to trauma and how it impacts the child's behaviors and relationships, including taking time to explain and discuss children's behavior with families when they are “acting out” due to trauma

**Social & Emotional  
Competence**

# Family Partnership Activity

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In small groups, look at the 5 statements provided. Divide a sheet of paper in half – on one side, write reasons why the statement might be true and the other side, reasons why the statement might NOT be true.

Brainstorm as many ideas as possible – you don't need to personally believe what you write. There are no right or wrong answers.



# Is it True? Not True? Brainstorm

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Families want what is best for their children.

Involving families in leadership roles requires nurturing, and is worth it.

In quality programs, professionals relinquish some control to families.

All families have strengths.

Partnering with families makes my job easier.

# Discussion

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Which statement generated the most discussion? Agreement / disagreement?

Which statement did you feel most strongly about?

What is the difference between family engagement and family partnership?

# Application

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What partnerships are available to families in your program?  
(Remembering partnership is different from engagement)

Partnerships require walking a fine line— being open to family's requests and being clear where compromise isn't possible. When does this come up? How do you navigate it?

How do you feel about sharing leadership with families? What situations make you nervous?

# Strengthening Families Assessment

## Strengthening Families Self-Assessment

STARS Abbreviated Version for Program Staff

Program Name:

Date:

Person/people completing self-assessment:

To promote Parental Resilience				
	Always	Sometimes	Not yet	Comments
1. Staff is available to greet families when they come in (1.3.1)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2. The program has multiple avenues for regularly communicating in a variety of ways (family orientation, individual conversations, written, etc) to provide information to families and to gather family input on curriculum activities (1.2.3)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3. Parents have opportunities to share their skills, talents and cultural traditions with children and other parents (1.7.4)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
4. The program accepts and supports diverse family structures (single parents, grandparents, same sex parents) (1.8.3)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
5. When common signs of stress occur, program staff reach out to families proactively and supportively	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
6. Program offers activities designed to address interests of different family members (e.g. fathers, mothers, other family members) (1.23.2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
7. Staff and parents talk together about their observations or concerns about a child who is experiencing stress, discuss how they will respond appropriately and follow up with each other to evaluate how they are doing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Is there anything else you'd like to share about your program's practices that support Parental Resilience?				



# Signs of Stress

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"Extensive research on the biology of stress now shows that healthy development can be derailed by excessive or prolonged activation of the stress response systems in the body and brain...Learning how to cope with adversity is an important part of healthy development. When we are threatened, our bodies prepare us to respond by increasing our heart rate, blood pressure, and stress hormones. When a child's stress response systems are activated within an environment of supportive relationship with adults, these effects are brought back down to baseline. However, if the stress response is extreme and long-lasting, and buffering relationships are unavailable to the child, the result can be damaged, weakened systems and brain architecture with lifelong repercussions."

The Center for the Developing Child of Harvard University

1. Eating disturbance
2. Irritable/difficult to soothe
3. General fearfulness/new fears
4. Language delay
5. Changes in school performance
6. Restless, impulsive, hyperactive
7. Physical symptoms (headaches etc)
8. Say they have no feeling about upcoming event
9. Difficulty identifying what is bothering them
10. Inattention, difficulty problem solving
11. Daydreaming or dissociation
12. Anxiety

13. Irritability
14. Aggressive behavior
15. Feeling helpless/passive
16. Worry about own/other's safety
17. Emotional swings/moody
18. Easily startled
19. Sad or angry
20. Difficulty sleeping, nightmares, sleep disturbances
21. Learning problems
22. Attention seeking
23. Revert to younger behavior
24. Re-enact trauma in a play





# Discussion

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- Which signs / symptoms stood out to you?
- Have you seen any of these behaviors in children?
- Why is it important to consider trauma in relation to a child's behavior?

**TABLE 1. Classification of Stress Responses** (Adapted from the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2005/2014)

Type of Stress Response	Examples of Stressors	Stress Response System
Positive	Being frustrated; getting immunized; first day of a new job; meeting new people; failing a test	Brief increases in heart rate, blood pressure, or mild changes in stress hormone levels
Tolerable	Death of a loved one; frightening accident; serious illness; prejudice and discrimination	Level and duration of activation of the stress response system is based on the presence of supportive relationships and environments
Toxic	Child abuse and neglect; family violence; maternal depression; parental addiction; persistent poverty; racism	Strong, frequent, prolonged activation of the stress response system in the absence of supportive relationships and environments disrupts early brain development and can result in health, emotional, and behavioral problems later in life

# Toxic Stress & Trauma Resources

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[ACES Primer Video](#)

[ACES Assessment](#)

[Hope – Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences](#)

[Friends](#)

<https://friendsnrc.org/prevention/protective-factors/>

<https://friendsnrc.org/evaluation/protective-factors-survey/>

[Harvard Center for the Developing Child](#)

# Application

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- How can you sensitively educate families about behavior as a sign of trauma? Or open a conversation about behavior that includes a discussion of trauma?
- Where can you find training / coaching opportunities for challenging behavior in the classroom? What resources are available to you?

## **“Family Well-Being” from the Strengthening Families Perspective**

The definition of “family well-being” in the Strengthening Families approach takes into account the unique characteristics and circumstances of a family, and is conceived as the effectiveness with which family members:

- Know, unequivocally, they are loved, and experience pleasure in each other’s presence
- Perform various functions (e.g., socialize children; assist with chores)
- Communicate and interact with each other
- Provide resources, goods, and services needed to support and maintain the family (e.g., supply adequate food and shelter, seek health care as needed)
- Protect its members, particularly vulnerable members (e.g., children, elders)
- Serve as buffers between its members—particularly children—and negative societal forces or conditions (e.g., racism, community violence)
- Prepare its members to navigate through or confront negative social experiences (e.g., racial profiling, discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation)
- Bond together as a unit to provide reciprocal care, emotional support, hope, encouragement, and guidance; resolve conflicts and seek peace; and assist each other during challenging situations and crises
- Demonstrate resilience—as individuals and as a unit—in the face of adversity

Questions? Feedback?

What is one thing you  
are taking away from this  
training?

# References:

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Center for the Study of Social Policy

<http://www.cssp.org/young-children-their-families/strengtheningfamilies>

Butterfly Trainings that Transform

[www.butterflyttt.com](http://www.butterflyttt.com)

Kolb D. (1984). Experiential learning: experience as the source of learning and development. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall

Medina, John. (2014). Brain Rules: 12 Principles for Surviving and Thriving at Work, Home, and School. Pear Press, Seattle, Washington



## NORTHERN LIGHTS AT COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF VERMONT

- Your Documentation of Professional Development (DPD) form will be emailed from [noreply@vsc.edu](mailto:noreply@vsc.edu) within a few business days. You can also access this form by logging into your registration profile and going to your Order History.
- Please complete the Training Evaluation by scanning this QR code or by following the link that will be sent by email.
- If you have questions about this training or your professional development, please contact Northern Lights at CCV.



THANK YOU!